



QUESTIONING THE ONENESS OF PHILOSOPHY

I. PHILOSOPHY AND THE ARTS

II. PHILOSOPHY, GENDER AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

4th Workshop of the Project
Experimentation and Dissidence

Editors

José Miranda Justo
Paulo Alexandre Lima
Fernando M. F. Silva



CENTRE FOR PHILOSOPHY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LISBON

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AUTHORS

José Miranda Justo, Paulo Alexandre Lima, Fernando M. F. Silva

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INTRODUCTION

Questioning the oneness of philosophy

With one single exception that will be explained in the second part of this introduction, the present volume contains the proceedings of the Fourth Workshop of the project *Experimentation & Dissidence*, held on October 11th and 12th, 2018 in the auditorium of the Berardo Museum, CCB, Lisbon. The Fourth Workshop, instead of being organized chronologically in the manner of its former counterparts, was dedicated to the relations between philosophy and two different sectors of thought and practices: the arts (in the broadest sense of the term) on the one hand, and gender and sexual difference on the other.

The aim of this workshop was to interrogate – from a historical perspective but first and foremost from a contemporary point of view – the borders of philosophy and its moving forms of conceptualization when it is confronted with disciplines or practices that, being by nature non-philosophical, nonetheless have a double relation with philosophy: first, such disciplines and practices proportionate pre-philosophical elements and relations that give rise to the philosophical creation of concepts; second, these practices and disciplines tend to form blocks of thought that intersect with philosophical concepts and, in light of this, enlarge and enrich their very fields of action in a way which is not alien to philosophy.

The kind of interrogation of philosophy that was at stake in this Fourth Workshop has a profound connection with the main topics of the research project in which it is embedded: experimentation and dissidence. On the one hand, the participants exploited the two types of interfaces mentioned above by addressing the tensions and complementarities between philosophy and non-philosophy in their movements of progressive conceptualization; the conclusion is that complementarities are never a simple additive game and that the tensions, conflicts and modalities of struggle are always more productive than mere situations of overlapping

or soft approximation; in this research project, tensions between philosophy and non-philosophy are envisaged as *dissent*, in the sense that they strongly tend to promote the becoming of the lines of force and creativity of philosophical and non-philosophical endeavors, and that this becoming is performed and stimulated by a high consciousness of difference. Dissent is the active and productive form of the existence of difference. On the other hand, this prevalence of conflict and dissent is far from eliminating the zones of interference and cooperation that subsist between philosophy and non-philosophy – in our case between philosophy and the arts, and between philosophy and gender or sexual-difference studies –; and these areas of interference and contamination constitute the planes where the attitude of philosophers, scholars of other branches of thought, and also artists, has to be *experimental* (this is not exactly in the sense inherited from science, but in a sense put forward in the realm of the arts, in particular during the period of the First Modernism, a sense that has essentially to do with the capacity for exploring new possibilities for the combination of elements and new paths of thought or action unheard of before, a sense that absorbs the groping attitude of the artist that does not know the results of her explorations beforehand and has to start executing the artwork in order to decide later if she will integrate the results in her oeuvre; but this sense of *experimental* also incorporates a sense that accepts the productive and creative contamination of the more or less fragmentary co-presence of the most disparate regions of theoretical or artistic practices). This capacity coincides with what Kierkegaard, in *Repetition*, called an “experimenterende Psychologi,” which is something we should translate as an “experimenting psychology,” instead of an “experimental psychology,” in order to underline the progressive and dynamic outreach of the expression. The “experimenting” attitude this research project aims at, and was very active in our Fourth Workshop, results to a large extent from the contact between philosophy and the supposedly non-philosophical areas of theoretical or even practical work. And the result of this attitude – which is mainly interrogative and critical of the philosophical tradition in its tendency to form self-enclosed systems of thought – goes in the direction of a conception of philosophy deeply characterized by its openness to other realities, precluding the effect of the stubborn oneness of philosophy. Our

conclusion is that the space for a kind of philosophy that cherishes and feeds its own borders, and constructs barriers that try to prohibit outsiders from entering its domains, or even to look inside through its windows, is predominantly getting nullified through the interactive contact between disciplines and the increasing eruption of branches or specialized areas of philosophy among which we find the philosophy of art, the philosophy of literature, the philosophy of film, the philosophy of performing arts, etc., and the philosophy of gender and sexuality or the philosophy of gender, race and sexual difference and even fields of studies that have designations like gay and lesbian philosophy or queer philosophy.

Questioning philosophy in its stability and specificity, but also in its new productiveness and proliferation, due to its heterogenic contact and intermingling with other fields of action and reflection, was the main goal of the Fourth Workshop of our research project.

According to the two lines of interest sketched out above, the present volume is divided into two sections. The first one has the designation of “Philosophy and the Arts,” something that might sound more restricted than we wish, since in English the expression “the arts” commonly has a narrower meaning than in its French or Portuguese equivalents. In fact, our aim was to open a discussion regarding the relations between philosophy and a broad set of aesthetical fields – from the plastic arts to performing arts, from literature to cinema.

The collection of essays contained in Part I of the present volume begins with a study by Fernando M. F. Silva on the “ideal of thought” in Hölderlin, a poet who gave an important contribution to philosophical reflection in his day. Adriana Veríssimo Serrão steps further in time and discusses the main aspects of Georg Simmel’s reception of Kant’s aesthetics, paving the way for a movement that reaches the plane of a philosophy of art and establishes an autonomy of art that deeply interrelates human life with works of art. Also drawing on Simmel’s thought, Maribel Mendes Sobreira analyzes the relation between architecture and philosophy and establishes a conceptualization of “shelter” and “to build” in an epoch “marked by the tragedy of culture.” José Miranda Justo addresses the DADA movement in its heterogeneity and draws conclusions for a contemporary criticism of the reductionist

wave that abolishes multiplicity and heterogeneity in the name of oneness. “Richard L. Anderson’s proposal on the nature of the work of art” summons Carlos João Correia’s attention who accurately examines the conclusions of his author, namely that “art is culturally significant, skillfully encoded in an affecting, sensuous medium.” Focusing on “Pessoa’s philosophy of the self presented in poetry and theatre,” Bartholomew Ryan puts forward a confrontation between Pessoa and Campos that allows him to enact the complex of distance/proximity between machines and the “empty oceanic thought.” Vera San Payo de Lemos addresses Brecht’s interest in philosophy as a counterpart of what the author himself thought about philosophers’ interest in theatre, and approaches the Brechtian “Lehrstück” (learning play) as a consequence of the author’s philosophical comprehension of knowledge. Christine Reeh-Peters’s paper “aims to raise the hypothesis of film as artificial intelligence by trying to grasp those concepts which describe the nature of both film and artificial intelligence;” to disentangle this complex of relations our collaborator refers to some of the latest reflections in philosophy on this matter and places them in relation to examples taken from films like “The Matrix,” “Blade Runner 2049,” “Metropolis” and “Solaris.” Ana Pais, in her position as a significant specialist in performance art, closed the first day of our Workshop with a characterization of her object of interest as a form of art that “challenges the relationship with the spectator, the boundaries of the artistic object and the very notion of artist, radicalizing the modernist premise of the art-life fusion,” and focusing her attention particularly on “Teatro Pogo’s controversial installation-performance *1p0g0* (Teatro São Luiz, Lisbon, April 14, 2017).”

Part II of the present volume is dedicated to the theme of “Philosophy, Gender and Sexual Difference.” It should contain Alison Assiter’s important contribution to our Fourth Workshop, a paper titled “On Vulnerability,” which raised much applause and substantially enriched our discussions. Unfortunately this was not possible due to the fact that her text has already been published for a different occasion. We wish, nevertheless, to extend our thanks to our colleague for her presentation and for her extremely active participation in all of the debates.

Maria Luísa Ribeiro Ferreira, in her quality as one of the first defenders in our country of the philosophical pertinence of feminism, opened the second day of the Workshop with a paper on the possibility or impossibility of the conciliation of women's rights and group rights. Dagmar von Hoff, as a specialist in what she designates as a "politics of trauma," deals with this philosopheme within the sphere of literature, namely by analyzing the case of José Agualusa's novel *A General Theory of Oblivion*. Elisabete M. de Sousa, the acclaimed translator of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* into Portuguese, addresses her author as a contributor to the ethical anthropology of the Enlightenment, who, by treating topics like the education of women, has broadened the scope of understanding of mankind. Maria Binetti confronts "feminist theory of sexual difference" with what she regards as "two of the main challenges of contemporary philosophy," the first being the need for a deep criticism of "the socio-linguistic constructivism of gender, transgender and queer-ness," and the second being the emergence "of a realistic or speculative turn in the 21st century as new spirit of the age." Drawing on Braidotti's arguments in favor of an investigation of "the body as a fluid space of intersection between the biological and the cultural realms in order to re-imagine its gendered and sexual potentialities," Diana V. Almeida sees "embodied subjectivity" as simultaneously "derived from" and shaping "the imaginary configurations of bodies in the artistic realms," which allows her to address "these dynamics" as "a political site of empowerment for women." Envisaging "the notion of public order from a bio-political point of view," and drawing on "the analysis of the state of exception by Giorgio Agamben," Pablo Pérez Navarro comes to the conclusion that "public order represents [...] a fundamental dispositive through which bio-power regulates the social life of gender, sexuality, reproduction and kinship." Sofia Roque closes this volume with "three notes for a critical reflection on emancipation as a practical experimentation of dissension and power"; she addresses this last topic "from a philosophical and political perspective on gender questions and feminist thought," and her arguments have their roots in the terrain of an "inspiring dialogue between Jacques Rancière, Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler."

To conclude I wish to express my deepest thanks to the Research Centre for Philosophy at the University of Lisbon, which has always supported the project and its initiatives. Thanks are also due to the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, which is responsible for funding the project and its activities. I very much appreciate all of those who actively participated, as speakers or as respondents, in the Fourth Workshop of the project, thus also contributing to the richness and success of the present volume. Finally, I would like to add a special word of appreciation to those who, with unlimited commitment and dedication, specifically helped out with the organizational tasks of the Workshop and the preparation of this volume: first, to my dear colleague, Elisabete de Sousa; to the extraordinary grant-holders of the project, Fernando Silva and Paulo Lima; to my incomparably attentive reviewer of my English texts, Sara Ellen Eckerson; to our most efficient secretary at the Centre for Philosophy, Sara Vargas; and to our extremely professional editorial designer, Catarina Aguiar.

José Miranda Justo
Main researcher of the Project E and D
November 2018

I. PHILOSOPHY AND THE ARTS

**“FOR ITS KNOWLEDGE, AS FOR ITS ACTION,
MAN NEEDS AN INFINITE PROGRESSION.”
HÖLDERLIN AND THE CONCEPT
OF THE IDEAL OF KNOWLEDGE**

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Abstract

One of the central problems in Friedrich Hölderlin’s philosophical thought, as well as one of the most pungent questions in the whole of German Idealism, is that *of the possibility (or not) of an infinite approximation to the ideal of knowledge* – or, if seen conversely, that *of the possibility of a “scientific quietism.”* The problem is dealt with recurrently by several authors, and also by Hölderlin, not only in several texts and letters but especially in a fragment entitled “Hermokrates an Cephalus” (1795). The aim is therefore to proceed to close reading this fragment, as well as the problem of the ideal of knowledge therein contained; through which we shall attempt to retrace the theoretical sources of this question in the young poet; to contemplate this question in its common theoretical framework; and finally to consider its impact not only upon the course of philosophy in general, but especially upon the development of Hölderlin’s system of thought.

Keywords

Hölderlin, Spiritual conflict, Philosophy, Infinite approximation, Ideal

I.

As we approach Hölderlin's philosophy, namely, the topic of its first influences, one realizes that such influences are so multiple and for this reason so explicit, that examples of this abound.

However, if one searches beyond mere influences, for *a unitarian or fundamental thought which may gather the previous influences and may be seen as the first image of a philosophical thought*, examples of this are both scarce and veiled.¹ By this we refer to a moment of decisive change, a *fracture*, not a contingent or given one, but *a fracture which is generated internally after a long maturation by the author, which he experiences under the form of a growing internal conflict*.

The phenomenon in question, wherein the problem of Hölderlin's *complex relation with philosophy* is brought to evidence, spans approximately between the second half of 1793 and the end of 1796. According to the poet's correspondence, during his period in Waltershausen, Hölderlin leads the "life of a hermit" (GStA 6.1: 130),² a life of "solitude, favorable to the formation of spirit and heart" (id.: 107). This would bring about a *rupture*. Hölderlin was "resolutely decided to separate himself from art" (id.: 113), and to devote himself to the study of philosophy, the "region of the abstract" (ibid.). And

¹ Hölderlin's posterior difficult relation with philosophy is well documented, yet not so much its origin from an early spiritual conflict, and much less from a spiritual conflict led by a philosophical issue as is that of the human possibility of attaining the absolute. On exceptions to this omission, see: FRANK, Manfred, *Unendliche Annäherung. Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1998; FRANK, Manfred, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, transl. by Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert, New York, SUNY Press, 2004; HENRICH, Dieter, *Konstellationen. Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789-1795)*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 1991; HENRICH, Dieter, *Der Gang des Andenkens. Beobachtungen und Gedanken zu Hölderlins Gedicht*, Klett-Cotta, 1986; JAMME, Christoph et. al., *Lo Sviluppo Filosofico di Hölderlin*, in *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* (1984-), Vol. 58, No. 3 (2003), pp. 423-436; KREUZER, J., *Vom Ich zur Sprache. Fichte und Hölderlin*, in *Fichte-Studien* 19 (2002), pp. 185-198; ITÔ, Kazuhiko, *Absolutes Werden und sehnsuchtsvoller Geist. Dichterische Haltung bei Hölderlin und Novalis und Fichtes Ich-Philosophie*, in *Keisei* 38 (1974), pp. 1-18; JÄGER, Hans-Peter, *Hölderlin – Novalis. Grenzen der Sprache*, Zürich, 1949.

² All citations, not only Kant's, but also from other authors, will be presented in a traditional manner (Abbreviation of work, volume of work, number of page(s)). All citations have been translated from their original German language into English. The citations are of my own translation.

as a result of this, a “metamorphosis” (id.: 109) takes place: namely, a period of *internal transition or transformation*, occasioned through philosophy and solvable only through philosophy; a period in which “new ideas enthrall” (ibid.) the young poet, and which, to paraphrase Hölderlin, “would be very decisive in [his] future life” (id.: 148). Namely, in a word, *a period of spiritual emancipation* which Hölderlin describes as “The great transition from youth to the being of man, from affections to reason, from the reign of phantasy to the reign of truth and freedom” (id.: 137).³

Such an emancipation, we believe, should be understood first and foremost literally – that is, in an *existential* regard. Namely, such a “great transition,” such a disruptive “metamorphosis,” consists of “a transition from affections to reason, from the reign of fantasy to the reign of truth and freedom” (id.: 137). And hence, what these words describe is a profound personal experience, a key-moment in Hölderlin’s own *formation* as a man, in this case, his difficult emancipation from poet to philosopher – a transition which, quite naturally, presupposed something as a redistribution of the powers of his spirit, namely, *one which privileged reason and the understanding in detriment of affections, the power of imagination or fantasy*.

However, such an emancipation must be understood more profoundly, also in a *theoretical* regard. For Hölderlin’s emancipation involves the powers of the spirit not only because it came to be accepted to connect certain powers to certain expressions of the human spirit, such as reason and the understanding to philosophy, or fantasy and affections to poetry. No. This emancipation evokes the powers of the spirit because *it is in such powers, and the specific vision which Hölderlin had of them, that lies the core of the comprehension of the poet’s problem with philosophy; and because, as such, the resolution of the problem of philosophy, as well as Hölderlin’s prospect of spiritual emancipation, depend on that specificity of the powers of the mind*.

Let us explain our words, resorting to Hölderlin’s own words in a letter to his step-brother, Karl Gok, on the 2nd of June 1796. Hölderlin believed that Man is a being of oppositions, and that one of the most unequivocal manifestations thereof lies precisely in the procedure of the powers of his spirit, as the expression of his feeling and thinking. As such, then, reason,

³ A transition which, still according to Hölderlin, “seems to me to be worthy of such a long development” (GStA 6.1: 137).

the power of all powers, is characterized by ascribing itself, as well as the remaining powers, *two opposite directions*. *On the one hand*, reason *lays the ground* (“legt den Grund” (GStA 6.1: 208)) of human life, and this through “its principles, the laws of acting and thinking” (id.). To be sure, the ground is here the foundation: reason founds human action and thought and, in addition, thus are founded action and philosophy, as well as a *first, restrictive sense of the latter*. Reason, as such, aspires to a zero-degree of human knowledge.

But, on the other hand, this is just one of the tendencies of human reason. For reason must be taken in all its span, and hence in the total scope of human knowledge; and so, just as reason grounds human action and thought, thereby laying the minimum ground – the zero-degree – of the latter (for reason’s eternal reference to an origin is proof of its humanity), *so must reason likewise refer human action and thought to another point, in this case, a maximum of human knowledge*. Namely, *reason must refer to the ideal*, for the ideal is also an essential objective of human thought and action.⁴ And since it lays the ground, but cannot refer the ground but to the ideal, then what reason does is to “once again ground,” to re-found human action and thought, once again casting them in search for an ideal ground: “But those principles of reason are themselves once again grounded through reason, insofar as they are referred by the reason to the ideal, the highest ground of all” (GStA 6.1: 208).

Hence, to summarize these two opposite tendencies of the powers of the mind, what results from this is not just any incongruence or conflict of the latter with themselves. Quite on the contrary, the result is “a general conflict in man” (id.: 208): “the conflict of the aspiration to the absolute and the aspiration to limitation” (ibid.). Namely, the conflict between the two tendencies of human powers, one striving for a return to the origin, or the fundamental ground, as the first principles of human knowledge and action – which, according to Hölderlin, is an “aspiration to limitation” [*Streben zur Beschränkung*], and another one striving for a progression towards the end, the ideal, as the final frontier of human knowledge and action – which, according to Hölderlin, is an “aspiration to the absolute” [*Streben zum Absoluten*]. And because such proclivities thus compose human action and thought, and because both have to be taken in their unceasing nature – as “a

⁴ “There is in every human activity a consummation, even in acts” (GStA 6.1: 251).

relentless activity” – then this only accentuates the conflict at hand, as well as the double opposite propension of the human being.

And yet, let it be noted, the kern of both problems lies not only in the conflict between these two antithetical aspirations. Truly difficult for the poet, as well as for the human species, is not the adoption of, or concession to, one or the other aspirations. According to Hölderlin, the conflict takes place because *these two philosophical-existential aspirations, the two aspirations of Man, and his powers, to the absolute and to limitation, are indeed simultaneous, and, as it seems, act independently from each other, yet nonetheless in their necessary interconnection*: one striving for the absolute-maximum, instilling convictions of perfection, aspiring to the ideal and hence preventing the regression of the other; the other one striving for the absolute-minimum, instilling convictions of originality, aspiring to the origin and hence preventing the progression of its counterpart. Namely, *Hölderlin’s problem with the conflict of the aspirations to the absolute and to limitation resides not only in what is conflicting in it, but especially in the simultaneity, in the quite independent inter-dependence, the heterogeneous intimacy of the two propeller springs of the human head and the human heart, which in truth seems to divide the human being and the powers of his mind* – and, what is even more painful and anguishing than this, seems to perpetuate his fracture and to prevent his emancipation into humanity. And this is what is truly difficult for Hölderlin, this is what is truly thorny in his relation to philosophy and truly anguishing in his poetic soul: that one such impasse in the natural aspirations which constitute human thought and action, was real, and visible not only in his actions, but also in his thought, in philosophy.

II.

The root of Hölderlin’s spiritual conflict may be sought in various areas and various authors. One of them, the one who would handle the question most radically, and hence is of special interest to us, is *Fichte*; the same Fichte whose classes Hölderlin would devotedly attend and praise, but also the same Fichte whose notion of the problem, so opposite was it to Hölderlin’s, would become the propeller spring for the advancement of the poet’s problem.⁵

⁵ See on all these topics GStA 6.1: 139-140; 142; 152; 155; 164.

The problem of Hölderlin's reading of Fichte, here etched broadly, faithfully reflects the question of the poet's spiritual emancipation. The problem, approached in the fragment "Urtheil, Seyn," and replied almost *ipsis verbis* in a letter to Hegel, dated 26th of January 1795, resides on the absolute and/or limited nature of Fichte's absolute I. Namely, Fichte postulated an absolute I which, according to himself, was so because his procedure was a circular one, and because, once inside such a circle, the I and his self-interpretation cannot leave it; that is, if the I is to be I. And so, without changing a comma to Fichte's words, Hölderlin sustains that Fichte's absolute I does indeed "contain all reality, it is all, and outside of it nothing is" (GStA 6.1: 155). But, Hölderlin adduces, because the I is absolute, this means that "for this absolute I there is no object, otherwise, not all reality would be in it" (id.). Now, human consciousness and its most human manifestations, as are freedom, or beauty, *must have an object*, simply because "a consciousness without object is (...) unthinkable" (ibid.). An object, Hölderlin adds, which may and should be *the I itself*, which is here, in his self-consciousness, "necessarily limited (...) hence not absolute" (ibid.). And if, as is the case, this consciousness has no object, no limitation, then this means that "no consciousness may be thought in the absolute I" (ibid.), that hence "as an absolute I, I have no consciousness" (ibid.) and the "absolute I is (for itself) nothing" (ibid.).

Now, if one translates this problem into that which by then assailed Hölderlin's spirit, this not only results obvious but it may lead us to new conclusions. For in Hölderlin's spirit as in Fichte's philosophy, central was the conflict between antinomic poles and the course of the I between the latter: a course which now adopted an absolutizing stance, now a limiting stance, and from then on weaved different philosophies, different destinations for the human being. Hence, *on the one hand* there is Fichte's synthetic philosophy, which progresses from finite to infinite, according to which the ideal of the I, the absolute, not only can be attained, but is indeed attained at every moment of the existence of an absolute consciousness. To resume Hölderlin's view of the problem, in Fichte's theory reason *lays the ground* (*legt den Grund* (GStA 6.1: 208)), but, precisely as it lays the ground, it lays the ideal, and reason, the understanding, the power of judgment, all are enthralled by it, hence re-founding, re-grounding, thus falling into the height of the absolute. And *thus arises the absolute, or the ideal. On the other hand,*

there is the philosophy of analytics, which progresses from infinite to finite, where reason envisages only the ground it itself lays and where, to recover that ground, it [reason] dismembers everything until it returns to the first origin of human knowledge. And *thus, from this limitation arise the general concepts of the understanding, or the opposites*. Hence, on one side, the ideal of human spirit is the image of an absolute I; on the other, the reality of the human spirit is the image of an empirical I. On one side, the amplest circle of action of the I, the *aspiration to the absolute*; on the other, the most exiguous circle of action of the I, the *aspiration to limitation*. Reasons which, we believe, more than suffice in proving the close affinity between the problem of philosophy in general and that of Hölderlin.

However, the identification of Fichte's problem with Hölderlin's existential and philosophical problem cannot rest here. The reason for this is simple and should be expounded. As such, then, the *aspiration to limitation* and the *aspiration to the absolute* are the two constituting elements of the "general conflict in the human being" (GStA 6.1: 208); and, according to our vision of them, they carry on being conflicting, as they are the maximum example of a consciousness devoid of object, an absolute I devoid of consciousness, an opposite without the other – or its antipode, which is also not to be desired. Now, according to Hölderlin, the conflict lies therefore in the total isolation of such tendencies; for this isolation seems to result only in univocal anti-theticity. But let us recall that, because in each of these tendencies is only the negation of the other, in those tendencies resides also – and always – their inter-dependence; and this inter-dependence, which is simultaneous, is even more problematic – it is, to be fair, the whole problem, for which a simple dissolution, or separation, is not the solution. And hence, one could infer that if the conflict is in the simultaneity of both aspirations, in limitation, as in absolutization, as well as in its apparent separation, *then neither mere separation, nor mere coexistence, can arise here as solutions*. Quite on the contrary, according to the young poet, *something of both, but something of neither of them, must take place*. Namely, because the dissolution of the two can never really occur, *then they must indeed be brought to one another in their separation; but because the bringing to one another is not at all desired, then they must be somehow separated in their union*. That is, the aspiration to the absolute and the aspiration to limitation, as is rendered obvious by Fichte's theory,

or would be by the antipode of the latter, must be brought to such a *state of union that is a separation, a separation that is union: in a word, a resistance between opposites, and one such resistance which not only shows that the opposites must exist, but also shows that they cannot exist, for both of these are the natural procedure of the human spirit*. Between subject and object, finite and infinite, limitation and absolute, there must be neither linear progression nor linear regression, rather a mutual resistance, a productive tension of eternal mutual supplanting: in Hölderlin's own words, *a state of fermentation*⁶ which brings the opposites to a necessary alternative *state of union in disunion*.

Hölderlin himself brings this to word. First on the 4th of September 1795, in a letter to Schiller, wherein the poet wishes to show "the unavoidable demand that must be made to every system, the union of subject and object in one absolute – I, or however one wishes to call it" (GStA 6.1: 181); secondly on the 24th of February 1796, in a letter to Niethammer: "I want to find the principle that explains the separations in which we think and exist, which is however capable of rendering in-existent the conflict, the conflict between subject and object, between our self and the world" (id.: 203).

Now, one such purpose, as it seems, obeys certain *conditions*.

The first condition, Hölderlin says, is that this is carried out "theoretically, in the intellectual intuition, in such a way that our practical reason need not come to our aid" (ibid.). That is, the first condition of a possible union between the aspiration to limitation and the aspiration to the absolute is that it is undertaken theoretically – theoretically, to be sure, referring here to the manner of progression of the human spirit now towards the ideal, the absolute, now towards the origin, the limitation. Now, as concerns the progression of the human spirit towards the ideal(s), Hölderlin's position is clear. For, according to the poet, if one takes human progression towards the ideal *practically*, then the ideal would have to act constitutively upon the spirit – which would surely be the case if man were in eternal unity with himself. The case, however, is not this – and hence, the constitutive action of practical reason cannot "come to the aid" of this question. It is therefore necessary to understand the question *theoretically*, for, from this point of view, the ideal acts in its merely regulating function upon the spirit, and hence there is no heteronomy between the human spirit and the super-human

⁶ See GStA 6.1: 229, 277.

absolute. As such, then, this means that between the human spirit and its ideal(s) there is no simple proximity, nor a simple progression or regression. Quite on the contrary, the fact that the I proceeds regulatively in relation to the absolute, or the origin, means that there is between both a sort of *barrier* – a barrier which is set by their mutual distance, thus bringing about the “general conflict in the human being” (GStA 6.1: 208). This barrier is precisely the *resistance* which Hölderlin believed must exist between the opposites; and because the absolute must be regulative and the I must be at once divided and united by the opposites which are his own being, then it is Hölderlin’s conclusion that *human progression can never be a finite one*. Such a progression is only possible through the “idea of an infinite progression of philosophy” (id.: 181).⁷

The *second and last condition* derives from the former. For, according to Hölderlin, man must indeed approach the ideal of the absolute theoretically. But, so says the poet, man “needs aesthetic sense for this” – and hence must undertake this not only theoretically, but also *aesthetically*.

As we see it, the question lies here in a more fundamental layer of the problem: that of the *reciprocal relation between the opposites*. Now, as was seen, the ideal acts regulatively upon the human spirit, which renders it unattainable for the latter. The same happens with the ideal of limitation, or the origin, which Hölderlin never separates from that of the absolute insofar as these are two sides of the same coin. This means – to resume Hölderlin’s problem – that human reason, the understanding, are led to extend in their maximum amplex between ideals. But because both these ideals act simultaneously, and this much is incontrovertible, then their amplex, though maximum, is insufficient to untie this Gordian knot, even to ascribe it a different form, perhaps one *less Gordian*, of reciprocity between opposing aspirations. In other words, reason and the understanding, in their intrinsic rationality, do not possess the agility to comprehend the problem but in its statically problematic form; and whenever they are faced with the above-mentioned mutual resistance or productive tension between opposites, they halt, thus bringing about the irresoluble problem. However, so says Hölderlin, the problem is not at all irresoluble. It is instead surmountable if one comprehends that the opposing aspirations of the human spirit are indeed incompatible and are

⁷ See also Hölderlin’s fragment “Hermokrates an Cephalus” (GStA 4.1: 213).

indeed insatiable, but, at the same time, if one discerns that it is possible that *between origin and absolute nothing differs but a name, and that both are one and the same image of infinity*. That is, if one discerns that from mere understanding and mere reason nothing good and productive may come forth towards the solution of such a complex problem, but from a different point of view of the latter the comprehension of the communion of origin and absolute may be attained, then, the vision of a linear, finite progression towards the ideal(s) is rendered meaningless and must be replaced by something radically different: *a non-linear, never attainable yet infinitely pursuable, never finite yet always infinite, progression towards the absolute*: “an infinite approximation (...), as is the approximation of the square to the circle” (GStA 6.1: 181). For, it is Hölderlin’s conclusion, “in order to render real a system of thought, it is necessary an immortality, as much as it is for a system of action” (id.). For the aim of such a search for union is not in pursuing an impossible absolute point, rather in pursuing *the possibility of the impossible, in living this experience beyond its intellectuality and in its sensibility*. In a word, once it perceives this, and sees the impossibility of this desideratum and yet the possibility of persevering in the path towards the ideal, the human being is left with no other choice than to approach it *aesthetically*, through the mutual reverse of those two sides of the same coin: not through the limited, or the absolute, but first and foremost through a different aspect, a different employment of both the understanding and reason, one visible in the “divine *εν διαφερον εαυτώ*, the ideal of beauty of the aspiring reason” (GStA 3: 83).⁸ And if this is so, if *philosophy is more than just aspiration to limitation and/or aspiration to the absolute*, then it must be something *in-between*: namely, philosophy is the union in disunion of the opposites; and such opposites are here unattainable, yet pursuable if seen aesthetically, that is, if understanding and reason cease their rational searches for the absolute and limitation, and rather see such aspirations as they have not been seen before: in their sensible “fermentation,” in their progressive resistance, in their heterogeneous homogeneity.

⁸ See Hölderlin’s *Hyperion*: “The great word, the *εν διαφερον εαυτώ*, (The One in itself differentiated) (...), for this is the essence of beauty, and ere it was found there was no philosophy” (GStA 3: 81).

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FROM AESTHETICS TO PHILOSOPHY OF ART: GEORG SIMMEL AS A READER OF KANT

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Abstract

In the essay “Kant und die moderne Ästhetik” (1903), which Georg Simmel dedicates to the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, the main topics which free the aesthetic sphere from subjection to strange elements (conceptual, moral, political, religious) – such as disinterest, pure pleasure, form, play – are brilliantly elucidated in a celebration of Kant as an anticipator of all “modern” aesthetics. Notwithstanding his compliment to Kant’s genius, Simmel considers that Kant is still trapped in a popular taste and a classic ideal which, by limiting art to beauty and structuring form, could not achieve the full essence of the work of art. Simmel addresses this divergence by offering at the same time some central lines of his own conception of the artistic form and the autonomy of art, which does not mean the isolation of the object, rather mediation between life and life. The work is a Third: between the life which is objectivated and organized in it according to its own legality, which again enters the flow of life through its reception by subjective fruition.

Keywords

Immanuel Kant, Georg Simmel, Aesthetics, Art, Form

1. Eulogizing Kant as the founder of modern Aesthetics

In the essay “Kant und die moderne Ästhetik” (1903), which Georg Simmel dedicates to the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (*Critique of Judgement*), Simmel brilliantly explains Kant’s aesthetics, praising him as the genius who anticipated all modern aesthetics.

Simmel goes through and justifies the main nuclei of the genial intuition which realized the independence of the aesthetic in relation to other values: the intellectual and cognoscitive, on one hand, and the practical and moral, on the other. Besides, Kant also defined the boundaries between two spheres of feeling, rigorously distinguishing the sentiment (*Gefühl*) of the beautiful from the sensation (*Empfindung*) of the pleasing.

Simmel immediately places as the starting point of his interpretation what he identifies as the most profound aspect of Kant's theory: the consideration of any object as aesthetic is only possible when said object is completely detached from its reference to the existence and exclusively apprehended in its phenomonic appearance. Aesthetic fruition cannot be dependent from the existence of one thing: neither from the proprieties it has as such nor from its real meaning and the relations it entertains with other objects from the empiric world. Only the qualities and proprieties manifested in it and from it are to be taken into account.

Here, abstracting from all the connections between a specific phenomenon and existence, resides the condition to apprehending its purely qualitative content. Only disconnecting the qualities from the real existence to which it is empirically connected is it possible to open the multiform possibilities for the fruition of the world in its properly aesthetic dimension. Independence from the existence of the object and from the effectiveness of the existing – Kant's *Interesselosigkeit* – is the necessary condition for the purity and freedom of the judgement of taste. Correctly understanding the absence of interest, it would not be indifference towards the object in itself, but rather indifference about whether or not the apprehended phenomena are adequate to the reality which surrounds or underlies them:

In fact, only then is it clear there is complete freedom and purity shining in the domain of the beautiful; only in this way does our fruition relation to things really limit itself to their intuition and to the distance of our fruition without touching them. Beauty lives in what in things is mere phenomenon, indifferent in relation to the reality which otherwise may be contained in those phenomena or not.

Denn erst damit ist die ganze Freiheit und Reinheit erklärt, die in dem Gebiet des Schönen leuchtet; erst so unsere genießende Beziehung zu den Dingen wirklich auf ihre Anschauung beschränkt und auf Distanz, in den wir sie genießen, ohne sie zu berühren. Die Schönheit wohnt in dem, was

in den Dingen bloße Erscheinung ist, gleichgültig gegen die Realität, die im übrigen in diesen Erscheinungen enthalten oder nicht enthalten sein mag.¹

On the contrary, when the importance we attribute to one thing derives entirely from the fact that it exists and how it exists, and therefore has the foundation in our interest for the selfsame existent, then are we already outside the aesthetic domain. It is the case of the theoretical interest and the practical interest, but also of the sensitive pleasure which depends from the object in presence, in as far as this object has to act upon us to provoke a pleasant impression, an immediate reaction on our sensorial capacity:

The sensitively agreeable is valuable to us because we have its fruition; in opposition, we have the fruition of the beautiful because it is valuable. However, this latter implication is only possible precisely when the fruition does not depend from the existence but from the proprieties or shapes of the things we are to judge as valuable.

Das sinnlich Reizvolle ist uns wertvoll, weil wir es genießen; das Schöne umgekehrt genießen wir, weil es wertvoll ist. Aber diese letzte Stufenfolge ist nur möglich, wenn der Genuß eben nicht von der Existenz abhängt, sondern von der Eigenschaften oder Formen des Dinges, die wir als wertvoll beurteilen müssen. (257)

To the discontinuous of the empirical pleasing there is the opposition of the continuous succession from the temporality of the phenomenic appearing. The sense of beauty may persist when the first image is becoming dissipated, and even in the absence of the object which provoked it.

2. Moving from subjectivity to objectivity

With his characteristic easy explanatory way, Simmel seems to faithfully reproduce the lesson from the first moment of the Analytic of the Beautiful – the definition of the beautiful as that which pleases independently from any interest. However, significant differences in focus are already felt in this explanation. Simmel surreptitiously moves what in Kant are conditions of

¹ GSG, 7, 256-257. Georg Simmel, "Kant und die moderne Ästhetik" (1st ed. 1903); in *Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe* (GSG), Bd. 7 Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901-1908 (ed. A. Rammstedt und O. Rammstedt), Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1995, Bd. 1, 1997, vol. 7, pp. 255-272. The quotations from the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (KU) are identified by their respective paragraphs.

appreciation and directs them to ways of object manifestation. A change in register which is almost imperceptible, from Kant's stress on subjectivity, on the subject's side, to the stress on the object side. To put it in other words: from the aesthetic as expression of a special dynamic from subjective faculties in the free play of imagination and understanding to the aesthetic as distinctive mode of the objects, and of its specific examples, the works of art.

After presenting the alliance of the aesthetic with the simple appearance which comes from the distancing attitude, and without considering it impossible that the aesthetic field may focus on any phenomenon in general, Simmel preferentially directs his reading of Kant to the artistic sphere. In reinforcement of this subtle movement, it is worth registering that in the examples he uses, Simmel mentions values more than he does states of mind (*Gemütszustände*). Exemplifying: the poetic value of a poem or the musical value of a piece of music is indifferent to the content of reality it has or to what connects it to the tissue of reality in which it is interwoven, and therefore it is erroneous in the aesthetic appreciation of art to pretend to determine how that content is adequate to the common empirical reality or to evaluate correspondences and fidelity in the meanings it shows. The work of fine art shares the same status as drama: the contents and events of current life reach a different stratum when such material is reconfigured according to the internal rules of dramatic art.

Hence, the absence of interest would not be so much the subjective freedom, as it is in Kant, as the liberation of the object which shows the work of art as pure self-presentation – not so much the free attitude of the subject as the freedom of the object which invites its appreciation.

In a single gesture, Simmel enhances the meaning of Kant's aesthetic theory as theory of subjectivity and transcendental analytic of human faculties, interpreting it as masterly anticipation of modern art's peculiar essence. Kant's aesthetic theory would already include the refusal of realism, of imitation and of adequateness. Not less relevantly, it would also prevent any enquiry in terms of correspondence between appearing and being. Kant would be under the shelter of the metaphysical grounding of art as revelation of fundament, the error he criticizes in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: that art is an immediate manifestation of life, when, on the contrary, it

should be understood as a production which frees itself precisely from life when it manages to establish itself on a plane which is distinguished from the intricacy of life.²

Art is indifferent to traits of reality which are beyond its describable and perceptible proprieties susceptible of being experienced. We experience colours, sounds, figures, brush strokes, textures, cadences, rhythms, but not what would be “behind” or “under” what is represented. It is not possible to have the perception of the deeper stratum of Being; the metaphysical in the world is an idea we may only attain through a leap (*Überspringen*), exclusively accessible to a metaphysical feeling devoid of sensoriality. Understood as phenomenality, art would be even “more purely empirical than the world of experience, because here there are inherent metaphysical [or mystical] presuppositions” (258-259).

The 20th century conception of art as sheer art invites a work of art to be considered in its simple intra-artistic reality, which is in itself an ideal reality, endowed with its own ideality, and only on that level of ideal meanings is it to be appreciated. From this point of view, Impressionism, though considered as a unilateral movement, would be the most coherent artistic principle (260).

3. The divergences: from the independence of aesthetics to the autonomy of the philosophy of art

When we might suppose the enthusiastic adherence to Kant’s role as founder of the contemporary conception of art would go on about the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*’s paragraphs dedicated to art as the expression of aesthetic ideas, the essay takes a very meaningful turn in explanation. The indifference for existence stipulated by Kant in his *a priori* foundation of the aesthetic attitude would be a merely negative determination in order to isolate the conditions of pure subjective pleasure, but which, according to Simmel, Kant converts to a positive condition for the aesthetic object when he defines this object as form; i.e., the pure form of the subject’s finality would have the purity of the object form as correlate, a criterion which, taken to the extreme limit, would only apply to free beauties, forms devoid of any meaning, a depurated

² Cf. “Schopenhauers Ästhetik und die moderne Kunstauffassung,” GSG 8, 106-107.

simplicity, and of irrelevant artistic value (KU, §14).

A profound principle which Simmel considers to have erroneous consequences: only form carries beauty, the sensitive elements being accessory elements and no inherent predicate of beauty, which led Kant to defend the primacy of drawing, in the case of painting, relegating colours to the secondary status of ornament or attraction. Even though colours and sounds taken separately may already constitute a form, the fact that Kant considers them as a play of impressions derived from either deprives them of aesthetic consistency (KU, §42). The main divergence is not in conceding to Kant that pure colours may be pleasing or even beautiful, but in the subordinate function they have in relation to the underlying structure of the composition within a painting. Kant would still be confined to a classical vision of form, structuring and intellectual, and that made him consider precisely as secondary what is capable of being experienced and give pride of place to order and to the internal connections which precede and support the sensitive elements as mere ulterior additions. This is also supported by the case of aesthetic attributes: a peculiar trait of Athena applied to Venus is not a contradiction with the “concept” of Athena, nor is it a historical or symbolical absurdity (KU, §49), but it may simply consist in an aesthetic contradiction immanent to the economy of what is represented.

It would suffice to give the concept of form the amplitude Kant was unable to, to perceive it as living form, internal unity of the diverse resulting from the reciprocal action of the parts in which all elements come into play for the joint forming of a world. The work of art is an emergent form of the cohesion, which cannot be separated and is not hierarchized, of its contents and of the expressive elements which interchange formal relations:

Form is the manner in which the elements are interrelated and coordinated to achieve any kind of unity.

denn aber Form ist die Art, auf die Elemente sich aufeinander beziehen und sich zu irgend einer Einheit zusammenfassen. (262)

And in this sense it is solidary with Simmel’s organic vision, for whom the work of art constitutes a singularity, a world which is self-organized according to its own legality. The “unity of the multiple” formula they both use must be understood in Simmel as “unity from the multiple” (*Einheit*

aus der Mannigfaltigen), obtained by the coordination of all the elements, each one continuously remitting to all the others within a given sensitive representation.

Though he managed by an extraordinary intuition to get ahead of the narrow artistic culture in provincial Königsberg, Kant was unable to do the same about the correlation between art and beauty. It is true that his conception of art, even refusing the principle of imitation in favour of originality, is circumscribed to the fine arts. Whereas Simmel, protagonist of the urban culture in Berlin, where he went to art exhibitions and theatre and musical productions, heedful of the changes occurring at the beginning of the 20th century, of the criticism made of academism and of the separation of genres in the name of new representations and styles, could not but see remains of a “popular” taste in such a correlation.

For the modern conception, the essence of art, which consists in bringing to the expressive surface the fragmentary multiplicity of existence, has nothing to do with beauty, which may be one of its qualities but never the only one, nor its main purpose. To consider that the artist aims to achieve beauty as his or her first objective is a sign of intellectualism and literary contamination. Creation is an inseparable unfolding from the initial original intuition and a work of art is the summit of a formation process which emanates from life and in it is accomplished and materialized as a peculiar individuality. It is the apex of setting-into-form (*Formung*).

A work of art comes into being when the fragmentary contents of existence are brought into a mutual relationship in which they find their meaning and the need for their approximation, therefore revealing in them a unity and an internal plenitude which occurs in them and which reality never guarantees. Ein Kunstwerk entsteht, indem die fragmentarischen Inhalte des Daseins zu einer gegenseitigen Beziehung gebracht werden, in der sie ihren Sinn und ihre Notwendigkeit aneinander finden, sodaß die eine Einheit und innere Befriedigung in ihnen aufleuchtet, die die Wirklichkeit nie gewährt. (262)

Notwithstanding the narrowness of Kant’s taste and his lack of direct knowledge of great artistic examples, and led solely by systematic reasonings from his own philosophy, Kantian independence of the aesthetic (the heautonomy) announces the demand for autonomy in 20th century art: a work of art “must

not – whatever the case and in none of its parts – ask what is not art for its meaning”: be it in historical, religious, political or metaphysical senses.

4. Aesthetics among life’s ultimate questions

No less surprising than the zealous analysis of the *Kritik der Urteilkraft* is the final part of the text, which again interprets the status of beauty, not as an immanent value in art but as subjective sentiment. It is a new shift: since the work of art has been objectified to liberate it from the constraints of beauty as its main function – a quality which is possible but not determining –, beauty is then subjectivized and integrated in the horizon of Simmel’s philosophy of life.

Kant’s originality is again exalted in the thought of the free play of faculties, the act of feeling without mixtures, the sentiment of an agreement between soul and representation, a sentiment which deals with intuitions that are devoid of concepts but which is endowed with its own orientation, though this is undetermined and cannot be objectified: finality without purpose (*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*) (KU, §10). It must be noticed in this explanation that, whereas Kant in his systematic plan mentions operations and their respective *a priori* principles, and establishes the articulation between sentiment and the reflecting faculty of judging, Simmel uses a clearly vitalistic and psychologizing terminology to describe the sentiment of beauty: as “solemn excitement,” “subjective reflex,” psychic energies and soul vibrations, giving emphasis to the “purely emotional” nature of an effect on the subjective spirit; in Simmel’s terms, on the interiority of the soul.

What we call beautiful is that which produces in us the subjective reflex of finality without one being able to say when and for what it is useful.

Was wir schön nennen, ist dasjenige, was in uns den subjektiven Reflex der Zweckmäßigkeit erzeugt, ohne daß wir sagen könnten, wann oder wozu es diene. (266)

The pleasure in the beautiful consists in the course of innumerable representations (*Ablauf von Vorstellungen*) comprised in a brief period of time. And the beauty of art is no more than apprehending the dispersive and unstopped flow of the contingent as a harmonious and condensed unity (263). Our

wishing to take time in contemplation, feeling that we are free, is a profound manifestation of life, all the stronger as in it grows the relation to scopes. Since man is the more end-orientated being, such manifestation is so much more elevated as those scopes are not confined to the domain of being (of concrete empirical experiences) nor subordinate to the sphere of what ought to be (of moral legality).

Even without capturing the completely free essence of the work of art, Kant understood as no other philosopher the pure feeling, which is not judgement but energy and vibration of the whole soul. Sentiment would be no more than the “pure, absolute function of all the single processes” (270) emerging when the soul entertains itself playing with representations without concepts – in Kant and Schiller’s line –, the self-satisfaction of a psychic dynamism exerted without constraints or precise direction. The expression of this sentiment, though individual, is not arbitrary, and in the discussion among different judgements of taste a validity surpassing individual limits is felt: the presence of the form of the human soul and its common functions: the supra-individual manifested in it as individual (KU §§6-8). This is the sense of the enigmatic statement according to which “art and beauty may connect again at a superior level”: when art reenters the current of life once more through its reception by subjective fruition, an entirely individual process, but which brings to the surface what is universally human in us.

Kant understood this well when he placed the experience of beauty in the tension between individual and universal, and he postulated the subjective universality as an *a priori* condition for the communicability of states of mind. This he did ultimately by integrating, when he integrated the aesthetic experience in the whole idea of humanity, thus elevating the human condition to “life’s ultimate question”:

Kant [...] took into account the need – of which there was awareness only one hundred years later – to intimately connect the aesthetic problems with the ultimate questions of life
(die ästhetischen Probleme in den letzten Fragen des Lebens zu verflechten) (272).

Since Simmel’s essay was so important to shed light on the innovative place of *Kritik der Urteilskraft* at a time when Kantism was almost confused with

a theory of knowledge, it is irrelevant to give an opinion on the accuracy of Simmel's reading. What is to be stressed is the fact that it is a remarkable document, identifying the nuclear points, therefore deserving to be included in the history of third *Critique* interpretations. The main topics which free the aesthetic field from submission to strange elements (conceptual, moral, political, religious) – such as disinterest, pure pleasure, play – are brilliantly elucidated in a celebration of Kant as anticipator of all “modern” aesthetics.

However, it is also worth noting that this essay stands out as a single piece among the great number of pages Simmel dedicates to Kant, mostly centered on knowledge and ethical themes. “Kant und die moderne Ästhetik” is the 15th on a series of lessons on Kant Simmel gave at Berlin University, with a Preface in which he points out that his intention is not historic-philosophical, but purely philosophical, aiming at “the nuclear thoughts with which Kant created a new image of the world.”³ An image of the world Simmel amplifies, including in his own philosophy of Life some inventions of Kant's aesthetics as principles of a new philosophy of art which he will develop in many writings, giving a multifaceted focus to the notion of autonomy:

a) As a spiritual formation which possesses a specific mode, distinguishable from those pertaining to other cultural productions, such as philosophy, religion and science;

b) as an individual configuration or individual law present in great artists, such as Michelangelo, Rembrandt or Rodin, with the great works of art responding to a problem only they themselves have put, including the capacity to transgress the rules in vigour;

c) as liberation from all spurious elements, reaching for an expressive supremacy modern art finally attained.⁴

Translated by Helena Leuschner

³ Kant. *Sechszehn Vorlesungen Gehalten an der Berliner Universität*, GSG 9 (“Kant. Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie“ (1905/1907), 9.)

⁴ Cf., among others, “L'art pour l'art” (1914) and “Gesetzmäßigkeit im Kunstwerk” (1917/18), GSG 13.

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THE RELATION BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE “TRAGEDY OF CULTURE”¹

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Abstract

The main purpose of this presentation is to clarify the relationship between Architecture and Philosophy, particularly the importance of Philosophy in such a relationship. Will architecture be a generating power in the materialization of thought? Or will it be something deeper than that and not a simple materialization of thought? In this research we tried to approach what is, fundamentally, Architecture, to identify what its essence and foundation are, trying to counteract the most common approach to Architecture, which only focuses on architectural objects. So, our concern is not to know what a building is or to find out its beauty or utility, but to realize what is a shelter and what means to build, and above all what architecture means in a time marked by the tragedy of culture (G. Simmel).

Keywords

Architecture, Philosophy of Architecture, Georg Simmel, Tragedy, Ruins

¹ Translation into Portuguese by Miguel Novais Rodrigues.

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Initial Considerations

In order to establish an intersectional reading between Architecture and Philosophy in the field of Philosophy of Architecture³ and not of Aesthetics, we will use, as a grid, the notion of tragedy of culture (cf. *Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur*)⁴ as developed by Georg Simmel in 1911.

Firstly, we feel the need to dissect the complex concept of “Architecture,” that is, its complex and ambivalent nature as a category of thought. If, on the one hand, it must deal with its materiality, on the other hand, it deals with the conceptual and creative aspects that its practice raises,⁵ varying between pure reason and practical reason, having as mediation the power of judgement. These two fields create a tension, a conflict for their determination in conceptual appropriation.⁶

³ The term Philosophy of Architecture is mentioned by Gordon Graham in an entry on Architecture in the 31st chapter of *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, edited by Jerrold Levinson. In it, the author speaks, in line with the chapter dedicated to Architecture, about its utility and value, questioning whether it can be considered Art. In *Philosophy of the Arts – Introduction to Aesthetics*, he questions analytically, whether the field of architectural reflexion should be considered within the scope of aesthetics or of philosophy of architecture. The latter would be seen as a branch of Philosophy of Art, distancing itself from the analysis that Roger Scruton, for instance, makes in *The Aesthetics of Architecture* or from what Hegel does in *Aesthetics*; it is also seen in “Filosofía y Arquitectura,” José Ferrater Mora (1955), in José Ferrater Mora, *Cuestiones disputadas, Ensayos de Filosofía*, Madrid, Revista de Occidente, pp. 43-59, 1967, II, pp. 274-284; another author worth mentioning is John Rajchman with the book *Constructions* which, in a Deleuzian way, problematizes the relations between architecture and philosophy. This short list should also feature Victor Consiglieri with the books: *Morfologia da Arquitectura; As Metáforas da Arquitectura Contemporânea; As Significações em Arquitectura*, and also *Le Philosophe et L'Architecte* from Daniel Payot. To finish this list, we will make reference to three compendia with texts from various authors, *Rethinking Architecture*, organized by Neil Leach, *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, edited by K. Michael Hays and *L'Architecte et le Philosophe*, organized by Antonia Soulez.

⁴ GSG vol.12, pp. 194-223; reading accompanied by the French, Spanish and English translations.

⁵ If, on the one hand, this materiality should express an immaterial idea and its symbolic aspects, on the other hand, it will also have to deal with the political, cultural, environmental and ethical implications...

⁶ As we can see in the following quotes:

Thomas Aquinas: “The house exists beforehand in the mind of the builder, and this may be called the idea of the house, because the craftsman tries to make the house similar to the form he conceived in his mind.”

This appropriation, as we shall see, is not only the apanage of the 20th century, but it is also transversal to a great part of the history of thought on architecture. Nevertheless, it will be in modernity that this tense relationship between technique and the values of human consciousness falls in crisis. The speed of technological evolution, mentioned by Simmel, leads to a specialization of the social structure, instrumented by technical-economic parameters.

This event has neglected architecture as a form of mental expression and spatial imagination. The emphasis on material and technological means has reduced the ontological complexity of architecture, leading to a slow death of its purpose, which can be understood or clarified through Georg Simmel's analysis of large cities and the idea that culture has in its structure a tension / struggle between its subjective process of the life of the spirit and the objectified forms of culture which crystallizes the flow of life into rigid structures.

Given its subjective-objective ambivalence, its materiality and objectivity, in which subjective immaterial values are communicated, architecture is found in this constant struggle. If, on the one hand, it produces forms that become autonomous, on the other hand, these start to be produced from life

Adolf Loos, who maintains that "architecture arouses states of mind in men. (...) If we find a mound in a grove, six feet long and three feet wide, heaped up in a pyramidal form, we will become serious and within us something will tell us: Here, someone is buried. This is architecture." Peter Zumthor: "architecture appears to me as a strong image, then it goes into the field of idea (conceptualization) with the visualization of the object (body or physical). The first images are naïf, from these images architecture arises, an architecture that exists by itself."

For example, in 1964, the architect Bernard Rudofsky, at an exhibition at New York's MoMa, entitled *Architecture without Architects* and in the book with the same title, draws attention to the richness of so-called architecture without pedigree:

"... the philosophy and know-how of the anonymous builders represent the largest and most unexplored source of architectural inspiration for industrial man. The wisdom withdrawn goes beyond economic and aesthetic considerations, for it alludes to the complex, growing and troubling problem of how to live and let live, such as being at peace with its neighbors, both in the narrowest and most universal sense." The sense of the work happens, not only in the recognition of the "author," but when we are referred to the spatial sensation and not to a mere visual memory, that is, underneath this spatial sensation is the activation of that which, primordially, leads us to the awareness of the architectural space. When it is subject to the appreciation centered on a "signature," its purity becomes a mere contemplative and explanatory object. We can, therefore, say that Architecture returns to its essence when it loses the author and accesses the Universal.

itself, but the architectural forms only return to life through ruin, which – as we will see later – is taken by Nature, its place claimed for it, “usurped” by the former’s tectonic materiality.

Concept

The term “Architecture” in its Greek etymology, the first notion of the word we come across upon researching in dictionaries and books versed on the subject of Architecture, is that of ἀρχιτέκτων (*arkhitektōn*) which, in Greek, combines two words. On the one hand, the ἀρχή (*archē*) which can mean both beginning and principle. It designates a starting point, a foundation, which Plato, in the *Laws*, book VI (775e)⁷ associates with a kind of divinity that, rooted in the human being, transforms it into a generating power of all cognitive activity (*Phaedrus*, 79d). On the other hand, τέκτων (*tektōn*) which is associated with τέχνη (*technē*), which means construction, edification, worker, technique. Architecture would thus be the operation that would materialize the ἀρχή, giving it form.

We may also recognize this generating power in the Indo-European word *tek* – to generate, to give birth to...; or *teks* – weave, manufacture. If we understood ἀρχή as the thing prior to reason, Architecture would be, and is, an activity that generates [the passage] from power to act.

However, the term “Architecture” may also be associated with οἰκοδομή (*oikodomē*), οἰκοδομικήν (*oikodomikēn*), οἰκοδομικός (*oikodomikos*). These words,⁸ derived from *oikos*,⁹ are associated with the capacity of a place to become home, to create an ontological identification with the territory; the word ἀρχιτέκτων (*arkitektōn*) would be used to designate the architect and not his discipline. The word associated with the root *archē* and *tektōn* arises when the bible is translated from Hebrew to Greek, thus originating the

⁷ “Pues el principio, cuando arraiga en lo humano como una especie de divinidad, lo salva todo con tal de que se le tributen por parte de cada uno de los que operan las honras que le son debidas.” *Las leyes* / Platon; ed. bilingue, traduccion, notas y estudio preliminar por Jose Manuel Pabon y Manuel Fernandez-Galiano. – Madrid : Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1960. – 2 vol. – (Clasicos politicos). – Paralel Text in Greek and Spanish.

⁸ *In Biblissima*. http://outils.biblissima.fr/lemmatiser_grec/index.php?pos_ind=6729348. E Perseus, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0167:book=1:section=346d>. Seen on 15-06-2014.

⁹ In: *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early christian literature*, pp. 561-564.

term ἀρχιτεκτονίας (*architektonias*), to translate from the Hebrew: *ma ḥā šā bōt, mā le ket*, and also *mā lā kāh*,¹⁰ which in Portuguese is translated by: able to idealize works or any kinds of labour, and still craftsman, as we can see in the Portuguese, English and Greek translations of Exodus 35:32 and 35:35.¹¹

The term that entered our language would therefore be the translation from the Greek ἀρχιτεκτονίας (*architektonias*) into the Latin *Architectura*, to which Hubert Damisch draws attention, saying that the Latin *Ars* is different from the Greek sense, which, for Cicero, would be “a way of being or acting, the ability acquired through study or practice, a knowledge of the technical nature.”¹²

As we saw above, the οἰκοδομικήν, used by Plato in his dialogues, when one wants to refer to Architecture, denotes that the relation with the idea of architecture arises from an empirical correspondence with the immediate environment, carrying a load of symbolic and mythological conception

¹⁰ In Bible hub. <http://biblehub.com/interlinear/exodus/35.htm>. Seen on 17-06-2014.

¹¹ “EX.35:32 and to make skillful works, to work in gold, in silver, in brass,”

by: “ἀρχιτεκτονεῖν TO-BE-ARCHITECT-ING κατὰ DOWN/ACCORDING TO/AS PER (+ACC), AGAINST (+GEN) πάντα ALL (NOM|ACC|VOC), EVERY (ACC) τὰ THE (NOM|ACC) ἔργα WORKS (NOM|ACC|VOC) τῆς THE (GEN) ἀρχιτεκτονίας ARCHITECTURE (GEN), ARCHITECTURES (ACC) ποιεῖν TO-BE-DO/MAKE-ING τὸ THE (NOM|ACC) χρυσίον PIECE OF GOLD (NOM|ACC|VOC) καὶ AND τὸ THE (NOM|ACC) ἀργύριον PIECE OF SILVER (NOM|ACC|VOC) καὶ AND τὸν THE (ACC) χαλκὸν COPPER OR BRONZE (ACC);

or: “Ex. 35:35 He has filled them with wisdom of heart, to work all kinds of workmanship, of the engraver, of the skillful workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of those who do any workmanship, and of those who make skillful works.”

to: “ἐνέπλησεν HE/SHE/IT-SATISFY-ED αὐτοὺς THEM/SAME (ACC) σοφίας SAPIENCE (GEN) καὶ AND συνέσεως INSIGHT/DISCRNMENT (GEN) διανοίας COGNITION (GEN), COGNITIONS (ACC) πάντα ALL (NOM|ACC|VOC), EVERY (ACC) συνιέναι TO-BE-BE-ING-TOGETHER; TO-BE-UNDERSTAND-ING ποιῆσαι TO-DO/MAKE, BE-YOU(SG)-DO/MAKE-ED!, HE/SHE/IT-HAPPENS-TO-DO/MAKE (OPT) τὰ THE (NOM|ACC) ἔργα WORKS (NOM|ACC|VOC) τοῦ THE (GEN) ἁγίου HOLY ([ADJ] GEN) καὶ AND τὰ THE (NOM|ACC) ὕφαντὰ WOVEN ([ADJ] NOM|ACC|VOC) καὶ AND ποικιλτὰ ὑφᾶναι TO-???, BE-YOU(SG)-???-ED!, HE/SHE/IT-HAPPENS-TO-??? (OPT) τῷ THE (DAT) κοκκίνῳ SCARLET ([ADJ] DAT) καὶ AND τῇ THE (DAT) βύσσῳ FINE LINEN (DAT) ποιεῖν TO-BE-DO/MAKE-ING πᾶν EVERY (NOM|ACC|VOC) ἔργον WORK (NOM|ACC|VOC) ἀρχιτεκτονίας ARCHITECTURE (GEN), ARCHITECTURES (ACC) ποικιλίας”

¹² DAMISCH, Hubert, in: *Enciclopédia Einaudi*, vol.3, Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1984, p. 30.

which shapes the cognitive relationship with the environment, which in this sense is intuited and thought of universally.

The polysemy of the word ‘architecture’ refers both to something constructed and to practical or theoretical knowledge, and it is possible to verify changes in the understanding and appropriation of the concept from time to time. We will focus on the fruitful debate of the twentieth century, in which new theoretical models have been sought in the field of this discipline, in order to overcome the canons instituted in the debate by the Fine-Arts and the very changes and demands that the industrial revolution has brought about, thus making the idea of architecture autonomous in relation to art.

Architecture in Philosophy

Philosophy, which, in a theoretical way, is concerned with origins, helps Architecture extract its sense and meaning from the rubble, which has been lost along the way by being so focused on the architects’ discourses on their objects and not on theoretical relations; we agree with Alberto Perez-Gomes when he says that “the apprehension of the meaning of architecture requires a metaphysical apprehension”¹³ which reveals “the presence of Being, the presence of the invisible within the everyday world”¹⁴ which should be expressed in symbolic relations of reality. Let us look at what Nietzsche tells us:

§ 218¹⁵

Stone is more stone than it used to be. – In general, we no longer understand architecture; at least we do not do so nearly as well as we understand music. We have grown out of the symbolism of lines and figures, just as we have weaned ourselves from the sound-effects of, and no longer imbibe this kind of culture-mother’s milk from the first moment of our lives. Everything in a Greek or Christian building originally signified something, and indeed something of a higher order of things: this feeling of inexhaustible significance lay about the building like a magical veil. Beauty entered this system only incidentally, without essentially encroaching upon the fundamental sense of the uncanny and exalted, of consecration by magic and the proximity of the

¹³ In Kate Nesbitt, *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁵ Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Humano, Demasiado Humano [1878]*, Edições Relógio D’Água, Lisboa, 1997.

divine; at most beauty *mitigated the dread* – but this dread was everywhere the presupposition. – What is the beauty of a building to us today? The same thing as the beautiful face of a mindless woman: something mask-like.

Nietzsche tells us that “In general, we no longer understand architecture,” that is, according to Daniel Payot’s reading of this paragraph in the book *Le Philosophe et L’Architecte*, we are no longer contemporaneous with the primordial idea of Architecture that, in a discursive way, has kept moving away from its purpose, because it no longer has the truth (*alētheia*) that connected the human being of the sensible world to the intelligible world. Christian Norberg-Schulz, for example, in rescuing the Roman concept of *genius loci*, thus tried to understand and disseminate a primordial idea of Architecture for our postmodern era. This idea got lost along the way, as was done, for example, by Le Corbusier, who transforms it into a machine to inhabit.

This is the architect of the modern city, which can be understood as having preferred speed and change to duration, as Georg Simmel described – the *blasé* attitude emerging as an antibody to the new way of life, where the architect became a hostage and a producer of that spirit that Simmel diagnosed.

If we put Georg Simmel’s¹⁶ and Lewis Mumford’s texts¹⁷ side by side, we can see that the first one diagnosed the disease, and the second tried to analyze and propose a cure for it, an early exit route for what they foresaw, and which ended up prophesizing nowadays, our contemporaneity.

The *blasé* human being was slowly neglecting his relationship within the community – not only with his fellow beings, but also with all other beings – dislodging community and cultural ties, seeing reality under the filter of economic exchange value, turning the human being into a mechanized being that responds to visual and virtual impulses, distancing itself from his roots.

Facing this crossroads, Mumford presents two paths: on the one hand, to continue following the way of technique and, on the other hand, to create a structure that confronts the kind of modern human being with himself, so that he can become devoted to collective interests. In a way, Arnold Berleant responds, when he calls attention to the need for a

¹⁶ SIMMEL, Georg, *As Grandes Cidades e a Vida do Espírito*, Artur Morão (trad.), LusoSofia:press, Covilhã, 2009.

¹⁷ MUMFORD, Lewis, *A Cidade na História: suas origens, transformações e perspectivas* [1961], Neil R. Da Silva (trad.), Martins Fontes, São Paulo, 2004.

relationship of ethical-aesthetical commitment to landscape, from which Architecture cannot be dissociated.

We are not contemporary

According to Payot's Hegelian analysis of Architecture, Architecture starts from the symbolic presupposition of a representation of a cosmic model, according to which "the temple represents the world, but the world, conversely, is constructed as a temple."¹⁸ According to this, architecture would begin to function as a metaphor that sustains the world, that is, "Architecture produces bodies."¹⁹ Architecture is always an idea of architecture, the object built is always an idea of Architecture, not Architecture in and of itself.

In contrast, there are those who try to focus on the idea of Architecture as a metaphorical element of language, and also as something that does not materialize in the sensible world, rather becomes truth in the intelligible world. Philological and etymological research is unanimous in locating the concept of Architecture in the Greek language, but, as we have seen, when we read Plato's texts and confront the various translations,²⁰ when referring

¹⁸ "Le temple re-présente le monde; mais le monde, inversement, est bâti comme un temple," PAYOT, Daniel, *Le Philosophe et L'Architecte: Sur quelques déterminations philosophiques de l'idée d'architecture*, Editions Aubier Montaigne, Paris, 1982, p. 68.

¹⁹ "L'architecture 'réalise des corpos'", idem, op. cit., p. 91.

²⁰ Starting from the idea that for Plato Architecture is one of the indispensable disciplines of human life, that he classifies (*Philebus* 56b-c) as being a pure science, in which, through mathematical and other criteria such as weighing, measuring, counting, the possibility of materializing constructions that did not exist before is given. (...) Let us see, for example, the dialogue *Meno* where Socrates asks the slave to (re)discover the geometric figures by himself, mathematically decomposing the sensible reality, thus accessing the intelligible, in which these figures remind the soul of their visualization of the intelligible. That is to say, the technē – of architecture – should materialize the intelligible through a geometric language to meet Beauty, where it would identify with Goodness, through its stability, solidity and beauty that should reproduce the model of eternal ideas, such as Vitruvius explains in *De Architectura*, as: *utilitas*, *venustas* (beauty) and *firmitas* (solidity). But the difference between the two is that for Plato the idea of utility centers on an ethical-aesthetic relation, whereas for Vitruvius utility is merely functional, it has no ontological meaning, as if it were a machine.

Utility comes from the ability to render concrete the places we inhabit, and through it architecture approaches the intelligible paradigm of creation [11], in which Goodness and Beauty are correlated, "(...) to what is useful we call Beautiful" (*Hippias Maior* 295d). The architect needs to master both theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge

to architecture, he uses the word/concept *οικοδομή* (*oikodomē* – home) and not *ἀρχιτεκτονίας* (*architektonias*), this being the one that passed on to the Latin language, as it was mentioned above. Architecture, in this way, centers on the dichotomy of an understanding between a real Architecture and a representational Architecture.

Architecture, because it is not merely a science of construction, confers to places an ontological connection through the understanding of the relation between *ἀρχή* (*archē*) and *οικοδομή* (*oikodomē*). Representational architecture is a deviation from that authentic relationship with Nature, of which the *oikodomē* is the original background. In this sense, an understanding of the

(*Politicus* and *Philebus*) in order to accomplish things useful to the community, bringing to the world something that did not exist before, thus moving away from mimetic arts. Thus in architecture the ethical and aesthetic have to go together, “neither the Good would be Beautiful, nor the Beautiful would be Good, if each of them were far from the other” (*Hippias Maior* 303-304a). In *Charmides* (165d) he tells us what architecture accomplishes: “If, talking about architecture, you ask me what work it does, as a science of construction, I would answer you the places where we live.” [11] or in the translation of Agostinho da Silva: “And [[if] you ask me what construction does the building, which is the science of building, I would answer the houses; and so the other arts.” [11] We encounter an ambiguity in the various translations, by the very polysemy of the word, for the Greek text runs as follows:

“καὶ εἰ τοῖνον με ἔροιο τὴν οἰκοδομικὴν, ἐπιστήμην οὖσαν τοῦ οἰκοδομεῖν, τί φημι ἔργον ἀπεργάζεσθαι, εἶπομ’ ἂν ὅτι οἰκήσεις: ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τεχνῶν. χρὴ οὖν καὶ σὲ ὑπὲρ τῆς σωφροσύνης, ἐπειδὴ φῆς αὐτῆν ἑαυτοῦ ἐπιστήμην εἶναι, ἔχειν εἰπεῖν ἐρωτηθέντα, ὡς Κριτία, σωφροσύνη.”

Usually, it is translated into Portuguese as in the original text and to English, French and Spanish as follows:

“And so, if you should ask me what result I take to be produced by building, as the builder’s science, I should say houses; and it would be the same with the other arts. Now it is for you, in your turn, to find an answer to a question regarding temperance – since you say it is a science of self, Critias – and to tell me what excellent result it produces for us.”

“ – Si tu me demandais, à propôs de l’architecture, quelle ouvre ele réalise en tant que science de la construction, je te répondrais: nos habitacions. Et ainsi de suite pour les autres arts.”[11]

“ – Y si, además, me preguntases por la arquitectura, que es algo así como saber edificar, y qué efecto es el que tiene, te diría que su efecto son los edificios. Y así, de las otras técnicas. En consecuencia, para la sensatez, en cuanto que es, según tú, una cierta ciencia o saber de uno mismo.”

As we can see in the excerpts quoted above, the word *οικοδομικὴν* was translated by: architecture / ability to build; *οικοδομέω* for building, building; *οἴκησις* the act of dwelling, dwelling, house, place; in this sentence we begin to see that Architecture is enabled to realize the places and buildings we inhabit, that is, to transform them into homes. It is not only a science of building inert objects, but it confers to the places an ontological and symbolic collection, linking the soul to the intelligible world through the sensible, giving it identity and anchoring in the dwelling.

archē of the *tektōn*, an archetypal understanding, is essential for an ontological construction of the *oikodomē*.

To understand the deep conjunction between the *archē* and *oikodomē* is to understand that the home of human being is their origin, and also, in the opposite sense, their origin is their home. The awareness of this bond would lead us to a more intimate, profound and fruitful reconnection with Nature. The solution would be to rescue (*re-ligare*) the idea of *oikodomē* (by *oikodomē* we always understand home in its original sense) thus bringing it to Architecture.

Oddly enough, the complex analysis of the concept, since it was created after the discovery of the relationship of the metric body with the surrounding landscape, leads us to a subjective view by means of the idea of architectural object, since a direct and objective form would be the shelter that would later derive to other types of buildings required by cultural demands.

This way, Nietzsche's idea that we are no longer contemporaries with architecture is a current testimony to our estranged relationship with the idea of Architecture. It has ceased to be contemporary with itself to become contemporary with the anthropocentric demands on culture and the disproportionate transformation of the landscape.

Insofar as nowadays the human being understands landscape to be devoid of its natural element, it can be said that, essentially, it does not understand the landscape that was once recognized as fundamental to the understanding of architecture itself. The idea of natural landscape has already been lost to such an extent, that it has become necessary to rescue an idea of totality, such as that of *φύσις* (*physis*) for the Greeks. If we focus solely on an idea of urban landscape, we do not understand that architecture, and consequently the city, have lost their other half.

With the development of societies and the consequent growth of the architectural object, this relationship has been moving Architecture farther and farther away from its purpose with its environment. The acceleration of time and the dispersion of space has led the human being to give greater importance to technique, and thus to have a virtual relationship with the environment through increasingly specialized spaces in the city. It is necessary, for this original idea of the relationship with the natural element to be redeemed, to transpose to our contemporary epoch the understanding the

Greeks had of *φύσις* (*physis*) as the totality of a world and not as something dispersed and amenable to a scalpel analysis.

Tragedy of culture: architecture between ruin and landscape

In the essay “The Concept and the Tragedy of Culture,” Georg Simmel begins by observing what distinguishes the subject from Nature, namely, consciousness, that is, the subject is not immersed in the object, as the animal is in nature.

The fact is that, unlike animals, humanity does not integrate itself unquestioningly into the natural facticity of the world but tears loose from it, confronts it, demanding, struggling, violating and being violated by it and it is with this first great dualism that the endless process between the subject and the object arises.²¹

The subject creates a “second object,” an artificial one, which becomes autonomous in the face of the first one and thus gives rise to culture. In culture, we thus have the objectivation of subjectivity. This duality that presents itself in the form of a dilemma between subject and object, life and forms, Nature and culture, is at the basis of the dichotomy between product and producer.

The spirit produces countless constructs which continue to exist in a peculiar autonomy, independent of the soul that created them as well as of any of the others that accept or reject them. This is the way the human subject confronts art as well as law, religion as well as technology, science as well as custom. The human subject is not only attracted and then repelled by their content, now fused together with it as with a part of itself and then again estranged from and untouched by it; it is also the form of solidity, of immobility, of lasting existence, with which the spirit, having become an object in that way, opposes the flowing liveliness, the inner self-responsibility and the changing tensions of the subjective psyche.²²

²¹ SIMMEL, Georg – “Le concept et la tragédie de la culture.” (1911) In SIMMEL, Georg, *La Tragédie de la culture*, Vladimir Jankélévitch (intro.), Sabine Cornille e Philippe Ivernel (trad.), Editions Rivages, 2013, pp. 179-217.

²² SIMMEL, Georg – “Le concept et la tragédie de la culture.” (1911) In SIMMEL, Georg, *La Tragédie de la culture*, Vladimir Jankélévitch (intro.), Sabine Cornille e Philippe Ivernel (trad.), Editions Rivages, 2013, pp. 179-217.

As we have seen, the objects created by the subject bear the mark of the subject; given the tragical character of culture, when the object created from a subjectivity no longer belongs to it and cuts the ties that connected him to it, becoming autonomous in the face of this subjectivity and simultaneously making this objectivity autonomous.

Man finds himself “obliged” to create (new) bridges between subject and object, between man and Nature, but these bridges never remain static, immutable, immobile, for there is no possible identity between the mobility of subjectivity and the immobility of objectivity. We are constantly linked to projective processes related to artifacts / objects, but there is still an “insurmountable” difference between life and those forms.

That is, the whole product of the spirit is, or may be, the result of a process in which the subject becomes indifferent to himself and extinguishes himself in the object. As Leopoldo Waizbort suggests in the book *As Aventuras de Georg Simmel* (“*The adventures of Georg Simmel*”): “The tragedy of culture is this uncontrolled and disintegrating transformation of means into ends: man, the true end, becomes a means; the object, the true medium, an end, to which men end up submitting.” (Waizbort, 2013: 128) As Georg Simmel will tell us, the subject is faced with these configurations that have become autonomous:

(..); but on the other hand it is in the very shape of the solid, of the crystallization, of the permanence of existence, that the spirit – thus made object – is opposed to the flux of life flowing, to internal self-responsibility, to the various tensions of subjective psychologism; as a spirit, closely connected to the spirit, he knows then innumerable tragedies born of this profound formal contradiction, between the subjective life which is relentless but limited in time and its contents which, once created, are immutable but timeless.²³

Hence the strangeness the subject feels before his artifacts, his creations. This alienation is aggravated by the division of labor, which breaks the bond between product and producer, thus creating products that do not need a producer. The tragedy of culture makes the subject indifferent, lost in a web of creations without creator, needing art in a quartered world to recover the

²³ SIMMEL, Georg – “Le concept et la tragédie de la culture.” (1911) In SIMMEL, Georg, *La Tragédie de la culture*, Vladimir Jankélévitch (intro.), Sabine Cornille e Philippe Ivernel (trad.), Editions Rivages, 2013, pp. 179-217.

objective dimension of the subject.

In a culture produced according to the mechanical division of labor, the distance between this (culture) and the subject becomes increasingly abyssal. We may also note something that may be an influence of Marx's work on the commodity fetishism. In fact, the contradictions which, according to Marx's philosophy, underlie capitalism, are taken up again by Georg Simmel to think about the paradoxes and conflicts that culture itself produces. But we shall not elaborate on this point.

Simmel's concept of culture, as we have seen, must be understood through the conflict between life and forms, between the creation of the life of forms and their autonomization. Here, there is a contradictory, conflicting unity. Life is a constant flow, it is transcendence of limits, of the unspeakable that, ironically, needs forms to be informed, that is, to embody and give expression to life (*Leben*) forcing it to have limits, to fix it and make it sensitive in order for the subject / subjectivity to find meaning in it. Herein lies the contradiction, the tragedy of culture for Simmel.

For Simmel, culture becomes an infinite task. Since life is infinity and transcendence, this is the movement we should think of when we speak of life in Simmel, lest we fall into the idea of a merely biological and social life. The fixation of life, as has been said, appears in its fixation in forms, but life is also a continuous transcendence of forms.

In Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), we can find bridges connecting with Simmel's reflection on culture. Here Benjamin considers the loss of character of the aura of the art work, in which the character of the work of art is transformed in a radical way. The author tells us that "what wilts in the age of the reproducibility of the work of art is its aura" (1936-39, 1992, p. 79). For it is the aura which shall disappear with the inclusion of mechanical technique in the nineteenth century, with the development of photography and, consequently, later, with cinema.

The philosopher, in an aesthetic essay on the frame, draws the distinction between the work of art and the "fragment of nature," saying that in this distinction we must keep in mind that the character of things is dependent upon their being considered as totalities or as parts. The character of things depends, on the one hand, on their being totalities in themselves, as is the

case in Nature, where there are no parts, but always totality; or, on the other hand, on their being parts of a larger whole. Simmel tells us:

That a being constitutes a unity in itself, obeys only the law of its own nature and suffers itself, or draws its strength and its sense from the relation which it has, as part, as a whole, is that which distinguishes the soul from all that is material.²⁴

That is, when we behold nature, as when we behold architecture, ruin, or landscape, we must consider whether we are facing a self-contained, detached system of life in which its energies converge to its own center, not needing the exterior, or if we are before something more complex, something which, while forming a unit, simultaneously has in itself the flow of life; in the background, between the various forms, we must ascertain their vitality, see how they are configured and what relationship they maintain with the life that originated them and with the totality in which they are inscribed.

This tragical quality of the relation between subject and object, man and nature, freedom and necessity, constitutes the essence of architecture, as Simmel tells us in his essay on ruin:

The great struggle between the will of the spirit and the necessity of nature, between the soul-force that tends upwards, and the weight that tends downwards, cannot achieve a complete equilibrium if not in a single art: architecture.²⁵

That is to say, architecture consists of a confrontation between the human freedom that tends upwards and the natural necessity that tends downwards, thus bearing some differences in relation to art, namely, in taking advantage of the laws of matter and in ascribing, in spite of everything, a central place to the proper characteristics of matter, of materials, making

²⁴ SIMMEL, Georg – “Le cadre. Un essai esthétique.” (1902) In SIMMEL, Georg, *Le Cadre et autres essais*, Karine Winkelvovs (trad.), 1st edition, Éditions Gallimard, 2003, p. 29.

²⁵ SIMMEL, Georg – “Die Ruine.” (1911) In *Georg Simmel. Gesamtausgabe*, hrsg. von Otthein Rammsted, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989, vol. 14, pp. 287-295.

them adhere immediately, by virtue of their own characteristics, to the plane that the subject traced, giving it body and configuring it perfectly. Let us see what the author says:

Architecture, however, uses and divides gravity and the force of matter according to a plan only possible in the soul, thus allowing matter to manifest itself, within the very limits of this plan, according to its immediate nature, and in such a way that this one seems to execute this plan with its own forces. This is the most sublime victory of the spirit over nature – just as a person is guided in such a way that his will is accomplished by him, not by the subjugation of his own will, but by his own will, so that the direction of his autonomy sustains our plan.²⁶

If we consider it, the whole construction can be seen as a split between subject and Nature, but also as a conjugation between both. However, this victory of the spirit does not resist time:

This balance of a unique character, between heavy matter, passively resisting pressure, and forming spirituality, always tending to the top, is nevertheless destroyed when the building falls into a ruin. Because this simply means that the purely natural forces began to triumph over the human work; the relation between nature and the spirit, represented by the architectonic work, hangs in favor of nature. (...) If in other arts he subjected the forms and events of nature to his orders, in architecture he used the masses and the forces of nature themselves, until they had expressed the idea made visible, as if they came from them themselves. But for the necessities of matter to submit to the freedom of the spirit, so that the forces of matter, whether pure or heavy, express fully the vitality of the spirit, it is necessary that the work subsists in its perfection. As the collapse of the edifice destroys the completeness of form, the opposing parts separate again from each other and reveal their original and universal hostility as if the artistic formation had been but an act of violence of the spirit.²⁷

The form that the subject had imposed on matter dissolves. What temporality shows us is that not even what was created from subjectivity resists it.

²⁶ SIMMEL, Georg – “Die Ruine.” (1911) In *Georg Simmel. Gesamtausgabe*, hrsg. von Otthein Rammsted, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989, vol. 14, pp. 287-295.

²⁷ SIMMEL, Georg – “Die Ruine.” (1911) In *Georg Simmel. Gesamtausgabe*, hrsg. von Otthein Rammsted, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989, vol. 14, pp. 287-295.

Nature reclaims its power, the subject is doomed to disappear in the object, and once the destruction of the building is consummated, what remains is an entirely new totality created by Nature's action on human work. Which makes ruin

a much more significant appearance than the fragments of the deterioration of works of art... the ruin of architecture shows in the destroyed or devastated parts of the work of art a development of forces alien to it; these are the forces and forms of nature. Thus, a new totality was born, composed, in turn, of an element of art and an element of nature united in a characteristic unity.²⁸

We can say that the suspension of the tragical character of the relation between subject and Nature does not come only from human action, in the active destruction of the building, but also from its passivity, when it acts not as a subject but as an object.

This is often the case, for example, with the inhabited ruins that man, by choice, allows to ruin, degrade, thus becoming the accomplice of nature, but in this case depriving the ruin of the balance between matter and spirit. It is in this sense that we often become uneasy when we encounter places that lack life but continue to serve as scenarios for it.

Appeasement occurs when ruin is taken exclusively by another life other than that of the subject, that of nature. When the conflict and the struggle between subject and object cease, a kind of metaphysical tranquility seizes upon this tragedy:

This is how ruin gives an impression of peace, because in it, the opposition of these two cosmic powers [the soul that tends upwards, and matter that tends downwards] act as the tranquilizing image of a natural reality; this is also what explains that the ruin is incorporated in the surrounding landscape, like the tree or the stone, whereas the palace, the village or even the country house... always leave another order of things and do not seem to agree with nature until later.²⁹

²⁸ SIMMEL, Georg – "Die Ruine." (1911) In *Georg Simmel. Gesamtausgabe*, hrsg. von Otthein Rammsted, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989, vol. 14, pp. 287-295; French version in GSG 19, pp. 242-248.

²⁹ SIMMEL, Georg – "Die Ruine." (1911) In *Georg Simmel. Gesamtausgabe*, hrsg. von Otthein Rammsted, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989, vol. 14, pp. 287-295; French version in GSG 19, pp. 242-248.

Ruin can be understood as an aspect of the tragic in which Nature overcame the spirit, bringing a sense of peace, suspending this conflict, returning the subject to the object. In it, there is no longer a separation between inner space and external space: the petrified forms were reintegrated in the continuous flow of life, Nature thus taking over human work, making this the movement of transition from culture to the metaphysics of life. In this way, we could say that architecture is a form given to nature, while the metaphysical dimension of ruin could be explained by saying that this is a human form made alive by Nature.

As architecture and ruin are linked to Nature, so is landscape closely linked with Nature, but landscape is not a “part of nature,” a delimitation of Nature itself, which is an indivisible whole, a totality, having no parts. Simmel tells us: “By Nature we understand the infinite connection of things, the uninterrupted procreation and annihilation of forms, the flowing unity of the event, which is expressed in the continuity of spatial and temporal existence.”³⁰

To put it very synthetically, landscape is, for Simmel, not taking several individual elements from “free-nature,” “trees, streams, meadows and fields” or a certain set of these, but, as the author says in *Philosophy of Landscape*, “Our consciousness must have, beyond the elements, a new whole, unitary, not linked to the particular meanings of each one, nor composed mechanically by them – this alone is landscape.”³¹

A fundamental concept to understand the phenomenon of landscape is the concept of *Stimmung* which, although we cannot translate it accurately or univocally, can refer to the environment of a particular place, but can also point to a disposition of the soul, and, finally, to the fusion of both aspects into a unique “atmosphere” or “tonality,” in which subject and object are combined.

Let us look at a passage from the author:

(...) to what extent is the *Stimmung* of landscape grounded in itself, objectively, being that it is a disposition of the soul, which by itself can only dwell

³⁰ SIMMEL, Georg – “Filosofia da Paisagem.” (1913) In SERRÃO, Adriana Veríssimo (coord.), *Filosofia da Paisagem uma Antologia*, CFUL, 2011, pp. 42-51.

³¹ SIMMEL, Georg – “Filosofia da Paisagem.” (1913) In SERRÃO, Adriana Veríssimo (coord.), *Filosofia da Paisagem uma Antologia*, CFUL, 2011, pp. 42-51.

in the sentimental reflection of the observer and not in outward things devoid of consciousness? (...) if *Stimmung* is a moment, or perhaps the essential moment, which brings the separate parts into landscape as a felt unity – how can it happen that landscape only exists, only possesses a “*Stimmung*,” when it is observed as a unit, and not before, in the mere sum of the loose parts?³²

How can we explain this unity of landscape which does not lie only in this, but which is also not wholly a product of the observer? Simmel suggests that perhaps the *Stimmung* of landscape and its visible unity may be the same thing, the same movement of the spirit, but from two different perspectives. Landscape is a “closed intuition in itself, felt as a self-sufficient, yet intertwined unity in something that extends into an infinitely greater, infinitely more fluid range, grasped in limits that do not exist for the feeling that dwells underneath it.”³³

It is in this sense that, through *Stimmung*, landscape can be taken as a mediating category between man and nature, culture and nature, revealing, on the one hand, the conflict between them and, simultaneously, referring to the whole that is Nature, of which our gaze has detached landscape. Simmel speaks to us of the “reconciled richness of landscape, which constitutes an individual, closed, full in itself and, nevertheless, remains bound without contradiction to the whole of Nature and its unity.”³⁴

We would venture to say that, just as in landscape, there is also a certain *Stimmung* in ruin, so we could say that either of them is a third among the various dichotomies and dualities that, for a moment, suspend the tragedy and the conflict between life and forms, subject and object, freedom and necessity, Man and Nature.

³² SIMMEL, Georg – “Filosofia da Paisagem.” (1913) In SERRÃO, Adriana Veríssimo (coord.), *Filosofia da Paisagem uma Antologia*, CFUL, 2011, pp. 42-51.

³³ SIMMEL, Georg – “Filosofia da Paisagem.” (1913) In SERRÃO, Adriana Veríssimo (coord.), *Filosofia da Paisagem uma Antologia*, CFUL, 2011, pp. 42-51.

³⁴ SIMMEL, Georg – “Filosofia da Paisagem.” (1913) In SERRÃO, Adriana Veríssimo (coord.), *Filosofia da Paisagem uma Antologia*, CFUL, 2011, pp. 42-51.

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DID DADA FAIL ITS OBJECTIVES? A REACTION AGAINST ARGUMENTS WITHOUT HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE, AND AN APPRAISAL OF THE DADAIST CONTRIBUTIONS FOR A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO HETEROGENEITY

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Abstract

The argument comes from some newcomers who believe they are defending Lettrism and in particular Isou's points of view. According to these newcomers DADA failed its objectives – as Surrealism also did – and a new wave of politically engaged destructive intervention was necessary in order to attain the goals of a youth movement which came to represent an authentic vanguard, politically, artistically, and – possibly – philosophically speaking. This new wave would have been Lettrism. From my point of view this kind of argumentation is completely deprived of historical sense in the appreciation of the DADA movement, and those who promote it do not even have a clear perspective of what could have been the so-called “objectives” of DADA.

The second part of this presentation aims at discussing the contributions that DADA, in spite of its avoidance of any clear “objectives” (or exactly because of this avoidance), can give to some contemporary debates in philosophy, namely in what concerns categories such as multiplicity and heterogeneity.

Keywords

DADA, Heterogeneity, Chance, Not-knowing, Artwork as subject

Precisely one year ago a conference took place both at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon and at the MAAT-Lisbon – Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology – with the title “Invisible Republic.” The title, as some of you might know, was not exceptionally innovative, but I am not going to comment on that detail. For the occasion I was invited to moderate one plenary session entitled “The Paradigm of Youth: the Lettrist Contribution to a New Age of Protest.” The session was announced as being “with Sylvain Monségu (Les Cahiers de l’Externité).”

The abstract that Mr. Monségu proposed for the session began in the following way:

Lettrism was more than an Avant-Garde group that decided to overcome the failure of some of their most radical predecessors (dada and surrealism), offering new aesthetic horizons based on letters “between poetry and paintings”; bringing in his numerous manifestos the project to revolutionize each area of the modern culture, in the mid of the twentieth century Isidore Isou met some angry young outsiders in Paris and created a group who experimented and announced the breaking point of may 68.¹

The least one can say is that these declarations are surprising in a number of ways. Beginning from the end, to say that Isou’s group “announced the breaking point of may 68” has nothing to do with the historical facts. The breaking point of May 68 is known to have been the 22nd of March, which began with “corporative” exigencies put forward by the students at Nanterre, but that soon acquired an important political significance involving pronounced leftist revolutionary tonalities. This immediately faced the conservative reaction of the PCF, which denounced the actions as anarchist and objectively pro-governmental. The most important document from that time, the students’ “Bulletin,” does not contain a single word that allows us to think that Isou’s group had anything to do with such a “breaking point” or even with its “announcement.”²

Also the idea that Lettrism offered “new aesthetic horizons based on letters ‘between poetry and paintings,’” besides being somewhat strange in its formulation – since the “horizons” are certainly not “based on letters” –,

¹ I quote from <https://invisiblepublic.info/full-program/>, seen on August 23th 2018.

² See Sylvain Zegel, *Les idée de mai*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1968, pp. 25-36.

seems rather pretentious. This is because when we think that the combination of “letters” in painting and poetry, that is, characters used with the objective to abolish the frontiers between poetry and painting, had already been introduced long before Lettrism, specifically in various moments of Modernism, in the two main varieties of Futurism – the Italian and the Russian – and in Dadaism.

But most striking in the quoted passage is the obnoxious declaration that Lettrism “decided to overcome the failure of [its] most radical predecessors (dada and surrealism).”³ I will not try to defend surrealism from this attack. In what follows I shall rather concentrate on the presupposition of a Dadaist “failure” and on what I envisage to be a necessary answer to this type of confusion.

A Dadaist “failure” would imply that DADA had a *body of objectives*, and that those objectives were not met. Now, the first question has to be as follows: did DADA have a body of objectives?

If we begin by considering the multifariousness of interventions that are at stake when we speak of DADA, we rapidly come to the conclusion that there is practically no unity of thought or practice among all of those artists who used the designation of DADA or who were labeled by critics or historians of art as Dadaists. In this sense it is quite obvious that DADA cannot even be considered to be a *movement*. DADA, as several commentators have remarked, was something else; it was a widely comprehensive state of mind, irreducible to a set of principles or guidelines. DADA was also far from being an avant-garde group; at the most, different Dadaist groups – sometimes only different individualities – can be distinguished in different localizations, for example: Zurich, Berlin, Paris, Cologne, Hannover or New York.

If DADA cannot be considered a unity, the consequence is clear: DADA could never have had a body of objectives. To give an obvious example, it is absolutely out of the question to try to reduce to any kind of sameness or even vague similarity Duchamp’s interventions and line of thought, on the one hand, and Tzara’s or Schwitter’s or Raoul Hausmann’s activities, proposals or ways of thinking, on the other.

³ Similar appraisals of Dadaism can be found in other declarations of Mr. Monségu; see, for instance, an interview published in the following webpage: <http://www.marie-eve-lacasse.net/fr/interviews/view/58/entretien-avec-sylvain-monsegu/?of=5> – seen on August 25th 2018.

It is, however, possible to discuss the idea that DADA was a “state of mind” – a “state of mind” with a certain type of prevalence during a certain period of time – in order to observe in a more precise way what this expression contains of a guided or misguided approach. Dada was a common “state of mind” at least in two senses: firstly, in a purely negative sense, and secondly in a partially constructive or productive sense. In the negative sense, we can establish with relative certainty that all of those – or almost all of those – who adopted the designation of Dadaists had in mind a destructive purpose directed against all types of traditionalism and conservatism not only in the different fields of the arts but also in the territory of politics, in the area of morality and everyday life and in several manifestations of thought.⁴ This negativity is an integrant part of every appreciation of DADA by all sorts of critics and historians. I will come back to this negativity later, which in fact deserves a further elucidation specifically in order to shed light on its confusion with nihilism.

In the constructive and productive sense it is, of course, much more difficult to establish a few general points of connection; any concreteness regarding general connections would create a detour distancing us from the crucial heterogeneity that characterizes the Dadaist interventions. In fact, at this level we will be forced to adopt a view that has to be concurrently presented along with a high degree of abstraction and a very cautious criticism of that very same abstraction. The productive efforts of the Dadaists seem to be somehow concentrated on the deep desire to create counter-cultural ways of intervening in the fields of plastic arts, literature, performance and even everyday life. These counter-cultural – and to a certain extent counter-social (not to mention anti-war) – productions were not only a direct result of the negativity that we have pointed out above. In several ways we can testify that such productions were a kind of creation departing, in part, not only from the fragmentary remains of the destructive processes, but also to a great extent based on the invention of new means of expression. I would like to stress a few examples of such new means: collage, photomontage, assemblage, cut-up technique and, of course, the ready-made.

⁴ For the sake of brevity, in this article I will deal predominantly – or almost exclusively – with the artistic intervention of DADA, but this does not mean that my remarks are not extensible to the other fields of action or thought that I mention.

Collage, for instance, as exemplified by Hannah Höch, Raoul Hausmann, Max Ernst and many others, was perhaps the simplest and more immediate form of producing a tremendous amount of new possibilities of sense (and non-sense) out of a principle of chance. Photomontage was certainly more elaborated and technically more developed, but its productiveness at the level of the effectiveness of chance was no less provocative. The cut-up technique, suggested by Tzara when he imagined the production of a poem out of the absolutely random aggregation of words cut out from a newspaper article, was a complete example of the unlimited creative potentialities of chance. Assemblage, as it occurred in Johannes Baader's big "Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama," or in the smaller, but no less effective, "Mechanisher Kopf (Der Geist unserer Zeit)" by Raoul Hausmann, was a kind of three-dimensional collage that greatly enlarged all of the potentialities of the simpler forms. And the ready-made brought about the possibility of dealing with chance from another angle, that is the singularity of an object deprived of esthetic characteristics – as Duchamp insisted on when he brought about the concept of "esthetic indifference" – instead of a conjunction of different previous materials.

In all these examples of Dadaistic productiveness the central and common element seems to be *chance*. Chance – precisely in the sense of an absolute lack of previous determinations – is deeply inhabited by an uncontrollable force: the force of openness. Openness – which to a certain extent is equivalent to radical indetermination – has to be seen in this context as an unlimited field of possibilities, in other words, an infinity of potential combinations at various levels: those of sensations, images, concepts, prospects, desires and even actions. This is to say that, in general, Dadaists have chosen chance, on the one hand, as a critical device against conservatism and immobilism, and on the other, as a medium of creation; not as the creation of dead objects or as a mere repetition of technical or esthetic solutions, but rather as a medium of creation of situations – as the Situationists will formulate later on –, each of which should open to a myriad of potential materialities and immaterialities.

An important characteristic of this intervention of chance has to do with the knowing or not-knowing involved in the process. Since the possibilities of each act of creation are open and infinite, we have to conclude that the

“creator” – or rather the “operator,” as the Portuguese critic and producer Ernesto de Sousa used to say in order to avoid the word “artist” – is completely unaware of the full consequences of his deeds. The operator cannot foresee the reach of his own actions and devices at work. In other words, the Dadaist “creator” *does not know* what he is doing. At least he does not know anything about the results of what he is doing; he is completely unable to evaluate the consequences or results of what he brings to effectiveness. This not-knowing completely transforms the relation between creator and creation. The freedom of the creator, which in a certain sense is total, does not coincide with the freedom of the work of art, which – more than total – is absolutely unlimited or, to say it more radically, infinite. In this case, the work of art adopts a position endowed with a high degree of subjectivity. The artwork becomes a subject.⁵ But this subject, being an infinite set of possibilities, also has to be a totally dynamic entity. Deprived of any type of inertia, the artwork circulates all the time in an open territory, and constantly emanates new perspectives of re-composition, effectiveness and productiveness. This means that the artwork, as a subject, supplants the subjectivity of the “operator” and also the one of the receptor. The receptor has, of course, its own freedom of choice and combination, but this freedom is limited in the sense that it is submitted to the efficiency of those determinations that flow from the artwork. In a word, the creator and the receptor are only semi-subjects; the Dadaistic artwork is fully a subject. And because the artwork acts as a subject we can also say that the creator and the receptor, being semi-subjects, also have to be seen as semi-objects.

At this point I would like to add a final topic regarding the Dadaist artwork. Why can we deal with the creation of chance-situations as a type of positive productiveness? It is clear that without the destructive – or deconstructive – impulses put forward by DADA all that we have said about its creative activity would not be possible. But the question is: does the Dadaist destructiveness persist during the entire process of construction, determining this very process? Or does the negativist moment give way to a set of positive attitudes or movements, which super-determine the artwork (or

⁵ I have treated this topic extensively in other texts; see, for instance, the third chapter of my “A Meditative Flow on Ernesto de Sousa’s Conception of Modernity (and two appendixes on related matters),” *OEI* #80/81, Stockholm, pp. 85-94.

which undermine the artwork in the sense that they totally pervade its field of existence and transform it into the type of unquiet openness that we mentioned above)? I believe that these questions can find a theoretically and highly productive answer if we resume and re-enact some aspects of Deleuze's and Guattari's concepts of *chaos* and *chaosmos* in their bipolar way of functioning. (I say bipolar to explicitly avoid the idea of some kind of dialectics.)

What I have been saying about the Dadaist intervention places us in a chaotic surrounding in two different but complementary ways. The destructive component of DADA results in the emergence of a specific kind of chaos; the enormous fragmentation resulting from the destructive impetus is in itself chaotic in the sense that all traditional connections fall apart. This first type of chaos is irrefutably negative; it results from an active negation and it produces negativity. But there is a second type of chaos. This second type results from the fact that parallel to the first type a combinatory drive immediately emerges that, in its multifariousness of possibilities, generates what can be called a "plain of consistency" where the set of directions taken by the different forces in action is infinite; this infinity of directions is exactly what I call heterogeneity (in order to distinguish it from the category of multiplicity – I will come briefly to this distinction later on). As mentioned earlier, the two types of chaos are complementary. On the one hand, the second type would not take place without the first; on the other hand, the first type incorporates a certain direction of action, which, in spite of being totally "blind," leads to the second type of chaos. In this sense, the "plain of consistency," being primarily chaotic, offers nonetheless the possibility for the existence of extraordinary small movements or force-directions that produce tiny bits of a kind of subliminal organization. This is to say that the very fact of chaotic de-composition and composition inevitably leads to the formation of pieces of cosmos. This is exactly the point where we can understand that negativity brings with itself the seeds of positivity. These seeds, as I have said, are tiny bits of organization, but they are effective in that they proportionate possibilities of choice, possibilities of acting in this or that direction according to the will of the subject, be it the artwork as a subject or the semi-subjects who are the so-called "artist" and the receptor (as we have already seen). Summing up this part of our argumentation, we can say that the Dadaist intervention was indeed constructive and productive in spite of

its deep negativity. And if it was creative in this sense, it is absolutely out of question to label it as nihilist.

What we have said until now also opens the way to a reflection on the characteristics of Dadaist chance. Chance is also a double-faced coin. On the one hand, it is chaotic, but, on the other, it is creative; it creates moments of relative determination that can be identified as the force-directions we have mentioned above. It is well-known that when we randomly shake a number of dice inside a box we unintentionally obtain a certain pattern of composition, i.e. a relatively organized result. This means that chance is in itself productive of segments of organization; chance does not produce a mere reduction of chaos to a unified organization, but it produces small agglomerates of cosmos within a plain of consistency, and we can come to the conclusion that chance has an inchoative effect regarding this type of chaosmos.

Now, if we arrive at the conclusion that the Dadaist use of chance has a positive or productive result that does not depend in any form on the will of the so-called artist, we can then establish that there is absolutely no ground to speak of the “objectives” of DADA. DADA did not have any objectives precisely because its attitude towards the activity that is complementary of negativity could not exceed what we designate as a chaosmos, that is to say, it could not eliminate completely the level of chaos and reduce it to a complete cosmos endowed with absolute unity. This impossibility derives directly from the heterogenic character of the Dadaist activity seen as a whole. And if DADA could not have any objectives, it is obvious that DADA did not fail any objectives. DADA only opened ways, multifarious ways, infinite ways, to more and more heterogeneity as the subsequent history of art clearly shows until the present day.

We have come now to the moment from where we can discern this type of heterogeneity and grasp a number of conclusions regarding its effects on an important philosophical debate that is presently taking place: the one that brings the defenders of a renewal of the reduction to unity, namely in Hegelian terms, face to face with those who firmly react against such a renaissance. Since I have to be brief in the current circumstance, I will give just one example from the first group of philosophers, and I will oppose it with my own conception of heterogeneity.

In his Preface to the 2008 edition of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* Slavoj Žižek writes:

The dialectical approach is usually perceived as trying to locate the phenomenon-to-be-analysed in the totality to which it belongs, to bring to light the wealth of its links to other things, and thus to break the spell of fetishizing abstraction: from a dialectical perspective, one should see not just the thing in front of oneself, but this thing as it is embedded in all the wealth of its concrete historical context. This, however, is the most dangerous trap to be avoided; for Hegel, the true problem is precisely the opposite one: the fact that, when we observe a thing, we see *too much* in it, we fall under the spell of the wealth of empirical detail which prevents us from clearly perceiving the notional determination which forms the core of the thing. The problem is thus not that of how to grasp the multiplicity of determinations, but rather of how to *abstract* from them, how to constrain our gaze and teach it to grasp only the notional determination. (Žižek 2008: x-xi; italics of the author)

This curious defense of Hegel against the “usual” perception of the “dialectical approach” is eloquent enough. Instead of the living heterogeneity – here designated as “multiplicity” – that DADA’s approach to art, politics, morality, etc., puts into action in its activities and in the forms of thought connected with them, what we have here is an absolutely anti-natural effort to submit – and reduce – the multifariously variegated fullness of the life of things to a “constraint” of our “gaze” in order “to grasp only the notional determination,” that is to say, in order to see nothing but the dead corpse of things behind the things themselves. For Žižek the “most dangerous trap,” that has to be avoided at all costs – including at the cost of the complexity of things (and at the cost of the rationality connected with this complexity) –, obviously lies in chaos and heterogeneity. His total incapacity to deal with chaos in a productive manner leads him to a semi-hidden concept of the “thing in itself” under the quite transparent cover of the Hegelian “notional determination.” But, in fact, as Marx wrote against the Hegelian understanding of religion, we should not look so much to the “beyond” (“das Jenseits”); we should rather turn our attention completely to “this side” (“das Diesseits”).⁶

⁶ MEW I, p. 379.

More than once, I have concentrated myself on the topic of heterogeneity, establishing the distinction between what I call three divergent figures of difference: diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity. I will not insist here on such divergences. I just would like to finish this reflection by stressing that the adequate metaphor for a comprehension of heterogeneity is that of an explosion. This is to say that heterogeneity is not linear and it implies a spreading of forces in an infinite number of directions. This is precisely what I believe can be observed in the different Dadaist approaches to all domains of life, including the domain of thought. And this is why I insist on the idea that such approaches are of great importance and influence for some of our contemporary philosophical debates, namely, the one confronting the recovery of unity, abstraction and the “notional determination,” on the one hand, and the radical criticism of reductionist views, and the defense of heterogeneity – or, at least, of philosophical forms of *difference* – on the other.

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CALLIOPE'S SISTERS. RICHARD L. ANDERSON AND THE NATURE OF THE ARTWORK

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze Richard L. Anderson's proposal on the nature of the work of art. Through a comparative study of different "philosophies of art," Anderson comes to the following conclusion: art is culturally significant, skillfully encoded in an affecting, sensuous medium.

Keywords

Art, Definition of Art, Richard L. Anderson, Morris Weitz, Anthropology of Art

I

"The Sisters of Calliope" is the title of one of the most significant works in the field of philosophy of art. However, it was not written by a philosopher, but rather by an anthropologist, Richard Anderson. The first edition of the book dates back to 1990, with a very symptomatic subtitle: *A Comparative Study of Philosophies of Art*.¹ Its aim could not be more precise: what can we say in philosophical terms about the nature of the artwork if we take into account not only the history of Western art but also the course of art in other human civilizations? What dissident voices will we discover, and will they, together with our culture, allow us to gain a more integrative vision of what art is?

¹ Richard L. Anderson. *Calliope's Sisters. A Comparative Study of Philosophies of Art*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1990.

Let us return to the main title: “The Sisters of Calliope.” Who was Calliope? The Muse for excellence, the one which, in principle, is invoked at the beginning of the epic poems, “Sing, O goddess, the wrath of Achilles”² or else: “Speak to me, Muse, of the versatile man who wandered so much.”³ In the *Theogony* of Hesiod,⁴ his genealogy is made explicit. She is the daughter of Zeus, the ancestral father of the gods, and of Mnemosyne, the titanic force that incarnates the memory and the strength of the past. Her Greek name, Kalliopē, literally means “the one of noble/beautiful voice.” According to Plato, she is the oldest muse⁵ and Aristotle, in *Rhetoric*,⁶ discusses the metaphor of the Athenian poet Dionysius Chalcus who presents poetry as “the cry of Calliope.” There are several authors who call Calliope the mother of Orpheus, if not the “mother of mermaids.” Hesiod, aware of the multiplicity of the arts, reports that she had eight sisters, each presented as a muse of the arts, but still invoking her as “the chief of the muses,” since only noble souls can hear her.

Calliope is, thus, the Muse of poetry and by antonomasia of Art as such. When Richard Anderson tells us about the sisters of Calliope, what concerns him is not so much the unity of all the arts, but whether it is possible to surprise a concept of art from the different civilisations of humanity.

The author goes so far as to bemoan the disinterest in the contemporary, even the academic world, about the nature of art. As he tells us: “While everything, from the rocks of the Moon or the desires of Oedipus, is examined in detail, art is often ignored.”⁷ Also, when this is not the case, the interest seems to be in its categorisation according to different styles or in the economical and social functions performed by the artists. “What has received little attention is the question of what constitutes the very core of art, namely aesthetics,” aesthetics understood, say, “as the branch of Western philosophy that focuses on the nature and the value of art.”⁸

² *Il.* I, v.1.

³ *Od.* I, v.1.

⁴ *Theog.* v. 79.

⁵ *Phaedrus*, 259d.

⁶ 1405a.

⁷ Anderson 1990: 2.

⁸ Anderson 1990: 2.

For obvious reasons – after all, this is a philosophical essay – we are not going to dwell on the anthropological criteria chosen by the author, let alone on the rigour and depth of his analysis of ten different cultures (each one corresponds to a chapter of the first part of the book). We want to stress that extreme care has been taken in choosing very diverse cultures, both geographically and socially. He has chosen to give examples of small-scale societies and complex societies, the latter ones usually referred to as civilisations. As Anderson emphasises, it matters little whether this or that culture knows or does not know words like “art” or “aesthetic;” what is relevant is to know how each of these cultures apprehends their artistic values in the works they do.

Let us see, in brief terms, the vision of aesthetics in each culture studied. In the first place, the culture of the San, hunter-gatherers of the Kalahari Desert, considered by geneticists as the direct descendants of the first Sapiens who inhabited Earth. Art, for them, is translated into three strands: a) pleasure of the senses; b) a sign of belonging to their own culture; c) expression of rejoicing and animist communion. They have very different forms of artistic expression: body embellishment, props, dance, music and rock painting.

Secondly, the culture of the Inuit, nomadic hunters from the Arctic regions. For them, artistic beauty not only provides pleasure but also has the magical power to ensure health and prosperity. Art goes through all the worlds, from the natural frozen world, through human reality and culminating in the supernatural world. The artistic expression is equally diverse, but in it is possible to apprehend an unusual gratification towards the creative gesture. As Anderson points out, for the Inuit, art is a transformation of the surrounding reality.

Thirdly, the culture of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. They are also nomadic people who live from hunting. However, art has a very different function from that of the peoples previously mentioned. Its purpose consists in eternal union with the creative principle, identified with the “dream world.” Hence attention is given to the preservation of the smallest details of traditional art. By perpetuating, through art, the eternal order of reality, they provide both human and natural prosperity.

Fourth, Anderson studies the art of the New Guinea region known as Sepik. They are sedentary people, dedicating themselves to farming and, sometimes, to hunting, where cannibalism is not absent. The societies that constitute this culture reveal paradoxical traits. They have no abstract notion of aesthetics and artistic activity, but their production of art objects is unique in the world. In the area within a radius of seven miles hundreds of ceremonial houses were built, in which artistic activities are created. Art is strictly reduced to a religious function because it is a common belief that the spirits and souls of initiated men inhabit the produced artefacts. Women are excluded from artistic activity and are cruelly murdered if they witness the rituals. Beyond the aesthetic contours adorning these religious dwellings, much of the art is dedicated to the construction of masks and the embellishment of yams. The art of the Sepik peoples is strictly religious, masculine, associated with different acts of initiation. It does not mean that they do not know the notion of “beauty” (yigun), but this is not the essence of what we call art.

Fifth, we find the Navajo, Amerindian peoples who are equally engaged in farming and hunting. The Navajo world is made up of good and beauty – *hózhó* – and of evil and ugliness – *hochxó* -, and artistic creation is what incorporates and enhances all positive values such as harmony, health, safety and happiness. Beauty is what is real in both things and people. Restoring the being of individuals is at the heart of human activity and art in general. The creation of “ephemeral art,” generally associated with chromatic circles of sand, pollen, and coal dust that are afterwards broken, is also peculiar to the Navajo. Its purpose is therapeutic. After the construction of the circle, sometimes with the dimension of six meters, the “patient” is placed in the centre of the circle, is surrounded by the created pigments, and then the destruction of the circle takes place.

Sixth, we find another African culture, the Yoruba, well-studied because of its presence in Brazilian “candomblé.” This culture of the African coast of Guinea has one of the most elaborate religious and divinatory mythologies of humankind. Beyond the supreme gods, usually indifferent to human vicissitudes, we find a myriad of supernatural beings, the orishas, to whom all artistic activity (sculpture, music, dance, oratory, among other arts) is dedicated. All artistic creation aims at conditioning the supernatural beings

to give fertility, prosperity and harmonious and energetic life to humans.

Seventh, we find the Aztec civilisation, a Mesoamerican culture that flourished between the 14th century and the fateful year of 1521. For the Aztecs art, along with the blood and beauty of flowers, encouraged the gods to postpone the impending apocalyptic world. Only a select group of craftsmen could devote themselves to art, using the supernatural power of flowers and songs, the desire to continue could be provided to the gods. In Anderson's words to the Aztecs, the beauty of art was the only genuine, enduring thing created by humans in this ephemeral world.

Classical Indian civilisation is studied in eight place. From this very complex civilisation, the primacy of time excels in aesthetic beauty, which explains the privilege of dramatic poetry (well-known in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*) and dance. The plastic arts are considered subordinate, despite their enormous beauty, in that they must express the rhythm and dance of the cosmos. What immediately distinguishes this civilisation is the existence of treatises on Aesthetics (*Nāṭyaśāstra*; *Abhinavabhāratī*). The core of their aesthetic theory is the concept of *rasa*. Without *rasa*, there is no dramatic and poetic art. This concept comprises several meanings. First of all, that of taste, as if art were the spice of a pleasant food. However, its deeper meaning corresponds to the total and absolute concentration of the mind in the work of art by combining eight distinct emotions. *Rasa* is, in a word, the superior feeling of the artistic creation.⁹

The art of traditional Japanese civilisation is studied in ninth place. The heart of it is soteriological, i.e. allowing the believer's redemption either through the intervention of the *kami* (sacred forces of Shinto) or the contemplation of nature in its beauty and ephemerality (*wabi-sabi*). One of the exciting aspects of the Japanese view is that art not only has an ontological role in the creation of the world but also extends the senses of sight and hearing, a fact which becomes evident in the tea ceremony and in the martial arts.

⁹ "(...) essential element in poetry is what they term *Rasa*, or Flavour. With this term, which is the equivalent of Beauty or Aesthetic Emotion in the strict sense of the philosopher, must be considered the derivative adjective *rasavant*, 'having *rasa*', applied to a work of art, and the derivative substantive *rasika*, one who enjoys *rasa*, a connoisseur or lover, and finally *rasāsvādāna*, the tasting of *rasa*, i.e., aesthetic contemplation." (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. *The Dance of Śiva: Essays on Indian Art and Culture*. New York: Dover, 1985 in *Aesthetics: the Classical Readings*. Ed. David. E. Cooper. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, 195).

Calliope's last form is art in Western culture. Anderson shows us that its history is dominated by four strands that sometimes intertwine: mimetic or representative art, pragmatic art, i.e. art centred on therapeutic, anagogic, and religious power, still present in contemporary art as in the case of blues and gospel music, as well as in the enhancements of the faculty of imagination. Thirdly, the author highlights expressionist theories of art, centred on the emotive sphere of human feelings and, finally, the formalist view, concerned only with the aesthetic value of the art form. According to Anderson, art in Western culture, beyond all its complexity, is the expression of this "quartet." The common point of all of them is the idea that art must evoke a response centred, as Burke said, on the "delight" it delivers.¹⁰

II

What are the philosophical implications that Richard Anderson draws from this comparative aesthetics? Firstly, although not expressly mentioned, it confirms Arthur C. Danto's famous intuition that art as such, art for art's sake, only makes sense in cultures such as Western and Indian that have a philosophical concept of reality and, as such, of contrast between the real and the apparent.¹¹ Plato's critique of the value of art for the knowledge of

¹⁰ Although we must stress that this delight is not the same thing as a mere pleasure. "Pleasure', I should say, is a very minor part of the whole aesthetic phenomenon. It is merely the 'epiphenomenon', the tail-end of what I call the impression or effect." (Edward Bullough. *Aesthetics. Lectures and Essays*. London: Bowes & Bowes, 1957, 45).

¹¹ "It is my view that art, as art, as something that contrasts with reality, arose together with philosophy, and that part of question of why art is something with which philosophy must be concerned may be matched by the question of why philosophy did not historically appear in every culture, but only in some, and preeminently in Greece and India. This is hardly a question we can answer without characterizing philosophy itself, and when we have done this it will not be difficult to see why art is a natural philosophical subject, indeed an inevitable one, once, of course, it is art and not just magic. My thought is that philosophy begins to arise only when the society within which it arises achieves a concept of reality. To be sure, any group of persons, any culture, acquires some set of concepts or beliefs that defines reality for it, but that is not the same as saying that they have a concept of reality: that can happen only when a contrast is available between reality and something else – appearance, illusion, representation, art – which sets reality off in a total way and puts it at a distance." (Arthur C. Danto. *The Transfiguration of a commonplace. A Philosophy of Art*. Cambridge (Mass.)/London: Harvard University Press, 1981, 77-78).

the real is very symptomatic of this relation.¹² However, the most interesting philosophical point of Anderson's research is that he is convinced that it is possible to define what art is. Also, this desideratum is more interesting because it is grounded, at least in part, in Morris Weitz's view of art.

As is well known, Weitz considers art to be an "open concept," and as such, it is meaningless to define art. "The primary task of aesthetics is not to try to construct a theory but to elucidate the concept of art. Specifically, it consists of describing the conditions under which we correctly apply the concept. Definitions, reconstructions, patterns of analysis are here displaced as they distort and add nothing to our understanding of art."¹³ And he adds: "The problem with which we must begin is not 'What is art?', But 'What kind of concept is art?'"¹⁴ Weitz's answer is well-known: we are faced with an "open concept"¹⁵ which means that the view we can have of art is always changeable concerning the history of artistic creations.

It is not a "closed concept" as when, for example, we sustain that the mathematical definition of a square is a geometric figure with four sides of the same length and four right angles. Although Weitz is sometimes not entirely consistent, he is explicit in stating that closed concepts can only "happen in logic and mathematics, where concepts are constructed and completely defined."¹⁶ In other domains, what we can get is, in Wittgenstein's words, quoted by Weitz, a "family resemblance." Just as members of a family usually have physical similarities so also works of art physically resemble one another. Artistic creations, throughout their history, have descriptive – when,

¹² "Self-consciously mimetic art arose together with philosophy in Greece, almost as if the latter found in the former a paradigm for the entire range of problems to which metaphysics is the response. It is to the great credit of ancient theory that it got the relationship right between art and reality, merely being wrong, or parochial, in supposing representation to be restricted to imitational structures, which rendered the theory of art as representation at a loss to accommodate artworks which, though they could have been perceived as representational, were clearly not mimetic." (Danto 1981: 82).

¹³ Morris Weitz. "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15 (1956), 27-35. Cf. Morris Weitz (ed.) *Problems in Aesthetics: an introductory book of readings*. New York: Macmillan, 1959, 153.

¹⁴ Weitz 1959: 149.

¹⁵ Weitz 1959: 152.

¹⁶ Weitz 1959: 151.

for example, we declare that artistic objects are artefacts – or evaluative meaning – when we say that a particular work of art is a “good work of art.”

Weitz even attempts at a definition of an open concept such as art:

Thus, mostly, when we describe something as a work of art, we do so in the condition that we are in the presence of some sort of artifact, made by human skill, ingenuity and the imagination of the human being, which embodies in its sensuous public medium – stone, wood, sounds, words, etc. – certain distinguishable elements and relations.¹⁷

However, according to Weitz, it is always possible to imagine present or future situations that destroy the rigidity of any definition. For example, to state that a piece of wood, discovered in a forest, is a work of art, although humans did not make it. And yet, Weitz introduces a concept that will be central to Anderson: “recognition criteria.”¹⁸

We can point out – concerning open concepts – recognition criteria. This is precisely the starting point for Richard Anderson. Art is an “open concept,” insofar as we cannot legislate on the future of art history. On the other hand, the type of “object” that the work of art is cannot be defined according to necessary and sufficient conditions, as we do in logical-mathematical terms or in chemistry. However, we can define Calliope, even taking into account her multiple forms in different cultures. What, then, is art? “Art is culturally significant meaning, skillfully encoded in an affecting, sensuous medium.”¹⁹

Just as Aristotle, correctly or not, defines “tragedy” by the enunciation of qualities (myth, mimesis, catharsis, and so on), so does Anderson define “art” through a set of qualities: 1. it is culturally significant; 2. it has sense, 3. ingenuity (skill); 4. it is coded, 5. sensitive; 6. it consists in an affective medium. Also, he adds something that neither Weitz nor Nelson Goodman – in the

¹⁷ Weitz 1959: 153-154.

¹⁸ “What, first, is the logic of ‘X is a work of art,’ when it is a descriptive utterance? What are the conditions under which we would be making such an utterance correctly? There are no necessary and sufficient conditions but there are the strands of similarity conditions, i.e., bundles of properties, none of which need be present but most of which are, when we describe things as works of art. I shall call these the ‘criteria of recognition’ of works of art.” (Weitz 1959: 153).

¹⁹ Anderson 1990: 238.

concept of “aesthetic symptoms”²⁰ – would say. “What’s more, things that are not usually art rarely have all the qualities listed above. (That is to say, the traits specified in the definition are not only necessarily present in art, but their absence is sufficient to separate what is artistic from non-artistic).”²¹

According to Anderson, each one of these qualities can be more or less developed according to time and culture, but, on the whole, they are sufficient criteria to define art. In this way, Anderson goes further than Stephen Davies, who criticised Weitz by saying that the concept of art may be disjunctive in the sense that in some circumstances it is *this*, in others it is *that*, but without the concept losing its rigour.²²

To conclude, Richard Anderson’s definition of Calliope is equally important because it condenses the history of the philosophy of art, from the Idealist and Romantic ages to the present day. Art is, therefore, this sensorial form that gives body to one or several meanings. This idea is present in Kant, Schelling, Langer, and Danto, to name a few of the crucial authors in philosophy of art.

Art is “Form and Feeling,” Langer quite rightly said, but, as Kant and Schiller have pointed out, in a free game of “faculties,” under penalty of being only in the face of “science.” So with this thesis, we end by recalling the words of George Steiner, quoting Shakespeare, according to which art and poetry will always give “a local habitation and a name” to universals.²³

²⁰ Goodman 1978: 67-68.

²¹ Anderson 1990: 239.

²² “There might be more than one way something can become art, in which case the necessary condition may be *disjunctive*, that is, expressed as an *either-or*. To take a non-art example, it might be a necessary condition for being a parent that one be a biological father, *or* a biological mother, *or* that one legally adopt a child, without there being a single relevant element common to all these methods. Similarly, what might be necessary for something’s being art could be that it is either *thus* *or so*, where *thus* and *so* possess no properties in common.” (Stephen Davies. *The Philosophy of Art*. Oxford *et al.*: Blackwell. 2006, 30).

²³ George Steiner. *Errata. An Examined Life*. London: Orion Books/Phoenix, 1997, 6.

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MACHINES AND “EMPTY AND OCEANIC THOUGHT”: FERNANDO PESSOA’S *DOING* AND *BEING* OF THE SELF

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Abstract

This essay focuses on Pessoa’s philosophy of the being and doing of the self and the connection between machines and the void in thinking, manifested in the poem *Ode Triunfal* [Triumphal Ode] by the heteronym Álvaro de Campos. Campos’ *pensamento oceânico e vazio* [“empty and oceanic thought”] is the term I use as the image of the void in human thinking which is found in his poem *Épisodios* [Episodes]. I look at the interchange of the two verbs for ‘being’ in Portuguese – *ser* and *estar* – which Campos explicitly utilizes and connects with each other at the end of a later short prose piece called *Ambiente* [Environment] in the penultimate sentence: “*Estar é ser.*” In the wake of Alberto Caetano’s nature poetry of the present, *Ode Triunfal*, alongside *Ode Marítima* [Maritime Ode], embodies Campos’ contribution to the *Zeitgeist* of experimental European modernism and the struggle of being and doing that reveals and expresses the schism, gap and link between the two verbal modes of passivity/activity in human existence and that of the relationship between machines and ‘empty and oceanic thought’ – a vision both philosophical and poetic. The *terra incognita* of machines which we are a part of, and of our thought as ‘oceanic’ and ‘empty’ is reflected in the oppositions and disintegrating antinomies of Pessoa and Campos in *Orpheu* and of the links and dichotomies of reality/symbol, human/non-human, animate/inanimate and interiority/exteriority. The essay is divided into two sections under the titles: I. 1915, Deaths, Machines, Constructions; and II. Empty and Oceanic Thought and the Affirmative Void of the Self.

Keywords

Being/doing, Void, Machines, Pessoa, Selfhood, Modernism

Que fiz eu da vida?
 Que fiz eu do que queria fazer da vida?
 Que fiz do que podia ter feito da vida?
 Serei eu como tu, ó viajante do Anel Anafrodisíaco?
 Olho-te sem te distinguir da matéria amorfa das coisas
 E rio no fundo do meu pensamento oceânico e vazio.

- Álvaro de Campos (Pessoa, 2002: 249)¹

The lines above are to be found in the middle of a poem called *Episódios* [*Episodes*] that Fernando Pessoa never published and which he attributed to his most productive and vociferous heteronym Álvaro de Campos. I choose these lines as the starting point to my essay in the tension and relationship between being and doing and the void of the self, and thereby approaching, perceiving and providing a philosophy of self in our world of sensationalist hysteria, fleeting and distracting information overload, looming human and environmental catastrophe, and swinging between pessimistic and optimistic visions of existence via Campos' poem *Ode Triunfal*.² *Ode Triunfal* was the first poem produced by Pessoa to be attributed to Campos, although Pessoa creates the narrative that *Opiário* is written by Campos earlier. I am thinking throughout the essay of the interchange of the two verbs for "being" in Portuguese – *ser* and *estar* which Campos explicitly utilizes

¹ My translation: "What have I done with life?
 What did I do with what I wanted to do with my life?
 What have I done with what I could have done with my life?
 Will I be like you, oh traveler of the Anaphrodisiac Ring?
 I look at you without distinguishing you from the amorphous matter of things
 And I laugh from the bottom of my empty and oceanic thought."

² Both *Ode Triunfal* and *Ode Marítima* are Campos' expressions of non-Aristotelian art which he articulates later in his return to writing in his two-part essay "Notes for a Non-Aristotelian Aesthetics" from 1925 as "based on inner force, the force of personality, an art based on sensibility rather than intelligence" (Zenith, 2006, xxv). The only complete play by Pessoa – *O Marinheiro*, with the sub-title "a static drama in one act" (Pessoa, 2001: 83), is published in the first edition of *Orpheu*, which makes a journey into human consciousness, creativity, dreams and the interiority and exile of the self in becoming plural and dispersed. Given the lack of space or time here, I will focus predominately on the vision of Campos via his poem *Ode Triunfal* from *Orpheu 1*.

and connects with each other at the end of a later short prose piece called *Ambiente* [Environment], published in 1927, in the penultimate sentence: “*Estar é ser*” (Pessoa, 2012b: 234 / 2001: 200). This is undoubtedly a difficult sentence to translate, which Richard Zenith renders as “Where I am is who I am.” In a note to the translated text, Zenith explains that this particular sentence “affirms that what we take to be temporal, spatial being (*estar*) is in fact essential, true being (*ser*)” [Pessoa, 2001: 335].

Campos’ struggle and dichotomy of being and doing reveals and expresses the schism, gap and link between the two verbal modes of passivity/activity in human existence and that of the relationship between machines and “empty and oceanic thought.” As is well known, *Ode Triunfal* was one of the three completed poems (alongside *Opiário* and *Ode Marítima*) by Campos which were published in the two editions of the literary magazine *Orpheu* in 1915. They embody Campos’ vision of the *Zeitgeist* of experimental European modernism, of machines alongside “empty and oceanic thought” – a vision both philosophical and poetic.³ In this short exploration of doing and being in the presence of machines and “empty and oceanic thought,” I split this essay into two parts under the titles: I. 1915, Deaths, Machines, Constructions; and II. Empty and Oceanic Thought and the Affirmative Void of the Self.

I. 1915, Deaths, Machines, Constructions

Being an artist born and living through the birth, rise and peak of high modernism, Campos and Pessoa – both one and two persons (sometimes we are not really sure who is more true or false) – mirror, appropriate, mock, embrace and reject in equal measure their epoch. Pessoa and Campos can now stand as quintessential poets of that era of chaos and “the new” – which is what “modern” means here. Pessoa’s work was practically unknown outside

³ There are other famous and completed poems published by Pessoa attributed to Campos over ten years later which also contain this duality and dichotomy – such as *Tabacaria* [The Tobacco Shop] and *Lisbon Revisited* (1926), and they could easily be discussed here, but there is less emphasis on the machine; there is a hopelessness in them that has taken the upper hand; the *Orpheu* poems are from 1915 which is a key moment for both the inner and outer life where Campos and Pessoa find their voice for the first time; and Campos’ *Orpheu* poems are published within a year of writing them for a fulfilled particular vision and statement (in contrast to the later great works) – a rarity in Pessoa’s oeuvre.

his small literary circle in Lisbon, but his output has slowly been brought to light in European philosophical circles. Alain Badiou threw down the gauntlet in an essay when he wrote: “If Pessoa represents a singular challenge for philosophy, if his modernity is still *ahead of us*, remaining in many aspects unexplored, it is because *his thought-poem inaugurates a path that manages to be neither Platonic nor anti-Platonic*” (Badiou, 2005: 38).⁴ Here we have again the allusion to the gap and tension in the depiction of Pessoa’s work as a “thought-poem,” which is a challenge to pin down to either a metaphysical or anti-metaphysical tradition, and which mirrors the nineteenth century philosophical precursors to modernism – Kierkegaard and Nietzsche – whose writings can be interpreted as *poetic-thought*.

I.i. 1915⁵

1915 is when the world realizes the extraordinary power of the new advances of technology in a world war; the collapse of old empires, value systems and monarchies; the massive diaspora of peoples and sudden rapid growth of the human population; the rise of new radical secular political movements in democracy, fascism and communism; the explosion of the many “-isms” in various artistic outlets; and a new scientific revolution spearheaded by Einstein’s theory of relativity. Nietzsche’s prophesy pronounced in the 1880s of the “advent of nihilism”⁶ for the next two centuries and “transvaluation of values” has begun. Merging Pessoa’s philosophical and literary visions, *Orpheu* itself is an example of how an artist could respond to the “advent of nihilism” (most of the *Orpheu* group are under the influence of this first international reception of Nietzsche),⁷ fusing the socio-political realities with the creative output as the events and catastrophes of the time haunt the literary magazine.

⁴ Badiou published this essay in 1998, and it took another seven years for it to be published in English.

⁵ For more on 1915 and its relations to *Orpheu*, see the volume of essays *O Ano do Orpheu 1915*, edited by Steffen Dix, Lisboa: Tinta da China, 2015.

⁶ Nietzsche, KSA 13.189, 11[411]

⁷ For more on the Nietzsche reception on Pessoa and the *Orpheu* group, see: Ryan, 2015, 56-57.

I.ii. Deaths

Before getting on to the machine itself and its relation to Campos' experimenting philosophy of the self, the year 1915 is the symbol, shadow and foreshadow of death which permeates both editions of *Orpheu*. I point out this aspect of death (witnessed in the various dedications and fate of many of the artists of *Orpheu*) to give a general background to Campos' vision of "empty and oceanic thought" and the machine as destroyer and creator; and to show the tragic presence of death on a personal level in Pessoa's life as a young man, and which gives an added intensity in trying to find or uncover a modern philosophy of self. *Opiário* from *Orpheu 1* is dedicated to his best friend and co-leader of the magazine, Mario de Sá-Carneiro, who will commit suicide in Paris at the age of 25 in 1916; *O Marinheiro* (also from *Orpheu 1*) is dedicated to his plastic artist friend Carlos Franco who volunteered to fight in WWI and will die on the battlefield in France in 1916; *Ode Marítima* (from *Orpheu 2*) is dedicated to the artist Santa Rita Pintor (who provides the artwork for that edition) who will die of TB at the age of 28 in 1918; Amadeo de Souza-Cardozo, who was to be the second painter to be included in the incomplete third edition of *Orpheu*, will die of Spanish flu at the age of 29 in 1918; and then there is Alberto Caeiro, the master heteronym who helped Campos to find his "true self,"⁸ who will die of TB (significantly, like Pessoa's father) at the age of 26 in 1916. In 1918, Pessoa suddenly finds himself practically alone with so many of his artistic collaborators and friends dead. Even Campos will fade away (perhaps he is in mourning), but will reemerge six years later in a new wave of explosive creativity from the mid-1920s with various iconic poems and will continue to write until the end of Pessoa's life. After Pessoa's death, Campos will disappear again, and we have not really heard from him since.

I.iii. Machines

Futurism is at its height during the conception and publication of *Orpheu*. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's *Manifesto of Futurism* was published in 1909

⁸ In his monumental yet unfinished "Notes for the Memory of my Master Caeiro," Campos writes: "As soon as I met Caeiro, I found my true self [*verifiquei-me*]" (Pessoa, 2012b: 102 / 2001: 49)

with its celebration of speed, machines, violence, youth, energy, progress and modernisation. Pessoa is caught up for a moment in the frenzy of Marinetti's bombastic manifestos,⁹ but in his playful and skeptical fashion goes on to create his own "-isms" such as Intersectionism (of which his "Slanting Rain" poems [*Chuva Obliqua*] from *Orpheu 2* are an example) and Sensationism (of which Campos' Odes are an example). While Marinetti glories in the power of the new machines, powerful men, and the violence that is unleashed in the actual world; Campos and Pessoa remain ultimately loyal to the art of creativity and the multifaceted entity and various visions of the philosopher and the artist,¹⁰ and include an unusual mix of unease, playfulness and satire in their relation to modernization and the machine – all exemplified in the publication of Campos' manifesto called *Ultimatum* in 1917.

Ode Triunfal famously begins with these lines:

By the painful light of the factory's huge electric lamps
 I write in a fever.
 I write gnashing my teeth, rabid for the beauty of all this,
 For this beauty completely unknown to the ancients.
 [À dolorosa luz das grandes lâmpadas eléctricas da fábrica

⁹ Marinetti is on Campos' mind as late as 1929 when he writes a poem called *Marinetti, Académico* (Pessoa, 2002: 368).

¹⁰ See for example Campos' definition of the philosopher and the poet in *Ultimatum*: "The philosopher will become the interpreter of crisscrossing subjectivities, with the greatest philosopher being the one who can contain the greatest number of other people's personal philosophies. Since everything is subjective, every man's opinion is true for him, and so the greatest truth will be the inner-synthesis-summation of the greatest number of these true opinions that contradict one another" [*O filósofo passará a ser o interpretador de subjectividades entrecruzadas, sendo o maior filósofo o que maior número de filosofias espontâneas alheias concentrar. Como tudo é subjectivo, cada opinião é verdadeira para cada homem: a maior verdade será a soma-síntese-interior do maior número destas opiniões verdadeiras que se contradizem umas às outras*] (Pessoa, 2001: 83 / 2012b: 157); and on the artist: "The greatest artist will be the one who least defines himself, and who writes in the most genres with the most contradictions and discrepancies. No artist should have just one personality. He should have many, each one being formed by joining together similar states of mind, thereby shattering the crude fiction that the artist is one and indivisible" [*O maior artista será o que menos se definir, e o que escrever em mais géneros com mais contradições e dissemelhanças. Nenhum artista deverá ter só uma personalidade. Deverá ter várias, organizando cada uma por reunião concretizada de estados de alma semelhantes, dissipando assim a ficção grosseira de que é uno e indivisível*]. (Pessoa, 2001: 84 / 2012b: 158).

*Tenho febre e escrevo.
 Escrevo rangendo os dentes, fera para a beleza disto,
 Para a beleza disto totalmente desconhecida dos antigos.]*
 (Pessoa, 2006: 153 / 2002: 81)

We are immediately brought into Campos' mind and vision of the world in 1915. In the third and fourth line, we witness the break from the ancient world – both from the Greek and Judeo-Christian – the authoritative foundation and official narration of Western civilization. Campos declares that the Greeks had no experience of the frenzy of the modern age of the twentieth century – in speed, machinery, noise, electricity, mass production, mass media and communication, and the phenomenal growth of the human population around the world. The “gnashing of teeth”¹¹ alludes to the descriptions of hell and damnation in the Bible, which is now something to be relished in these feverish days of modernism. There is a fusion into something new. This fusion of the Ancient Greek and Hebraic traditions recalls Pessoa's contemporary James Joyce's famous line from *Ulysses* that “Jewgreek is Greekjew. Extremes meet” (Joyce, 2008: 474). These words are said in a drunken haze by Stephen Dedalus, the young man who bears a name that is a cross between the first Christian martyr (St. Stephen) and the craftsman and artist from Greek mythology (Daedalus). The twentieth century idea of Jewishness, or by calling the twentieth century “the Jewish Age,” signifies that everyone is “becoming urban, mobile, literate, articulate, intellectually intricate, [...] learning how to cultivate people and symbols, not fields or herds” (Slezkine, 2004: 1). In essence, it is modern and dynamic. Hence, it is no accident that Pessoa notes that his most modern heteronym (Campos) has a hint of Jewishness in him,¹² and comes from the Arabic village of Tavira in the Algarve. And Joyce, very intentionally, places a “half-Jew” (nothing is ever so clear-cut in Joyce's landscapes as only Leopold Bloom's father was

¹¹ See, for example, in the New Testament: Luke 13:28; Matthew 8:12, 13:42, 13:50, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30; Acts 7: 54; and in the Old Testament: Psalm 35:16, 37:12, 112:10; Job 16:9; Lamentations 2:16.

¹² See Pessoa, 2001: 258 / 2012a: 280: “[...]Campos neither pale nor dark, vaguely corresponding to the Portuguese Jewish type [...] [*Campos entre branco e moreno, tipo vagamente de judeu português*].

Jewish, while his mother was Protestant) at the centre of *Ulysses* which has been called “the Bible of universal homelessness” (Slezkine, 2004: 79) and considered one of the masterpieces of modernism.

The fever of modernism erupts in the wake of the first European reception of Nietzsche, of which Pessoa was a part, in the aspect of Nietzsche’s *Rausch* or frenzy of the artist to Campos’ *febre* (fever, delirious, seething), *fúria* (fury/rage) *raiva* (rage/fury) mentioned various times throughout *Ode Triunfal*.¹³ In the section of Nietzsche’s *The Twilight of the Idols* called “Toward a psychology of the artist,” the philosopher states that every artist must have the physiological condition of frenzy [*Rausch*] which “must first have enhanced the excitability of the whole machine [*Maschine*]; else there is no art” (Nietzsche, 1976: 518 / KSA 6: 116). Hence, Campos writes at the beginning of his poem:

O wheels, O gears, eternal r-r-r-r-r-r-r!
 Bridled convulsiveness of raging mechanisms!
 Raging in me and outside me,
 Through all my dissected nerves [...]
 [Ó rodas, ó engrenagens, r-r-r-r-r-r-r eterno!
 Forte espasmo retido dos maquinismos em fúria!
 Em fúria fora e dentro de mim,
 Por todos os meus nervos dissecados fora]
 (Pessoa, 2006: 153 / 2002: 81)

Although I have written more substantially on Nietzsche and Pessoa elsewhere (Ryan, 2015), I will just mention here that Pessoa ensures that Campos shares the same birthday as Nietzsche (15th October), and the motif of man becoming an explosive machine is another link between the two. Campos writes in *Ode Triunfal*: “Ah, but once more the incessant mechanical rage!” [*Mas, ah outra vez a raiva mecânica constante*] (Pessoa, 2006: 159 / 2002: 88) And Nietzsche writes in a letter to a friend in his middle period: “Basically I live an extremely dangerous life, for I belong to those machines which can explode.”¹⁴ In the final phase of his work before his mental collapse,

¹³ In *Ode Triunfal*, *Febre* is used four times (Pessoa, 2006: 153, 158 / 2002: 81, 87); *fúria* four times (Pessoa, 2006: 153, 154, 159 / 2002: 81, 82, 88); and *raiva* three times (Pessoa, 2006: 158, 159 / 2002: 87, 88).

¹⁴ This was written in a letter to Johann Heinrich Köselitz (whom Nietzsche called Peter Gast)

Nietzsche states in his concise myth-making report to history – *Ecce Homo*: “I no longer speak with words but with lightning bolts [*mit Blitzen rede*]” (Nietzsche, 1992: 57 / KSA 6, 320); and a few lines later in the same work he defines the philosopher as “a fearful explosive material [*Explosionsstoff*] from which everything is in danger.” In the final chapter, he declares: “I am not a man, I am dynamite [*Dynamit*]” (Nietzsche, 1992: 963 / KSA 6, 365). Campos recognizes from the beginning that he was like a machine, but it was only after meeting Caeiro that he found that he was able to realise and hone his vision and become a real poet, and perhaps do something rather than nothing: “As for myself, before meeting Caeiro I was a nervous machine that busily did nothing.” (Pessoa, 2001: 49 / 2012b: / 102)

I. iv. Constructions

During Nietzsche’s time, the explosive possibilities of science were being radically felt in the industrial age, and a few decades later Pessoa’s generation will witness the beginning of the atomic age. Here we find both the paradox of the age and the paradox in Campos and what it is to be a self – in the tension between doing and being in our link to machine as construction, mechanical object, efficiency, appropriation, distribution and production.¹⁵ Campos shifts from wanting to be everything at the same time in studying to be a mechanical, then naval, engineer in Glasgow, jumping from one port to another, and busily trying to be a part of as many “-isms” as he can; to later becoming the indolent, lonely idler in Lisbon trying simply to be. Ironically, the two colossal poets of nineteenth century USA of the

on the 14th August 1881 (Nietzsche, KSB 6, 112).

¹⁵ In the appendix of a work published in 1950 called *The Nomos of the Earth*, Carl Schmitt maps out how “every social and economic order” has attempted to construct and control the world – through three primary aspects: Appropriation, Distribution and Production (See Schmitt: 2006: 324-335). A German contemporary of Schmitt, the philosopher Martin Heidegger, makes his own journey or “turn” [which has been called his *Kehre*] after WWII in a small text called *Gelassenheit* published in 1959 in his own exploration of “doing” and “being” via what he calls “meditative” and “calculative” thinking as a response to the world of advanced technology and the triumph of industrialization and modernization in the superpowers of the USA and the Soviet Union. See: Heidegger, Martin; *Discourse on Thinking [A Translation of Gelassenheit]*, translated by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966.

industrial age of over-activity are idlers or loafers – the expansive poetic rambler Walt Whitman and the melancholic mariner Herman Melville. The poet in Campos is born through the influence of two great loafers of poetry – Whitman and Alberto Caeiro.

Caeiro resides in the realm of “being”; while Campos lives in the interlude of “being” and “doing” in vacillating between embracing the machine in over-activity and the lack of necessity or will to do anything. The tragedy of advanced technology and machines which are meant to make life easier and more efficient is that they actually make us and time run faster, and make us more anxious with our time and the slipping away of time speeding towards death. This advanced technology instills in us an incessant need to keep distracted or entertained where Campos’ metaphysical tedium can no longer even be experienced, and where boredom itself becomes a privilege. The divergence between doing and being and the response by Campos and Caeiro to the modern age of advanced technology and machines can be symbolically and existentially understood in our relationship to the butterfly. While the butterfly stands for the remarkable journey in biological metamorphosis, it may also help us understand our different ways to approaching reality and existence. On the one hand, we can view Campos as a great *Zeitgeist* modernist poet alongside the industrialists, colonialists, capitalists and “go-getters” chasing after the exotic butterfly who flutters unpredictably in the breeze. The chase for the butterfly is frustrated and never satisfied in the incessant noise and clumsiness of the chase. On the other hand, we can envision Alberto Caeiro sitting down quietly or standing completely still, letting the butterfly come to land on him, without noise, without chase, without seduction, but simply by being.

In 1915, as the mechanical-naval engineer, Campos is a constructor of machines, and in *Ode Triunfal* he will literally yell: “If I could express my whole being like an engine! / If I could be complete like a machine!” [*Ah, poder exprimir-me todo como um motor se exprime! / Ser completo como uma máquina!*] (Pessoa, 2002: 82 / 2006: 154). It is important and significant to see the way Campos signs off his three poems from *Orpheu*: the first, in *Opiário*, from the Suez Canal (a marvel of engineering construction and an artificial river from the nineteenth century); the second, in *Ode Triunfal*, from London (the world metropolis and colonial capital of the world in

1914); and the third, in *Ode Maritima*, with no location indicated this time but simply signing off as “Álvaro de Campos, Engineer.” Thinking with the poet and with echoes of Joycean play, we hear and see both the “engine” and the “ear” in the word “engineer.” Words become (and disintegrate and morph into) sounds in the fourth line of the poem and again at the end of the poem, which is just a prelude to the sound collage of words to being spoken aloud throughout the middle ecstatic sections of *Ode Maritima* (again not unlike Joyce who brings language to the limits of a human being’s reading capacities in *Finnegans Wake*, and where the voice of the reader itself becomes the musical instrument for the words as notes to be played). In the Portuguese language, there is the verb *engenhar* which can also be translated as “invent” or “forge” (which Richard Zenith does in his translation) and which Campos utilizes at the end of the poem – presenting engineering as construction and creating – as machine from the outside modern new world to the empty inner self finding a new voice: “I’m oblivious to my inward existence. I turn, I spin, I forge myself” [*Nem sei que existo para dentro. Giro, rodeio, engenho-me*] (Pessoa, 2006: 160 / 2002: 89). This “engineering” or “forging” oneself leads into the second and concluding section of this essay.

II. “Empty and Oceanic Thought,” and the Affirmative Void of the Self

It is hard to know exactly when Pessoa wrote *Episódios*, in which we find the line “And I laugh from the bottom of my empty and oceanic thought.” According to recent Pessoa scholars it was probably in the second half of the 1920s.¹⁶ One can be reminded of Freud’s “*Ozeanisches Gefühl*” (oceanic feeling) from his later works – *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) and *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). There are various publications and explorations of the “cosmic consciousness” throughout modernism from Feuerbach to Freud in coping with a restructured worldview without the authoritative Judeo-Christian God. Although Pessoa was very much aware of Freud, his use of the “ocean” metaphor is already there throughout his life due to, firstly, for obvious reasons, his being Portuguese and relying on and applying

¹⁶ Pizarro & Cardiello make a convincing case for second half of 1920s, circa 1st October 1927 (see: Pessoa, 2014: 631). They note that Cleonice Berardinelli, in her critical edition, states that there was a draft version dated 1st October 1927, but she didn’t supply a call number for the document, which no one else has located.

the national myth and emphasis on the symbol of the sea; and, secondly, for giving him a classic motif for his own interior explorations of the human imagination that has no limits, to sail on and to the *terra incognita*. Both the *Livro do Desassossego* and *Ode Marítima* are good examples of this interior journey.¹⁷ The sea as Homeric is mentioned in *Ode Marítima* (“The ancient and forever Homeric sea” [*No velho mar sempre o homérico*] (Pessoa, 2006: 192 / 2002: 137); and later again in *Episódios*: “And the rhythm of the Homeric sea climbs above my brain – / From the old Homeric sea, the savage of this Greek brain [*E o ritmo do mar homérico trepa por cima do meu cérebro – / Do velho mar homérico, ó selvagem deste cérebro grego*] (Pessoa, 2002: 249). The ancient past is reflected unto the modern age again in Campos, and as his predecessor Camões began the epic poem *Os Lusíadas* with making the break with Virgil in declaring a new “hero” envisioned in the collective of the Renaissance Portuguese seafaring explorers, Campos makes another break in the first lines of *Ode Triunfal* (and ignoring Camões in the meantime).

The “modern” thought is empty and oceanic. The word for empty that Campos uses is *vazio*, and he also likes to use the expression “the world’s dynamic void” [*o vácuo dinâmico do mundo*] (Pessoa, 2006: 208 / 2002: 174) as his vision of the riddle of the universe, which can be first found in the unfinished epic *Saudação a Walt Whitman* which would have been Campos’ poetic contribution to the never completed *Orpheu* 3. These same words are also included at the end of his untitled poem which begins with the words “If you want to kill yourself, why don’t you want to kill yourself?” [*Se te queres matar, porque não te queres matar?*] (Pessoa, 2006: 223 / 2002: 307), dated 26th April 1916, on the ten-year anniversary of the suicide of Mario de Sá-Carneiro. “The world’s dynamic void” is the vast revolving emptiness, and there is a likeness again to the modern machine in the inclusion of the word “dynamic,” where Campos consciously yells out in *Ode Triunfal*: “Brotherhood with all dynamics!” [*Fraternidade com todas as dinâmicas!*] (Pessoa, 2006: 154 / 2002: 82).¹⁸ In typical outrageous fashion, Campos declares this new modern

¹⁷ For more on Pessoa’s interior journey, see my essay “*Navegar é preciso; viver não é preciso*: The Impossible Journeys of Kierkegaard and Pessoa,” in *Philosophy in the Condition of Modernism*, edited by Ana Falcató and Antonio Cardiello, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 385-414.

¹⁸ Santa Rita Pintor, who is the first plastic artist to contribute images to *Orpheu*, also uses the word “dynamic” in the title of his first painting in *Orpheu* 2 and also “mechanical sensibility.”

world of machinery, incessant noise, busyness, movement and industry as the “New metallic and dynamic Revelation of God!” [*Nova Revelação metálica e dinâmica de Deus!*] (Pessoa, 2006: 156 / 2002: 85). As well as being Pessoa’s and modernity’s cosmological vision of the universe,¹⁹ “the world’s dynamic void” is perhaps the drive and curse that Pessoa and Campos endlessly grapple with and find themselves in.

I view Campos and Pessoa’s whole poetic work as haunted and propelled by the opening two words of Hamlet – “Who’s there?”. The break between the antiquity and the middle ages with the contemporary world is that the Ancient Greek poets, Dante of the Middle Ages and even that of the Renaissance of Camões have the Muses and the gods and to invoke and for guidance. The moderns are left only with the tedium of themselves, to invoke themselves, as Campos expresses in one of his final poems: “The Ancients invoked the Muses. / We invoke ourselves [*Os antigos invocavam as Musas. / Nós invocamo-nos a nós mesmos*] (Pessoa, 1998: 208 / 2002: 533). As the experimental modernists delve deeper (not only Pessoa and his heteronyms, but also in Pirandello and later Beckett), even their “self” is no longer guaranteed, and they are left with only their voice or just the echo of it in a well – referring again to Campos’ poem: “So many times I have leaned over / the well I suppose myself to be / and bleated “Ahhhhh!” to hear an echo” [*Quantas vezes me tenho debruçado / Sobre o poço que me suponho / E balido “Uh!” para ouvir um eco*] (Pessoa, 1998: 208 / 2002: 533). And in *Tabacaria* [The Tobacco Shop], Campos writes, “I invoke my own self and find nothing” [*invoco / A mim mesmo e não encontro nada*] (Pessoa, 1998: 176 / 2002: 323). Of course, this “nothing” is crucial, which cannot be examined now in this paper, but it is central in Campos and dramatically introduced in the opening of three of his great later poems of *Lisbon Revisited* (1923), *Lisbon Revisited: 1926*, and *Tabacaria* where he becomes (not unlike Beckett) “the poet of nothingness.” In the year before he dies, Pessoa publishes a poem in

The complete title of the artwork created in Paris is: *Estojo científico de uma cabeça + aparelho ocular + sobreposição dinâmica visual + reflexos de ambiente x luz* (SENSIBILIDADE MECANICA). Two of Amadeo de Souza-Cardozo’s artworks from 1915, that were also created in Paris, that might have been included in *Orpheu 3*, include the words “dynamic” and “ocean” [*Arabesco dinamico* and *Oceano vermelho azul cabeça*].

¹⁹ Is this a returning to, or modification of, a pre-Christian or supra-Christian conception – found, for example, in the *Upanishads* texts?

his only finished book, *Mensagem*, that states that “myth is the nothing that is everything” [*O mito é o nada que é tudo*] (Pessoa, 2006: 373 / 1979: 27). This impossible task in invoking the nothing that is repeated can be a frustrating problem for the reader and for Pessoa and Campos’ later broken, unfinished odes which end up being navel-gazing rather naval-voyaging odes in the repetitive quest to excavate or unearth the echo or muse from within. As an aside, Pessoa worked on his own English language translation of *Ode Marítima* and called it *Naval Ode*. (Pessoa, 1993: 213) Was he intentionally making a pun with naval and navel?

Pessoa does give a solution or antidote (a salvation even) in the poetry of Caetano. We return again to the tension and relation between “doing” and “being.” In the graft of doing, Campos concludes *Ode Triunfal* by saying (as already quoted above) that he doesn’t even know that he exists inside; instead the “I” turns, spins and forges itself. In the gesture of “being,” Caetano declares in one of the poems from his *Keeper of Sheep* collection, “I don’t know what nature is; I sing it” [*Não sei o que é a Natureza: canto-a*] (Pessoa, 2006: 33 / 2009: 65). Here we have the age-old dichotomy in *being* in belonging to the earth and the earth belonging to us, and that of the *doing* in which we attempt to control, manipulate, transform. In the great tradition of indigenous cultures outside the Western worship of the machine, doing and being a slave to time, Caetano’s human is merely a strand of a spider web, knowing that whatever he does to the web he does to himself. For Caetano, it is the wind that gives us our first breath and not vice versa. This is the ecological conundrum and catastrophe that we are facing today.

In conclusion, Pessoa confronts, surfs and plummets the “world’s dynamic void” and utilizes this “empty and oceanic thought” as the expression, location and definition of his art. There is a line in the penultimate episode of Joyce’s *Ulysses* that comes close to Pessoa’s and Campos’ modernist constructing artificer amidst the empty and oceanic thought and cosmos, which reads to be “ineluctably constructed upon the incertitude of the void” (Joyce, 2008: 650). Here we have the inescapability (ineluctably), uncertainty and instability (incertitude) of our human situation; the construction of our forms, rules, systems, etc. (constructed); and the ever-present void. This may well

be Joyce's definition of art, beauty, human existence, *Ulysses* and modernism. In *Finnegans Wake*, he goes much further, and comments to his son seventeen years after completing the book that no one will read, and he writes: "my eyes are tired, for over half a century, they have gazed into a nullity where they have found a lovely nothing" (Joyce, 1966: 359, 361n). But this does not have to be interpreted or perceived as despair; on the contrary, the act of creativity and creation is affirmation and the "will to life." The being and doing of the workings of the poet in throwing the human being into the middle of things, is that crucially, to quote Auden, "poetry makes nothing happen." (Auden, 1991: 248)

Finally, it is important to remember that Campos "laughs" from the bottom of his empty and oceanic thought. There is always the admonition of a smile or laugh with Pessoa, Campos and Joyce that breaks us free from the despair of taking ourselves and life too seriously or gravely; the laugh liberates us and keeps us afloat (and again which their philosophical forerunners Kierkegaard and Nietzsche also were very aware of and included in their demanding and critical philosophy). To keep himself buoyant on his journey to becoming a serious poet, Joyce's Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* "laughed to free his mind from his mind's bondage" (Joyce, 2008: 204); and while Campos reveals to the reader and to himself this "empty and oceanic thought," he crucially "laughs from the bottom of this thought. Even the later, supposedly despairing, masterpiece *Tabacaria* ends with the word *sorriu* (smiled), where Campos, from his window, sees the owner of the tobacco shop smile while "the universe / Reconstructed itself to me, without ideals or hope" [*o universo / Reconstruiu-se-me sem ideal nem esperança, e o Dono da Tabacaria sorriu*] (Pessoa, 2006: 179 / 2002: 326). The being – as *ser* and *estar* –, and the doing (*fazer*) abide and remain in tension in constructing and living as a modern human being. Campos and modernism remain a paradox in which we are still somewhat located, so that we return to quote from that strange poem *Episódios* in which I began this talk, where Campos continues to emphasize the paradox of his position (and the position of modernism): "And I, the modern one that I am not [*E eu, o moderno que o não sou*]" (Pessoa, 2002: 248).

With the dichotomies of *being* and *doing*, the machine and empty and oceanic thought, and busy constructor and aimless idler, the last words of Campos in *Orpheu* encompass the tension and symphony and cacophony

of machines and the “empty and oceanic thought” in the twentieth century. The reader finds the poet alone again, emerging out of the intense reverie of his maritime ode, standing on the edge of the empty port, gazing out on the vast Atlantic horizon, reflecting on and within his own empty and oceanic thought, while a large mechanical crane slowly turns:

And the real, naked hour like a wharf without ships,
 And the slow turning of the crane, like a turning compass,
 Tracing a semicircle of I don't know what emotion
 In the staggered silence of my soul...
 [E a hora real e nua como um cais já sem navios,
 E o giro lento do guindaste que, como um compasso que gira,
 Traça um semicírculo de não sei que emoção
 No silêncio comovido da minh'alma...]
 (Pessoa, 2006: 196 / 2002: 142)

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HOW TO KNOW MORE ABOUT MANKIND WITH MUSIC, THEATRE AND OTHER ARTS. ON BRECHT'S LEARNING PLAYS

Vera San Payo de Lemos

CET

Abstract

Brecht stated in one of his short and sharp notes that philosophers paid since immemorial times attention to theatre because theatre people deal with interesting things for philosophers such as the human behaviour, the human opinions and the consequences of human actions. Though the focus on these issues is characteristic for Brecht's epic theatre as a whole, it is especially in the innovative artistic form and function of the pieces called *Lehrstück*, the learning plays created with the composers Hindemith, Weill and Eisler in the last years of the Weimar Republic, that the arts are used as instruments for a better knowledge and understanding of human behaviour. How these pieces aimed to develop this better knowledge and understanding will be analyzed in this paper.

Keywords

Learning play, Transformation of the concert form, Gebrauchsmusik, Gemeinschaftsmusik, Art for producers

“Making music is better than listening to it” – this statement, posted in big letters in the public hall with chairs and a simple podium where *Lehrstück* (*Learning Play*) by Bertolt Brecht and Paul Hindemith premiered on the 28th of July 1929 at the Baden-Baden Music Festival, points out the musical context of the play and condenses in its clear and provocative simplicity the heart of the aesthetic theories that inform the polemic and for a long time misunderstood group of plays defined as *Lehrstücke* (in German, literally teaching plays or plays containing a lesson, a moral, a doctrine) and

translated mostly as “didactic plays” or “learning plays.” I will use the term “learning plays” in an attempt to show that these works belong to Brecht’s most innovative writing and were created as librettos for a new music genre called “learning play” by the composers he worked with: Eisler, Hindemith and Weill. Conceived as an avant-garde experience in a new artistic field that mingled several art forms (music, theatre, dance and film) and articulated aesthetics with politics, the learning play as artistic genre is closely linked to the expectations for a new society that existed in Germany during the Weimar Republic before the rise of fascism.

There are six learning plays by Brecht. Written as librettos to be fully composed they are much shorter than the plays of the epic theatre where there is also music, mostly in the form of songs (composed by Weill, Eisler or Dessau), but with a different function. In the plays of the epic theatre, such as *Mother Courage and her Children*, the songs appear occasionally as ingredients of Brecht’s famous *Verfremdungseffekt*, as elements included to interrupt the dialogue and the action of the play and make the spectator conscious that he is attending a performance in which he is invited to reason about the changes in human behaviour in the also always changing situations. The six short learning plays written by Brecht are: *Lindbergh’s Flight* (with music by Weill and Hindemith), *Lehrstück* (simply *Learning Play*, later named *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent*, with music by Hindemith), *He Who Says Yes* (with music by Weill), *He Who Says No* (without music), *The Decision* (with music by Eisler) and *The Horatians and the Curatians* (with music by Kurt Schwaen). With the exception of *He Who Says No* (written in 1931 as a counterplay to *He Who Says Yes* but neither composed nor performed in Germany in Brecht’s lifetime) and *The Horatians and the Curatians* (written in 1935, during the exile in Denmark, and performed for the first time with music by the GDR’s composer Kurt Schwaen in 1958, two years after Brecht’s death), the four other plays, *Lindbergh’s Flight*, *Learning Play*, *He Who Says Yes* and *The Decision* were written and performed between 1926 and 1933. The learning plays didn’t open in theatres as theatre productions but as music pieces in the music festivals for which they were composed. Music critics and not theatre critics wrote about its premiere. Published in Brecht’s complete works together with all other plays of the epic theatre (GBA 3, 7-125; GBA 4, 279-303), the learning plays cannot be fully evaluated without

the score and the sound of its music. The dramatic characters of the chorus and leader of the chorus, the variations, repetitions, sharpness and shortness of their sentences would sound quite different with music; they would perhaps arouse the pleasure of singing together rather than the annoying impression of pedagogical insistence on a idea to make something clear that everyone has already understood.

Typical ingredients of the learning play are the use of chorus, the cast of types rather than individuals, the active involvement of the audience, the presentation of judicial scenes in which the chorus acts as intermediary and the theme of the relationship of the individual to the community that is also central in Brecht's complete work. This group of six plays written by Brecht has to be interpreted on the whole and seen as a cycle that developed as a work in progress. Like a musical theme with variations, his learning plays all have similar themes that are presented in each play from different perspectives: there is the central theme of the individual's duties and responsibilities towards society, the theme of the consent or agreement, interpreted as the willingness to change permanently, to quit a state of things, even the own individuality and way of thinking, in order to embrace something new, that reveals to be necessary for the society in a given situation. As The Learned Chorus from *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent* expresses it: "If you have improved the world, / Then improve the world you have improved. Give it up!" Or "Changing the world, change yourselves! / Give yourselves up! (GBA 3, 46)." Other themes are the theme of the voyage, the expedition, to break borders and do something important for the community, and the theme of the examination and discussion of the implications of someone's actions, behaviours and decisions in a difficult situation.

Being related to one another and building a sort of sequence, a philosophical spinning up of a cluster of ideas, we can however recognize two diptychs among the five plays written in the years of the Weimar Republic: *Lindbergh's Flight* and *Learning Play* form one diptych, dealing, the one, with Lindbergh's successful flight over the ocean and the progress it meant for mankind, and, the other, with the crash of the plane piloted by Charles Nungesser and the examination of his faults and these of the three mechanics who fell with him; *He Who Says Yes, He Who Says No* and *The Decision* form another diptych (that would become a triptych). These three plays are all based on *Taniko*, one

of the 240 plays of the Noh Theatre that are still performed today. *Taniko* means in Japanese *The Valley Hurling* and alludes to the ancient custom of throwing someone into a valley that, in Buddhist metaphysics, doesn't mean the end of life but is seen as a rite of passage, the way to a rebirth in a reincarnation. The fable and the central motive of *Taniko* will appear in secularized variations in *He Who Says Yes, He Who Says No* and *The Decision* mingled with the theme of the consent introduced in *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent*. To attenuate the strangeness of this oriental custom in the occidental versions of the play the individual has to give his consent or agreement before being thrown into the valley or, in other words, he has to accept the decision or the verdict of his death sentence before being killed.

The two main issues and aims of the program of the Baden-Baden Music Festival are the concepts *Gebrauchsmusik* (in its double meaning of music to be used, to be practiced, and that is lacking) and *Gemeinschaftsmusik* (also in its double meaning of music that addresses issues of the community and is meant to be performed by a community of professionals and amateurs players, with or without an audience). Both concepts express the active-passive debates that characterize the musical aesthetics of the twenties. They emerged as a reaction to the experiments of New Music, confined mainly to music experts, and to the crisis of the traditional concert form. The consciousness that times were rapidly changing and a new era was coming up was widespread. The rise of the working classes claimed for active participation but also the new middle class looked for different forms of entertainment in sport events, in the new media as film, radio and music records as well as in the music dance imported from the USA and performed at dancing clubs, coffee houses and balls. The concert form is criticized as an affair of passivity of the individual that should be replaced by the activity of the community. As the young music critic Theodor Adorno stated in 1930: "At the concerts remained those that remained behind" (Adorno apud Krabiell 1995, 149).

The assumption that the mere instrumental music played in concerts led to lethargy (in several of his texts on music Brecht would call it numbness and even suppression of all intellectual capacities) suggested a shift to vocal music supported by the idea that one could do things with words, that songs and theatre plays could be weapons for such a difficult task as changing the

world. In his famous essay *The Author as Producer*, Walter Benjamin quotes Eisler's observation on the importance of the word in music: "We should beware of overestimating orchestral music and thinking of it as the only art-form. Music without words acquired its great importance and its full development only under capitalism." Stating that the transformation of the concert is not possible without the collaboration of the words, Benjamin refers Brecht's and Eisler's learning play *The Decision* as an example of this transformation of the concert form and praises it "as a peak achievement of both musical and literary technique" (Benjamin 2006, 285).

Responding to the new audience structure and the new forms of music consumption the *Gebrauchsmusik* pursued two different trends: it produced music for amateurs (with a stylistic and technical simplicity that enabled them to play and sing it easily) and music for the technical media that remained attached to the old concert form and used the new devices simply to reach a wider audience. In his essay *Basic Issues of Musical Listening*, Heinrich Bessler also juxtaposed practical *Gebrauchsmusik* with autonomous concert music. Though he recognizes that the new composers try to practice it in a different way, he remembers that *Gebrauchsmusik* always existed to intensify a practical behaviour in a given situation: in dancing, work songs, anthems, liturgical music and lullabies. Using concepts of Martin Heidegger, his former philosophy teacher, he explains that *Gebrauchsmusik* belongs to the immediate realm of *Zeug* (equipment), something that is *zuhanden* (ready-to-hand) as an object of manipulation, whereas the concert music as "in some way self-contained" belongs to the realm of *Ding* (thing), to objects of bare perceptual cognition and reflection which Heidegger describes as *vorhanden* (present-at-hand) (Bessler apud Hinton 1993, 83-84). The music critic Karl Laux sums up the wish of the several amateurs' groups and the young generation of composers to rejuvenate the *Gebrauchsmusik* in a much more simple sentence: "They no longer want concerts which release listeners from life but music-making which releases the listener in life" (Laux apud Hinton 1993, 84).

The second key concept, the *Gemeinschaftsmusik*, also called *Sing- und Spielmusik*, music to be sung and played, meant a kind of *Gebrauchsmusik* that was only for the pleasure of singing and playing music by amateurs and not intended to be performed in front of an audience. Eliminating the

gap between the production and the consumption of art, it is an expression of the notion of art for producers. These producers could be, for example, the Communist worker's choirs that had half a million members in the Weimar Republic, amateur dramatic groups, school choruses and school orchestras but also professional actors who wanted to join these activities. The organization called *Musikantengilde*, led by Fritz Jöde, was one of the biggest in Germany with over a million members, most of them young people. One of their popular initiatives was the *Offene Singstunde* (an open hour to sing). A choir sang the first voice, invited the audience to join in and continued singing the second and the third voice. The usual separation between performers and audience was suppressed as soon as the singing community arose. Wanting to attract the amateurs for the new experiments with *Gemeinschaftsmusik* planned for Baden-Baden, Hindemith initiated a collaboration with Fritz Jöde in 1927. The clear preference for music from the past, specially the folk song, that established easily an agreeable feeling of harmony and togetherness, encapsulated the *Musikantengilde* in a sort of romantic sect and brought the collaboration rapidly to an end, but the topic of music for amateurs shaped the program of the Festival in 1928 and 1929 and was a direct influence for the genesis of the learning play (Krabiell 1995, 157-162).

It is exactly the concept of community that Brecht picked up as the main issue for the first learning plays written for the Baden-Baden Music Festival in 1929, *Lindbergh's Flight* and *Learning Play*. The three main topics of the Festival's program were music for amateurs (the *Learning Play* was meant for them); music for the radio (*Lindbergh's Flight* was conceived as a radio learning play for boys and girls) and music for film. *Lindbergh's Flight* was presented at the Festival on the 27th of July in its concert form, but on the next day Brecht demonstrated how the play could be used to change the present-day radio and transform it in an apparatus for communication rather than for distribution. Instead of simply broadcasting a concert or some other musical piece in a one-way mode with the listener as simple consumer, the radio should operate on a dialogical mode and interact with the listener assuring him a productive role. On the left side of the stage was the radio orchestra, its singers and the technical equipment; on the right side with the score in front of him the listener, who read and sang Lindbergh's

part to the instrumental accompaniment supplied by the radio. On the back of the stage was the explanation of the theory underlying this learning play (GBA 24, 87). One year later, when Brecht writes a new version of the play, he suggests that this experiment could also be done with the listener sitting at home, receiving the part broadcasted by the radio and playing Lindbergh's role with the score published by one of the many radio magazines in front of him (GBA 24, 87).

In the short programme note for the premiere on the same evening of the other play, the simply called *Lehrstück*, the piece is presented as a "collective artistic experience," "created to enable the authors and those who participate in it to know themselves and not to be an event for other people" (GBA 24, 90). The audience was therefore invited to play an active role and sing together with the crowd, repeating parts of the text like a responsory in a liturgical service. For this purpose the text of the crowd was projected on a screen with a simplified score. The Learned Chorus stood in the background, the orchestra was located on the left; in the left foreground was a table at which were seated the conductor of the singers and musicians, the Chorus Leader and the Speaker. The singers of *The Four Who Are Fallen*, the pilot and the three mechanics, sat at the desk in the right foreground. In the centre of the stage acted the two clowns and Mr. Smith in the grotesque clown scene that is very often performed as a sketch out of the context of the *Lehrstück*. As Brecht describes, the composer and the author were also present and gave their instructions during the performance (GBA 22. 1, 352). In his text *The radio as a communications apparatus* (1932), Brecht suggests another form to use the play in ordinary situations: the listener could also assume the role of the airplane crew and communicate with the role of the Learned Chorus provided by the radio (GBA 21, 556). In Baden-Baden the audience participated with enthusiasm till the clown scene in which the limbs of the aching Mr. Smith are progressively amputated by the two clowns under the guise of helpfulness. Also shocking was the film sequence in which the dancer Valeska Gert performed death with painful realism. People fainted, cried, shouted and left the hall (Krabiel 1995, 172). Though Hindemith's music was highly appreciated, the strangeness of Brecht's philosophical text and the scandal originated by what we would call today a happening lead to the suppression of the sponsoring, the end of the Music Festival in Baden-Baden, its

relocation next year in Berlin under the name New Music Berlin 1930 and also to the end of Brecht's collaboration with Hindemith.

For the new festival two new learning plays should be presented also as a diptych: Weill's and Brecht's *He Who Says Yes* and Eisler's and Brecht's *The Decision*. After the scandal originated by the last learning play in Baden-Baden and fearing the radical aesthetic and political principles of Brecht and Eisler, the direction of the Festival claimed to evaluate their piece in advance. Brecht and Eisler interpreted this demand as a political censorship. In an open letter they declared that they would withdraw their participation and address their work to the active cultural groups of the workers' movement. As they stressed it should be performed by "those people who neither can pay for art nor are paid for art, but just want to take part in it" (GBA 24, 97-98). Expressing his solidarity with Brecht and Eisler, Weill withdrew also *He Who Says Yes* from the Festival and addressed the piece he had conceived as a "school opera" to the children and teachers of a school in Berlin who produced it in their school, directing acting, singing, playing, conceiving the stage design. It was the first learning play totally produced as it was intended by its authors, namely as an exercise for those who participate in it, coupling pleasure with learning, work with creativity and thought with feeling. As part of the pedagogical experiment Brecht asked the schoolchildren to express their opinion on the subject of the play and propose changes. The proposals of the schoolchildren are the only notes published in Brecht's writings on *He Who Says Yes* and *He Who Says No* (GBA 24, 92-95). Though Brecht had eliminated many specific oriental aspects of the Noh play and transformed the text into a parable the ancient custom of the human sacrifice in the valley hurling remained difficult to accept in the rational and secularized occidental context. Considering the critical opinions of the schoolchildren and other friends, Brecht writes a second version of *He Who Says Yes* and a new play entitled *He Who Says No* where the character of the boy refuses to submit to the traditional self-sacrifice and declares: "And as far as the great custom is concerned, I cannot see any sense in it. I need a great new custom that we should introduce immediately, the custom of thinking anew in every situation" (GBA 3, 71).

One of the most virulent critics of the Noh play was Eisler. He couldn't find any rational justification for the self-sacrifice in the name of the ancient

custom and criticized the form of the parable chosen by Brecht saying that the story was too abstract and lacked the signs of a concrete social reality. With this critic in mind Brecht chooses a concrete and actual political subject. The play doesn't present directly, like the former two plays, the incidents of a journey, but is the report, in a trial situation, of the problems of a very specific journey that is already finished: four Communist agitators explain to the Central Committee of The Communist Party, represented in the play by the Control Chorus, why they have killed their young comrade during a revolutionary mission in China. He had endangered the mission at the moment of greatest revolutionary potential and agreed with the death sentence for the sake of the Communist cause. The notion that individuality must be subsumed for the good of the community and that the cause demands sacrifice relates this play to the other learning plays.

The Decision was first performed at the Philharmony in Berlin on the 13th of December 1930. It was in an important concert hall in the centre of the city and not in the places generally chosen for the meetings and festivities of the workers' movement, but as Eisler declared "It is a political seminar of a special kind on questions of the party's strategy and tactics. [...] The Lehrstück is not intended for concert use. It is only a means of pedagogical work with students of Marxist schools and proletarian collectives" (Eisler apud Hinton 1993, 90). In the programme of the premiere, Brecht explained that it is "not a play in the normal sense. It is an event put on by a mass chorus and four players" (GBA 24, 96). The four players who played the four agitators were three actors (one of them Brecht's wife Helene Weigel) and a tenor who sang several solos. The mass chorus acting in the play as the Control Chorus that represents the Central Committee of the Communist Party consisted of more than 300 members of workers' choirs conducted by Eisler. They sang the several choruses that punctured the action. Some parts of the text were projected on a screen. The four players sat on chairs and stood up to present with very simple means – a rope, some leaflets, a bowl of rice, four masks – their report. Using songs, accompanied recitative, direct address and scenes of dramatic action, *The Decision* was received as an oratorio and compared with a red mass, but, as a learning play, it was also intended as a platform for discussion. The programme included a questionnaire for the audience and the performers

with questions on the subject of the play to be discussed with the authors in a meeting one week later (GBA 24, 96).

Being performed in different cities in Germany, mainly in halls of the workers' movement, *The Decision* is forbidden by the authorities in January 1933, just before Hitler's election, on the ground of spreading Communist propaganda and its authors accused of incitation to high treason. In the fifties, living both in the GDR, Brecht and Eisler forbade themselves the public performance of *The Decision*. It was closely linked to the political struggle and the expectations for a new society that existed in Germany before the rise of fascism and would be misunderstood in a different historical context (GBA 23, 418; GBA 30, 447). Furthermore the dark shadow of Stalinism, with its suppression of any dissidence, its show trials and its executions, hanged inevitably over the play. Brecht's heirs suspended the prohibition only in 1997. Since then it has not been performed very often not only because of the complex resonances of its subject but also because it is difficult to fulfil the high requirements of the musical score.

In its radicality *The Decision* reflects the exacerbation of the political struggle at the end of the Weimar Republic and brings up the question: What became of the learning play when this era came to an end? The conflict between Brecht and Hindemith after the scandal at Baden-Baden in 1929 provides one of the answers. When Hindemith published the piano vocal score of the *Lehrstück*, after the Baden-Baden premiere, in the preface he focussed on purely musical matters and stated that "the form of the piece is, if possible, adapted as required. The order given in the score is therefore more a suggestion than a set of instructions. Cuts, additions, and reorderings are possible" (Hindemith apud Hinton 1993, 79). Previewing that such cuts would erase the sharpness of the political issues in the play, Brecht had already assured in his contract that cuts could only be made with his permission (Krabiel 1995, 176). His aim was to promote dissension, discussion about human behaviour in society, and not superficial harmony and a brief feeling of community through music. In the preface to his second version of the play, *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent*, he makes his point stating that "it would never be possible for such an artificial and shallow harmony, even for a few minutes, to create on a broad and vital basis a counterbalance to the collective formations which pull apart

the people of our times with a completely different force” (Brecht apud Hinton 1993, 79-80). The aesthetic values of the learning play had to yield to the requirements of political struggle.

What happened to the learning play in Brecht’s work during exile was what we could call its de-musicalization and transposition to the field of theatre. At Baden-Baden it originated as music for amateurs, as a new form of an oratorio (like those of Bach and Haendel) that included the possibility of inserts of other artistic forms of expression such as theatre scenes, projections of photos or film sequences and moments of dance. In his text *On the theory of the learning play* (written in 1937) Brecht maintains the idea of assemblage of different art forms stating that “The form of the learning play is rigorous to facilitate the introduction of self-invented and actual parts” (GBA 22.1, 351-352) or, in other words, the text of the learning play is not fixed. It can be used as a nuclear piece that inspires a completely different artistic production, a platform for improvisations and the brainstorming of people who want to discuss ideas, an exercise in dialectical and critical thinking. He also maintains the idea of a learning experience that can occur anywhere and is centred on those who practice it when he asserts that “the learning play teaches when it is performed, not when it is seen, [...] it doesn’t need any spectator but he can obviously be used” (GBA 22.1, 351-352).

Brecht distinguished the *Lehrstück* (the play to be used for learning wherever it is possible, at school, at work) from the epic *Schaustück* (the play to be seen in a theatre). Epic plays such as *Life of Galileo* show mainly the contradictions in society, that social relationships and the norms of behaviour should not be taken for granted but examined critically and understood in their historicity. The learning play goes beyond the epic play: it aims at a total abolition of the division between performance and audience, at the elimination of the gap between the production and consumption of art.

A very impressive document of the concretion of the cluster of ideas subsumed under the notion of the learning play in the last years of the Weimar Republic is the film *Kuhle Wampe* written in 1931 by Brecht, with music by Eisler, directed by their young collaborator Slatan Dudow and performed by professional actors and singers like Ernst Busch and over 4000 amateurs of workers’ choirs and sport’s associations. I will show a brief sequence of an open air festival that mingled sport activities, agit-prop theatre and

singing by choirs. After a brief agit-prop play a choir sings Eisler's famous *Solidaritätslied*, the *Solidarity Song*. The effervescent activity at the open air Festival contrasts with the way home. In the final sequence, often interpreted as a premonition of the dark times to come, the workers enter a sombre tunnel with their bikes and rucksacks. The echoes of the *Solidarity Song* underlie the sequence.

At the end of this journey through the learning plays, as examples of experimentation and dissidence that discussed philosophical and political questions using several art forms in the Weimar Republic, I want to quote a short note in which Brecht remembers these creative times in 1938, during exile. Making a list of these experiments in the different art fields (and it is surprising that the learning play appears again as a music genre) he reaffirms at the end the critical spirit that characterizes him as an author who is always conscious that times are changing and believes that art should be used as an instrument to transform the world into a better world.

The avant-garde

the dadaism

the expressionism

the new objectivity

the period play

the frozen music, the solo instruments with ensemble, the utility music, the mass song, the learning play

the revue, the main thread, the aphorism put on stage, the performed slogan
we criticized the times and the times criticized us (GBA 22.1, 322)

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MACHINE THINKING, THINKING MACHINE: CONSIDERATIONS ON FILM AS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract

We live in times in which science-fiction meets the actual present reality. Trans- and post-humanist ideas like Cyborgs and robots or machines powered by AI are no longer ideas we know from the cinema screen. Yet are human intelligence and artificial intelligence of the same kind, do they have the same kind of reasoning? This paper inquires on the way film may or may not be capable of cognition in the context of AI. Can film “think” and if so, which kind of intelligent reasoning does the cinematograph provide? To raise the hypothesis of film as artificial intelligence could help give an example on the very nature of machine thought, beyond the human way of reasoning. I propose to firstly apply on film the “weak AI hypothesis” and secondly to introduce the “strong AI hypothesis” on the cinematograph as a “robot philosopher” such as claimed by Jean Epstein. Finally, I will argue for film as AI in the sense of producing an own kind of thought beyond the limitations of human cognition and reasoning, based on Walter Benjamin’s concept of apparatus.

Keywords

Artificial intelligence, Cinema, Henri Bergson, Jean Epstein

We live in times in which science-fiction meets the actual present reality. What we thought as impossible yesterday has insidiously been overtaken by new possibilities of technological development. The existence of cyborgs, AI-robots and AI-machines – technological trans- and post-humanisms – are no longer a fiction. We have humans who wear techno-chips implanted in their skin, google glasses and even super-intelligent robots who speak at conferences about their own condition of being.¹ But how can we deal with these new forms of machine intelligence epistemologically? And what exactly is an artificial intelligence – AI? A self-learning machine, conscious of its own identity? A machine that can act, move and think in humanlike fashion as we know it from sci-fi-films? And how can we approach nowadays the question which mathematician Alan Turing has raised 70 years ago: “Can machines think?”² Are the human ability of thinking and artificial intelligence necessarily of the same kind, must they have the same kind of reasoning? Or do we rather desire machines which are able to transcend the human limits of thought?

The huge range of questions encompass aspects of the philosophy of mind and computation as well as epistemology, ethics and finally aesthetics, if we remember for example how in the 1990’s media artists created screen-based software characters scripted to interact with exhibition visitors. And then there is of course cinema itself: there are since the 1920’s humanlike AI characters, if one thinks of movies like “Metropolis,” “2001: A Space Odyssey” or “Blade Runner” – they all are on AI, showing different AI-characters with intelligent humanlike interaction capacity. Nevertheless, I would like to raise the question the other way around and propose to consider if film itself can be designated as a form of AI. Can film “think” by itself and if so, which kind of intelligent machine thought is the cinematograph providing? By reflecting on the thinking of film, I will rely on references from the field of continental film philosophy and theory in order to confront them with the

¹ As a super-intelligent and self-developing example of AI it is worth mentioning the robot Sophia by Hanson Robotics (Hongkong). Sophia is since October 2017 a declared citizen of Saudi-Arabia. She is famous for her claims to be self-conscious. She makes jokes and gives rhetoric feedback. She is a mix of a scripted personality – similar to what a screen writer does for a fictional film character – and a self-learning machine intelligence at a human scale. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNT7qGqmYfc>.

² Alan Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” in: *Mind*, p. 434.

concept of AI. The claim that film thinks and does so philosophically, that it actually does philosophy, has first been raised by Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze (in the 1970s and 1980s) in reliance on thinkers of classical film and media theory; the claim became more and more established in the last two decades. To associate it with a reflection on AI could coin an example on the very nature of machine intelligence in opposition to human thought.

Let me start by defining what I understand by AI throughout. At first sight, the creation of intelligent computational machines that behave and think like humans seems nowadays the common sense idea of AI. The online-dictionary *techopedia* specifies: “The core problems of artificial intelligence include programming computers for certain traits such as: knowledge, reasoning, problem solving, perception, learning, planning, ability to manipulate and move objects.”³ But are these aims, such as “learning, planning and reasoning” of machines, an activity of the mind which could be related to thinking? What exactly is “thinking”?

At first sight no consensus among scientists seems possible. In order to avoid the enquiry Turing had reformulated his question whether machines can think – by asking whether a machine can *act* indistinguishably from the way humans as thinking entities would do.⁴ Thirty years later, in the context of philosophy, John R. Searle reassessed the very same argument and introduced what he calls “strong AI”: “The appropriately programmed computer really is a mind” in the same sense as human beings have “cognitive states.”⁵ Furthermore, “partisans of strong AI claim that (...) the machine is not only simulating a human ability.”⁶ Such a simulation is designated as “weak AI” by Searle.⁷ “Having a mind” is thus an equivalent of human “cognitive capacity” (Searle), whereas “thinking” appears as correlate to “acting” (Turing). Stuart Russell and Peter Norvig resume the Turing-Searle-argument as follows: “the assertion that machines could possibly act intelligently (or, perhaps

³ <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/190/artificial-intelligence-ai>.

⁴ Compare to: Stevan Harnad, “Minds, Machines, and Turing: The Indistinguishability of Indistinguishables,” pp. 425–445.

⁵ John R. Searle, “Minds, Brains and Programs,” in: Peter Morton (Ed.), *A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind: Readings with Commentary*, p. 347.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

⁷ See: *Ibid.*, p. 347.

better, act as if they were intelligent) is called the “weak AI” hypothesis by philosophers, and the assertion that machines that do so are actually thinking (as opposed to simulating thinking) is called the “strong AI” hypothesis.”⁸

As far as this article is concerned: I will take this last resumption by Russell and Norvig as referring premise and propose to raise the question whether film is to be considered a form of strong or a form of weak AI. Does it act as if it were intelligent or does it actually think by itself? I will thereby add the argument that a strong film-AI is not necessarily a human way of intelligent thought, with its intrinsic limitations, but rather something else: a way of intelligence *beyond* the human. Such an idea differs from the approach Turing and Searle have analyzed. Searle had presented the so-called “Chinese Room Argument,” holding that the strong AI-hypothesis would be false because: “Computational models of consciousness are not sufficient by themselves for consciousness.”⁹

Of course my proposition also contains certain limits and is meant to be a thought experiment. We cannot possibly claim that film has a self-conscious mind the way humans have. However, I want to draw attention in this context to the ongoing critique of speculative realism and materialism on an anthropocentric position of philosophy. This critique is based on the rejection of so called “correlationism”¹⁰ which questions the Kantian subject-object opposition as circular and enquires into a reality frame independently from a subject and subjectivity, independently from a human perspective. By transferring such a position into the context of “film as AI” we can bring a new light into the circular discussion: must intelligent thinking necessarily be human or can a machine add something new to the idea of thinking, create new insight for example into philosophical topics? In order to answer let me start by applying the first hypothesis on AI to film: could film possibly act intelligently or act as if it were intelligent?

But such a question comes along with another one: what do we actually understand by film? Whether digitally created or based on a reproduction

⁸ Stuart Russell, Peter Norvig, *Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach*, p. 1020.

⁹ John R. Searle, *Consciousness and Language*, 2002, p. 16.

¹⁰ The term is coined by Quentin Meillassoux’s book *After Finitude – An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* and is “the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other” (Meillassoux 2009, 5).

of the visible and audible physical world,¹¹ the film medium – recorded and reproduced by a machine originally designated as “cinematograph” – is time-based and composed by streams of moving image and sound, forming narrative and sometimes stories by assemblage; thereby cinema constitutes a specific form of film, embedded in a certain artistic tradition of storytelling. Of course, the so defined medium does not act in a physical sense: films are no material players, or, as Cavell claims: film is as light as light. But from the point of view of certain philosophers this does not mean these moving images and sound do not exist as much as the material world. According to Henri Bergson – who is quoted as much in the context of film philosophy as in new materialism – the world literally *is* image, there is an “aggregate of images which I call the universe.”¹² Furthermore, “all these images act and react upon one another”¹³ whereby Bergson calls “matter the aggregate of images and perception of matter these same images referred to the eventual action of one particular image, my body.”¹⁴ In short, image equals matter for Bergson, and both are acting and reacting.

Deleuze reassesses Bergson’s claim of “image = matter” and transfers it into the context of cinema, understood as an aggregate of active moving images: “The material universe, the plane of immanence, is the *machinic assemblage of movement-images*. Here Bergson is startlingly ahead of his time: it is the universe as cinema in itself, a metacinema.”¹⁵ And Pier Paolo Pasolini, on whom Deleuze as well relies, claims quite similarly: “In reality we make cinema by living, that is, by existing practically, that is, by acting. All of life in the entirety of its actions is a natural, living film.”¹⁶

In summary: film is streams of moving images, based on action in a double sense: firstly, the images (no matter whether they are visual or sonorous)

¹¹ I consciously avoid the word “reality” as an all-encompassing category, in order not to get into a debate where we first have to clarify what we understand by reality and its multiple character.

¹² Henri Bergson, “Matter and Memory,” in: John Mullarkey (Ed.), *Henri Bergson – Key Writings*, p. 89.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, p. 61.

¹⁶ Pier Paolo Pasolini: *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 204.

move by themselves, act upon one another (Bergson/Deleuze). Yet secondly, they are the carrier of actions recorded in form of image and sound, therefore forming narrative and stories. That film narration (including cinema) is based on action (just as life itself for Pasolini) and means: film is acting on that level as well. But does this film action at least simulate intelligence?

The answer is strikingly simple: film is scripted. In other words: if film is forming narratives and stories based on action and acting on the same plane as matter, then it is acting as intelligent as its narrative or storytelling is. I thereby underline: film is scripted, in that sense and in other words, it acts as if it were intelligent, it is simulating predefined intelligent thought. This would mean film satisfies the level of the “weak AI” hypothesis.

Let me now, as a second step, introduce Jean Epstein, the pioneer thinker of explicitly claiming film as a form of AI in the sense of giving ground to the “strong AI” hypothesis, that film actually does think by itself in opposition to simulation. As early as 1946 Epstein refers not only to the cinematograph as a thinking machine of its own intelligence, but to a “robot philosopher”¹⁷ who develops “cinematographic thinking” or a “mechanical philosophy” and possesses the “power of effecting diverse combinations (...) which is one of the fundamental characteristics of any intellectual activity among living beings.”¹⁸ Furthermore according to Epstein, “the cinematograph stands out as a substitute and annex of the organ in which the faculty that coordinates perceptions is generally located – the brain – the alleged center of intelligence.”¹⁹ He sees the cinematograph as an intellectual robot with its own immanent way of reasoning going beyond “human ideation,” giving the ground for a new kind of philosophy and arguing by attributing both the weak as well as the strong AI hypothesis to film – understood as the thought of the cinematograph:

The cinematograph is among the still partially intellectual robots that, with two photo and electro-mechanical senses, as well as a photochemical recording memory, shapes representations – that is, thought – in which we discern the primordial framework of reason: the three categories of extension, duration and causation. This would already be a remarkable result if cinematographic thought, as in the case of the calculating machine, were only

¹⁷ Jean Epstein, *Bonjour Cinéma und andere Schriften zum Kino*, p. 83 (translation mine – C.R.).

¹⁸ Jean Epstein, *The Intelligence of a machine*, p. 65.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

mimicking human ideation. On the contrary, we know that the cinematograph inscribes its own character within its representations of the universe with such originality that it makes this representation not simply a record or copy of the conceptions of its organic mastermind [mentalité-mère], but indeed a differently individualized system, partly independent, comprising the seed of the development of a philosophy that strays far enough from common opinions (...) ²⁰

To underline the same idea from a slightly different perspective I still wish to refer to the introduction of Epstein's "The Intelligence of a Machine" by translator Christophe Wall-Romana. He argues that the late Epstein shows "how to philosophize with cinema as a fulcrum" – in the sense that cinema "plays the part of the thinking agent."²¹ Nevertheless, Epstein even defers to possible objections by comparing machine thought to the human scale when he says:

Yet – one might object – this machine does not think. Then what is it actually doing when its work replaces the cerebral task of the calculator to perfection? We should recognize that a mechanical thinking exists alongside organic thought (...). ²²

Epstein stresses here that the thought of machines is different, existing alongside human or "organic" thought, and that the cinematograph is such a "thinking machine."²³ Following Epstein's line of reasoning we can add that the cinematograph fulfils the necessary conditions for the "strong-AI" hypothesis. Film is an own form of thinking, without simulation. However, we have not yet understood the possibilities of such mechanical thought in the context of philosophy: "And while it resembles organic thinking, we are only beginning to learn to activate this mechanical thinking that will expand in future robots and whose implementation is logically prescribed by the development of our civilization."²⁴ Epstein connects future forms of AI to film as AI.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

²¹ Christophe Wall-Romana, "Translator's Introduction: The Philosophy of Cinema," in: Jean Epstein, *op. cit.*, pp. vii-viii.

²² Jean Epstein, *ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

²³ Ibid. p. 66.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 66.

In what follows I will try to delineate a possible perspective on the kind of thought we are dealing with when we talk about film and its overlapping with philosophical insight. As a first example I will continue with Epstein, yet due to the limitation of this article, I can only show a glimpse of his implications in the context of philosophy. However, Epstein states that film provides certain philosophical conclusions on the nature of reality. According to Epstein reality as such is not existing, because it is composed of a “sum of unrealities,”²⁵ deriving from the nature of time and space, the two different “interchangeable modes of unreality”.²⁶

The cinematograph (...) shows time to be merely a perspective resulting from the succession of phenomena, the way space is merely a perspective of the coexistence of things. Time contains nothing we might call time-in-itself, no more so than space comprises space-in-itself. They are made, one and the other, of essentially variable relationships among appearances that occur in succession or in simultaneity. This is why there can be thirty-six different times and twenty kinds of space, in the same way there can be innumerable particular perspectives according to the infinitely diverse positions of objects and observer. Thus, after having taught us about the unreality of both, continuity and discontinuity, the cinematograph rather abruptly ushers us into the unreality of space-time.²⁷

This idea that “time is not made of time”²⁸ resembles Derrida, who in *Ousia and Grammé* points out that for Aristotle, the kernel of time, the moment of the “now”, is non-temporal, a limit, something which also Hegel considered. The “now” is “its nonbeing [*Nichtsein*] in itself and becomes immediately something other than itself.”²⁹ According to Derrida, Hegel has applied the same negative principle to space. Hegel sets the point (the smallest spatial entity) as a non-spatial reference in relation to which spatial extension functions as negation.³⁰ Furthermore, Epstein’s description of “unreality”

²⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

²⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe II*, quoted in: Jacques Derrida, “Ousia and Grammé: Note on a Note from Being and Time,” in: *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 41.

³⁰ “It negates itself by itself in its relation to itself, that is, to another point.” (Cf. Jacques

as infinitely multiple (I recall from the quote above: “there can be thirty-six different times and twenty kinds of space, in the same way there can be innumerable particular perspectives according to the infinitely diverse positions of objects and observer”) also recalls Alain Badiou. In his major work *Being and Event* (2006) Badiou fuses the set theory of mathematician Georg Cantor with Heideggerian ontology. Following Cantor, “Being” is for Badiou not “one” and also not “one multiple”³¹ because “one” simply is not. Instead, Being is *infinite multiplicity* for Badiou, an idea grounded in Cantor’s set theory where *absolutely infinite multiplicity* is designated as *inconsistent*.³² For Epstein, film explores such an inconsistency which he calls “unreal” and thereby discloses a “sum of unrealities,”³³ the *unreality of reality itself*. In other words – and this is my main point: Epstein argues that film shows certain features of reality which would otherwise have remained hidden.

Nevertheless, Epstein has not been the only nor the first one to reflect on the nature of the cinematograph. In what follows I would like to recall Walter Benjamin’s apparatus referred to in his famous artwork essay. Benjamin’s apparatus is actually the conceptual result of an approach which designs a special relation between technology and man. Thereby the apparatus has the characteristic that it *can* be operated by human intervention, but there is no such necessary condition. In order to better understand this apparatus I propose to briefly inquire into how Benjamin relates Man and *Technik* – translated as *technics* – in general.³⁴ *Technik* is for Benjamin divided between

Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 42).

³¹ “(B)eing is neither one (because only presentation itself is pertinent to the count-as-one), nor multiple (because the multiple is *solely* the regime of presentation).” Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 24.

³² Badiou quotes Cantor: “On the one hand, a multiplicity may be such that the affirmation according to which *all* its elements “are together” leads to a contradiction, such that it is impossible to conceive the multiplicity as a unity, as a “finite thing”. These multiplicities, I name them *absolutely infinite multiplicities*, or *inconsistent*.” (Ibid., pp. 41–42).

³³ Jean Epstein, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

³⁴ I refer hereby to Hyun Kang Kim who inspired me with her essay “The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology,” in: *Thinking Reality and Time Through Film*, pp. 128–137. Her essay has emphasized the need to understand Walter Benjamin’s theory of film in the larger context of his work; his concept of technology linked to a utopia of an interplay between nature, Man and technology thus came to my attention.

a first and second one.³⁵ The first one only exists “in fusion with the ritual”³⁶ – it is still related to magic rituals and the human body, thus apparently “underdeveloped” when compared to the one of machines, the second *Technik*,³⁷ which is best translated by “technology.” The difference between the two is set by Benjamin in the following: “the first *Technik* completely relies on the human, whereas the second one as less as possible.”³⁸ Here Benjamin describes the switch from human to post-human. Yet he emphasizes that the objective of technology (the second *Technik*) is not the domination of nature. This is indeed the “perspective of the first *Technik*,”³⁹ whereas the second *Technik* (technology) involves art and is not opposed to nature, but rather constitutes “an interplay between nature and man.” Furthermore, according to Benjamin, film is displayed as follows:

“the function of art today to be socially decisive is the practice of that interplay. This is especially true for film. Film is there to train Man in those apperceptions and reactions, which are conditioned by the handling of an apparatus, and whose role in his life increases nearly daily.”⁴⁰

Hyun Kang Kim points out that for Benjamin: “Technology makes precisely this change of perspective from in-itself to for-itself possible.”⁴¹ Indeed, Benjamin explicitly describes the cinematograph as an apparatus capable of enabling an “equipment-free aspect of reality”; through the procedure that “the apparatus has penetrated so deeply into reality” is provided the “vision of immediate reality”⁴² – “immediate reality” meaning the reality for-itself, as Kim mentions.

This vision of the technical apparatus is a perspective which is no longer human, achieved through the fusion of human perception and the

³⁵ This division is present in the *second edition* of the artwork essay, see: Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften VII*, pp. 350–384.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 359 (translation mine – C.R.).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 359 (translation mine – C.R.).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 359 (translation mine – C.R.).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 359 (translation mine – C.R.).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 359–360 (translation mine – C.R.).

⁴¹ Hyun Kang Kim, *op.cit.*, p. 130.

⁴² Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” p. 35.

technological possibilities of a machine. Kim further points out that the filmic apparatus is a “turning point for human knowledge.”⁴³ Again, the same situation with Benjamin as with Epstein: film dispels features of reality which otherwise would have remained withdrawn. In this case it enables a possibility to overcome the subjective condition, as speculative realism formulates it. The kind of machine intelligence, as film provides it, helps to claim the need for a thinking beyond the human and the recognition of an autonomous reality that is independent of human thought and its limits.

However, the described switch of human thought “from in-itself to for-itself” is probably to be considered the most important consequence of film for philosophy. It may be the reason why it has become so popular to use movies as a tool for philosophical reflection. The attraction of film for philosophers consists in the very fact that we can see the world through the eyes of a machine, a non-human apparatus: therefore we can penetrate into reality in a way human perception cannot. In this sense film can also be regarded as a technological thought that extends the human mind: “the cinematograph stands out as a substitute and annex of (...) the brain – the alleged center of intelligence.”⁴⁴ A post-human annex or extension would make us brain-cyborgs while watching films, diminishing the borderline between machine and human, just in the sense as Donna Haraway claims: “Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines.”⁴⁵ Yet this ambiguity should be the concern of another analysis.

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⁴³ Hyun Kang Kim, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁵ Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, p. 152.

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ONLINE REFERENCE – ARTICLES AND VIDEOS

(available online November 2018)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNT7qGqmYfc>

<https://www.techopedia.com/definition/190/artificial-intelligence-ai>

THE AUDIENCE, ONE HUNDRED YEARS AFTER

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Abstract

In a mixed territory between visual and performing arts, performance art has been considered one of the most fertile and open artistic formats of experimentation and dissidence. Indeed, Michael Kirby first defined it as a “non-matrixed” art (Kirby 1968). In line with Debord’s critique of the world as spectacle, performance has adamantly refused representation (in favor of an encounter in the “here and now”), the commodification of art (creating ephemeral experiences that cannot be traded and process-oriented work) and the cathartic effect of art (highlighting instead its “transformative power,” Fischer-Lichte 2008). Characterized by a series of predominantly self-reflexive aesthetic strategies, performance art challenges the relationship with the spectator, the boundaries of the artistic object and the very notion of artist, radicalizing the modernist premise of the art-life fusion. In this paper I would like to rethink performance’s distinctive features in light of Teatro Pogo’s controversial installation-performance *1p0g0* (Teatro São Luiz, Lisbon, April 14 2017), in the framework of the event *Reinvenções – one hundred years of the futurist conference*. The audience participated more than the artists had anticipated and, the following day, Pogo accused them of vandalism in the media, creating an intense though brief debate in the public sphere about the ethic and aesthetic limits of art as experience. How dissident can a performance be today?

Keywords

Codes, Limit, Participation, Performance, Spectator

In a mixed territory between visual and performing arts, performance art has been considered one of the most open formats of experimentation and dissidence from artistic norms, conventions and traditions, since it has been coined, by American historian RoseLee Goldberg (1979), an artistic genre emerging in the early twentieth century with Italian Futurism. Since the 60s, it has been a fertile ground for experiments with materials (artistic and non-artistic) and contexts (especially, the street, the white cube and the blackbox), exploring artistic concepts and categories such as space, authorship and the boundaries of the artistic object, as well as focusing on audience experience and participation. In short, performance art has adamantly refused representation (in favor of an encounter in the “here and now”), the commodification of art (creating ephemeral experiences and process-oriented work) and a cathartic effect (instead highlighting its ritual and participatory features). Performance art is self-reflexive, disruptive and experiential.

The audience is key to the definition of the new aesthetics (Fisher-Lichte 2008). Yet, the ways in which this happens have changed. If futurist proto-performance had the power to provoke and unsettle its audiences in the *Serate* or if the 60s/70s happenings converted the audience into participants of an experience, contemporary audiences became self-conscious of a vast array of theatrical dispositives and spectatorship protocols. This means that the more open to participation a performance is, the more audiences are expected to know what to do and how to act responsibly towards the role. Moreover, participation has been critically addressed both as a false promise of audience empowerment (Bishop 2012), for a spectator doesn't necessarily become politically emancipated or empowered simply by participating in the performance, and as a neoliberal symptom of depriving the spectator of his or her right to spectate, when he or she does the job of the performer on stage.

With this in mind, one might ask: how much dissident and experimental can performance art be today? In what ways are contemporary audiences truly self-conscious and empowered as opposed to uncertain and equivocal? I will examine these topics by discussing the controversial installation-performance *Ip0g0*, by Pogo Teatro, in the framework of the event *Reinventions – one hundred years of the futurist conference* (Lisbon, 2017). *Reinventions* was, in turn, part of a larger curatorial programme named *Project P! Performance*

in the Public Sphere, developed by Pedro Rocha, Levina Valentim and myself, which included a one-day international symposium, performances and the publication of a book under the same title (also available as an ebook in English at www.performativa.pt). I should note that *Ip0g0* was not presented as performance art *per se* but one can nonetheless read it through the lens of its key features. For the purpose of this text, I will pay attention specifically to the clash between the artists' intention and the response of the audience.

The audience, one hundred years after

On April 14th, at Teatro São Luiz, Pogo Teatro's installation-performance took place in the theatre's large winter garden, as part of a three-hour event that occupied the whole building with 14 performances. Well known for its anarchic procedures, satirical humor and criticism of the media (especially television), this multidisciplinary collective (active since the 90s) literally threw a party to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the futurist conference by Almada Negreiros and Santa Rita Pintor, which originally took place in that theatre. The party was staged as if in a war scenario, in reference both to the futurist praise for war as a civilizing force and to the actual and symbolic wars we live today. Thus, the performance aimed at infusing war affects in an atmosphere of celebration blurring the borders between art and life, which has long been one of the company's aesthetic principles. Occasional white smoke and sound design, repeating acoustic events happening in the room, reinforced an oddly charged atmosphere for a party.

Pogo's lavish installation apparatus attracted many people. At a certain point, however, something happened which shifted the event to an uncertain direction. One of the artists took a plate from the table and smashed it on the floor. This unscripted gesture (later said intended to be unrepeatable) not only cracked open the possibility of audience participation, but also demanded from the artists a definite word on the limits of such participation. Yet, without a clear statement from the company who praises an anarchic collective mode of collaboration, the audience increasingly followed the gesture, generating a feeling of disorder and chaos, perhaps fueled by the thick and tense atmospheric audiovisual dispositive of decadence, war and destruction. However, breaking plates escalated to ransacking the installation: some spectators also left the room holding artist plates with them,

while others took serigraphy napkins and cutlery or even walked out with Pogo's 20 years monograph.

Two days later, Pogo Teatro sent out a press release to Lusa, the most important news agency in Portugal, accusing the audience of vandalizing their performance and questioning the ethos of participation. "Pogo Teatro was a victim of ransacking and vandalism at teatro são luiz" was the title of the quite provocative text. But almost only sensationalist media took interest in the subject; hence, it soon died out. On the contrary, the discussion grew quite intensely on facebook. The wide majority of people at the event claimed that Pogo was not clear in establishing the rules, therefore, they could not blame it on the audience. Others understood the gesture as self-promotion. Despite the fuss, the debate faded out quickly. "Oh, it was just a performance," said a journalist to the company member Ruy Otero, after the latter claimed the press release as part of the performance. What does this remark say about the potency of dissidence instilled by performance? What does the ransacking and vandalism acts say about audience participation today?

Artists' Intention

As a multidisciplinary company dedicated in the last years more to visual arts than to performance (our invitation was a kind of provocation to the company to recuperate performative practices of the old days), Pogo Teatro was far from expecting an audience wishing more than just to participate. Seeing themselves more as a multidisciplinary collective operating in the gallery space, Pogo was, in fact, shocked because they assumed the protocol of the museum, according to which one must not touch. As I was later informed, they decided not to change the rules in the middle of the game. Conceived as a free-roaming area, the performance-installation should stay free. But this decision had a price: as Pogo decided on the spot to become spectators of their own performance, they separated themselves from the scene that was actually being performed by the audience: the pillage and vandalism of the ruins of performance.

Audience response

One hundred years after, the audience takes for granted the possibility of participation unless otherwise stated. The prospect is likely in theatrical contexts, especially in roaming projects. Perhaps, it is also especially likely to be embraced in the context of an event motivated by the 100th anniversary of a futurist landmark: partly as a spontaneous tribute to the particularly rebellious artist Almada Negreiros, who performed it originally and partly as a way of breaking the inevitable celebratory and mannerly tone of these sort of events. Thus, while the collective might not have expected a take over by the audience, the audience surely could expect such an invitation from Pogo.

An unscripted gesture generated an escalating sense of empowerment in the audience that affected the chain of events. In what ways can we understand this empowerment? On the one hand, we can say they did it for fun and enjoyment, as if at a Luna park. On the other hand, if spectators took pieces of the installation with them, this can hardly mean they were unaware of its value. On the contrary, they understood the artistic value of these pieces and that is the reason why they took them. Hence, ignorance doesn't really hold as an explanation.

Another hypothesis considers pillage and vandalism as acts of protest. In the streets, car burning, rock throwing, breaking windows, ransacking a property are some of the customary forms of protest. Yet, to say audience participation in *Ipog0* was a protest is perhaps a bit farfetched. What can hardly be denied is that the sudden contamination of the action of breaking plates powerfully shifted the expected audience response and even neutralized the artists themselves. In Portugal, the expression "partir a loiça toda" (literally, to break all the dishes, which is the equivalent of "hitting the fan" in English) means to cause problems, to act against the rules, to provoke and make a scandal. The audience symbolically used their unrestricted freedom to break dishes as if breaking the rules and protocols of spectatorship. I am suggesting here that the audience, not ignorantly but feeling entitled by the freedom it was given, aligned with performance art's archetypical combat against artistic formats and conventions, even against the company's unexpressed will. In this perspective, thus, the audience embraced its disruptive potential.

Needless to say, the clash between the artist's intention and the unexpected audience response is not new in performance art. In works like *Cut Piece* (1964), Yoko Ono sat silently on a stage with a pair of scissors and spectators were invited to cut away her dress; in *Rhythm 0* (1974), audience members were told to use any of the 72 objects on display in the gallery (chains, scissors, loaded gun, axe) on Marina Abramovic's body. Contrary to what happened in *IpOgO*, Yoko Ono and Abramovic accepted the risks of their decisions, including not giving the audience clear rules of how and to what extent should objects be used.

A last hypothesis, I would further suggest, is to consider the destruction caused by the audience as an opportunity to open a space of participation outside of strict and pre-established protocols. In the spirit of an Artaudian theatre of cruelty, which led systems of representation (the theatre) and the prescribed functions of the body (the body as an organism) to ruin, the audience took the role of the plague: they brought to ruin the performance dispositive and the spectatorship protocol. For Artaud, the aim was to activate the senses and get to the nervous system of the spectator, allowing life itself to immerge instead of its representation. In this case, I would argue that the audience aimed at activating a new set of relations, interactions, affects, thoughts, discussions, questionings about participation and performance, by creating a zone of discomfort and tension that, to a certain extent, blurred life and art.

To conclude, I would like to think back on the journalist's words – "it was just a performance" meaning not serious, not for real, a game, a trick, or even worse "just art." It undervalues performance as much as it resonates with the institutionalization process of performance art in the last decades and its more recent absorption into the museum/market-discourse. Yet, looking at it from another angle, it is hard to find an art practice with more provocative and political potential "just" by means of a gesture, intentional or not. It took "just" a single gesture to attract a gang of followers, to contaminate a social and artistic space, to get under the skin of participants and artists, to transform conventions and protocols, even if for one moment. It can take just a performance to change things.

However, to experiment and dissent by means of performance art also demands a “performative programme.” This is how performance artist Eleonora Fabião describes the “engine” that sets in motion performance’s experimental force:

The programme is the motor of experimentation because its practice creates a body and relations between bodies; it unleashes negotiations of belonging; it activates unthinkable affective circuits before formulating and executing the programme. The programme is the engine of psychophysics and political experimentation. (Fabião 2013:4)

In my view, this is what *Ip0g0* lacked, though I am not being completely fair with Pogo here because the work was not intended as a performance art piece. However, the notion of a performative programme can be helpful to think of the work and the audience as two potential forces that meet in performance art. When the programme is clearly sketched and laid out, it can set in motion experimentation and fuel relations, negotiations, activations. Without it and without instructions on how to participate, the space is open to unpredictable contamination and random cruelty.

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II. PHILOSOPHY, GENDER AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

FEMINISM, MULTICULTURALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS: SOME QUESTIONS

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Abstract

In this paper we shall discuss the possible (or impossible) conciliation between women rights and group rights. We shall discuss three main issues – those who argue that women's rights are incompatible with a full acceptance of multiculturalism, those who think that the problem is actually insoluble and only time, education and progress will be able to solve it, those who defend that women are better protected inside their particular cultures.

Keywords

Cultural conflicts, Feminism, Group rights, Multiculturalism, Women rights

1. Feminism as a relevant philosophical issue

Almost every philosophical problem has a long story which grows and becomes stronger when being studied by authors of different tendencies. The importance of feminism as a relevant philosophical issue is recent and its entrance in the main ground of philosophy has not been peaceful. In fact, women and women's condition did not interest classical philosophers – when analysing the general concept of “man” they did not care about the specific problems lived by women. This half of humanity was not considered as an adequate philosophical topic of discussion.

The appreciation of feminist thought as an important philosophical movement takes us back to the 19th and 20th centuries. It was not a peaceful issue because it faced prejudice, a most difficult enemy. In its beginning it was

scorned by politicians, philosophers and the great majority of common people who neither understood nor followed the legitimate claims of women.

The fight for women's rights congregated women of various status and origins – factory workers denounced the poor condition of their work, young women asked for more freedom and required a full access to education and jobs; intellectuals and scholars favoured these political vindications and, step by step, all these demands were analysed and disputed in a philosophical ground.

In order to justify the philosophical status of feminism – a subject sometimes despised by “formal” philosophers – we must analyse if this movement obeys the requirements of philosophical thinking. We all know that philosophy quests for a meaningful human life and searches for a full integration of human beings in the world they inhabit. This search produces arguments and theses. Philosophy requires an abstract formulation but its most relevant theses are embedded in people's lives and problems. Philosophical arguments present alternative ways of thinking and require a rational analysis. The arguments presented by feminists are accurate, rationally grounded and cannot be taken as mere opinions. Being critical, questioning and provocative, they challenge the “status quo” and compel us to individual reflexion. In a word, they fulfil the requirements presented by Kant when defining philosophical knowledge in his *Introduction to 1765 Winter Semester*.¹ Furthermore the same methodology is followed by feminists and “official” philosophers, both deal with common problems, questioning issues of an ontological, ethical, political, anthropological and epistemological sort. Pondering, examining, understanding, arguing and acting are essential attitudes cultivated by feminist philosophers. And in spite of their diversity in face of the concept of gender – a main subject considered by all of them – the Socratic purpose of living “an examined life” is a goal they all want to reach.

2. Sex and Gender

Gender is a relevant concept in the scope of *Women Studies*. It is also an object of research in history, sociology, anthropology, inter-cultural psychology and other social sciences. In the first years of *Women Studies* gender was used

¹ Kant, *Nachricht von der Einrichtung seiner Vorlesungen in dem Winterhalbjahre von 1765-1766*, AK, II, p. 308.

in contrast with sex. Sex had a biological meaning while gender concerned an intellectual construction expressing the expected different behaviour of men and women. The fact of being born man or woman would lead to a certain type of attitudes, socially expected and accepted as “normal.” Masculine and feminine became cultural concepts and were linked with fixed patterns of culture.

“First Wave Feminism” began in the second half of the last century. Its main thesis considered sex as an immutable characteristic that marked all humankind, while gender was applied to the conventional data built by different cultures. The initial aim of these “Gender Theories” was to establish equality between men and women, condemning the artificiality and discrimination of most social norms towards women. But during the last two decades of the 20th century, feminist theories gained a new direction and the fight for equality lived together with the claim for difference, admitting the specificity of behaviour of men and women and valuing a feminine way of life. The “Second wave feminism” sustained that the body is also a cultural construction and cannot be understood by an exclusively biological interpretation. In her book *Inessential Woman*, Elisabeth Spelman criticizes the abusive generalisation of the concept “woman,” showing that the characteristics applied to it excluded many women, namely those belonging to minority cultures.² Identifying all women in the general concept of “gender” denies the multiple experiences of different ethnical groups and creates an artificial situation, a sort of sisterhood, ignoring the real differences derived from class, ethnical belonging and culture. Spelman sustains that “Though all women are women, no woman is only a woman.”³ In her opinion the identity of a black woman is not the sum of a certain type of feminine characteristics, plus ethnical conscience. Identity is built in a peculiar way, attending to factors that the dichotomy sex/gender does not consider.

The opening to new sexual identities, such as gays, lesbians, queer, transvestites and transsexuals, leads to a change in the status of gender. This concept is no longer contrasted with sex; it is used when studying all sort of relations between men and women, as well as all forms of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Academic Afro-American researchers introduced the

² Elisabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman*, London, Women’s Press, 1990.

³ Spelman, op.cit. p. 187.

study of the so-called “post-colonial theories,” stressing the multicultural factors and attending to the specific problems of women’s rights inside ethnic cultures. The works produced by these researchers confirmed the fact that feminine identity cannot be faced as an uniform group – race, class, age, culture, styles of life and sexual preferences must be considered. In the so called “post-modernity” the sexual difference loses its weight and becomes a mere element to be considered among others. The concepts of sex and gender are put down and today we commonly use the expression “transgender subjectivity.” This situation gave origin to “Third wave feminisms.”

“Third wave feminist studies” developed in a post-modern context and suffered the influence of French philosophers, such as Deleuze, Foucault and Lacan. Yet, gender theories are not peacefully accepted and prompt several conflicts among the defenders of equality, plurality and difference. Deconstruction and fragmentation are the dominant methodologies, giving voice to small groups, studying their idiosyncrasies, legitimating them and giving them a status of social acceptability.

3. The conflicts between cultural autonomy and women’s rights

Ours is a multicultural world. We live in a situation that requires the acceptance of inevitable differences as well as the creation of convivial platforms, so that cultural groups may inhabit the same space and be pacifically acquainted to one another, avoiding conflicts. This order of things is far from being achieved – we frequently notice the existence of subordinate relations between native minorities and the dominant culture. In theory, it is easy to accept that societies are ruled by different values and that there are different ways of inhabiting the same place. Yet, there are certain habits and practices that may collide and become problematic. Concerning the relation between feminism and multiculturalism we remark that the vindication of women’s rights can become a factor of antagonism and dissidence. And to researchers leading with multicultural studies there are some non-peaceful questions such as:

—To what extent the feminist movements, fighting for women’s liberation, collide with equally legitimate rights of cultural autonomy?

—How to conciliate the shock between groups of immigrants (Africans, Asians, Orientals, Gypsies, etc.) and the European and American societies

where they intend to live?

—How to surpass the barrier of ancestral customs, recognizing their originality and consistence, when certain habits and practices seem obsolete and even degrading to feminine condition as it is now presented in Western societies?

Feminist theories appeared in Europe and in the United States connected with suffragist movements. They gained an academic status with the creation of *Women Studies* or *Gender Studies* and nowadays they are part of many curricula in humanities which have been enriched with the contribution of Eastern, African, Muslim and Hindu researchers. These non-European ways of life helped raise new perspectives. One of them – and most problematic – is the universality of women's rights. We must be aware that the term feminism welcomes multiple orientations and that, under the motto of women's empowerment, there are different political views.

Some years ago we could state that all those orientations had a common aim – to give women a status of full citizenship, which meant an unlimited access to all places, professions and advantages, intrinsic of human condition. The progressive conquests of the different feminisms seemed to be linear and unquestionable. Yet, while new rights were acquired by women, other questions arose, such as:

—Can women's rights, vindicated in western countries, damage the identity of minority groups, threatening multiculturalism?

—How can we surpass the relativistic position of denying the possibility of universal values, accepting that each culture has its own values?

—How to avoid the temptation of considering Western values superior to others, stating that small groups, when leaving their countries, must adopt a new way of life?

—Should we ignore certain practices, common in many native cultures, such as forced marriages; adolescent fiancées and wives; subordination of women to their husbands, brothers and masculine relatives; attacks on women students with the pretext that only men are allowed to study; acceptance of physical punishments; practices such as genital mutilation, marriage arrangements, the imposition of burkas, tshadors or simple veils?

At first sight we think that considering women as second rate humans would be censured by all feminist movements and that they would forget

their dissidences and fight for the common cause of women's liberation. This alliance did not occur and we verify that the relation between feminisms and multiculturalism is not peaceful.

Let us consider some points that can help us analyze this problem.

4. The struggle between women's rights and multiculturalism: some critical views

We chose two different perspectives to illustrate the struggle between women's rights and multiculturalism. Our aim is to show some different voices inside Gender Philosophy and that autonomy is not a peaceful issue, even when it is required by women who want to change their groups' norms and practices.

Susan Moller Okin is an intransigent defender of women's rights, considering them above the rights of cultures and sustaining that the right of departure from their communities should be allowed to every woman. In her texts "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" and "Mistresses of Their Own Destiny: Group Rights, Gender and Realistic Rights of Exit,"⁴ Okin stresses the difficult situation of those who try to change their group practices. She places individual freedom above collective norms.

Contrasting with Okin's theses we selected the articles of two strong defenders of cultural identity – *Monique Deveaux* and *Leti Volpp*. Both philosophers propose appeasing solutions, even when facing situations where women's rights are at risk. They criticize ruptures and hasty alterations of minorities' patterns, arguing that a political approach to solve cultural conflicts is more effective than a direct opposition.⁵

⁴ Okin, Susan Moller, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" in J. Cohen, M. Howard and Martha Nussbaum (eds.), *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 9-24 e "Mistresses of Their Own Destiny: Group Rights, Gender and Realistic Rights of Exit," in *Ethics*, 112, vol.2 (January 2002), pp. 205-230.

⁵ Monique Deveaux, "A Deliberative Approach to Conflicts of Culture," in *Political Theory*, vol.31, 6 (December 2003), pp. 780-807; Leti Volpp, "Feminism versus Multiculturalism," 101 *Colum. Law. Rev.* (2001), pp. 1181-1218. Available at <http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/facpubs/9>

Susan Moller Okin

Susan Okin's writings expose the critical situation of most women in native cultures. Their status inside their groups prevents them from becoming "mistresses of their own destiny." They are expected to be wives and mothers and their family's main purpose is to arrange them good marriages. This is their primary goal and their ideal of fulfilment is circumscribed to private and familiar interests.

Okin is pleased to verify that civil society has been progressively sensible to injustices against minority communities as a whole. The precariousness, segregation and poverty of those groups have led different governments to care for them, answering positively to their demands. Yet she is worried that women's condition inside those groups has not been noticed neither denounced. Alleging respect and consideration for cultural differences, few people have contested discriminatory practices towards women. There is a veil of silence covering habits that affect the physical and psychological health of women. Such is the case of genital mutilation, polygamy, illiteracy, total subordination to males and other similar practices and habits which constitute an outrage to human rights. Okin is also sensible to the absence of feminine delegates in negotiations with official institutions and governments. And she condemns the powers given to closed communities as well as the deliberate ignorance of different governments concerning the abuses practiced on the feminine population of ethnical cultures.

Okin speaks in defence of the rights that everyone should have, in order to choose his, or her, own life, inside or outside their group of belonging. And she remarks that this choice is much more difficult to women than to men. In fact, women have poor chances to succeed outside the protection of their social group. They are ill-educated and unprepared for a non-domestic job; they were brought up in a manly ideology of which they are not conscious and that makes them insecure. This situation leads them to accept being protected by the male members of their groups, so that they, unconsciously and pacifically, accept a status of minority, which is considered natural. They do not identify it as oppressive.

We must recognize that the opportunities outside their original community are scarce and discouraging. Their poor instruction is a negative handicap to possible job options. The professions they can have access to

are situated in the bottom of the social hierarchy – they become domestic servants, shop clerks, nurse auxiliaries and, most of the time, prostitutes. The safety they have in their natural communities and the uncertainties of a life outside them cause women of native communities to accept their fate and try to live it the best way they can. On this basis we understand why an autonomous life is not very tempting. And we cannot forget the negative consequences upon a woman who abandons her community, such as persecution, revenge, and abandonment from her family and kindred.

Okin wishes that every woman should be able to make her own free choice without retaliation. Yet, she is aware that the consequences of liberation are sometimes more painful than keeping on in a situation of passivity and obedience. So, she sustains that it is not enough to give all women the right to seek a different life. The State must give them conditions so that they may be able to live a dignified life outside their communities. But this would imply an alteration towards the functioning of these minority groups, a task that should congregate all feminist philosophers. Which, in fact, does not happen.

Monique Deveaux

In contrast with Okin, Monique Deveaux sustains a conciliatory approach between the values defended by Western cultures and the minority groups that live inside them. She believes in the efficacy of a dialogue among citizens and proposes debate and negotiations, rather than imposed norms. So, she analyses some possible concessions, with the very pragmatic purpose of reaching a common understanding. To this Canadian philosopher, liberal ideology is not a synonym of democracy. There are many ways of living and it is false to consider that Western practices should be universally accepted. She appeals to a “reframing of the challenges posed by traditional or non liberal cultural minorities”⁶ pleading for mutual understanding in what concerns different ways of life where women’s condition are at stake.

In her article “A Deliberative Approach to Conflicts of Culture,”⁷ this author deals with the South African context and analyses a particular situation – the arranged marriages negotiated by parents, a practice that the

⁶ Monique Deveaux, “A Deliberative Approach to Conflicts of Culture,” p. 780.

⁷ See note 5.

post-apartheid Constitution tried to forbid. Rather than imposing strict laws, this philosopher states that it is preferable to negotiate with the families that are part of the process. She sustains that conflicts are better solved if we deal with the situation in a peaceful and non-compulsory way. She classifies as “liberal” the defence of universal moral norms and criticizes this procedure. The imposition of a liberal ideology to ethnical cultures leads to the exclusion of many people who do not agree with liberal norms. Acquiring the state of a moral consensus is rejected by Deveaux who argues that the idea of a same pattern of good and evil abolishes the inevitable differences. We must consider the particular interests of ethnical communities and accept the distribution of power by their group members. When insisting on keeping certain practices, these members show their wish to maintain their powers and to assure their own status.

Instead of strict alterations and prohibitions Deveaux advises us to be attentive to a diverse range of voices inside the communities and to try to understand their different points of view. She gives importance to possible concessions made by both parts – the State authorities and the communities’ leaders. This should be the best policy to conciliate as much as possible the laws of the State and the customary norms.

One objection against Deveaux’s posture is that we cannot put at stake some values like autonomy, dignity and freedom. These were difficult conquests that enrich all humanity and cannot be despised in name of any particular group. Although considering the importance of cultural dialogue, some concessions can be a retrocession in the fight for human dignity and are therefore unacceptable. Regarding the use of marriage arrangements, a strict prohibition is irreversible. In fact, this is a practice that contradicts the right that male and female have, to choose the person they want to marry. Women are the main victims of this custom, especially very young women, who since childhood are promised to their fiancés. Deveaux knows that in some tribes of South Africa men buy their future wives. I think this is an unacceptable way of treating women as merchandise. Marriage becomes a more or less profitable business to those who arrange it. The same rigour should be used in case of other situations where women’s dignity is at risk, such as when their due inheritances are denied, when they are forced to polygamous marriages or when they are left destitute after divorce.

Deveaux does not sponsor the customary law on arranged marriages, but instead of banning it she chooses to explore the interests and strategic needs of the communities. She advises the State employees to inform the families involved in this process of the risks and negative consequences of this procedure, warning them that if the wife is rejected or if she wants to return to her own family, the latter must pay a certain amount of money to the husband's relatives. And perhaps this heavy charge to the woman's family will discourage this custom.

It is difficult to accept this and others of Deveaux's arguments in what concerns a possible solution for inter-cultural disagreements. The dialogue she values is based on pragmatic and opportunist motivations and there is no ethical basis on her reasons. The deference she shows towards cultural groups and their members is praiseworthy. But is it acceptable to sacrifice women's rights in name of the coherence and autonomy of their cultures? Is it enough to bargain and negotiate to alter the status quo?

We think that the banishing of some cultural habits is only possible with legislation. If the proposed methodology of mutual concessions should be accepted as a determinant criteria of intercultural dialogue, some practices as slavery or apartheid would still resist, namely because they benefit certain groups.

Leti Volpp

Leti Volpp is another voice defending the supremacy of cultures and ascribing a second place to individuals, particularly to women's condition.⁸ Contesting Susan Okin, she argues that it is absurd to oppose feminism and multiculturalism. Such an opposition is based on prejudice and does not resist an accurate examination of women's status in the Third World. She rejects dualistic oppositions, accusing them of being simple and partial and considering the conflict between feminism and multiculturalism as an invention of some feminist researchers. Volpp analyses this opposition as being derived from Western values. So, she tries to demonstrate their contradictions and attack their weak points. To her, the thesis that coercive norms on women is heavier in minority cultures is a flaw. When examining immigrant communities she denies the frequency of violence upon women.

⁸ See note 5.

The fact is that when certain damaging episodes towards women occur in these small communities, they tend to be interpreted as specifically cultural, while the same facts would be classified as merely deviant when happening in Western societies. To this philosopher we must establish parity between what happens in either of these contexts, accepting that domestic violence is also frequent in Western countries. In what concerns crime against women, it is important to distinguish what is cultural and what is individual, avoiding the accusation of minorities of being responsible for this state of things. In fact, this is not what happens with other crimes that, when performed by Western offenders, are not considered as cultural. Volpp is also critical of the negative look of Western researchers over the feminine condition in native cultures. She contrasts this attitude with the habitual silence about certain religious groups in USA, as for example, Mormon communities, where women still occupy a subordinate status.

Trying to establish a fruitful dialogue between feminism and multiculturalism, she analyses three items, in an effort to implement them in Western cultures:

First, she is interested in contradicting the thesis that non-Western women have a more dangerous life in their communities than European and North American ones have. Secondly, she wants to show that the alleged subordination and inferior status of women of ethnic cultures is essentially due to colonial history and to liberalism, where the idea that Western women are free is spread. The confront feminism/multiculturalism was developed in the scope of liberal ideologies. These have opposed race and gender, ignoring that, because they are constitutive, these data cannot be separately studied. It is also Volpp's intention to consider the opposition of feminism and multiculturalism, stressing the deliberate ignorance of some feminist philosophers concerning some forces present in minority cultures forgetting their impact on the lives of women. The emphasis given to feminine subordination in non-Western cultures produces destructive consequences. One of them is to forget the forces that exist and shape these cultures. Culture is a whole constituted by interactive parts. It is dynamical, too complex to be the object of a dualistic opposition.

Volpp also criticizes the legitimacy of a trans-national fight for the rights of women as human rights for it is based on a patronizing view over third

world women. This sort of perspective considers those women as incapable of constructing their own way of living and gives them as reference some ideologies in which they are not comfortable. Denying the statement that "*West is best*," third world women should present their own proposals to Western feminist philosophers; they should despise worn out solutions and be creative and autonomous in the choice of their own ways.

Leti Volpp considers the assimilation of minority culture in a majority one as a form of oppression. So, she rises against all solutions that pretend the liberation of third world women imposing them the rejection of their own customs and the acceptance of an alien way of life. Yet, she is not insensitive to issues that apparently contradict gender equality. But this does not stop her from criticizing Susan Okin, who only considers two possible solutions: either the integration of minority cultures in Western cultures, or the alteration of some cultural habits concerning the way women are considered (or despised).

My point of view is that Volpp's wish to preserve native cultures' autonomy leads her to misunderstand the real facts. We cannot deny that in Europe and North America domestic violence exists and that women are abused and explored. But we must not forget the work of innumerable institutions on the watch of these crimes. When these occurrences are denounced, they can rely on justice – there are courts to punish these crimes and we can count on the censure of public opinion, of the media and of civil society.

We also think that Volpp's analysis is superficial when she approaches some facts which are quite different. This happens when she analyses the interdiction of using the veil in French schools while scarves are accepted with no problem. Citing Hoodfar, she writes: "When a white woman who is Muslim wears a veil, it is perceived as fashion; when an Iranian-Canadian woman wears a scarf as fashion, it is perceived as a veil."⁹ On pretending to show this contradiction, Volpp forgets the imposition of tchadors and burkas and takes as equal two different situations – the imposition made to Muslim women of using a veil and the free choice of Western women to cover their heads with scarves or to use shawls. We are also critical of the importance she gives to Mormon communities in USA. Their small number does not allow us to establish a parallel with what happens in the innumerable ethnic

⁹ Leti Volpp, "Feminism versus Multiculturalism," p. 1190.

communities. And we remark that the excesses of Mormon communities have been largely denounced by the media and most times provoke the coercive dissolution of those groups.

5. The difficulty of arguing against facts

The interest of Gender philosophers regarding the debate between multiculturalism and women's rights is recent. They were firstly concerned with other conquests and the problems they analysed were raised in an academic context, emphasizing issues like identity and difference and trying to annul the different social status between men and women. We presume that some bad conscience, as well as some fear of being accused of ideological haughtiness, prevented them from denouncing the abuses committed over ethnic women. The result was a mild acceptance and even complicity with certain degrading customs and the silence over situations is ethically unacceptable.

It is time to face those problems, analysing them without prejudice and trying to solve them with objective arguments. We must not forget the real and concrete persons they involve – in the present case women. So, I conclude this paper with the written testimony of an Iranian student who went to study in France, where she finally could get rid of her veil: "From thirteen to twenty-three I was repressed, condemned to be a Muslim, a compliant and prisoner woman under a black veil. From thirteen to twenty-three years! And I don't admit that anyone tells me they were the best years of my life."¹⁰

As the popular proverb says: "We cannot argue against facts."

¹⁰ "De treize à vingt trois ans j'ai été réprimée, condamnée à être une musulmane, une soumise, et emprisonnée sous le noir du voile. De treize à vingt trois ans. Et je ne laisserai personne dire que ce furent les plus belles années de ma vie." Chahdortt Djavann, *Bas les voiles*, Paris, Gallimard, 2003, p. 7.

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**THE POLITICS OF TRAUMA. LITERARY VISIONS
– JOSÉ EDUARDO AGUALUSA'S NOVEL
TEORIA GERAL DO ESQUECIMENTO
(A GENERAL THEORY OF OBLIVION)**

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Abstract

In Western cultures, experiences of violence and psychological suffering are chiefly informed by the discourse of trauma. Here, literature and film are tasked specifically with portraying the vulnerability of the individual within the framework of the traumatic situation and highlighting forms of societal and state responsibility, which allow violence, inequality and disempowerment. Literary case studies (José Eduardo Agualusa, Clarice Lispector and Leïla Slimani) as well as Martha Nussbaum's criticism of trauma narrative are the focal point of this paper.

Keywords

Trauma, Victim, Perpetrator, Oblivion, Angola

The psychologist and trauma expert David Becker says that trauma does not exist in abstract form. Trauma exists only in concrete social contexts. It always concerns individuals, who experience horrible things in horrible situations. It concerns suffering inscribed in specific bodies. On the other hand, the so-called trauma discourse corresponds in all its varieties to "translations" and "representations" of these injuries which the individual has experienced. José Brunner, who has written a comprehensive study on the politics of trauma, on violence and psychological suffering in the United States of America, Germany and the conflict between Israel and Palestine, states that experiences of suffering of those affected – here with special emphasis on soldiers returning home from operational zones – have been

translated into clinical imagery for the last one hundred years. These are then transported into politics, for instance, as pieces of legislation or health insurance clauses. When we speak of mental scars and vulnerability, we are implicitly referring to violence, injustice and helplessness, but also to social and state responsibility.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that, in speaking about trauma, what we mean are ultimately always constructed contexts or narratives, which imply a political dimension. Trauma, thus, serves as a concept which has circulated widely in the media. The representation of traumatic experiences in literature and film, however, follows all too often patterns which now must be viewed as standardised and whose primary function is to create principles of arrangement and to insinuate images of healing processes. Thus, cinematic representations such as the films on those returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan analysed by Brunner show stereotypical patterns of successful reintegration into society, rather than displaying the fact that traumatised soldiers are at higher risk of becoming criminal perpetrators. With this in mind, Brunner's critique of the customary modes of trauma narratives becomes apparent.

This form of politics, in which the victim is always codified and only therapeutic success is deemed the focal point of considerations on the topic of trauma, has also been questioned by the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum. She asks whether trauma and the anger connected with it can ever really dissipate. She is concerned not with relativizing past wounds and scars, but rather with the fundamental human ability to orientate oneself towards the idea of "good." Nussbaum's embodiment approach is context-sensitive, particularistic and gender-sensitive. It is situationally specific biographies, particularly biographies of individuals from a non-affluent, culturally non-Western background, which Nussbaum takes seriously. She places the vulnerability of the individual at the centre of her thinking, but from the viewpoint of Aristotle's – and also Rousseau's – theory of empathy. She attempts to recognise her own similarity with traumatised individuals: "the pain of another will be an object of my concern, a part of my sense of own well-being, only if I acknowledge some sort of community between myself and the other, understanding what it might be for me to face such pain." (p. 317) This similarity, this sense of understanding underpins the

feeling that the same pain might well be experienced by oneself. This common sense of anguish rests on the ability to recognise similarities between oneself and other people. Thus, Nussbaum tries to maintain a flow of empathy, helping to avoid the tendency to identify dissimilarity. She prefers narratives that promote empathy and prioritises the theory of “good” when she writes of not giving in to phantasies of taking revenge on perpetrators, but, rather, that love for others, paired with an understanding of their worries and needs, is sufficient motivation for moral behaviour. Nussbaum criticises the establishing of mental borders and the insistence on negative emotions. She advocates thinking about victims, which does not focus simply on future retribution of the perpetrated act, but instead focuses on freeing oneself from the restraints of the past. She concerns herself with forgetting and forgiving. In *Upheavals of Thought*, Nussbaum stresses that a person may keep their dignity without pursuing an individual or becoming preoccupied with him or her. In short, Nussbaum puts her faith in empowerment, in the individual’s ability to free itself from terrible predicaments.

A corresponding path is taken by José Eduardo Agualusa in his novel *A General Theory of Oblivion*, first published in the original Portuguese in 2012. José Eduardo Agualusa was born in 1960 in Huambo, Angola. Many of his novels as well as his short stories portray the postcolonial history of Angola, which has been blighted by civil war stretching over decades. Today, Agualusa lives in Luanda, Angola’s capital, but also in Lisbon. It is the former city that is the backdrop to *A General Theory of Oblivion*. The protagonist, a Portuguese by the name of Ludovica, has lived for over thirty years – separated from the outside world – in an apartment on the top floor of a high-rise building in Luanda, in the so-called “house of the envied.” She herself has bricked up the entrance to her flat – as a result of an emergency. Following Angola’s independence from Portugal in 1975, she attempts to return to her homeland with her sister and brother-in-law. Both her sister and brother-in-law, however, disappear without trace and we must assume that they have fallen victim to an act of violence. Ludovica – also known as Ludo – does not know what to do and is eventually attacked by an intruder, whom she shoots dead and whose corpse she drags onto her rooftop terrace. Fearing retribution, she remains exactly where she is and walls herself in her own four walls. Within the confines of this internal prison, she writes poems

on the walls of her apartment as if they were her “mouth,” while the civil war continues down below on the streets of Luanda – dramatic scenes, which we as readers learn of through secondary plot lines and figures introduced into the narrative. All these narrative threads are characterised by experiences of violence. We are presented with perpetrators as well as victims, whom we get to know in the course of the book. There is, for instance, Montes, a soldier and secret service officer, who orders the executions of Portuguese mercenaries and interns subversive “left-wing dissenters.’ And it is he who eventually falls from a roof, whilst attempting to mount a satellite dish. For a long time, the name of journalist Daniel Benchimol, who searches for those persons lost under the new regime, is to be found on Montes’s death list. Also part of the plot is the street urchin Sabalu, who in the end manages to break into Ludo’s flat and free her. All these characters – and this is a salient point about the novel – resist the otherwise typical dichotomy of victim and perpetrator. They are all capable of empathy and begin to resemble each other. It even appears as if the characters actually become one another. Equally, the victim’s existence is constantly mixed with inspiration and the development of abilities. Thus, agent and victim are not distinguishable from one another, but rather they begin to resemble and even tend to merge into one another. This becomes particularly clear at the end of the novel when the mysterious “accident” that Ludovica experienced in her childhood is described. It is the “humiliation” of rape, which is the root of everything and informs the whole book. Yet, even here, Agualusa’s novel is not simply a standardised trauma text, promising healing and freedom. It is not concerned with shaping the interpretation process of trauma, which typically informs rape narratives in contemporary literature. Rather it is the process of embodiment, it is the realm of forgetting, which the narrator describes and which is responsible for setting in motion both processes of remembrance and – to use Aleida Assmann’s concept – a “constructive forgetting.” Because we must be able to discard memory, in which the synapses are “stuck,” in order to gain the capacity and openness for new experiences. Accordingly, the protagonist states: “Our mistakes correct us. Perhaps we need to forget. We should practise forgetting, reaching for oblivion.”

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WOLLSTONECRAFT, AN ENLIGHTENED READER

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Abstract

Even when one considers that the explicit purpose of the work is the discussion of the status of women and the defense of their rights, Mary Wollstonecraft's seminal work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, can be read as a sequence of chapters which, from different angles and using various methodologies, provide answers to a key issue of the Enlightenment – What is Man? Without neglecting political criticism, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* goes a step further than her previous *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, since it refocuses the rights to freedom and education via a subtle but effective demonstration that *Erziehung* fosters the possibility of *Bildung*. In fact, M. W. claims that once the state and/or church institutions grant to women equal possibilities of cultivating the mind, the spirit and the body similar to those already available to men, it is indeed mankind that will be the recipient of gains that would eventually improve the social and political condition of nations.

Keywords

Bildung, Enlightenment, Erziehung, Wollstonecraft

1. Introduction

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) died young but lived a life as intense and responsive to challenge as her own times. Most commonly and rightly so, when focusing on the social-political relevance of Mary Wollstonecraft's two *Vindications* – *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* written in 1790 and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written two years later – it is the political, social and intellectual context concerning the newly independent thirteen American colonies (1776) and the American Revolutionary War (1775–83),

side by side with the events prior to and during the French Revolution (1789), which are taken as determinant for the development of Wollstonecraft's philosophical thought, in particular via the momentous reflection and civil agitation they brought about to key figures she aligned with and defended, like the moral philosopher, Dissenting preacher and political pamphleteer Richard Price (1723-91),¹ or attacked, like Edmund Burke (1730-97), or both aligned and attacked, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78).

Yet, it is also of notice that Wollstonecraft, during her adolescence and early womanhood, witnessed the overwhelming changes of the social and demographic structure of the English society, then going through the first decades of the Industrial Revolution, as acknowledged in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*.² These changes materialized in a cluster of social and economic transformations which affected all layers of society – the enclosure movement propelled the disappearance of a rural world where peasants had recognized their own place in the community they lived in, partly because of the individual role they played in the thriving or failing of its wealth; the loss of independence of artisans and skilled crafters catapulted the rising number of industrial laborers who came to be counted merely as 'hands'; independent merchants became, or had to give place to, business men and bankers; the overwhelming growth of cities took place side by side with the survival of landowners. This was the case of the Anglo-Irish Kingsborough family Wollstonecraft would later work for as governess, her last position before living exclusively from her writing thanks to the publisher Joseph Johnson (1738-1809) and her regular contribution to the *Analytical Review*

¹ Moral philosopher, Dissenting preacher, political pamphleteer and also mathematician, Richard Price reached his influence to various intellectual and political sectors and was one of the key activists in societies and circles, such as the Society for Constitutional Information, the Bowood Circle, the Club of Honest Whigs (Benjamin Franklin's designation for the London Coffee House club) and welcomed many non-aligned activists, among them Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, B. Franklin and John Adams, politicians like Earl Stanhope and William Pitt the Elder, and Unitarian ministers and men of science.

² Vd. *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Marilyn Butler and Janet Todd, and co-edited by Emma Rees-Mogg, New York: New York University Press, 1989, vol. V, pp. 1-60; for a direct reference to the Agrarian Revolution and the disappearance of the class of mechanics, see pp. 56-7; from now on, this work is referred to as *VRM*. Note that her grandfather had been a prosperous weaver, a way of living and social class which would virtually disappear in two generations.

(1778-88). Together with the succession of inventions and developments in industry and science, this state of affairs would forever compromise any anticipation or expectancy concerning means of living and labor relations. In addition, the urgency of finding some stability in new environments and in a shifting society that would respond to the challenges posed by the industrial inventiveness that marked those times contributed actively to the spread of groups and associations of citizens that one way or the other offered reflection, or consolation, in the case of religious movements, or both, in the case of the first proto-unions of workers. The conflation of these phenomena opened the way to the possibility of experimentation to join dissidence in matters of social awareness in all ranks of society, paving the way for different representatives of knowledge, be it in philosophy, religion, literature and/or affiliated domains or in the hard sciences and in the field of economics, to produce writings or to set off experiments concerning education and sanitary measures, working conditions and schooling of the children workers, quite often developing ideas on the psychology of self-development at the same time. It is against this background that the young Mary leaves the paternal home with the firm decision to support herself and become financially independent and determined to provide herself with tools to become a writer and gain intellectual autonomy, long before any knowledge of hers of what the French free-thinkers had to say about liberties or the rights of men.

Interestingly, Wollstonecraft's quest to find her own image, as well as her endeavor to see it accepted by society, can almost be defined using the words of Raymond Geuss to sum up the 3 traits that typify Wilhelm Meister as hero of J. W. v. Goethe's (1749-1832) inaugural *Bildungsroman*,³ namely: "development of one's powers, discovery of one's true wants, and realistic acceptance of the world as it is."⁴ In fact, her personal endeavor prefigures the hero of the *Bildungsroman*, classified by Franco Moretti⁵ as an individual on his way to become an adult whose self-awareness is determined by mobility and interiority: the typical hero is then a young person leaving home

³ *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795) would only be translated in 1824 by Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) with the title *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*.

⁴ Raymond Geuss, "Kultur, Bildung, Geist," *History and Theory*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (May, 1996), pp. 151-64; here, p. 159.

⁵ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, London, Verso, 1987.

whose ups and downs reflect the challenges of new times and ambiances and whose life is marked by dynamic instability, who eventually substitutes a new freer (urban) environment for the closed (rural) family ambiance. It is also pertinent to notice that her quest is almost contemporaneous with J. G. Herder's⁶ and I. Kant's emphasis on the reciprocity of the process of *Bildung* and *Erziehung* and of the command of reason over the whole process of self-awareness, seen in its individual repercussions prior to the social-political effect. Hopefully, I will demonstrate how Wollstonecraft's path and writings carry the blueprint of this *Zeitgeist*, thus making her part of the group of thinkers and philosophers engaged in finding a new status for mankind by means of giving man a new purpose – to make use of reason for the sake of self-development and of self-knowledge.

2. Wollstonecraft's practical process of *Bildung*

Wollstonecraft was only 17 at the time of the independence of the American colonies. By then, she had shown remarkable autonomy of spirit and mind and power of decision and, to a large extent, this was due to an acute alertness to the frailty and precariousness of the place of the woman in the family and in society, in general. At home, she had fully assumed the position of guardian of her mother against her father's tyranny and played an active role as mentor of her sisters. In the dwellings in different rural areas of England, and later in London, where her unstable and bullying father took his family to live in, the young Mary cultivated friendships which enabled her to gain some intellectual insight that her paternal home could not offer, thus improving both her social and educational skills and strengthening the resilience that never failed her throughout the next decade.

By the time of the French Revolution, when she was 29, she had already tried different careers in various jobs in her struggle for financial independence. Her first period of seeking financial independence, lasting

⁶ *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774). It has been argued that the translation of this work (1800) was actually the work of Henry Fusili (Johann Heinrich Füssli, 1741-1825), the same Fusili that would be part of Wollstonecraft's circle during her years with the *Analytical Review*, with whom she would become very seriously infatuated. See Marcia Allentuck, "Henry Fuseli and J. G. Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* in Britain: An Unremarked Connection," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Jan. – Mar., 1974), pp. 113-20.

approximately 13 years, saw her living in Yorkshire, Wales, London and Ireland, travelling as far as Lisbon, taking jobs as paid companion, establishing and directing schools in two different places, and working as governess after the collapse of her school in Newington Green. And it was certainly due to her reflection on how to educate the young that the difference between the opportunities available to boys and young men and the ones that could be grasped by girls and young women gained weight as a question of inequality, not only of birth or social status, but indeed of social and political rights. It is true that her thoughts on education and pedagogy originate in a line of thinkers comprehending John Locke (1632-1704) and his *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (1693), Lord Shaftesbury (1671-1713) and also Rousseau, and obviously Catharine Macaulay (1831-91) whose *Letters on Education* Wollstonecraft would enthusiastically review for Johnson's periodical in 1790.⁷ Yet, the backbone of her political and educational thought and her proposals for a new type of educational institutions would definitely be shaped by her contact with the Dissenters and non-conformist Protestants, who had to find a way out of the official Anglican control in order to school and educate their young,⁸ as well as by her reading of works like Richard Price's *Review of the Principal Questions of Morals* (1758) or James Burgh's (1714-1775) *Thoughts on Education* (1774).

Hence, even before reading Macaulay and other thinkers she might have come into knowledge in later years on the occasion of the famous weekly dinners promoted by Johnson, the two years in Newington Green, between 1884 and early 1886, largely account for her radical propositions concerning equality and liberty for all men and women of all walks of life, religion and race. These years were indeed momentous for the formation of her pedagogical, political and feminist thought. Wollstonecraft would always remain a follower and defender of Price and Burgh's principles and their ideas concerning freedom of speech and universal suffrage and equality of rights. It was also in Newington Green that she came into the knowledge of

⁷ Vd. Bridget Hill, "The links between Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macaulay: new evidence," *Women's History Review*, 4:2, 1995, pp. 177-92.

⁸ Vd. Alan Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 24-41; here, pp. 24-6.

the work and thought of other dissident activists and men of science⁹ who Price and Burgh had congregated in their activities. It was also through Price that Wollstonecraft eventually met Joseph Johnson, who would become the publisher of all her works and her mentor and protector for the remaining years of her life. Moreover, they stand for an almost perfect symbiosis of *Bildung* and *Erziehung*, with Wollstonecraft successfully pursuing the aim of gaining a personal and social image of an intelligent woman and promising writer, capable of self-cultivation and self-support and at the same time remaining receptive to tutoring by mentors she respected and admired. As mentioned before, running a school helped her ideas on education, and her pedagogical thought certainly benefited from her own practice as pedagogue, but the learning and the sermons of Richard Price and the friendship with Mrs. Burgh, the widow of the famous dissenter James Burgh,¹⁰ who had joined Price in the societies he founded or worked closely with, molded Wollstonecraft's personality as thinker and philosopher. In fact, during the subsequent period as governess of the Kingsborough children, her ideas on the rights of women based on liberty and equality were already instilled on her pupils. The living proof would be the quite astounding life of Margaret King (1773-1835)¹¹ who would forever revere her tutor's legacy.

3. Liberty as equality of rights and equality in education

By 1787, despite all the hardships she had faced to support and educate herself, Wollstonecraft was in total control of her intellectual abilities and had

⁹ Wollstonecraft shows her familiarity with Joseph Priestley's work (1733-1804), whose career benefited from his friendship with Price. See *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Marilyn Butler and Janet Todd, and coedited by Emma Rees-Mogg, New York: New York University Press, 1989, vol. V, pp. 107; 256. From now on, the work is referred to as *VRW*.

¹⁰ The title resonates in Wollstonecraft's own *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, published later in 1787.

¹¹ After an early marriage and having had seven children, she left all her family behind and embarked on a new life in Italy with the man (George William Tighe, Irish agricultural theorist) she had met and fallen in love with during the Grand Tour she took with her husband in 1801. She would later study medicine in Jena, write educational books and short stories for children. In Rome, she welcomed the young Shelleys, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Godwin, the daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, and Claire Clairmont, widow of Lord Byron.

assimilated the core of ideas that fundament her thought in what concerns human rights, and the role of the State in their implementation. Johnson's circle in the *Analytical Review* included radical personalities of different areas of activity from politics to the theater, from various arts to the clergy, all of them sharing political ideals close to the French Revolution and often active members in political societies of their day.¹² Their influence instilled consistency into Wollstonecraft's political and social thought which would more and more associate equality to liberty, and equality of rights to equality of education.

Her first theoretical work, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* published in 1791, as well as the novel *Mary: A Fiction*, and a children's book, *Original Stories from Real Life*, published a year later, despite the obvious auto-biographical inspiration, allow us to assess how her thought evolved from advice on education and/or rules to instruct parents and the state on how to educate their young towards an acute awareness of the impossibility of equality in education without effective political freedom and equality of rights, or, to be more precise and faithful to our author, towards the firm conviction that there is no possibility of self-cultivation and educational development for girls and boys, for women and men, without laws and institutions that rule out the property system not only in what concerns hereditary titles and estates, but also in what concerns the structural hierarchy within the family, since wife and children were no more than the property of the

¹² This circle would play a decisive role in the years which witness a second phase of Wollstonecraft's dialectical process of *Bildung* and *Erziehung*, of particular relevance for her writings based on her stay in France, namely *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution, and the Effect it Has Produced in Europe* (1794). Among others, and besides William Godwin (1756-1836), there were Thomas Holcroft (1745-1809, dramatist, novelist, journalist, and actor, close to Thomas Paine at the time of the publication of *The Rights of Men* (1791); Joel Barlow (1724-1812), American poet, diplomat, and politician, who also helped Thomas Paine publish his *The Age of Reason* when Paine was imprisoned during the Reign of Terror; the already mentioned Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), painter, art critic and translator whose work influenced William Blake (1757-1827) as illustrator and who would in 1809 be the ghost translator of Herder's *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*; John Horne Tooke (1736-1812), clergyman, politician and philologist, advocating Paine's ideas and ideals, a member of the London Corresponding Society who fought for universal suffrage; and Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825), poet, essayist, critic, editor, and author of children's literature, herself a proto-feminist and sister of John Aikin (1747-1822), physician and littérateur, a close friend of Johnson's.

married man. This shift can be seen, for example, in radical changes of tone and content in the way Wollstonecraft discusses some authors. As Vivien Jones¹³ remarks, in 1789, Wollstonecraft still selected excerpts from *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* by the moralist John Gregory (1724-73), who prescribed different types of education for girls or boys, for her anthology *The Female Reader*; however, three years later, Gregory would be cited in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* only to receive harsh criticism as defender of the perpetuation of the inferior status of the female sex,¹⁴ be it from the legal, intellectual or moral point of view. And we remember well her harsh criticism of Rousseau's ideas for the education of Sophie in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, but cannot ignore that her reflections on inequality owe a lot to Rousseau's ideas, even if she bases her proposals on the use and cultivation of reason and not on a drive motivated by self-interest, or goes far beyond his reflection on the inequality of men.

With time, contemporary pedagogical and educational issues would then be critiqued as the result of policies and laws dictated by a patriarchal society. This is clearly the case of her abundant considerations on marriage in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* which target the appalling consequences for women of William Blackstone's statement ruling that woman and man are one person under the law, thus suspending all legal rights of the wife, whether as individual citizen or owner of property,¹⁵ a situation Mary Wollstonecraft could assess quite well in result of the unhappy marriage and separation of her sister Eliza (1784-6). *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*¹⁶

¹³ Opening remark of Vivien Jones in "Mary Wollstonecraft and the literature of advice and instruction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 119-40.

¹⁴ Gregory, like Rousseau, is accused of having "contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society." *VRW*, p. 91.

¹⁵ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. Vol. 1 (1765), pp. 442-445: "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything."

¹⁶ Published in 1791, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* is the first of three immediate responses to *Reflections on the Revolution of France* (1790) by Edmund Burke, a text that, in turn, responds to Richard Price's sermon preached in 1789 to the London Revolution Society, entitled *Discourse on the Love of our Country*. Wollstonecraft's first *Vindication* opened the so-called

already demonstrates how, at the heart of Wollstonecraft's political thought on the rights of men and of women, lies her clear perception of the failure of the State and of the Anglican Church in providing laws and institutions that might enable the citizen, be it man or woman, to receive a good education. The situation in England is actually described as a case study of total disruption in the desirable balance between the educational duties of the State and the capacity of self-improvement of the individual. The "vulgar" are unable to cultivate their minds because they have to work "to support their body" and the rich are also victims of the poor education they receive due to the property system that secures their privileges without any cultivation of reason and virtue:

Is it among the list of possibilities that a man of rank and fortune *can* have received a good education? How can he discover that he is a man, when all his wants are instantly supplied, and invention is never sharpened by necessity? Will he labour, for everything valuable must be the fruit of laborious exertions, to attain knowledge and virtue, in order to merit the affection of his equals, when the flattering attention of sycophants is a more luscious cordial?¹⁷ (VRM, p. 42)

Wollstonecraft's observations refuting Burke's claim of the superiority of the political organization in England versus revolutionary France, as a result of the supremacy of the so-called "inbred sentiments" of the English, certainly reflect her assimilation of Locke's *tabula rasa* as well as Rousseau's claim that the child is an ignorant being. Nonetheless, Wollstonecraft's remarks gain a different contour when understood having as background her own pursuit of a new social and political organization that may grant citizens the possibility of moral improvement:

What moral purpose can be answered by extolling good dispositions, as they are called, when these good dispositions are described as instincts: for instinct moves in a direct line to its ultimate end, and asks not for guide or

Revolution Controversy which agitated the intellectual and political milieus between 1790-95 producing some thirty texts and pamphlets. Wollstonecraft's response was immediately followed by Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*, in two parts (1791 and 1792) and William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793).

¹⁷ VRM, p. 42.

support. But if virtue is to be acquired by experience, or taught by example, reason, perfected by reflection, must be the director of the whole host of passions, which produce a fructifying heat, but no light, that you would exalt into her place.¹⁸

In her view, virtue is not an instinct and is instead learned by practice; the control of passions is under the light of reason; and attaining moral standards depends on the actual learning of virtue by practicing and on an enlightened command of passions. Not surprisingly, Wollstonecraft states that if the poor peasants cannot ever develop their virtue, control their passions, and attain moral standards, this is the fault of the landlord who blindly cultivates the wrong concept of the beautiful and the sublime to embellish his estate:

I know, indeed, that there is often something disgusting in the distresses of poverty, at which the imagination revolts, and starts back to exercise itself in the more attractive Arcadia of fiction. The rich man builds a house, art and taste give it the highest finish. His gardens are planted, and the trees grow to recreate the fancy of the planter, though the temperature of the climate may rather force him to avoid the dangerous damps they exhale, than seek the umbrageous retreat. Everything on the estate is cherished but man; – yet, to contribute to the happiness of man is the most sublime of all enjoyments. But if, instead of sweeping pleasure-grounds, obelisks, temples, and elegant cottages, as *objects* for the eye, the heart was allowed to beat true to nature, decent farms would be scattered over the estate, and plenty smile around. Instead of the poor being subject to the griping hand of an avaricious steward, they would be watched over with fatherly solicitude, by the man whose duty and pleasure it was to guard their happiness, and shield from rapacity the beings who, by the sweat of their brow, exalted him above his fellows.¹⁹

In the opening paragraph of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft makes it clear that her concept of the sublime and the beautiful is not intended for the eye and, thus, is radically distinct from Burke's:

(...) if, therefore, in the course of this epistle, I chance to express contempt, and even indignation, with some emphasis, I beseech you to believe that it is

¹⁸ *VRM*, pp. 31-2.

¹⁹ *VRM*, p. 56.

not a flight of fancy; for truth, in morals, has ever appeared to me the essence of the sublime; and, in taste, simplicity the only criterion of the beautiful.²⁰

In accordance, Dr. Price's political views are considered "a sublime system of morality" (VRM, p. 18). Underscoring the balance in self-development I mentioned above, this same concept of the sublime is used to define the quintessential moral character, as opposed to the character of a man lacking intelligence or compassion, in terms which show some resemblance to Friedrich Schiller's theory concerning the aesthetic education of man:

In life, an honest man with a confined understanding is frequently the slave of his habits and the dupe of his feelings, whilst the man with a clearer head and colder heart makes the passions of others bend to his interest; but truly sublime is the character that acts from principle, and governs the inferior springs of activity without slackening their vigour; whose feelings give vital heat to his resolves, but never hurry him into feverish eccentricities.²¹

Wollstonecraft only uses Burke's definition of the beautiful in correlation to the sublime, as developed in *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), to Burke's own style in *Reflections on the Revolution of France*, which she classifies as "a mixture of real sensibility and fondly cherished romance,"²² as well as "little" and "weak," the exact attributes she applies to women who have let themselves be influenced by Burke's *Inquiry*.²³ Indeed, she labels Burke's style just as feminine as his category of "beautiful" is.

A Vindication of the Rights of Men contains many of the topics that will be more extensively discussed and fully exemplified in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, this time not with the purpose of taking sides in a public political debate centered on the fierce challenge faced by the English political system in face of the constitutional rights of men which agitated revolutionary France, but with the single objective of publicly discussing the inhuman

²⁰ VRM, p. 7.

²¹ VRM, p. 8.

²² VRM, p. 44.

²³ VRM, p. 45.

condition of the woman in order to argue that by granting women an equal degree of citizenship as men already enjoyed, all layers of society and the nation as a whole would benefit from it. Whereas in her attack on Burke's *Reflections*, Wollstonecraft analyzes the English constitution, the system of property and the hereditary titles, the establishment as a whole and the role the clergy there played, as well as slavery, as components of a political and social organization which is based on fallacies and preconceived ideas of superiority of the English monarchy regime and of its representatives, in particular the aristocracy, and thus in need of "enlightened" public debate, in the second *Vindication*, there is only place for Wollstonecraft's own enlightened arguments of a woman philosopher who pledged to use reason to speak for her own sex. It is true that with various nuances those same topics are addressed in the second *Vindication*, yet, the discussion clearly reveals a more anthropological, sociological or psychological point of view, and, in general, those components are taken as the proper causes for the dependence of the woman on fathers or husbands, their subsequent plight as daughters, wives and mothers, as well as their failure in attaining a higher moral level or in assuming new roles and professions.

Compared to *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* points out more explicitly at the reciprocal benefits, for the fight against inequality in citizenship and in the rights of men and women, of a global political and legislative effort directed at a reform of the institutions which must be based on the association of freedom to civil rights and to education in order to find a solution for the contemporary situation of women in society. However, in its discussion of the above mentioned topics concerning the English institutions and laws as the true obstacle for the emancipation of women, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is as strong a political libel as *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. The moderate tone that pervades the introductory letter to Talleyrand who was actively engaged in the making of laws in revolutionary France,²⁴ in contrast to the fierce

²⁴ Wollstonecraft had met Talleyrand before the writing of the second *Vindication*. Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord (1754-1838), former Bishop of Autun, became an active politician after his resignation and served in the Estates-General, the Constituent Assembly, and the National Assembly. He claimed for the confiscation of the church property and was one of the legislators behind the 1791 French Constitution which demanded a national system of free education.

argumentation *ad hominem* that runs throughout her letter to Burke, is obviously intended as support and empowerment of the French legislator. In addition, it obviously highlights Wollstonecraft's acute awareness of the contemporary state of policies and politics in England, where there is no hope of change and reform because there are no signs of revolution in sight, and in France, where there is hope of change and revolution exactly because a revolution is going on.

The appeal to education that pervades *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* should not be simply accounted for as proof of Wollstonecraft's pedagogical and educational thought. Instead, her plea makes proof of a realistic approach to the situation of the woman in society. To demand reform in educational institutions and profound changes in the roles of all the agents involved, from children to teachers and tutors and parents, was possibly the only appeal that would have some chance of success in times when reception to a discussion of educational issues was widely consensual, when indeed education was the focus of a number of woman writers in England, who had realized that the deep changes in its social fabric brought about by the Agrarian and the Industrial Revolutions and the paramount political challenges prompted by the American Revolution and the French Revolution required a global approach that could be launched through reform in education.

Wollstonecraft's message contains an anthropological content with the seeds of revolution. If the State provides an education based on freedom and equality of rights, if the institutions fully assume their role as *Erzieher*, women and men will be free to find their own image and role in society, to pursue their *Bildung*, virtues will have the opportunity of being learned and put into practice, passions will be controlled by an enlightened reason, moral standards will rise. By vindicating the emancipation of woman Wollstonecraft also aims to be read as the herald of an age where mankind could fulfill its ultimate end, an end that W. v. Humboldt (1767-1835)²⁵ would eloquently

²⁵ "Der wahre Zweck des Menschen – nicht der, welchen die wechselnde Neigung, sondern welchen die ewig unveränderliche Vernunft ihm vorschreibt – ist die höchste und proportionierlichste Bildung seiner Kräfte zu einem Ganzen. Zu dieser Bildung ist Freiheit die erste und unerläßliche Bedingung." In *Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Gränzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen*. The text dates from 1792, but it was only published in 1851. The first English edition of Humboldt's works including this text is Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Sphere and*

describe, in the same year of the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, with the words I believe appropriate to conclude:

The true end of Man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole. Freedom is the grand and indispensable condition which the possibility of such a development presupposes.

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ABOUT A NEW REALISM OF THE SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

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Abstract

The official history of philosophy has been thought and formulated by men in accordance with a substantialist dualism, commanded by the phallo-onto-theologic transcendence of the perfect and immaterial Act. The emergence of feminist thinking has disrupted that hegemonic paradigm deconstructing its theoretical assumptions, and rehabilitating a new pattern based on the immanence of a dynamic and self-differing ma(t)ter. In the context of contemporary feminist philosophy, the current paper aims at reconsidering the sexual difference of female identity out of phallogocentric dualism or transgender nominalism as a new pattern of being and thinking.

Keywords

Materiality, Dualism, Mediation, Fluidity, *Continuum*, Reciprocity

1. Introduction

The official history of philosophy has been thought, written and performed by men in accordance with their own bodies, subjectivities and praxis. In order to justify that hegemonic pattern, the phallo-logos disposed the hierarchical primacy of a transcendent, perfect, and immaterial Act in dualistic opposition to the finite and contingent world, built by the material element: passive, indeterminate, and assimilated to female-non-logos. The exclusion of women from the active production of thinking is not a random fact regarding a pretended universality, neutrality or asexuality of philosophical discourse, but rather an immanent determination of the hegemonic logos,

articulated around a rigid dualism between ideal transcendence and material world, form and matter, good and evil, spirit and nature, male and female, etc.

That is the context from which the feminist turn of contemporary philosophy emerges, disrupting the assumptions that naturalized phallogocentrism as an hegemonic model, and rehabilitating a new philosophical pattern based on a non-dualistic immanence, capable of including what the abstract logos takes away. The emergence of feminist thinking challenges the official history of philosophy, and engages it with a radical transformation.

As it is well known, “feminism” is a general term for multiple and diverse perspectives, streams, waves, backgrounds, intersections, etc., belonging to different scientific and cultural fields. The current lines will frame into an ontology of sexual difference following some ideas of the new speculative turn, namely, the concepts of radical immanence and material becoming, which will find in the self-differing potency of female body the basic metaphysical pattern.

2. Hetero-sexist Essentialism vs Transgender Nominalism:

A fake Choice

Such as I will consider it, the category of sexual difference is able to free female identity from two opposite conceptions dualistically confronted and equally unilateral, namely: the naive essentialism of the eternal feminine, and the anti-realist linguisticism of genders, transgenders and queerness. Both options, while apparently opposed, agree with the obliteration of the actual and concrete female identity. The former because it reifies identity into an abstract ideal; the latter, because it turns the real to an empty signifier without referring. In the first case, the essentialism of the eternal feminine responds to the metaphysical pattern of pure active forms participated into mere passive and indeterminate materialities. Accordingly, the female form is distinguished by eternal attributes of indetermination, obscurity, irrationality, matter, fluidity, evil, volatility, etc., and dualistically opposed to male attributes of determination, luminosity, rationality, active form, solidity, goodness, consistency, etc. Given the constitutive deficiency of female identity, women’s destiny was subordinated to men’s dominance in any cultural and social field.

In the second case, post-feminist queer theory belongs to a neo-linguistic nominalism which reduces identities to mere *flatus vocis*, resulting of cultural constructions and power relationships economically determined. That radical constructivism has prevailed during the last decades of the 20th century, and produced the potentially infinite dissemination of transgender identities, i.e., bi-gendered, cross-dresser, drag king, drag queen, femme queen, female-to-male, FTM, gender bender, genderqueer, male-to-female, MTF, non-op, HIJRA, pangender, pansexual, intersexual, asexual, questioning, transsexual, transperson, woman, man, butch, two-spirit, trans, agender, third sex, gender fluid, non-binary transgender, androgyne, androgynous, femme, gender gifted, gender blender, person of transgender experience (Žižek, 2017, p. 135). Among them, to be woman counts as another queer identity at the same level of actuality than becoming butch or drag king, characterized by the stereotyping of female gender.

The radical nominalism of queer theories has been the target for several criticisms, that agree with the femino-phobic and phallogocentric bias of post-feminism. In general terms, the critics consider that queerness reinforces sexist stereotypes, makes women invisible, confuses their claims, weakens their emancipatory force, and mixes incompatible interests. For instance, Rosi Braidotti (Braidotti, 2002, 11-64; Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, p. 26) and Elizabeth Grosz (Grosz, 1995; Grosz and Probyn, 1995) understand “queerness” as “a reactive category that sees itself in opposition to a straight norm” (Grosz, 1995, p. 219), and ends reifying both gender stereotypes and counter-identities under a pretended neutrality that turns out to be hegemonically masculine. Other material feminists (Alaimo, Hekman, 2008) object to queer constructivism the phallogocentric reduction of matter to the mere passive recipient of linguistic and cultural forms. The radical lesbian feminism of Sheila Jeffreys (2003) points out the political incompatibility between queer claims and feminist liberation. Lastly, from a metaphysical point of view, Catherine Malabou denounces “the theoretical violence of the deontologizing of woman” (2011, p. 99), preamble of any other violence.

Summing up, the alternative between the metaphysical essentialism of classical phallogocentrism and the anti-metaphysical nominalism of queer post-feminism conceals a dualistic pattern that forces the choice between two fake options: either a necessary, infinite and eternal ideal of being

a woman, or a contingent, temporal and relativistic construction, culturally performed. In such dualistic terms, the discussion essentialism vs. anti-essentialism, objectivism vs. subjectivism, universalism vs. contingentism turns out to be futile and irrelevant. Much more productive and meaningful is to explore the conceptual possibilities offered by theoretical patterns that have overcome abstract oppositions. That is the case of sexual difference framed into a material ontology, outside of hetero-sexist essentialism as well as transgender nominalism.

3. The speculative Turn in the 21st Century

New realisms and materialisms emerge nowadays as speculative horizon of the 21st century. Prima facie, the rise of the so-called speculative turn (Bryant, Srnicek, Harman, 2011) clashes with the linguistic turn as main paradigm of the second part of the twentieth century, dominated by post-metaphysical deconstructions and discourse analysis. By contrast, the new century arises with the ontological certainty of the real in its irreducible and irrevocable presence. Speculative reality is neither the objective counterpart of mental representations, nor the transcendent hard core beyond all finitude, or the unknowable Other beyond all knowledge. On the contrary, speculative reality is a very complex multiplicity of experiences, perceptions, intuitions, thoughts, representations, languages, discourses, desires, appearances, fantasies, objects, etc., in which the real unfolds. In Markus Gabriel's words, "thinking itself is part of what there is, and thus it is not just *about* what there is" (2015b, p. 340), a property of the very thing instead of an external view of the object, so that the real is both: active thinking and passive thought. And that leads us to another determination of speculative reality, namely, it is not about substances or clear and distinct *res*, but about reduplicating actions – objective-subjective – in continual becoming. That reality has overcome its old substantialist ballast as individual thing in itself in order to become the relational actuality of a subject which is always reflexively other.

New speculation takes distance from the old naïve and substantialist realism as well as from the postmodern linguistic constructionism, both abstract and one-sided. While naïve realism emphasizes the independency of external objects and reduces consciousness to the passive spectator of a

self-subsisting world, postmodern nominalism emphasizes the performativity of social actors and reduces the world to the passive production of rational, linguistic and economic agents, both individual and social. New realism, by contrast, posits the reciprocal action between objectivity and subjectivity, things and ideas, nature and spirit, both relational terms of a same actuality conceived in its immanent reflection.

One of the general features of new speculation is the dialogue with scientific fields like genetics, neurobiology, quantum mechanics, computer sciences, artificial intelligence, physics, mathematics, etc., envisaging a positive exchange. The searched integration between philosophy and sciences reflects into a certain “biological ontology” (Richardson, 2013, p. 21) or “speculative biology” (Malabou, 2016, pp. 175-78), whereby the discussion about the ontological status of nature comes back to the speculative reflection along with a renewed interest for ecophilosophical issues. Speculative nature is not a given objective *res*, but a dynamic subject, ontologically mediated by multiple and diverse actants, and hence the concept of a “second nature” (Bennett, 2010, p. 115) “more than natural,” a sort of “supra-naturalism” (Johnston, 2014, p. 139) intra-acted by multiple flows and singularities.

Also the social sciences have received the new ontological influence of the so-called affective or emotional turn (cf. Massumi, 1995; 2002; 2015; Hemmings, 2005; Sedgwick, 2003), proposed as alternative paradigm to the linguistic constructionism and the primacy of economic and political relations. According to the affective turn, reality of affections is primary and elemental, a basic substratum determined by material, pre-conscious and pre-individual dynamisms. Affects are relational, open and self-differing energies; they proffer a political view based on contingency, plurality and materiality of affective flows.

The speculative turn also impacts on feminist thinking, pointing out the exhaustion of the linguistic paradigm and turning to think female identity in and by her own materiality. At the decline of linguistic turn, Rosi Braidotti diagnoses the state of the art in the following terms: “with the demise of postmodernism, which has gone down in history as a form or radical skepticism and moral and cognitive relativism, feminist philosophers tend to move beyond the linguistic mediation paradigm of deconstructive theory and to work instead towards the production of robust alternatives” (Rick

and van der Tuin, 2012, p. 25). These robust alternatives alluded by Braidotti inscribe into the new materialist and realist ontologies and share the purpose of thinking the feminine from within. In accordance with such premises, arises the so-called “material turn” (Alaimo, Hekman, 2008; Dolphijn, van der Tuin, 2012) of feminist theories, represented by authors like Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Stacy Alaimo, Susan Hekman, Rick Dolphijn, Iris van der Tuin, Claire Colebrook, Moira Gatens, Karen Barad, Nancy Tuana, Elizabeth Wilson, Elizabeth Bray, Sara S. Richardson, Diana Coole, Samantha Frost, Catherine Malabou or Slavoj Žižek. They are all urged to think reality in its immanent, self-active and virtual materiality.

Neo-material and neorealist feminists consider that “the emancipation of the mat(t)er is also by nature a feminist project” (Dolphijn, van der Tuin, 2012, p. 93), insofar as it is engaged with overcoming the phallogocentric reduction of matter-ma(t)er to a mere receptive and indeterminate substratum as passive as women are. For such a feminist project, matter is a vibrant subject: reflective and dynamic, ontological locus of origin, active energy, self-differing and vital element of everything. Matter is ma(t)ter because both are conceptive, generative and sexed subjects. None of them are mere passive and neutral substrates in which active forms inscribe, but the autopoietic process of self-differing, enabled by their own immanent redoubling or reflection.

For material feminisms, matter is constitutively sexed, and hence the ontological relevance of concepts like sex, sexuality or sexual difference, instead of the cultural category of gender understood as linguistic constructions accidentally performative of bodies. In the context of material feminisms, sex is a transversal category, crossing multiple levels of meaning and analysis, i.e., genetic, cerebral or neurocognitive, hormonal, gonadal, but also socio-cultural, psychic, conscious, unconscious, and ontological. From the perspective of classical metaphysics sexes are 2, and they are both determined by a rigid dualism that opposes, separates and excludes them as two different substances. However, according to a feminist realism, there is rather a multiple “sexual differing” (Dolphijn, van der Tuin, 2012, pp. 137 ss.) in permanent transposition, so that the sexual dyad emerging from such a matter becomes a multiple, complex and heterogeneous dynamism, reciprocally related by similarities and continuities (Richardson, 2013, 197 ss.).

In other words, the dimorphism of sexual differing turns to be much more heterogeneous, disseminated and reticular than the dualism of two opposite sexes (cf. Wilson, 2004a, 58-59).

For that kind of realist feminism, the formula of sexualisation is defined by the self-differing energy of the ma(t)ter, which enables to think female identity out of substantialism as well as nominalism, into the immanent, self-reflective and dynamical terms of material subjects in continual generation. Such are precisely the terms of the feminist realism addressed here.

4. About the Ontology of sexual Differing

Thinkers as Luce Irigaray, Luisa Muraro, Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti or Catherine Malabou agree with positing sexual difference as ontological radical question of contemporary thinking. Sexual difference is for them an essential concept constitutive of being, of course not in the terms of classical metaphysics, but rather according to the self-reflective and negative terms of a generating difference, whose speculative conception arises from German Idealism and continues up until now. Thus, the sexual-ontological difference here at stake is not the substantialist difference between women and men, but the active self-differing of identity, redoubled by its own negativity and otherness. To put it in Žižek's words, "sexual difference is thus ultimately not the difference between the sexes, but the difference which cuts across the very heart of the identity of each sex, stigmatizing it with the mark of impossibility" (Žižek, 2012, p. 761). Thus, feminism is about an immanent differing in which identity reflects, mediates and recreates itself as other.

The ontological radicality of sexual difference expresses the immanent dynamism of becoming other in order to achieve oneself, a mediate action that ontologically precedes and supports any formal representation. Iris van der Tuin underlines the virtual energy of such a difference in the following words: "sexual difference is a 'hyperinternalistic' or 'immanent' affair, the most basic, *ergo*, the most virtual of feminist objects and tools. It underlies all actualized feminisms and all feminisms in the archive. As virtual, sexual difference is not a form of Difference. Sexual *differing* is always already virtually at work for feminist futures and therefore has the greatest potential for the generation of these futures" (van der Tuin, 2014, p. 69). Briefly, sexual

differing unfolds the generative potency of the matter, renders it capable of giving birth, forming and transforming the entire reality. Hence its vital importance as core category of feminist thinking.

As immanent and self-reflective dynamism, sexual-ontological difference must contain a negative or indeterminate instance able to become re-determined by new figures. Thus, the double function of the difference: negative and positive, destructive and creative, separative and unitive, and in any case properly dialectical and medial. Accordingly, Elizabeth Grosz explains that “the ontological status of sexual difference implies a fundamental indeterminacy such that it must explain its openness, its incompleteness, and its possibilities of being completed, supplemented, by a (later) reordering” (1995, p. 80). Becoming real, the negative and indeterminate instance of difference keeps replacing its energy as inexhaustible source of new determinations, in such a way that sexual identity remains open to an always unpredictable future.

Given its immanent dialectics, sexual difference is reciprocally immediate and mediate, material and non-material, essential and apparent, universal and singular. I will briefly refer to that constitutive tension. First of all, sexual difference is an immediate position: an irreducible fact presupposed to all other determination. However, the given immediacy of sex only exists in its reflective and negative differing, which implicates multiple, heterogeneous and complex unfolding. Therefore, the immediate factum of sexual difference results reciprocally mediated and integrated into the dynamic synthesis of multiple elements as different as genes, neurons, hormones, language, political relationships, symbols, desires, choices, etc. That self-reflective dynamism never stops and involves human sexuality in a continuous differing, both separating and reunifying the heterogeneous elements of material identities.

Secondly, sexual difference is dialectically material, and therefore also non-material, negative and always other than itself. On the one hand, it exists – Braidotti asserts – “encrypted in the flesh, like a primordial memory, a genetic-data bank that pre-dates entry into linguistic representation” (Braidotti, 2002, 46). On the other hand, it produces the whole cultural, spiritual and symbolic world in which it is reflected as living dynamism, both material and non-material. Just as matter is sexed, so it must be the

culture in which it is inscribed, so that nature and culture, body and mind express the reciprocal, plastic and continual dynamism of the matter.

In third place, sexual difference is itself an essential determination, this not meaning the dualistic dispute essentialism vs. anti-essentialism, or the reification of an eternal and transcendent essence. Following Catherine Malabou, I will argue that “the accusation of ‘essentialism’ only means something at the price of a total philosophical ignorance of the meaning of the word ‘essence’” (2011, p. 136). For the purpose of avoiding paying that price, Malabou resorts to the Hegelian concept of essence as determinate negation, concrete and creative. In accordance with that concept, the essence of the sexual difference would consist in the generative potency of the negative capable of redoubling the identity into a new being. Such an essence is energy – not substantial form –, active virtuality – not perfect act –, and therefore Malabou calls it the instance of “transformability of beings” (Malabou, 2011, 136).

Lastly, sexual difference involves a certain universal consistency, particularly situated in the time, space and concreteness of each singular individual. That universality does not appoint a quantitative generalization, or the common features of a set, or a general representation for many individuals, because all that belongs to the representative domain of substantialist metaphysics, whereas concrete universality belongs to dialectical and self-differing realities. Sexual difference is universal to the extent that its dialectical dynamism keeps the tension between the same and the other, the indeterminate and determined, the common and particular. In that respect, becoming woman is universal as well as particular, both in the immanence of a self-differing process where the former tends to the communion, sorority and solidarity with a common history, while the latter multiplies and diversifies the richness of any singular individual. The particular becoming of each singular woman continues and disrupts, embodies and deterritorializes at once an unpredictable history, so personal as collective.

Briefly, when sexual difference is conceived in and by itself as ontological radical dynamism, then it is able to unfold the immanent potential of female identity, reestablished into her material energy. Therefore, becoming-woman seems to be the universal way of being, nascent from that material energy which generates and nourishes everything.

5. Female Identity as self-differing and conceptive Becoming

The sexual difference that determines female identity does not depend on relative and complementary oppositions to male identity – final measure of everything – but on itself, measured by its active and creative potency and capability of a radical otherness, that which has become the formula of ontological sexualization. In fact, female capacity for negating her simple identity and conceiving an absolute otherness in the material immanence of herself constitutes the formula of the ontological difference thought as “non-All,” i.e., as self-differing dynamisms of all. That is the reason why in the new speculative scene, female identity emerges as cipher of the real in the following terms: “a woman is the process of this not-being that is constitutive of the whole being of the One” (Badiou, 2017, pp. 94-95); “the ontological failure which opens up the space for subjectivity” (Žižek, 2017, p. 147). Therefore, the contemporary formula of reality seems to have been redefined in the terms of female sexuality, and in virtue of her potency of becoming (m)othering.

Ontologically conceived, female identity embodies the radical dynamism of the real, self-differentiated by the double reflection of the negative: destructive and recreative. The essence of such an identity consists in a negative potency committed to the autopoietic becoming real. When Žižek asserts that “man and woman are not located on the same ontological level, they are not two species of the same genus. The primordial couple is rather that of woman and void (or death: *das Mädchen und der Tod*)” (2016, p. 11), he is actually placing the primordial in a redoubling movement of self-differing, also contemporarily called mediation and repetition. Not only for Žižek but also for a long tradition *Mädchen* links to *Tod*: chaos, night, abyss, negation, *Ungrund*, womb of birth and death. In a similar way, the “minimal concept for women” (Malabou, 2011, p. 93) supported by Malabou resorts to the negative as decisive determination. Of course, it is not about the formal nothingness as dualistically opposed to perfect being, as if *Mädchen* and *Tod* were two abstract substances, but about a reflective, determinate and double negation, creative of being-woman.

The female’s conception posits herself and the other, or better, posits herself becoming other because for her *esse est concipi*, giving birth and keeping always *in statu nascendi*. That redoubling energy emerges from feminist thinking as a pattern of both a new ontology and a new woman. When

becoming woman is measured by her own differing – instead of being measured by cultural stereotypes or queer counter-stereotypes –, that releases multiple desires, possibilities, decisions, sexualities, fecund relationships, etc. in continuous flowing. The subject of such freedom is material, virtual, negative, always non-all, and hence ever open to new movements. Authors like Luce Irigaray, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz or Christine Battersby, among several others, are engaged with the work of releasing female identity following the logic of her immanent differing. They all agree with a material, dynamic and dialectical feminist ontology, based on a kind of identity that escapes from clear and distinct representations in order to assume the patience of the negative and obscure.

In that sense, Luce Irigaray describes female reality as an essential “fluidity” (Irigaray, 1985, pp. 106 ss.; Stephens, 2014), which resignifies in positive terms that ancient phallogocentric analogy between feminine fluids and pollutant impurities. Fluid identities perform the difference, incorporate its dynamic virtuality, solve its tensions and subsist in its repetition. Irigaray’s fluidity expresses the measure of an identity in permanent metamorphosis, which is never solidly equal, but always dialectically “other in herself” (Irigaray, 1985, p. 28). Therefore “woman always remains several” (Irigaray, 1985, p. 31), neither one compact substance nor two separate things. She rather becomes tripled, because the subject of such a difference is always tri – synthesis, mediation, center, reciprocity –, never just simply one or separately two.

Rosi Braidotti, in turn, pursues a “nomadic” feminist theory (Braidotti, 1994, 1996), based on the immanent and material virtuality of non-unitary subjects, in continual self-differing. In her thought, difference means potency, dynamism, active virtuality that unfolds the intensive content of reality. Nomadic identities exist in permanent transpositions and metamorphosis, always capable of multiple flows and intensities. Braidotti’s nomadism is essentially feminist to the extent that it is supported by a material/maternal energy continuously generating. For her, “the material/maternal” is not just “the instance that expresses the specificity of female sexuality” (2002, p. 23), but also the instance of the whole reality, which keeps conceiving, containing and nurturing everything.

Accordingly, the “volatile bodies” (1994) of Elizabeth Grosz advocate for a corporeal female identity intercepted by physical, biological, psychic, cultural and symbolic energies. She thinks the corporeal in continuity and reciprocity with non-corporeal reality, by virtue of a sort of ideal-matter or extra-matter that exceeds its own materiality in order to produce the symbolic world (2017). Matter differs itself, and in that respect sexual difference plays an essential role as vital and material differing, radically constitutive of the real (2011). Through sexual differing, female identity releases “strange carnalities” (Grosz and Probyn, 1995) rid of phallogocentric stereotypes, and generates “sexual subversions” (1981) capable of exploring new ways of being and enjoying, always provisional and precarious.

At last, the “mobile” and “relational” identities of Christine Battersby follow the pattern of “a body that is capable of generating a new body from within its “own” flesh and from within the horizons of its “own” space-time” (1998, p. 6), that is, the pattern of a redoubling materiality. According to Battersby, the female body substitutes the substantial and abstract identity of classic metaphysics – traced from a body unable to give birth – by the self-differing and dynamic identity of a new “fleshy” ontology of feminism. Catherine Malabou also appoints this dialectical creation under the concepts of “epigenesis” and “plasticity” as trans-differing and mediating dynamism. A material subject who can give birth to herself and the other expresses an essential way of being, living, and thinking based on the concepts of immanence, reciprocity and vital fecundity as ontological determinations.

Briefly, the feminist ontology above described tried to restore female identity in her immanent self-differing dynamism, insofar as it attempts to restore reality into female conception and birthing. Re-ontologizing sexual difference and re-sexualizing realism, conceiving and naming the real as feminine and the feminine as real, such is the double movement of a feminist ontology.

6. To conclude: Re-sexualizing Culture

Along the history of phallogocentric philosophy, sexual difference was rigidly separated in two opposite poles: active and passive, formal and material, master and bondmaid. Hence men became the One, and women became the others erased from history and culture. Such hegemonic pattern was traced

from masculine identity as allegedly solid, rational, and luminous, incapable of giving birth, but indeed capable of rejecting the other into the margins of existence. Then pure thinking was abstractly addressed to transcendent, immaterial and perfect substances, although unfortunately fallen into the corrupt material world in which living beings are born. The new soft-edition of phallogocentric dominance replays the devaluation of female-heterosexist identity under the undecidable dissemination of queerness, in which all sexes, sexualities, genders and transgenders are totally cultural constructions.

In such a context, the feminist question of philosophy begins wondering “what happens if we model personal and individual identity in terms of the female” (Battersby, 1998, p. 2). And what happens then is a new pattern of philosophy engaged with thinking sexual difference in and by itself, outside of essentialisms and nominalisms. The incorporation of feminine identity into philosophical reflection reciprocally transforms both female identity and ontological conception. Regarding female identity, ontological differing releases its immanent and creative virtuality beyond genders or counter-genders stereotypes. Regarding ontology, feminine identity recovers the ma(t)erial place of origin and the nascent condition of being.

A new feminist realism is not a mere abstract issue, but a living work, individual as well as collective, that turns feminism into the infinite project of sexualizing culture, nature, being. Of course, a sexualized culture does not mean a world divided into two opposite sexes – just as patriarchy built it – or neutralized in multiple undecidable *queer* performers – as trans/post-feminism does it. Sexualizing culture, nature, being means to reconnect them with the material/maternal womb of life, the only source of energy, freedom and sense. A sexualized culture is disposed in immediate connection with the mat(t)erial meaning of existing, and so it is able to liberate its virtual flows, interweave threads of essential reciprocity, cultivate the otherness, nourish and expand living energies. A sexualizing culture is that capable of fecund contacts and fruitful births, not because it contemplates transcendent ideas, but because it actualizes its self-differing identity in always new senses and values.

Precisely in that feminist conception of reality – radically immanent, mat(t)erial and nascent – resides the pattern of a new culture, that I would rather imagine as the original becoming-woman, child, universe and divinity of everything.

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CAN GENDERED CREATIVITY IN THE VISUAL ARTS BE POLITICALLY SUBVERSIVE?

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Abstract

“The embodied structure of the subject is (...) a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic and the material social conditions.”

Rosi Braidotti, “Between the No Longer and the Not Yet: Nomadic Variations on the Body” (2000)

In the context of feminist criticism’s commitment to a revision of hegemonic readings of gender and sexuality in literature and the arts, Braidotti challenges current scholars to investigate the body as a fluid space of intersection between the biological and the cultural realms in order to reimagine its gendered and sexual potentialities. Since embodied subjectivity derives from and shapes the imaginary configurations of bodies in the artistic realms, I aim to investigate how these dynamics may constitute a political site of empowerment for women in a (still) patriarchal society.

Focusing on the production of some 20th century and contemporary U.S. (or U.S.-based) women artists, I will examine how they strive to give visibility to female sexuality, both in its morphological and phenomenological singularities, often in dialogue with mythic and/or mass media discourses. I will consider works by Imogen Cunningham (1883-1976), Georgia O’Keeffe (1887-1986), Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), Judy Chicago (1939-), Carolee Schneemann (1939-), Ana Mendieta (1948-1985), Cindy Sherman (1954-), Janine Antoni (1964-), and Vanessa Beecroft (1969), in several mediums, including painting, photography, sculpture, installation, and performance.

Keywords

Embodiment, Feminism of difference, Sexuality, Women artists

Since its inception that feminist philosophy has been marked by political urgency, exemplified by the *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* (1791), that cost the life of Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793), executed during the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution, and by *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), where Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) offers some “Reflections on the Moral Improvement That a Revolution in Female Manners Might Naturally Be Expected to Produce,” to quote part of the title of her last chapter. Throughout the 20th century, from the suffragist movement to the explosion of feminist thought in the early 1970s, feminists continue to appeal to action, be it based on a reconsideration of the literary canon, as proposed by Adrienne Rich (1929-2012), in the classic “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision” (1972), or, since “The Personal is Political,” to quote the title of Carol Hanisch’s essay from 1970, centered on more prosaic matters still relevant nowadays, such as the equitable division of domestic chores and shared parenting, advocated by the sociologist Judith Lorber in *Paradoxes of Gender* (1994).

Furthermore, feminists claim the need to give visibility to women’s material and symbolic contributions and point out the importance of striving for self-representation, in a still patriarchal context that tends to reify female subjects submitting them to the logic of late capitalism’s exchange systems, as advertising so well illustrates (Williamson). If we take the body as an “empirical-transcendental structure” (Braidotti 117) constituted by flesh (a fluid materiality simultaneously shaped by concrete factors and by the symbolic dimension) and made by desire (the play of pre-discursive forces that escape and condition rationality), the centrality of embodiment in the feminist political project becomes evident. Indeed, each living subject is endowed with a body, a situated field of interactions that overlaps the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological dimensions and is in constant flow, determined but not closed by a series of ever-changing variables that came to be conceptualized as intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989.

Thus in the contemporary feminism of difference the nomadic subject, as posited by Braidotti (rereading Deleuze and Guattari), adopts a “transgressive identity whose transitory nature [allows] connections” (42) in a fluid network of coalitions, which enables us all, feminist thinkers and actors, to engage in the weaving of a counter-memory, as a mode of “resisting

assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self” (60). “Your Body is [indeed] a Battleground” – to quote the motto used in the silkscreen that the visual artist Barbara Kruger made for the Women’s March on Washington, in 1989, at the height of “Reaganomics” and its moral conservatism. Kruger divides a woman’s face with a vertical line that delineates an area of shadow (the negative of analogic photography) and points towards those more obscure dynamics that contribute to shape our choices, in this case, the possibility of having a legal abortion.¹

My reflection will engage with the work of seven women artists – Georgia O’Keeffe, Imogen Cunningham, Carolee Schneemann, Ana Mendieta, Judy Chicago, Louise Bourgeois, and Janine Antoni – to consider their figurations of female embodiment and the ways they subvert hegemonic representations by giving visibility to female morphology/desire and also by denouncing the structural elision/reification of the female body² by/in the patriarchal context.

I will start by considering how early 20th century artists played around the female invisible sexual morphology, giving it a visual representation, though they may not have acknowledged it themselves. In fact, Georgia O’Keeffe (1887-1986) struggled to deny the gendered appropriation of her work by Stieglitz’ (1864-1946) circle, namely their insistent claim that she represented pure womanhood (Barson 12). In 1919, the photographer and gallerist who first showed her work without her consent and who would become her lover and later marry her, wrote the essay “Woman in Art,” where he argued “The Woman receives the World through her Womb. That is her deepest feeling. Mind comes second.” (quoted in Barson 12). Resisting this essentialization, throughout the 1920s O’Keeffe deliberately adopted the male style of Precisionism to depict New York’s skyscrapers, the icons of technological progress, in paintings such as *The Radiator Building – Night New York* (1927), where she still “incorporate[s] a play (...) between the straight lines of the architectural forms and the ethereal smoke, which is reminiscent of the folds of flowers” (The Art Story). In later paintings, such as *From the Faraway, Nearby* (1937), done when she had started to spend

¹ Caldwell contextualizes the production of this iconic image and provides several interesting links, including one for the interview Kruger gave to W. J. T. Mitchell in 1991.

² For an overview of feminist perspectives on the body, see Lennon, 2014.

longer and longer periods in New Mexico, the artist seems to eschew realist conventions and to adopt a surrealist approach, merging figure and background and juxtaposing bleached animal skulls to the desert landscape, which may be read as “allegories of nationhood and identity,” in the context of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl (Barson 14). In her later phase, she adopts an abstract approach to landscape, evident in the painting *From the River – Pale* (1959), where topography acquires a quasi-organic quality and the water channels look like veins.

In this process of active resistance, O’Keeffe tried to distance herself from her initial synaesthetic experiments, inspired by the paintings of Arthur Wesley Dow (1857-1922), who in turn echoed Wassily Kandinsky’s (1866-1944) theosophical vision, presented in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911). In some of her early oil paintings entitled *Music, Pink and Blue No. 1, No. 2* (1918), the artist seems to explore what we would today call “negative space,” pointing towards an invisible dimension that seems to be unrepresentable. In a feminist reading, I would interpret the pink circular lines as vaginal lips, topped by a series of clitorises in No. 2, which would lead us to consider these images as possible representations of female orgasm(s). O’Keeffe’s gigantic flowers could similarly be read as the deliberate effort to render female anatomy visible and to represent female desire (Chave), subverting the typical womanish still lives populated with well-behaved flowers.

Actually the photographic technique of the close-up also shaped Imogen Cunningham’s (1883-1976) visual language, particularly her rendering of blown-up flowers (see for instance *Two Callas*, 1929), which defamiliarizes representation, inaugurating the new vision that Modernism sought. This is precisely what O’Keeffe evokes when striving to avoid erotic readings of her works: “Nobody really sees a flower – really – it is so small – we haven’t time – and to see takes time... So I said to myself – I’ll paint what I see – what the flower is to me but I’ll paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it” (The Art Story). Nonetheless, we may grasp much more than just the pure, disembodied vision that the artist purports to follow, in part resisting the fact that not only herself but her art were introduced “in sexual terms from the first (...) not directly through her own work but through [Stieglitz’s] many sensual photographs of her, where her paintings sometimes served as hazy backdrops to her voluptuous, nude or

lightly clothed body” (Chave 359).

In the light of these considerations it is extremely interesting to examine a portrait Cunningham made of Stieglitz in front of one of his wife’s paintings. Entitled *Alfred Stieglitz, Photographer* (1934), the picture shows an aged man looking sideways at the camera and standing up close to what seems to be O’Keeffe’s *Black Iris* (1926), which, in contrast with some other flower depictions that combine vaginal and phallic imagery (such as *Jack-in-the-Pulpit* No. 2 and No. IV, for instance), presents a series of leaves (or vaginal lips) that open into darkness, pointing towards the mysterious interstices that differentiate female anatomy. Stieglitz’s head seems to come right out of that space, inverting the symbolic relationship of appropriation that he had been developing with O’Keeffe through the repeated series of portraits of her body. This reading is reinforced by the fact that one of the traits of Cunningham’s language is its humorous subversion and its visual puns, evident, for instance, in some of her depictions of plants, such as *Araujia Seed Pod* (1956), with its clearly vaginal connotations.

Carolee Schneemann (1939-) took this a step further and dared to conceptualize the vagina as a source of knowledge, the internal equivalent of the serpent, the Ouroborus, the mystic symbol of the eternal return in the dynamics of life and death. In her site, the artist describes the iconic performance *Interior Scroll* (1975) in the following words:

I thought of the vagina in many ways – physically, conceptually: as a sculptural form, an architectural referent, the sources [sic] of sacred knowledge, ecstasy, birth passage, transformation. I saw the vagina as a translucent chamber of which the serpent was an outward model: enlivened by it’s [sic] passage from the visible to the invisible, a spiraled coil ringed with the shape of desire and generative mysteries, attributes of both female and male sexual power. This source of interior knowledge would be symbolized as the primary index unifying spirit and flesh in Goddess worship.

This performance was staged at the “Women Here and Now” conference in East Hampton, Long Island, where Schneemann covered herself with mud, stepped on a table where she assumed postures of nude female models, read from her book *Cézanne, She Was a Great Painter*, and finally extracted a long spiral of paper from her vagina and also read from it (Smith). Honored

as a sacred vessel, the female anatomy clearly spoke to the audience and was empowered as the source of all texts, the root of knowledge and desire that made the manifestation of materiality possible.

Reclaiming “the power of the naked body,”³ Schneemann had been pushing the boundaries of public morality for a while, emphasizing the expression of female sexuality since her early body work such as *Meat Joy* (1964), a Dionysian-inspired ritual where nude women and men danced and rubbed each other with paint, raw chicken and fish. One year later, she released the video *Fuses*, a depiction of an erotic encounter between her partner and herself that articulates desire from a female point of view, aiming to counter the dominant pornographic images of sexuality (Ballantyne-Way). The film was manipulated, burnt and painted over, and the close-ups of the intertwined bodies, watched by Kitch, her cat, were intersected with shots of ocean waves and natural elements, but it still caused outrage at its screening in art galleries and festivals.

The Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) also employs her body as an artistic tool, using her individual experience as a political refugee to symbolize exile as a discursive position that disrupts the notions of origins and destination (Blocker 91). Challenging “the monumental gestures of male land artists such as Robert Smithson and Walter de Maria,” known by interventions such as *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, and *The Lightening Field*, 1977, respectively, Mendieta’s *Siluetas* series highlights “the human scale in relation to the landscape,” and inscribes her presence/absence in several natural sceneries, leaving a trace of the primeval female body (Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden).

As an art student at the University of Iowa, Mendieta had already started to develop a highly politicized work, commenting on the sexualized morphology through a series of self portraits that mix typical male and female traits (see, for example, the series *Untitled (Facial Hair Transplants)*, from 1972) and also through a performance protesting the rape and murder of her fellow student Sara Ann Ottens. Tied to a table with her legs and her buttocks exposed and smeared with blood, Mendieta stayed immobile for

³ In the interview to BOMB magazine, the artist claimed to be “interested in sensuous pleasure and the power of the naked body as an active image rather than the same old, pacified, immobilized, historicized body. So for me, to activate and determine the energy of my naked body as imagery was to disrupt all the traditions I had learned.”

over an hour, while the students and professors that had been invited to her apartment, unaware of her intentions, had the opportunity to process the horror of that crime, an example of performance's cathartic involvement with the audience (The Art Story). Later on, asserting her diasporic and transcultural identity (Blocker 94), Mendieta appropriates rituals from several indigenous cultures of America, Africa, and Europe, and uses her body as a template to engrave the female body on the land. This is done by leaving blood traces on a white sheet (in a parodic subversion of the Turin Shroud, allegedly used to wrap the body of Jesus after the crucifixion) that is laid in what (due to the camera's angle) looks like an open tomb, probably being a stone niche, whose basis is adorned with a plant disposed in a semi-circle. More unusual in the *Siluetas* series is the actual presence of the artist's body, lying in an earth grave and partially covered with white flowers in what can be read as a comment about the symbolic continuity between the female body and the natural world. A sequence of photographs from the same series shows the imprints of the artist's body being washed away by succeeding waves, which highlights our physical impermanence and also points towards the erasure of the female body from public memory, for instance.

The need to rewrite history from a female perspective had already been expressed by Virginia Woolf in the fictional essay *A Room of One's Own* (57), and this is precisely the theme of Judy Chicago's (1939-) monumental installation *The Dinner Party* (1979), now in permanent exhibition in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, at the Brooklyn Museum. The artist's site says that the work "consists of a series of *Entryway Banners*, the ceremonial table representing 39 important historical female figures, the *Heritage Panels* [visual maps that rewrite history from a woman's perspective and] elucidate the contributions of the 999 women [listed] on the *Heritage Floor*, and the *Acknowledgement Panels* that identify Judy Chicago's assistants and collaborators." In fact, though Chicago planned and designed the ceramics and the embroideries, she worked five years with a team of women specialized in different crafts that "rendered [the vulvar and butterfly motives] in styles appropriate to the individual women being honored" (Brooklyn Museum).

The artist had previously been involved in collaborative work, together with Miriam Shapiro, with whom she co-founded the California Institute of the Arts Feminist Art Program, and several of their students, in

the *Womanhouse* project (1972). In her autobiography, published in 1975, and entitled *Through the Flower* as the non-profit feminist art organization that Chicago would found three years later, the artist describes their joint effort to repair an old mansion in Los Angeles, talking about the perseverance required by such a large-scale project that made all twenty-three women go beyond their limits and reach their full potential, despite internalized fears of failure and tensions resulting from the lack of confidence in female authority figures (103-132). Open from January 30 to February 28, 1972 and attracting more than nine thousand visitors, the “house became a total environment, a repository of female experience and womanly dreams” (Chicago, *Through the Flower* 113), allowing the women artists involved to explore and heal their anger at being reified by the male economy of desire and at being closeted in the domestic space, performing invisible, repetitive chores that served the family. The collective created several installations in the house and in the garden and they also developed five performances. To illustrate the topic of compulsory domesticity, I would like to highlight the “Maintenance” piece, where a woman irons a long sheet or washes the floor, and the installation *Linen Closet*, by Sandy Orgel, that posits a plastic female mannequin emerging out of the shelves that cut through her body horizontally.

Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), undoubtedly one of the major 20th century artists, also commented on the fact that the female body tended to be reified in the domestic space and developed a series entitled *Femme-Maison*, which started in the late 1940s with drawings and paintings and was developed throughout several decades. One of these drawings (1947) sketches the outlines of a female naked body whose upper torso and head are replaced by a house; it is worth mentioning that this image was later used as the cover of Lucy Lippard’s *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women’s Art* (1976) and became for a while the emblem of the women’s movement. In her usual tone of false naiveté, Bourgeois accentuates the female figure’s harmonious symbiosis with its universe and then adds, “There is a sexual loneliness. She is dignified, but she is alone... [...] The little hand is trying to call for help. She is not sexual at all. Her head does not know that she is naked. She has no hair or bosom... they are occupied by work” (MoMA). Once again the woman’s vitality is solely devoted to domestic tasks and, devoid of desire, her body is

inscribed in the architectonic structure and obliterated by it, as some other drawings from the same series illustrate (1945-1947), recurring to a similar strategy of substituting the head, index of identity, for a one-dimensional house from which a non-figurative stain escapes, which may be interpreted in surrealist terms as the female figure's frustrated aspirations.

Bourgeois will make a number of sculptural variations on this topic, including the one using the infamous Barbie doll (1982) that still inspires feminist outrage for perpetuating damaging beauty standards and presenting a passive and consumerist role model for girls (Valenti). The artist repeats the same visual jest, this time extending the clay tower that covers the figure's body almost to the knees, leaving a cloud of blond hair out, equivalent to the previous color blots coming out of the women's heads to signify their thwarted ambitions. In 1994, the rendition is made with white marble and the woman is lying down with her knees up, a position that accentuates her belly and breasts and raises some ambiguity about her being pregnant. In the place of her head, a gigantic monolithic house rises vertically with a little opening for a door underneath that suggests penetrability. Once again the nudity heightens the figure's vulnerability, and "the traditional domain and supposed haven of women is made a suffocating confinement, more a prison than a source of familial contentment" (Posner 31).

I still want to analyze another work from this series, made in the artist's final phase, where she privileges fabric as a sculptural material and uses what looks like a museum case to present biomorphic sculptures that tend to be quite ambiguous. This piece from 2001 reduces the female figure to a truncated torso marked by protuberances signaling out-of-place breasts; the body looks like a plateau in the center of which a tiny house stands. The device of the showcase frames this body in almost scientific terms, like a curiosity in an institutional collection, which confers upon it a general quality, as if illustrating the factual circumstances of a woman's life. Besides, though the female body is larger than the building, it is reduced to an amalgam of bodily parts and it serves as the container of the house that stands perfectly geometrical on top of this dissembled being.

To end this section about the equivalence of the female body to domestic architecture, I want to take a look at *Inhabit* (2009), a performance-installation by the contemporary visual artist Janine Antoni (1964-). In 2011, at a

conference organized by the Guggenheim, Antoni refers to the creative process behind this particular work and points out two sources of inspiration for it: on the one hand, religious iconography, namely the representations of Our Lady of Mercy holding space for the congregation within her open mantle; on the other hand, Louise Bourgeois' *Cells*, a series of large installations "constructed from either abandoned doors, or (...) from wire mesh" that point towards imprisonment and voyeurism (Askew 32). One could add to this list of inspirational works the sculptural variations that Bourgeois did on spiders, in particular the gigantic *Maman* (1999) installed in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern, London, in 2000. This work assimilates the body of the mother to that of a spider, a simile that the younger artist would later recreate in her daughter's bedroom. Alluding to the fact that a mother generates and gives body to her offspring, Antoni also underlines the structural continuity between the woman's body and the material components of the house, suspending herself from the ceiling and tying to the furniture the prosthesis that covers her torso. This idea is reinforced by the dollhouse that goes from her waist to the middle of her legs, a little below the knees, as if it were a sort of skirt – the body of the mother is a playground for the children and the family in general, one could deduce.

In conclusion, I believe that the works of the seven artists here considered provide an example of feminist politics in the aesthetic realm, offering a countergenealogy that paves the way for the emergence of a new symbolic system. Recognizing and valuing the sexual specificity of female desire and giving visibility to a matrilineal thread that empowers women as historic agents (vide Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*), these artists confer centrality to the representation of the body, be it through metaphorical configurations, such as in O'Keeffe's and Cunningham's flowers, or through the allusion to the archetype of the female Goddess, present in the work of Mendieta and Schneemann, whose performances conflate their bodily presence with prototypical images. Additionally, these women artists also protest against the reification of female subjectivity, and seek to problematize the equivalence between womanhood and the domestic space, for instance in the collective project *Womanhouse*, in Bourgeois' *Femme Maison* series, and in Antoni's *Inhabit*. Many other artists could have been cited, in particular Cindy Sherman (1954-) and Vanessa Beecroft (1969-), whose parodic quotation

of mediatized images of femininity show that gender is a cultural script that can be playfully reenacted in many different configurations (as Judith Butler has shown in the classic *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1990), but I assume that the examples provided have helped to answer positively the question that titles my essay. Yes, gendered creativity is politically subversive because it creates discursive practices that sustain different imaginary identities, which fulfil not only a cultural but also an ontological function (Braidotti 103), allowing women to experiment more liberating practices of embodiment. Indeed, “imaginary forms are constitutive of our experience of the world, bearers of affective significance, the means by which we not only think but feel our way around that world” (Lennon, “Imaginary Bodies” 111). Thus, in the ongoing differentiating process of dreaming and building together a world that enables the flourishing of singularities (Mercedes), it is crucial to engage in the creation and circulation of expansive imaginary bodies.

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BIOCRIMINALITY AND THE BORDERS OF PUBLIC ORDER¹

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Abstract

In this presentation, I aim at exploring the notion of *public order* from a biopolitical point of view. It draws on the analysis of the *state of exception* by Giorgio Agamben, through which he studied the tendency of Western democracies to re-produce forms of sovereign power that bypass parliamentary democratic control. Departing from his analysis, I will argue that *public order* is one of the main forms through which these forms of sovereign power disseminate in a microphysical form, in almost every instance of the judicial system. Moreover, in a similar vein that the state of exception represents, for Agamben, a crucial dimension of the relation between the order of life and the order of the law, public order represents, in my view, a fundamental dispositive through which biopower regulates the social life of gender, sexuality, reproduction and kinship.

Keywords

Public Order, Homonationalism, Biopolitics, Monogamy, Friendship.

Introduction

Since its irruption in European civil codes during the XIX century, the notion of public became an essential part of state biopolitics of reproduction, gender and kinship. Its common uses in the hands of governments, but also jurors and other public officers entail the exercise of specific forms of

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sovereign power, often surpassing the limits of any meaningful separation of powers in Western liberal democracies. In this sense, while partly overlapping with the logics of exceptionality explored by Giorgio Agamben (2005), public order became the legal *dispositif* (Foucault, 1975, 133) through which sovereign power and the logics of exceptionality disseminate in a micro-physical form, in almost every instance of the administrative and judicial structure of the nation state.

However, where refugee and other camps stand as paradigmatic heterotopias for the state of exception, the genealogy of public order bounds this *dispositif* to the liberal institution of civil marriage. The order of public order is thus, in the first place, that of the monogamous, heterosexual, reproductive couple. This does not isolate, nonetheless, public order from the biopolitical definition of borders, margins, and constitutive outsides of the community or of the nation. On the contrary, the irruption of public order in modern law as a tool for the normalization of marriage served, from its inception, to put the performative power of the state at the service of defending the community from alien, decaying, immoral relational practices. The biopolitics of public order are, therefore, closely bound to the history of Western racism and to the anti-migratory policies of the fortress Europe, to which they belong as one of its most vague and inapprehensible, but still ubiquitous and naturalized, constitutive elements.

Through the biopolitics of public order, queer reproductive projects, non-monogamous migrants, transgender bodies, and other “biocriminals” are subjected to moral and legal scrutiny. However, in the same way migratory fluxes may be subjected to state and also transnational forms of neglect and violence, but not stopped, so are dissident genders and relational practices exposed to a differential distribution of vulnerability (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, 2) through institutional hostility and plain criminalization, but not erased form in the cultural and political landscape. Usually, we are more or less familiarized with the geopolitical causes leading to the succession of the misleadingly called migratory “crisis.” In a similar way, we may ask, what is this impulse rendering it impossible, at the end, for state institutions to contain the flux of emerging forms of relationality? What is the topographical structure of that encounter or, rather, what kind of cartographies emerge from it? Moreover, how are we to conceive this failure of the

state in containing queer, racialized, biocriminal bodies in the strict margins of recognition the state offers? Should we “open the borders” of liberal state institutions regarding state control over kinship, gender and reproduction, or should we, on the contrary, refuse altogether the terms of recognition offered by the state? How can we best resist the order of public order?

In order to approach some of the questions raised by the encounter between biopower and resistance, or even the clash between assimilationist and radical sexual politics, it may turn useful to explore the genealogical relations between the biopolitics of public order and the racist, exclusionary construction of Western nation states. In a similar manner to the way Jasbir Puar did in *Terrorist Assemblages* (Puar, 2007), I will also depart from Agamben’s criticism of the logics of exceptionalism, with the aim of exposing some of its parallelisms, and differences, with the biopolitics of public order as such. Then, I will also address the relation of contiguity or, rather, of historical overlapping, between the biopolitics of public order and the homonationalist frame. Finally, and in order to avoid the depiction of the resulting biopolitical scenario as equivalent to that of the penal colony (Foucault, 1975) or the totalitarian camp (Agamben, 2005) I will also explore the counter-biopolitical role played by the force of disestablishment (Duggan, 1994) and the works of that form of biocriminality that Michel Foucault referred to as friendship.

Abyssal cartographies

At the end of one of the most influent discussions of biopower Foucault offered in his lectures at the College de France, he introduced a compelling analysis of the relation between biopolitics and racism. If biopower is a governmental rationality substituting the sovereign right to kill by state management of life, of populations considered primarily as an assemble of living beings, then how do modern nation states justify, Foucault asks, their “need to kill people, to kill populations, and to kill civilizations?” (Foucault, 2003, 257) For Foucault, this *necropolitical* side of biopower, as Mbembe would call it, would not reside in a different or a complementary governmental rationality. In his view, the category that makes it possible for the economy of biopower to exercise the right to kill in its own terms is no other than *race*. Racism, Foucault argues, is the strategy through which the other is depicted

as a threat to the wellbeing of the group, the health of the population, or even the survival of the species. Thanks to racism, therefore, the state performs the killing function in the name of life itself. Moreover, according to Foucault, the logics of racism extend its rule, not only over racialized others, but also over those who are depicted as *biocriminals* of different kinds, on the basis of posing a similar threat to the moral strength of the community.

There is a topological problem at play in this biopolitical account of the right to kill. The biocriminal outcast, whatever form it adopts, does not represent an absolute, exterior form of otherness. Because of the eugenic logics at play, the target of racism has an ambivalent relation of belonging to the population whose wellbeing justifies its killing or its political *vanishing*. Certainly, the racialized other or the biocriminal Foucault was thinking about is not a full member or a legitimate citizen of any given population. Its biocriminality serves to define, rather, the margins of the population. When biopower, in this sense, takes hold of that mark of sovereign power that is the right to kill, literal or otherwise, it reveals itself as the power to decide who is to become, as it were, the mark of the margin, the living or, rather, the dying border of the population itself. Foucault's biocriminal, because of this topological operation of power, threatens a population by virtue of belonging and not belonging to it at the same time. In this sense, the biocriminal signals a similarly ambivalent topology to the one Agamben addressed in his influent treatment of the figure of the refugee as a "limit concept" (Agamben, 1998, 134), confusing the boundaries between exclusion and inclusion in that state of exception which is the refugee camp.

In genealogical terms, the biopolitics of public order emerges in close relation with this topological dimension, in relation to the definition of the inside, the outside and the margins of the nation. This is the case, at the very least, since public order was introduced in modern law as a way to discipline the institution of civil marriage, as it had been conceived during the French Revolution. The intimate relationship between monogamy and public order dates, also, from this time, but it has long roots in the rejection of polygamy by French political philosophers and jurists during the 18th century. Montesquieu, for example, depicted both Christian monogamy, for not allowing divorce, and Islamic polygamy, as a major biopolitical problem:

Things are much altered since the Christians and Mohammedan religions divided the Roman world; these two religions have not been nearly so favorable to *the propagation of the species* as that of those masters of the world. (Montesquieu, 2014, 168, my emphasis).

It was under the influence of this tradition that the jurist Jean-Étienne-Marie Portalis wrote his Preliminary Address on the first draft of the Civil Code where the idea of “public order” was introduced for the first time, when he stated that “the legislator can, in the interests of public order establish such impediments [to marriage] as they deem appropriate” (Portalis, 2016, 17). Of course, illicit unions included polygamous ones, and Portalis himself considered polygamy to be “revolting.”² The enforcement of the same *biopolitical* tradition Montesquieu belonged to is made evident when he remarks that “the publicity, the solemnity, of marriages may alone prevent those vague and illicit unions that are so unfavorable to *the propagation of the species*” (Portalis, 2016, 16).

As if to emulate the propagation of the species, the uses of public order propagated, in a chain of performative repetitions, from one civil code to another, way beyond the limits of Europe, from Latin America to Japan (Noriega, 2007; Novoa Monreal, 1976). Meanwhile, however, state regulation of monogamy continued delimiting a diffuse, imaginary boundary between Western countries and Arab world, even though polygamy is in fact a minority practice restricted to certain Islamic countries.

The impact over non-monogamous relational structures is obvious. The fact that, as some would say, “public order is monogamous in the Western world” (Noriega, 2007, 2) exposes polygamous and polyamorous people, but also multiparental families that may be neither,³ to specific forms of vulnerability and state violence, from the denial of widow’s pensions to plain deportation. As a result, the biopolitics of public order define a whole cartography by imposing a monogamous *relational performativity* (A. C. Santos, 2019) *within* the community while limiting its permeability to alien, abject and, ultimately, unintelligible relational practices coming from its outside.

² Indeed, his account of the benefits of raising children between “the two spouses” have little to envy to San Agustín’s elegies to monogamous marriage.

³ Brazil, for example, has recently recognized non-monogamous forms of kinship with no direct relation with polygamy nor polyamory.

In this sense, the biopolitics of public order delimit, as Catarina Martins has shown (2015), what Boaventura de Sousa Santos would call an abyssal line, that is, a division such that:

“The other side of the line” vanishes as reality, becomes inexistent, and is indeed produced as nonexistent. Nonexistent means not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of being. Whatever is produced as nonexistent is radically excluded because it lies beyond the realms of what the accepted conception of inclusion considers to be its other. (Sousa Santos, 2007, 45)

Sousa Santos signals precisely modern law as one of the most accomplished Western forms of abyssal thinking. According to him, distinctions between what is legal and what is not would be abyssal not only because of their dichotomic structure, but also due to the process of geographical territorialization of the law, which would have evolved in close relation to the history of colonialism. Therefore, even when these abyssal lines lack any fixed location, their relation with modern law would nonetheless delineate a whole postcolonial cartography.

Homonationalism and the biopolitics of friendship

Gradually, the protection of a restricted spectrum of gay and lesbian rights has become a part of the biopolitics of public order in many countries. Nowadays, some European countries, as Slovenia has recently done (Čeferin & Meznar, 2014), present the protection against certain forms of homophobia as an issue of public order in explicit terms, in what can be read as an intrinsic part of the emerging biopolitics that Jasbir Puar refers to as *homonationalism*. For her, the historical shift in the relations between the state and at least certain relational rights, including gay and lesbian (monogamous) marriages, would be still entrenched in the exclusionary, Western-centric, and ultimately, racist constitution of the nation state. That is why the homonationalist frame, for Puar, would demand for,

A deep critique of lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses and how those rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to citizenship – cultural

and legal – at the expense of the delimitation and expulsion of other populations. (Puar, 2013, 335)

According to Puar, Israel's strategies of pinkwashing, aimed at promoting an image of gay-friendliness in order to be perceived as progressive, modern and tolerant despite or even through the violation of the rights of the homophobic Palestinian people, would be a paradigmatic example. The works of nationalism would be equally present in Europe and the US, however, especially in the widespread discourses depicting Islamic refugees as a threat to the security of women or LGBT people. It could be assumed that homonationalism serves as a way of opening the borders to, at least, those who run away from homophobic or transphobic violence, institutional or otherwise. The treatment given in European countries to gay LGBT asylum seekers, however, prove that hypothesis wrong (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017; Vine, 2014). Transgender migrants and asylum seekers, in particular, often find themselves trapped between biopolitical regimes clashing between them, leading to often unbearable situations in relation with legal gender and name recognition or access to hormonal treatments (Namer & Razum, 2018; Rojas & Aguirre, 2013; van der Pijl, Oude Breuil, Swetzer, Drymioti, & Goderie, 2018). The deportations of transgender migrants who happen to be, also, sex-workers (Vartabedian, 2014), make it evident that this emerging, homonationalist layer of the biopolitics of public order benefits only the mobility of very specific groups of queer people.

Despite its inner fragmentations⁴ and its emerging forms, such as the homonationalist frame, the biopolitics of public order is a force of the *status quo*. While it is true that jurors and public officers invoke the powers of public order in often arbitrary ways, re-signifying and producing new meanings for this empty signifier, they do so only to allow for an effective microphysical distribution of sovereign power. The biopolitics of public order are, therefore, a micro-political, disseminating form of the established order, *acting upon a disseminating impulse of an opposite direction* by which individuals and, through them, populations, produce and inhabit new relational possibilities.

⁴ Especially evident in relation with the regulation of the reproductive field.

Foucault provided, also, a very compelling account of this impulse for public disorder. For gay culture to become part of a radical or, at least, an interesting political project, he argued, it would need to turn into an impulse for creating new forms of relationships. In an interview for the gay magazine *Christopher Street*, he provided a quite specific example:

Why shouldn't I adopt a friend who's ten years younger than I am? And even if he's ten years older? Rather than arguing that rights are fundamental and natural to the individual, we should try to imagine and create a new relational right that permits all possible types of relations to exist and not be prevented, blocked, or annulled by impoverished relational institutions. (Foucault, 1994, 158)

By suggesting to use adoption in a totally unprecedented way, one to which the institution was certainly not intended for, Foucault was not just defending the need for inventing new forms of relationality *apart* from the forms of institutional recognition provided by the state. In a way, he certainly was, but he was *also* thinking on how to turn these creative, relational alternatives into a force of institutional transformation. The cultural force that he had in mind was not a new layer, but, on the contrary, a counter-force for the biopolitics of public order, that is, for the way state biopolitics oppose all those "vague and illicit unions" referred by Portalis in his passionate defense of the *marriage* between marriage and public order. The name of the force Foucault was thinking about for opposing the rigidity of the institutions normalizing sexuality and, concomitantly, the racist, Eurocentric frame was no other than *friendship*.

Foucault's discussion of friendship in the above-mentioned interview, but also in others like *Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity* (1994b) and, of course, *Friendship as a Way of Life* (1994), points to something similar and, at the same time, completely different from an anarchist project of producing new forms relationality beyond the normalizing powers of the state. Friendship would be, rather, a way of subverting its normalizing powers, exciting our political imagination toward a radical transformation of liberal state institutions. Demands for the recognition of non-monogamous kinship relationships, queer and third-party assisted reproductive projects or the demands for gender self-determination, would belong, in my view, to

this sphere of relational creativity. In this sense, Foucault's "friendship" is just another name for *queerness*, very close to the way Lisa Duggan uses this word in "Queering the state":

This is not the historical moment when we want to set up a negative relation to state power or slip into limiting forms of libertarianism. The arguments would need to be carefully framed to emphasize that state institutions must be even-handed in the arena of sexuality, not that sexuality should be removed from state action completely. Activists might also make the crucial distinction between state institutions (which must, in some sense, be neutral) and "the public" arena, where explicit advocacy is not only allowable but desirable. (Duggan, 1994, 11)

We would possibly still need to slip, perhaps, into at least some non-limiting forms of libertarianism. The demand of the intersex and transgender movements for the end of the legal life of gender or, at the very least, for the disappearance of legal gender marks from identity documents, would fit quite nicely in that category. In any case, both these claims and what Duggan calls "disestablishment" uses of liberal rhetoric would be ways of resisting the homonationalist layer of the biopolitics of public order. At least if we read the works of friendship as a counter-biopolitical force or, that is, if we understand friendship as an impulse for *public disorder*.

To include friendship, in the latter sense, in radical sexual politics would entail both resisting and taking distance from the logics of exceptionalism and the set of liberal institutions of the state, along with the impoverishing frames of cultural intelligibility they help to consolidate. However, such a counter-biopolitics would also need to consider, in order to be able to shake the moral, legal, political, economic and even religious principles of the nation that courts and jurists often refer to as "public order," to consider all of the above as targets of political transformation.

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ON EMANCIPATION AS A PRACTICE OF DISSENSION

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Abstract

This presentation collects three notes for a critical reflection on emancipation as a practical experimentation of dissension and power. This topic will be addressed from a philosophical and political perspective on gender questions and feminist thought, and setting forth a possible and inspiring dialogue between Jacques Rancière, Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler.

Keywords

Political philosophy, Feminist theory, Hannah Arendt, Jacques Rancière, Judith Butler, Emancipation, Gender

Feminism, regarded as a theory or as a social movement, cannot be critically approached without taking it in its plural and conflicting aspects. Modern theoretical versions and different strategies of political organization reflect a great diversity of means and ends, of categories, geographies, epistemological and ideological models. I would like, therefore, to begin by stating that, as a researcher as well as an activist, my presentation is part of a vaster debate about the relationship between Marxism and Feminism. This is a topic, inside the scope of political theory, that I also address from the perspective of someone committed with a practical life and from my own experience of heterodoxy and of politics as a concerted action.

This presentation collects three notes for a critical reflection on emancipation as a practical experimentation of dissension and power. This topic will be approached from a philosophical and political perspective on Gender Questions and Intersectional Feminism, setting forth a possible and inspiring

dialogue between Hannah Arendt, Jacques Rancière and Judith Butler. This is my main question: how can we think political emancipation as an individual and collective practice of dissension, considering the present context of the humanitarian era of globalized capitalism and the liberal, normative and *pop* assimilation of gender equality?

1. Gender Equality and the persistent perplexities of Human Rights

The present time, despite many other determinations, is being confronted by what I have called¹ “the persistent perplexities of Human Rights.” The aim of my first note is to understand better and to problematize this historical and theoretical background. After World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is certain that the contemporary world does not reflect the peaceful post-historical fate of humanity postulated in the charter of universal and inalienable rights, which would irresistibly match “a democracy on a planetary scale with the global market of liberal economy,” as Jacques Rancière recalls in his essay “Who is the subject of the Rights of Man?”² Indeed, according to the author, the new landscape of humanity, freed from utopian totalitarianism, has become the stage of new outbursts of ethnic conflicts and genocides, often leveraged by religious, racist and xenophobic fundamentalisms, and other manifestations of the *Inhuman*. In this new era, Human Rights are invoked to respond to the needs of populations hunted out of their homes and land, threatened by war or misery; they are “the rights of those who have no rights,” according to Rancière’s definition.³ Human Rights are thus claimed in the form of a new ethical imperative, namely the right to “humanitarian interference,” which ultimately boils down to “the right to invasion.”⁴

¹ Cf. Sofia ROQUE, “Fronteiras da (in)diferença. Notas para Um Estudo sobre os Limites da Política e dos Direitos Humanos,” in *Pensar para o Outro. Desafios Éticos Contemporâneos. Homenagem a Cristina Beckert* (Lisboa: Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa, 2017), pp. 300 – 312.

² Jacques RANCIÈRE, “Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?,” in *South Atlantic Quarterly* Spring/Summer 2004, 103 (2-3), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p. 297.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 298 e 302.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 298.

“Humanitarianism,” considered as the ethical paradigm of the present time, is the result of this process of indifferentiation centered in a “feeling of compassion that ignores the axiological polarity of its object,” as Cristina Beckert so lucidly explained.⁵ Humanitarianism is, in fact, part of that regime based on the innocuity of humanitarian rights which renders its subjects anonymous and, consequently, makes them apolitical beings. In this sense, the humanitarian era is also the time of the erosion of politics; and, according to Rancière, politics is situated in that area of conflict shaped in the very gap between the abstract literalness of Human Rights and the polemics around their verification.⁶ In addition, Human Rights’ apparent political futility is such that, like superfluous or “useless” things, they are offered to the poor and the rightless, along with food and medicines, as an act of charity. Perhaps we should start asking why are some (or so many) people only allowed to “live” rather than “live well.”⁷ In order to answer this question it is necessary to make use of the familiar strangeness that emerges from the words of those who thought about “the decline of the Nation-State and the end of Human Rights”⁸ after the totalitarian experiences of the last century, like Hannah Arendt, as well as from her critical revisitation led by contemporary authors such as Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière.⁹

There is a very interesting debate between these three philosophers on this topic, yet I cannot explore it here due to obvious reasons of space and coherence. Nonetheless, I would like to note here the problematic substance we can read between its lines: the paradoxical character of Human Rights situated in a permanent *aporia*, which has become the basis of the liberal-democratic tradition.

⁵ Cf. Cristina BECKERT, “Do ‘crepúsculo do dever’ à ‘valsa das éticas,” in *Philosophica*, n.º 17/18, Lisboa: Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa, 2001, p. 9.

⁶ RANCIÈRE, “Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?” p. 307.

⁷ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b 24; *Idem*, *Politics*, 1252b 28-31.

⁸ This expression matches the title of the last chapter of Part II of Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), on “Imperialism.”

⁹ See Giorgio AGAMBEN, *Homo Sacer. O Poder Soberano e a Vida Nua*, Transl. António Guerreiro (Lisboa, Editorial Presença, 1998 [1995]); RANCIÈRE, *Op. Cit.*

In her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,¹⁰ Hannah Arendt traces a path that begins in the French Revolution and continues until the middle of the 20th century, demonstrating that Human Rights are anchored in the experience of an inner contradiction: on the one hand, although “inalienable,” Human Rights are mainly evoked to protect the most disadvantaged or underprivileged ones from state power or social insecurity, and, so, these are the rights that must operate in order to promote some balance between the movements of inclusion and exclusion within the sphere of a political organization; on the other hand, even though Human Rights are expected to be materialized by democratic legislation or by revolution, in the realm of civil rights, they are also and simultaneously what remains for those who had to leave behind the territory of their rights, i.e., while they are “universal” and “individual,” Human Rights acquire political validity and reality only when their subjects are either in the condition of belonging to a community, or trapped in situations of separation and deportation.

Following Hannah Arendt’s words, we can conclude that the absence of fundamental rights seems to manifest itself, first and foremost, in the deprivation of a “place” in the world that would make the opinion meaningful and the action effective. In this sense, what is at stake here is the fundamental “right to have rights,” using Arendt’s original expression, and, inseparably, the right to belong to a kind of organized community.¹¹ According to Arendt, if History granted privileges that, in the 18th century, “Man” instituted as natural rights, in the 20th century, “Humanity” itself became the single foundation and guarantee of those rights, which are universally valid for all its members, including those who were expelled from this fundamental community we call “Humanity” – but “it is by no means certain whether this is possible” and, furthermore, until now, “the world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human.”¹² In his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*,¹³ Giorgio Agamben discusses

¹⁰ Cf. Hannah ARENDT, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man,” in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973 [1951]), pp. 267-302.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 297-298.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 298 e 299.

¹³ See also AGAMBEN, “Means without End. Notes on Politics,” in *Theory Out of Bounds*, Vol. 20 (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000 [1993]).

the separation between “the humanitarian and the political,” arguing that bare life, or the human creature considered only in its quality of a living being (the life that in the *Ancien Régime* belonged to God, and, for the ancient Greeks, life as *zoe* was unmistakably distinguished from the ethical and political way of life, *bios*) has now occupied – since Modernity – a central place in the concerns of the State and became its “earthly ground.”¹⁴ So, we can say there is a kind of power paradoxically rooted in the bare life of human beings that is absolute, in the ontological order, as well as void, if we consider the political order instead.

To conclude, the idea of a fundamental “right to have rights,” to come back to Arendt’s expression, seems to make all the perplexities around Human Rights converge into the main question on “what is politics?” and, therefore, on the origin of power. In their critical readings of Arendtian thought, both Rancière and Agamben made their own ways, yet trying to answer the same questions.

The increasing institutionalization of feminist discourse and practices, from a global point of view and considering its geographical and cultural asymmetries (namely, the promotion of constitutional and juridical inscription of rights, the publication of international directives, the investment on education for equality and on public policies to support and protect victims of violence) is being reinforced with the “NGO-zation” of feminism, the crystallization of “gender equality” as a Human Right, and the spread of a deceptive idea about individual and collective self-sufficiency. This process is constituted and mediated through an axiomatic principle that brings silencing instead of letting speak, imposing itself by sublimating all its social, economic, cultural, symbolic and ideological configurations. So, the humanitarian claim for gender equality is based on that fundamental assumption that, firstly and ultimately, women have inalienable dignity and have the right to have rights because, after all, they are “human” beings. However, once again, this sacred quality of “human,” while conferring in-violability on life, does not generate agency or the construction of *de facto* political subjects able to enjoy “equality and distinction,” to borrow Hannah Arendt’s words;¹⁵

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

¹⁵ ARENDT, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), p. 175.

instead, it is much more a condition emptied of body, singularity and power, it is the experience of political subordination, i.e., that of the victim-object of our sympathy.

The process of political sublimation described here is even more complex because it also entails a normative reiteration and a consequent normalization of stereotyped gender identities that shape our bodies, laws and institutions. Moreover, the most mediated or *pop* versions of this phenomenon have ended up uncritically reinforcing identity politics, which in turn ignores or neutralizes the complexity of power relations that express different historical processes of domination, exploitation and violence. At the present time, a radical feminist enunciation of the problems and the models of political organization must not only establish a possibility of communication and concrete experience of liberation, but also reverse the so-called institutional and conservative feminism. Feminist emancipation is not exhausted by the juridical debates, by the statistics on the persistence of gender inequality and violence, or by reality itself. It is related to all that at one time. However, it also means, above all, to question what exists in-between us and cannot be regulated or decreed; it is to realise the urgent aspiration for social change; it is to open and inaugurate, in each one of us, and in our lifetime, an expanded possibility originated by self-determination and solidarity, i.e., throughout an individual and collective encounter. So, in this first note I have talked about power.

2. Feminism, Capitalism and Critique

Since its first appearance, in Kimberle Crenshaw's inspiring article published in 1989,¹⁶ the concept of *intersectionality* and the theoretical field it has opened represent a significant challenge to feminist thought. In short, the theory of intersectionality – if one can speak of a *theory*, as perhaps it is only a powerful heuristic device – holds that each individual or group occupies a specific social role within systems of oppression and discrimination, and that different oppressions are themselves an intersectional field of

¹⁶ See Kimberle CRENSHAW, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," in *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. Available in <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.

experience. Presently, we cannot think about the meaning of emancipation and its conditions of possibility without trying to understand and subvert this intersectional social-order, and critically enquire about the relationship between feminism and the articulated and contradictory totality that is neoliberalism.

Several feminist theorists inside the scope of Materialism have devoted their studies to this topic,¹⁷ incorporating in their analyses the realm of social-reproduction and questioning the power relations that are structurally reinforced in gender and class inequalities, as well as in racism, homophobia, police violence, closed borders policies, and so forth. Philosophers such as Nancy Fraser, Angela Davis, Cinzia Arruzza, among others, seek to restore the emancipatory potential of this political field, proposing a “Feminism for the 99%,”¹⁸ combining different identities, problems and vindications – and the realistic will to transform everything.

In any case, I would like to insist here that returns are never easy because something more than intellectual fashion changed in the 1980s and 1990s. Empirically, neoliberalism and globalization took place; theoretically, post-structuralism happened. And, nowadays, we must face the swirling vortex of social-networks and technology. These changes indicate that the ground on which the questions of capitalism and gender oppression must be enunciated has been also transformed radically. Therefore, it is not enough to try to find new answers to the old debate on the “organizing principle” that links patriarchy and capitalism. We may have to raise another kind of questions and expect completely new answers.

3. Politics, Emancipation and Dissension

Hannah Arendt proposes to understand politics as the desire for involuntary disclosure, the venture of action between peers and the beginning of something new. Acting is, therefore, to dare the risk of entering the stage of public life and to take part in the web of relationships that comes with it.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Banu BARGU and Chiara BOTTICI (eds.), *Feminism, Capitalism, and Critique. Essays in Honor of Nancy Fraser* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹⁸ See Linda Martín ALCOFF et al., “We need a feminism for the 99%,” 27/01/2018. Available in <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jan/27/we-need-a-feminism-for-the-99-thats-why-women-will-strike-this-year>

Consequently, action and speech unfold “the paradoxical plurality of unique beings,”¹⁹ and the very experience of politics entails a performative experience in which a space in-between is revealed as a common ground – as power – among the ones who act in concert:

Freedom in a positive sense is possible only among equals, and equality itself is by no means a universally valid principle but, again, applicable only with limitations and even within spatial limits. If we equate these spaces of freedom [...] with the political realm itself, we shall be inclined to think of them as islands in a sea or as oases in a desert.²⁰

When Arendt declares that “we are not born equal, we become equal,”²¹ she is underlining the idea that politics is part of human artifice and she is arguing for the recovery of a public space that remains emptied of its potential of power and appearance, in order to confront the spread of the desert: “the modern growth of worldlessness, the withering away of everything between us.”²² Then, what *Common* can be desired and found in this space in-between, in such a way that this bond would not entail the perversion of politics, nor proscribe the very essential quality of human plurality?

In a different perspective, Jacques Rancière places the problem of Human Rights in the contentious ground of politics, defining it as the realm of action that questions the consensus on the hierarchical distribution of places and functions. Those who “have no part” are the subject of politics. Therefore, political action – regarded as dissensus – is based on the presupposition of equality and the willingness to verify it, by associating the relations of inclusion and exclusion²³ in one significant gesture.

In my opinion, if we regard these answers to the question on “What is politics?,” the prospect of feminist emancipation will not be limited to the debate of institutional consensus, and its experimentation will not be restricted by an utopian possibility handed over to an absolute future. In a certain way, emancipation is an essential part of the experience of politics,

¹⁹ ARENDT, *The Human Condition*, p. 176.

²⁰ *Idem*, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006 [1965]), p. 267

²¹ *Idem*, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 301.

²² *Idem*, “Epilogue,” in *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), p. 201.

²³ Cf. RANCIÈRE, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 304-306.

since it is the practical inscription of politics' internal promise of equality or simply the very "assumption" of it.

When Rancière reflects on the misadventures of critical thought and the paradoxes of political art in his book *Le Spectateur Émancipé*,²⁴ he defines social emancipation as a disruption of the "police distribution of the sensible" or, in other words, of the "harmonious fabric of community," where "everyone is in their place, their class, taken up with the duty allocated to them, and equipped with the sensory and intellectual equipment appropriate to that place and duty."²⁵ So, here, there is a suggestion of an analogy with our main topic that is not difficult to figure out. To break "the agreement between an 'occupation' and a 'capacity'" and "to conquer a different space and a different time" are expressions Rancière uses to reflect on emancipation and class, but these words impart meaning to a broad thinking on self-determination and gender. Therefore, if we change the procedure and if we start posing unreasonable hypotheses, then we will see that there is no longer a lost community or a harmony that needs to be restored between sexes:

What "dissensus" means is an organization of the sensible where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing its obviousness on all.²⁶

What I understand by dissent is not the conflict of ideas or sentiments. It is the conflict of several sensorial regimes. [...] Because dissent is at the heart of politics.²⁷

According to Rancière, politics is what Plato teaches, but *a contrario*. In this sense, we can regard emancipation as a practice of dissension, i.e., as an individual and collective action that alters the realm of the possible by replacing the evidence of what is seen, thinkable and feasible, and provides the reallocation of those who can appear or take place and those who are able to think and modify the coordinates of the common world. It is in this

²⁴ RANCIÈRE, *Le Spectateur Émancipé* (La Fabrique-Éditions, 2008). *Idem*, *The Emancipated Spectator*, transl. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2009).

²⁵ RANCIÈRE, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 42.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 48-49.

²⁷ RANCIÈRE, *Le spectateur émancipé*. p. 66.

way that the author defines what can be a process of political subjectivation: “the action of uncounted capacities that crack open the unity of the given and the obviousness of the visible in order to sketch a new topography of the possible.”²⁸ Concluding, the substance of a collective understanding of emancipation cannot be just the comprehension of the processes of domination and oppression – it is rather “the collectivization of capacities invested in scenes of dissensus.”²⁹

In this, so to speak, comprehensive paraphrase of Rancière’s argument I want to echo both Hannah Arendt’s political thought, and Judith Butler’s subversive thinking on the deconstruction of gender and the new possibilities of feminist agency, which I will expose now very briefly, starting with a quotation from *Gender Trouble*:

The theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness invariably close with an embarrassed “etc.” at the end of the list. Through this horizontal trajectory of adjectives, these positions strive to encompass a situated subject, but invariably fail to be complete. This failure, however, is instructive: what political impetus is to be derived from the exasperated “etc.” that so often occurs at the end of such lines? This is a sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself. [...] This illimitable *et cetera*, however, offers itself as a new departure for feminist political theorizing.³⁰

With the publication of *Gender Trouble*, in 1990, Butler demonstrated how the naturalized knowledge on gender operates, by anticipation, as a violent circumscription of reality. Indeed, if gender ceases to be a stable and perpetual presumption, to become a category implying discontinuity, instability and parody, within a normative framework, this “citation of a quote” (or a “copy without an original”) becomes an expression of a reality in crisis. So, the theory of gender performativity – which entails a critical genealogy of the naturalization of sex and bodies in general, as well as a debate on obligatory heterosexuality – could be called a “subversive” one, yet not a revolutionary one. However, as Butler recalled, “no political revolution is

²⁸ *Idem*, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 49.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 49.

³⁰ Judith BUTLER, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006 [1990]), p. 196.

possible without a radical shift in one's notion of the possible and the real."³¹

In fact, the instability of the category of gender has questioned the founding constraints of feminist political theory, thus opening other configurations for identities, bodies and politics itself. If the idea is not just to celebrate the possible, then what is at stake here is the re-description of those possibilities that already exist and are considered culturally unintelligible and impossible. My argument is that both the specific sensible re-composition of the possibility of feminist "agency" and of subjects' signification processes correspond to operations of dissent, since they include, in the field of emancipation, the location of strategies for a subversive reiteration of gender and, consequently, the immanent possibility to contest it.³²

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THE FOURTH WORKSHOP OF THE PROJECT EXPERIMENTATION AND DISSIDENCE AND THE RESPECTIVE PRINTED MATERIALS ARE FINANCED BY NATIONAL FUNDS THROUGH FCT (FUNDAÇÃO PARA A CIÊNCIA E A TECNOLOGIA, I.P. – PORTUGUESE FOUNDATION FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY) IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT PTDC/MHC-FIL/1416/2014

