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- * Inspiration vs Kenosis,
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- * Jung and Inspiration in
Japanese Art; After Rorty:
Bergson Revisited
- * Creative Cosmopolitanism;
Platonic Order; Moholy-Nagy
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Editorial

Contemporary philosophical definitions of “art” or “creativity,” which refer to a variety of human practices arising between antiquity and this day, seem to encounter two major obstacles: *anachronism* (institutional definitions and aesthetic definitions) and the indeterminacy of what was *actually* constitutive as the motivation behind such activity (e.g. Levinson’s “intentional” definition). This situation reflects a general methodological problem with *art* that appears whenever we use this term, namely the elusive character of its subject. However, regardless of whether we take ancient Greek poetry, or Tuscan and Venetian painting, or theatre of the Siglo de Oro, or Victorian arts and crafts, or North American sculpture and architecture, or music anywhere, every form of “creative” production has usually declared a source – one that would legitimize, first of all, a qualitative value of its produced artifacts or performed activities and, secondly, their role as models to be followed by other activities, through mimesis or induction.

As one will easily recall, early Twentieth-Century artists accentuated the implosion of the privileged position of the art of their time by tearing it away from its presumed relation with those superior points of reference that the legitimizing, inspiring agents had assumed. Thus a hundred years ago, the arts broke away from the concealed powers that their authors and commissioners had used in the Nineteenth Century to impose and secure their own social positions. Apparently, art became autotelic, self-aware, and free from what was not art – free to serve a pedagogical purpose that was to be its own.

Done and dusted. Or was it? The main question that we asked philosophers and aestheticians for this issue (i.e., if contemporary self-sufficient, post-conceptual, socially engaged art recognises what sort of inspiration is standing at its origin or, if it finds none, how it can explain its transgressiveness) seems hardly to have echoed among those thinkers who proclaim a pedagogical mission of the new arts geared toward liberating unenlightened audiences from undesirable norms, prejudices, and references. While the pedagogical mission exposes contemporary artists’ clearly transcendental position, performing artists, immersive artists, and theorists of engagement art and of other arts successful at dismantling people’s commonplace views in the name of *amelioration* have not responded to the posed question.

On the contrary, the problem of art’s *inspiration* is mostly addressed here by thinkers who see that artists rather follow pre-existing reality and join it in re-instituting it in their works, and not the other way around. Perhaps surprisingly in this context, it is Rorty’s imperative to aestheticise philosophy that brought about an analysis of Bergson’s ontology, which is the subject of Randall Auxier’s article and reverberates through José Miranda Justo’s work – the former one devoted to the founding constitution of *image* in the perceptual flux and the latter one focused on the experience of the *singularity* and *universality* of the creative act. Romantic *imagination* that awakens or misleads artists struggling with balancing its evolving structures and a post-traumatic *dreaming* which, being a harvest of collective memories, can become a source of individual

emanation are presented in contributions from Maarten Doorman and Mara Miller, respectively. The concept of *kenosis* as a specific attitude is explored by Derek Whitehead in the thought of Meister Eckhart and Martin Heidegger, for the sake of determining the cognitive conditions that enable creation. A retrospective of the concept of *cosmopolitanism* as a driving factor for creative activity is presented by Ștefan-Sebastian Maftai in the context of the Romanian avant-garde movement expressed in the *Contimporanul* journal.

The presented articles seem to be not questioning art as a peculiar type of human activity that not only forces the artist to invent and learn new means of expression but also moves beyond the cognitive mechanisms accessible through his or her reflective powers. *The original unknown* which through the creative process is allowed by the artist to reveal itself in or through an artistic form makes this form evoke particular, definite, though not single, interpretations. The more difficult to pin down the source of the creative act, the more accurate the interpretations. This seems to be juxtaposed to another *unknown*, namely one that followers of the contemporary movement place at the other end of the creative act – in its interpretation, which in the case of their art remains indefinite and rather too widely open.

Although this seems to be a predominant note that plays throughout the texts presented below, the editor is certain that a more careful reader will also find in them if not responses, then other significant philosophical questions about the art of our day.

Bogna J. Obidzińska

CREATION BETWEEN ONE AND MANY

Mara Miller

I let the piece sing its own stories:
Post-Modern Artistic Inspiration

Abstract

This paper distinguishes three common definitions of inspiration, dismissing both the Platonic (defining inspiration as a superior and seemingly frenzied performance carried out without regard to rules) and "Germ" or "Springboard" (defining inspiration as taking an idea and developing it) theories as both philosophically uninteresting and inadequate to art-making's complexities. "Radical alterity," by contrast, examined through the work of three contemporary women artists (Reiko Mochinaga Brandon, Kei Tsuji, and the author), recognizes art-making as seemingly originating outside the artist (in divinities for Hesiod, in the collective unconscious for Carl Jung, in landscapes and/or events, in dreams that seem unrelated to the artist's life). It explains why interpretation of a work of art can be difficult for the artist herself, yet others interpret the work readily.

The paper argues that the sense of transmission from sources outside the artist demands the rejection of dichotomous views of inspiration (a work is inspired or not) such as Plato's and Jung's, and permits a more multifaceted and continuous definition of inspiration to emerge. Radical alterity, especially when the source of inspiration might be the Jungian collective unconscious, allows artists to justify their work, and both artists and patrons to justify expense. Correctly understanding inspiration turns out to matter for many reasons.

Keywords: Brandon, Reiko Mochinaga, collective unconscious, dream, inspiration, Japanese artists, Jung, painting, Plato, radical alterity, Tsuji Kei

I. ONE ARTIST'S ACCOUNT – OUR FIRST MODERN EXAMPLE

Let me begin as an artist, and I promise I will end as a philosopher – although only after a brief journey as an art historian as well. For most of my adult life

I have emphatically *not* wanted to be an artist. Since I have taught in several art departments, and even three art colleges, art-making was an activity with which I was familiar. I was glad I didn't have to do it. There was so much amazing art in the world already – why go to the bother of making more?

But some years ago I awoke with a clear memory of a vision I had dreamt – and an equally clear sense that I had been “ordered” to paint it. There are artists on both sides of my family, so it is not surprising that I had had such dreams before. But that had been as a child and again just after college. Now it was twenty-seven years since I had last made any visual art. I had no materials, no studio, and no practice. I confided my dream to my husband, though; as Jungians we often discuss our dreams. He said I should paint it; I dismissed it. He insisted over the next few days, and eventually just stopped at an artists' supplies store and led me in. I had no idea what I needed. What size canvas? What size is a dream? It could be anything – from a miniature's few centimeters to an enormous mural. Yet faced with the stretched canvases on display, I found I knew immediately what size it must be – surprisingly large: three feet high by four feet long. (Its direction was also obvious.)

Taking it home to our back yard, I propped it against the wall of the garage and began to paint a flat steel-gray for the background, all over, as smooth as possible. And stored it in the garage. For four months. In November, I brought it out again, and started to work, outlining circles all the same circumference in deep blues and black (they seemed the colors of deep space, of ether), using a tin can to trace the shapes – which had to be perfectly circular (though with outlines of uneven width), just as my grandmother had used them to cut biscuits from dough. I “had” to use the implements she had used as much as possible (where had this idea come from? what relation had she to my dream?), so I applied this first painting's circles with knives.

The difficult part was discerning where to put the circles and how many to use. Also, I didn't remember the dream image as clearly as I had thought. Were some circles overlapping? (The dream conveyed a sense of enormous depth, as of outer space, which painters commonly indicate by overlapping forms.) These were matters of great importance, but little certainty. So I finished the first as best I could, and painted ten more with different numbers and distributions of circles. At first, none were near the edges (a dream has no edges); then they began to drift off the canvases, even as their distribution became more ordered. It was hard to say why; it just “felt right” for each new canvas, one after another. I began to fill in some, then all, of the circles. To change the sizes. Some introduced a different palette, blood reds escaping as droplets – or were they explosions? Blood or fire? Eventually the series became something else entirely, with one enormous circle in a corner and smaller ones circling around it. Or were they emanating from it?

For eighteen months I couldn't stop painting. I painted one series after another – nearly all the paintings were in series with permutations; only a few (the “self-portraits”) with a single form each.

Is It Inspiration?

Why talk about this?

The process certainly resulted in “art works,” fulfilling most or all of Denis Dutton’s “twelve criteria for art” – whether good or not need not concern us.¹ They were also creative, in that they seemingly came from nothing. (The notion that “creation” means making something from nothing, as God made the world in Book One of *Genesis*, is an inheritance from Christian thought.) Most important is that their making raises very directly the problem of inspiration, for five overlapping reasons. Most saliently, 1) they never seemed to me to be “my idea.” There was a sense of alterity, what I will call the “utterly other”² – their estrangement from “myself” and everything I thought of as *my* psyche, my activities, wishes, plans. As a person who had studied depth psychology and philosophy from my teens on, and had by then both published and taught on comparative views of selfhood, I had some sense of what this meant. It *felt* as if the “command” had come from someone else; was this a case of what Derek Parfit called q-intentioning? Not exactly – in q-intentioning, the q-intender is another person, and there was no such person.

I knew from both study and personal experience that the utter otherness of some dreams could indeed be part of oneself, and that such knowledge could lead one to “owning” what ego or consciousness *could not* acknowledge – I knew that the “other,” Jung’s Shadow, the part one refuses to or cannot see as oneself, is indeed part of oneself. Indeed, Jung’s version of dream analysis had kept me alive during my suicidal late teens. (More on dreams below.) Yet there was my impression of an imperative – presumably emanating, like Hesiod’s, from somewhere (though I had not then read Hesiod).

There was also 2) a gap between its creation and everything else I was doing. They were not part of any ongoing attempt (to paint, to imagine some picture). 3) There was almost no effort – to the original imagining, or to the creation of the “artwork” (if such it was, and it is certainly more an artwork than it is anything else). 4) Nor were they part of any on-going sense of identity, successful or otherwise. (I was not, before them, an unsuccessful artist; I was not an artist at all.) Finally, 5) there was the difference, or distance, between this work and any problems I was working on at the time, so that while I eventually saw it as the solution to a problem, that happened only after a) the artistic production, b) the transformation of images into symbols in my – or others’ – interpretation.

1 They conform to some criteria of artworks according to the (admittedly problematic) “institutional theory of art”: they have been exhibited as such, after being accepted by juries and curators into exhibitions; they have been purchased as such; they bring intrinsic pleasure, according to some of their owners and the artist herself (the author). They also fit all Dennis Dutton’s twelve criteria for art: “direct pleasure, skill and virtuosity, style, novelty and creativity, criticism, representation, special focus, expressive individuality, emotional saturation, intellectual challenge, arts traditions and institutions, and imaginative experience.” Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), 52-59.

2 This contrasts with many experiences of the other as part of us, as someone with whom we have overlapping feelings, projects, and/or identity, share co-subjectivity, etc. Regarding co-subjectivity, see Mara Miller, “Art and the Construction of Self and Subject in Japan,” in *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*, ed. Wimal Dissanayake et al. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

Defining Inspiration and an Ancient Example

Today we use “inspiration” and “inspire” in several different senses:

1) It refers to any activity that is really whole-hearted and enthusiastic: “she danced as if inspired,” such as Janis Joplin’s renowned singing of “Ball and Chain” at Woodstock. Although it comes from Plato’s sense of particularly gifted poets’ performances, an especially confident or original or enthusiastic or enlivened execution of a well-practiced or well-understood performance, idea or image, even a laborer may be “inspired” to complete his work before quitting time, or to try a different tool. Plato restricted “inspiration” to poetry, excluding it from visual arts (because he believed they operated by means of rules, and thus were *techne*), but over the past couple centuries we began using the concept regarding the visual arts and, more recently, the sciences and life in general. I will consider this usage metaphorical (though for Plato it may have been literal) and set it aside.³

2) It often means taking a mundane outside source as the basis for work or action, so that it serves as a springboard for a course of action or thought, providing a certain germ of an idea to be developed into an eventual progression of ideas. I will call this the “weak” sense, the sense in which an artist may be inspired by Socrates’ biography to paint his death, without any sense of how to convey it. This is not very interesting, and I do not discuss it further – although it provides the preponderance of cases of “inspiration” discussed and indexed by philosophers.⁴ Indeed, despite issuing from the writer’s or artist’s own mind, it is like receiving a commission to undertake a portrait or a particular landscape. This seems to be the sense in which novelist Kristin Bair O’Keefe, author of *Thirsty* and *The Art of Floating*, uses dreams in her magical realism – a very different use than mine.⁵

3) Or one may, by contrast, discover the idea *plus* many or all indications of how to implement it (the fulfillment or implementation of the original germ) “out of the blue,” seemingly from nowhere, as I did with my dream and the ancient Greek poet Hesiod did with the Muses’ command to write poetry to honor them and the gods. For this third, “strong” definition applies to the first documented case of inspiration in Western history, the early Greek shepherd-turned-poet (and economist), Hesiod. Hesiod describes his transformation from a shepherd to poet as due to the commands of the semi-divine muses:

3 While, in “inspiration,” important parts are carried out without referring to “rules,” defined as *generally* applicable instructions, some rules *always* apply; in my paintings, I a) used pigments b) on a surface; they were, moreover, rectangular, although some artists break this last rule. Inspiration applies to those aspects where ideas, instructions, methods, were needed, but there were no applicable rules (as in Hesiod’s case, it seems), or those that there were, were ignored. Usually if one just reverses the rules, it’s not really inspiration; more is required. (But what? Where does this “more” come from? See below.)

4 In fact it doesn’t seem to matter to most philosophers. The first forty or fifty (I stopped at that point) references to “inspiration” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press’s *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, and *Wikipedia* (disappointingly) refer only to the weak sense – someone was inspired by someone else’s work or ideas in the sense that it gave them an idea to develop into their own. They give no primary entry. Few discuss work whose ideas do *not* follow from previous concerns (their own or another’s). If the concept is rooted in antiquity, a survey of indexes of modern aesthetics/philosophy of art anthologies suggests it should stay there.

5 Kristin Bair O’Keefe, “Making Magic.” *Writer’s Digest*, July/August 2014, 30-33. www.Writers-Digest.com.

And one day they taught Hesiod glorious song while he was shepherding his lambs under holy Helicon, and this word first the goddesses said to me -- the Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus who holds the aegis:

(ll. 26-28) "Shepherds of the wilderness, wretched things of shame, mere bellies, we know how to speak many false things as though they were true; but we know, when we will, to utter true things."

(ll. 29-35) So said the ready-voiced daughters of great Zeus, and they plucked and gave me a rod, a shoot of sturdy laurel, a marvelous thing, and breathed into me a divine voice to celebrate things that shall be and things there were aforetime; and they bade me sing...⁶

Hesiod implies that their command included *how* to carry it out. I will call this the "strong" sense of inspiration. These three definitions (weak and two versions of strong, the all-at-once and the intuitive feeling-one's-way to the finished product) apply to my experience making some of my works, discussed below (though not to all my art). Hesiod's appeal to divinity suggests both alterity and superiority to the artist.

Jung's Artistic Dichotomy

Psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung wrote extensively on artistic inspiration, in works now collected in Volume XX of the Bollingen Foundation series.⁷ His main purposes in those essays were distinguishing his theory from Freud's regarding art, clarifying the nature of art, explaining symbols, archetypes, differentiating the psychology of art from the psychology of the artist, and, most importantly for us, determining the roles of the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious in and of themselves and in relation to art. Jung separates artworks into two mutually exclusive categories, based primarily on which of these two types of unconscious is "in charge of" the art making. Inspired works (Type I) are those:

which flow more or less complete and perfect from the author's pen. They come as it were fully arrayed into the world, as Pallas Athene sprang from the head of Zeus. These works positively force themselves upon the author; his hand is seized, his pen writes things that his mind contemplates with amazement. The work brings with it its own form; anything he wants to add is rejected, and what he himself would like to reject is thrust back at him. While his conscious mind stands amazed and empty before this phenomenon, he is overwhelmed by a flood of thoughts and images which he never intended to create and which his own will could never have brought into being (72-3 B110).

At the other extreme, for Jung, is Type II work that follows the intention of the artist, who remains in charge of his process throughout:

But... There are literary works, prose as well as poetry, that spring wholly from the author's intention to produce a particular result. He submits his material to a definite treatment with

6 Hesiod, *The Theogony of Hesiod*, translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (SacredTexts Classics Hesiod Greek [1914], <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm>).

7 Carl Gustav Jung, "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry" and "Psychology and Literature," both of which are in Part IV of *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, English translation by R. F. C. Hull, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 15, Bollingen Series XX (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966). All following page and section numbers are to this text.

Cf. also: "Über die Beziehungen der analytischen Psychologie zum dichterischen Kunstwerk," in *Seelenprobleme der Gegenwart* (Zurich: Rascher, 1931) and "Psychologie und Dichtung," in *Gestaltungen des Unbewussten* (Zurich: Rascher, 1950).

a definite aim in view... His material is entirely subordinated to his artistic purpose; he wants to express this and nothing else... In either case, the artist is so identified with his work that his intentions and his faculties are indistinguishable from the act of creation itself... (72; B109).

Some of my art is of this type. I conceive a plan and carry it out, I know exactly what effects I want and why. My miniature paintings of flowers on a gold background “after” the style of Japanese Rimpa painters Sotatsu and Kiitsu’s large folding screens translate their style and subject matter to American wildflowers and a tiny scale. They’re fun, pleasurable – maybe even beautiful. Other people want them and tell me they enjoy them. The creativity, however, is mundane at best: applying a known quantity and known quality to new size and new subject matter by means of logical extrapolation. The “inspiration” is of the weak and metaphorical varieties. And there is no need for interpretation. You just enjoy them. I doubt they’re symbolic.

Dichotomous Categories Don’t Help in Understanding Inspiration in Art

I disagree with Jung’s (and Plato’s) dichotomous characterization of inspiration, for several reasons. First, when we talk about an artist or work being “inspired” it may apply to any or all parts of the process/product: to the basic idea, what it should look like (its form), how it should be carried out (materials and techniques), and the degree of enthusiasm or rapture or planning that the artist uses. As a result, many artworks combine the types. For example, my paintings depicting (in gold and silver against an indigo background) a tiny bear in the sky of a landscape, occupying the Buddha’s position in the frontispieces to Heian-period sutra scrolls, are largely Jung’s type II (like the flowers on gold after Sotatsu): I knew exactly what I wanted to do and how to do it. But the original idea presented itself out of the blue as an inspiring “waking vision.” They are a hybrid. In this case, while they are enjoyable, they are also open to “meaning.” For in addition to personalizing an ancient Japanese format and motif, they suggest the opening up of Buddhist enlightenment/salvation to animals, an idea implicit in Chapter Twelve of the *Lotus Sutra* (“The Dragon-King’s Daughter”) that became pervasive in Japan in the middle ages.

Second, if we take intention as the deciding factor, we immediately find we have three categories, for artists may *intend* to incorporate chance, serendipity, accident. And there are also the cases of “planning” for interference or direction by the unconscious, as with my “White Music” paintings (*Sztuka i Filozofia* 37-2010, 97), where leaves are allowed to fall into the wet paint and are kept there.

Third, in my experience, inspiration is not always a complete, all-at-once phenomenon. (We may call such works “subitist,” from Lat. *subito*, sudden, like the term used in Zen scholarship to denote schools with sudden rather than gradual enlightenment.) Sometimes it occurs only more or less, or gradually, one feels one’s way, in steps – some of which are inspired, others not. This is one of aspects of the artist’s talent, originality, or “genius” – another word for inspiration, since the “genius” was originally a minor god. The temporal dimension of inspiration must be remembered.

Fourth, there is a basic question about “who is in charge.” Jung tries to capture this by the term “intention,” but intention is present in both cases, I would argue, though for Jung only in the second (or “uninspired” – though it is not meant to carry the usual pejorative connotation of work that is humdrum or undistinguished). In Hesiod’s and my cases, though, intention applies to the carrying out of the work, which does not, however, arise from anything we recognize as ourselves. It is the distinction between the intention to carry out a work and coming up with the idea in the first place. Hesiod and I certainly intended to do our work – Jung’s “this and nothing else” – but it was not originally *our* intention, but someone else’s, the “utterly other” I spoke of earlier. In my case, once I had been given this vision with its command to paint, my intention was “to produce a particular result” as in Jung’s uninspired cases.

Fifth, once we look at how artists actually work, we often find them charting a course between the weak and strong senses identified above: “taking inspiration” from something outside themselves – typically a material – but in such a way that the material determines a whole new form or course of action. It has a much more powerful, even determining force. A sculpture of mine was definitely inspired (weak sense) by my accidental discovery of two identical strips, fifteen feet long and three inches wide, of copper flashing discarded in a roofing. It was instantaneously evident that this was perfect for something, and only a further couple minutes were needed to be inspired (strong sense) as to what that was: a knot signifying marriage; I “saw” the two strips in their knot, but only because the material had presented itself to me. Japanese gardeners often speak of “listening to the rock,” an experience in which what needs to happen to the artwork arises from an outer source, from an independent being. Artist Reiko Mochinaga Brandon says, “I let the piece sing its own stories.”⁸

Such misunderstanding of these issues can lead to further misunderstandings. The hybrid example of the Buddhist bears described above, in addition to combining logical/planned aspects and processes with an inspired idea and intuitive execution, prompts us to confront issues of pleasure and meaning, as well. In many cases, my dreamed art is not especially pleasurable. Enjoyment is not their point. It is that perplexity arising when we face a work of art that is not especially enjoyable that prompts us to wonder what it “means” (even when it is our own work, even when we dreamed it – it came “out of” us). Beauty can stop thought. Sometimes by distraction, but sometimes because aesthetic pleasure can be – is defined as – inherently valuable. It arouses no need for understanding. This, of course, is one of the main services art can play to ideology.

Jung’s and Plato’s dichotomy has the advantage of simplicity, but it overlooks these important complications.

Why Does It Matter? Medieval and Chinese Examples

Why does inspiration matter? This is two questions. First, what is it there for? Why does it exist? I believe this is simple: it explains *to the maker herself* and

⁸ Email response to my questions, July 23, 2014.

to others why she creates art. This is very useful for people like Hesiod and me who don't create art – until they do. It provides, for artists/non-artists who otherwise feel unjustified in creating their work, a cloak of protection – a justification – must we say a rationalization? – for the hubris of making something utterly new,⁹ or for making anything at all. This was the case with Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), the nun whose *Book of Divine Works*,¹⁰ musical compositions, and paintings became so well known. Paintings of her show her inspiration flowing from billowing clouds in wavy red lines through the window.¹¹ In my case, although women had begun to take their place in the art world well before me, it was psychologically necessary to avoid even the possibility of “outshining” my father and my mother's brother, both of whom had devoted their lives to becoming (professional) artists but who had fallen far short of their dreams – and who had suffered terribly from this inability. And how in god's name does a shepherd like Hesiod explain how and why he suddenly finds it necessary to write a poem praising the gods – and get it written down – if not in gods' names?

Inspiration is also useful in justifying expenditures that may be necessary, either to make the art itself, or on behalf of the deity or belief system expounded.

The second question, “why do we need to *understand* inspiration?” has more answers, for there are several reasons. First, socially, psychologically, politically, artists and their publics benefit. Artists need to find the right way to take responsibility for our work – we can't do that if we're pretending it's not ours. But at the same time, if we claim it's entirely ours in the usual sense (the sense in which I'm writing this article, which was inspired by the journal's call for articles, my own and other artists' work, and Jung's theories – but only in the weak sense), we're deceiving ourselves and others – and we're also not capable of reaching the answers we want, because with inspiration we're not in the same position of knowing that we usually are in. Cases of *inspired* art are inherently mysterious.

Second, if we're wrong about it, if it implies – or conceals (depending on your belief system) – a superior being who informs us about our work – it's misleading. Truth always matters. It may be shoring up illusions (of deities who tell us what to do, of our own importance, of our intimacy with gods).

And inspiration is expensive – we put a lot of resources (time, money, energy, labor, attention) into carrying it out – so we should know why we do

9 I avoid the term “creation” so as not have to go into the philosophical debates about whether creation is restricted to God.

10 Hildegard von Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, manuscript 1942, Biblioteca Statale di Lucca, reproduced in Sabina Flanagan, *Secrets of God: Writings of Hildegard of Bingen* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1996).

11 For analysis of these images of Hildegard's inspiration, see Mara Miller, “The Lady in the Garden: Subjects and Objects in an Ideal World,” in *Crossing the Bridge: Comparative Essays on Medieval European and Heian Japanese Women Writers*, edited by Barbara Stevenson and Cynthia Ho (New York: Plagrave, 2000). Madeline Caviness argues, in “Artist: ‘To See, Hear, and Know All at Once,’” in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World*, ed. Barbara Newman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 110-124, that portraits of Hildegard writing from her Book are from her own designs.

this, what we are doing it for. Particularly when we do it – or have others do it – at the bidding of divinities, it easily justifies exploitation of those who do the work or finance it.

Fourth, our understanding of inspiration deeply affects our understanding of artists. On the one hand, we may, as painter Mark Rothko asserts (and Plato thought), end up believing that because they are inspired, artists are “mad,” foolish and not responsible for their work: “What is the popular conception of the artist? Gather a thousand descriptions, and the resulting composite is the portrait of a moron: he is held to be childish, irresponsible, and ignorant or stupid in everyday affairs. ...Biographers contrast the artlessness of his judgments with the high attainment of his art, and while his *naïveté* or rascality are gossiped about, they are viewed as signs of Simplicity and Inspiration.”¹² Thus does a Platonic view of inspiration trivialize them and their work, and that can make it harder for the artists.

Fifth, our understanding of inspiration deeply affects our understanding of the artistic process as well. This is true especially as regards time. We may seriously underestimate the time and effort and intelligence and dedication that go into an inspired work. The answer by Brandon (whose work is discussed below) regarding how long it took her to make one of her sculptures indicates the disparity: “All my life.” Similarly with my copper marriage-knot. It took a couple minutes to request the discarded metal and wind it up to carry home, a couple hours looking for the right kind of knot in knot books (and a couple hours finding the right knot book), an hour or two to tie the knot. (The copper was two inches wide, and didn’t tie easily.) But how many hours, over how many years, had I spent as an art historian looking at copper, to realize its possibilities instantaneously? How many years had it taken to understand the meaning of marriage as a tying together? To learn the ceremonial sense of Japanese gift-wrap knots and Chinese good-luck knots – not just fishermen’s knots for accomplishing a purpose? To gain the social skill and emotional maturity to ask a complete stranger for what I wanted?

The theory of inspiration therefore challenges the labor theory of value as applied to art.¹³ What is valuable in art is not necessarily what took longest to make – or rather, we have to re-examine what we mean by making art. And for good reason. What goes into the inspiration-generation (the years of looking and living) are essential but don’t show up in the making. Taking time in its manufacturing is not necessarily related to results.

This is seen also in the sixth implication, the way our understanding of inspiration also challenges our sense of how effort is related to results. In everyday life we have a fairly reliable sense of how much effort it will take to carry on our daily lives (with certain major exceptions: we can buy our way out of labor by paying workers; farmers take a chance on the year’s work being undone by weather; computers have changed the ease with which we can make huge mistakes, and so on). But inspiration suggests a whole other way in which effort

12 Mark Rothko, *The Artist’s Reality: Philosophies of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 1.

13 Thorsten Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: The Modern Library, 1934; first published 1899).

is unrelated to results. Writing articles, I struggle to find the words and syntax that will convey my meaning to my readers. Painting, I put no effort into that at all, yet people of all kinds understand it.

For finally (seventh), how we understand inspiration affects our understanding of the meaning of form, of symbols, of art itself, of dreams, of the unconscious – personal or collective.

II. INTERPRETATION, SYMBOLS, AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

DREAMS

How do art-inspiring dreams differ from other dreams? How does art prompted by a dream differ from other art? Is it different when it comes from a dream, a well-known route from the unconscious, than if you just “see it” or “know it,” somehow?

The dream that prompted my first paintings differed from my other dreams, in that a) it issued a command to act; b) it had neither plot/action nor characters; c) it *seemed* meaningless (but not “crazy” or nonsensical, as dreams commonly do) – all features shared by the dream of a monk at Dunhuang that inspired the painting of hundreds of caves illustrating Buddhist paradise.

As a follower of Jungian psychology, of course, I certainly recognize my dreams as my own mental and/or emotional activity. In my case, both Jungian and Gestalt dream analysis reveal purely personal interpretations to many dreams.

But “I” don’t devise the images or activities in my non-art dreams – if I dream of my school, that image comes from my experience with a building/institution outside of myself; my contribution to the dream is the “choice” of it and the memory – and of course the significance or reason for its appearance (assuming, as a Jungian would, that there is some). But there was no such physical or experienced correlates/precedents to the image(s) on whose realization this dream insisted. The images arising from my dreams that appear in my paintings, however, are *readily understood by people who don’t know me*.

JUNG’S COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

What seems to be a private language coming from a dream or a (waking) vision is often intelligible to other people. How is this possible? For those of us who accept a psychoanalytic theory of dreams as arising from our unconscious, how is it that it can present information or perspectives that are new to us?

A. “Reception” and Interpretation by Others

Art inspired by dreams presents meaning in terms that are widely shared. Such is the loneliness in one of my paintings noticed by a locksmith who was fixing my door – although my own understanding of the painting was not in terms of loneliness or solitude, but fear. (That painting was part of the *Landscapes of*

Fear series.)¹⁴ “Indeed,” Jung claims (rightly) “the special significance of a true work of art resides in the fact that it has escaped from the limitations of the personal and has soared beyond the personal concerns of its creator (71).”

But sometimes it is in terms of the viewer’s purely personal life – only *after* which I recognize them as related to experiences of my own. An example: one of the paintings in a series with deep reds, purples and browns – face it, blood colors – streaked vertically in thick paint covering the entire canvas, with two small overlapping squares indicated only by their edges, which are lime and emerald green and almost sky blue. A seventeen-year-old guest asked: “Did my father tell you about me?” I said no. “I had to go into a mental hospital for observation. It was a condition of my not going to jail. This painting,” he went on, “reminds me of me and my psychiatrist when I was in the hospital.” I myself had made the connection between the background colors and messiness and blood, equaling intense emotion, and the squares as rationality, being “measured,” and their colors representing peace and calm. But I had not seen a) the possibility of the linkage between two beings – a linkage b) via a calm rationality, nor that c) the squares could readily symbolize persons. I had not seen that I might have, in fact, painted a self-portrait – the squares representing myself and another. Once he said it, of course, I could see it; and now having written it, I see it more clearly still – and draw further implications. This would seem to be what Jung meant when he wrote, “We would expect a strangeness of form and content, thoughts that can only be apprehended intuitively, a language pregnant with meanings, and images that are true symbols because they are the best possible expressions for something unknown – bridges thrown out towards an unseen shore” (75-6, B116).

But what makes it possible for someone to see into the heart of someone else’s psyche – through their art – in that way? Jung says this is the wrong question. We are not seeing into the artist’s psyche, but into the collective storehouse of humanity’s symbols. The artist’s dreams come not from the individual unconscious that is the source of most dreams (here he says Freud is wrong) but from the collective unconscious:

I am assuming that the work of art we propose to analyze, as well as being symbolic, has its source not in the personal unconscious of the poet, but in a sphere of unconscious mythology whose primordial images are the common heritage of mankind. I have called this sphere the collective unconscious, to distinguish it from the personal unconscious.

He proceeds to define the two:

The latter I regard as the sum total of all those psychic processes and contents which are capable of becoming conscious and often do, but are then suppressed because of their incompatibility and kept subliminal. (80, B125).

...The collective unconscious is not to be thought of as a self-subsistent entity; it’s no more than a potentiality handed down to us from primordial times in the specific form of mnemonic images or inherited in the anatomical structure of the brain. There are no inborn ideas, but there are inborn possibilities of ideas that set bounds to even the boldest fantasy and keep

¹⁴ *Sztuka i Filozofia* 37-2010, 98-99, reproduced two of this series, “Twist of Fate” and “Where Are the Mothers for Us?”

our fantasy activity within certain categories: a priori ideas, as it were, the existence of which cannot be ascertained except from their effects. They appear only in the shaped material of art as the regulative principles that shape it; that is to say, only by inferences drawn from the finished work can we reconstruct the age-old original of the primordial image (80-81, B126).

So: many people understand my painting.¹⁵ More remarkably, they do so without trying – automatically; some of them read my paintings emotionally as fast as they would read a traffic sign on a highway. How does this happen? Why is it able to? And why is it that someone with no background in either my art or in “art appreciation,” no conversation with me about it, can understand a deep meaning of my painting? Jung suggests that such works convey by means of symbols, “...For a symbol is the intimation of a meaning beyond the level of our present powers of comprehension” (76, B118):

A symbol remains a perpetual challenge to our thoughts and feelings. That probably explains why a symbolic work is so stimulating, why it grips us so intensely, but also why it seldom affords us a purely aesthetic enjoyment. A work that is manifestly not symbolic appeals much more to our aesthetic sensibility because it is complete in itself and fulfills its purpose (76-7, B119).

The collective unconscious offers two additional solutions to questions raised by artistic inspiration. As far as the source of this “command” I was given, if it comes from Jung’s collective unconscious, that could explain the “utter otherness” I experience, since this is neither personal nor conscious nor available to consciousness in therapy:

In contrast to the personal unconscious, which is a relatively thin layer immediately below the threshold of consciousness, the collective unconscious shows no tendency to become conscious under normal conditions, nor can it be brought back to recollection by any analytical technique, since it was never repressed or forgotten (80-81, B126).

It also helps explain the commonality of *recognition* – the frequency with which we find ourselves reacting to (someone else’s) work of art as if it tells *our own* experience.

B. “Reception” and Interpretation by Me

Inspiration raises questions about meaning and interpretation not only in regard to the viewer/audience, but to the artist herself. Unlike art conceived by conscious me, in my art inspired by dreams and visions, not only is there need for interpretation, but the interpretation may be just as problematic for me as for anyone else. I say “may be” because, as we have seen, some viewers look at one of these paintings and have an immediate sense that it “makes sense,” whereas I struggle to make sense of it until one day it suddenly falls into place (by means of one of two different processes).

What did my first (dreamed) paintings mean to *me*? Since they present themselves to me as if they come from someone else, the task of interpretation falls to me as it would to anyone else. They seem to come from outside me

¹⁵ I believe not all my painting has “meaning” or is “understood.” One collector said of a painting that he “liked looking at it; it makes me feel calm.” Enough said.

– not just outside my ego, but unrelated to my experience. In this sense they resemble two experiences I have had of “ghosts,” both with a strong – nay, utterly convincing – presence of the dead person, one of which was accompanied by a message from him that seemed impossible for me to have conjured up: that what I was worried about, caught up in regretting, was no longer happening (for my dead visitor), so I was free simply to let it go myself.¹⁶ With both the dreams and the “ghosts,” I craved something: a way to understand the meaningless events in my life, as I had craved the presence of the two men whose ghosts visited me. But there were two significant differences. The two ghost visitations are readily interpreted as wish fulfillment, as the paintings were not (more evidence that Jung, not Freud, is right and that art-dreams do not come from the personal unconscious). And the men whose ghosts came. The paintings were not.

They seemed to represent something, but what it was unclear, vaguely reminiscent of a number of things, such as planets revolving around a sun or moons around a planet (though in the first images there was nothing like the sun, nor a comparable discrepancy in size). They were a little like jugglers’ balls or billiard balls – but the colors were wrong (far too drab) and there was no reason to assume their presumed “motion” was confined to a plane (nor that it had any pattern at all, recurrent or *caused*, as with planets). Were they attracted by an unseen gravitational pull – even falling? Or were they escaping, like bubbles only without the iridescence? I kept trying to “explain” them verbally to myself and others, using terms such as these. And eventually, once all this occurred to me, I suddenly saw that it was the very *ambiguity* of the interpretations that was the key to the meaning.

It was their very inability to conform to a model of anything I knew to exist that eventually clued me in to their significance. Actually “ambiguity” is not quite the right word, requiring as it does choice between two interpretations, whereas the key to my paintings was that there were several potential meanings. Logicians call such a situation “vagueness.” But that too is inappropriate, suggesting as it does indecipherable boundaries and lack of clarity, like a ghostly apparition. My paintings had competing interpretations, many of which were each quite clear.

They were visual analogs to my cognitive and emotional experience of “having too many balls in the air” while being unable to discern any order – my experience of the confusion of my life, confusion that had been at that point uncomfortably prolonged.

I had been feeling for several years as if too much was going on, too many different kinds of demands, with little perceptible order. Was there an order to the events in my life? Was someone, or something, controlling the motion – the constant sense of movement in my life? Was this an ongoing self-perpetuating system (like a solar system or a repetition compulsion), or an illusion of freedom actually following intelligible (if imperceptible) laws of physics, like escaping

¹⁶ John Le Carre’s novel *The Constant Gardener* is a fascinating study of a contemporary ghost giving the protagonist information, knowledge, and perspectives he cannot himself muster.

helium balloons or bubbles? Or a collapsing cascade of events following the inescapable laws of gravity – everything falls eventually?

It was the very amorphousness, the vagueness, of the “spheres” (were they rock or air? material or ethereal?) and their positions that caught my internal struggle. The dreams gave me symbols that, as Jung put it, “should be understood as an expression of an intuitive idea that cannot yet be formulated in any other or better way” (70, B105).

I have subsequently been “inspired” to paint other series representing abstract ideas or principles intimately related to my experience, whose meaning became clear only in the assemblage of many different such images. They continue in a similar vein – sets of images that provided a specific and concrete form for what was abstract. I ended up considering such paintings a sort of “abstract expressionism” – though it gives form not to emotion but to a primarily intellectual confusion. In these cases, only after completing several of these paintings and looking at them as a viewer, as I would anyone else’s paintings, did a “meaning” related to my experience occur to me.

But is there any reason to believe that the accounts I eventually gave to the separate series have any greater validity than the interpretations assigned to Rorschach images? That is, one can always find a pattern, but is the pattern “there,” somehow, in the image, or only in the mind’s eye? (How and why this will matter will depend on one’s purposes, of course.) Is there any difference here between my interpretations of my own work and my interpretations of someone else’s? – of Chagall’s or Picasso’s?¹⁷ Or someone else’s interpretation of mine? Jung’s theory compels the conclusion that no individual has proprietary rights over the interpretation – not even the artist.

III. MORE CASE STUDIES: JAPAN AFTER WWII

All this is well and good, but are there any cases where it really matters? I might have continued confused about my life, and my young friend would have thought no one could understand the nature of his relationship with his psychiatrist or his emotional relief at “overlapping” with a calm and ordered being (which he might not have even put words to without my painting). But we are just two individuals whose everyday desperation pales before the force of great art, which Jung argues is to embody the symbol, the archetype, that “transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, and evokes in us all those beneficent forces that ever and anon have enabled humanity to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night” (82, B129).

Such symbols are crucial at times of mass disasters such as war – and the atomic bombings. Novelist (and art collector) Yasunari Kawabata, Japan’s first

17 I don’t want to get into the issue of interpretation here, beyond insisting that any sound interpretation minimally a) requires evidence correlating the form and the meaning; b) must have been within the artist’s realm of possibility at the time of creation (no attributing Christian meanings to pre-Hispanic Mexican art), although c) she need not have intended it; d) usually allows multiple interpretations on different levels: a psychoanalytic interpretation does not preclude a historic or Marxist one.

Nobel laureate for literature, once wrote, regarding his stopover in Kyoto to see art, temples and gardens after an official visit to the ruins of Hiroshima after the atomic bombing, that “looking at old works of art is a matter of life and death.”¹⁸ What makes art so important after such devastation?

Japan’s situation was dire.¹⁹ It demanded a complete rebuilding of the nation and the culture. How did Japanese artists contribute?²⁰ Were they able to “transmute our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, and evoke in us all those beneficent forces that ever and anon have enabled humanity to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night,” as Jung put it? And if so, how did this work? Jung argues that

with [inspired] works ... we would have to be prepared for something suprapersonal that transcends our understanding to the same degree that the author’s consciousness was in abeyance during the process of creation. We would expect a strangeness of form and content, thoughts that can only be apprehended intuitively, a language pregnant with meanings, and images that are true symbols because they are the best possible expressions for something unknown – bridges thrown out towards an unseen shore (75-6, B116).

This is a complicated question. A penetrating set of complex answers (focusing on their positions, attitudes, group affiliations, and personal histories) is provided by Alexandra Munroe’s, *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*.²¹ Japan After World War II offers us many examples of artists taking inspiration from either prehistoric or traditional historic arts and artists, using their materials, techniques, and even their physical locations and relations to the earth. The situation is worth our attention for several reasons. First, this deliberate return is not at the cost of modernism (and post-modernism), but comprises a *part* of modernism, a powerful stream within it.²² Second, it reflects a need to connect with something outside the artist.

18 He was “defending” his need to reconnect with his country’s past after an experience of tertiary trauma. See Mara Miller, 2014. “«A Matter of Life and Death»: Yasunari Kawabata on the Value of Art After the Atomic Bombings,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 2014, 72-3, 261-275. Donald Keene translated, in *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature in the Modern Era*, Volume I (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 827; (1st ed. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1984), 805. “Tertiary trauma” is my new term for distress experienced by those who hear or see images of trauma to others. See Mara Miller, “Terrible Knowledge And Tertiary Trauma,” Part I: «Teaching About Japanese Nuclear Trauma And Resistance To The Atomic Bomb», in *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 86(05), 157-163; published online 05 Jul 2013.

19 Regarding those losses and their effects on identity, see Mara Miller, “Japanese Aesthetics and the Disruptions of Identity after the Atomic Bombings” *kritische berichte. zeitschrift für kunst- und kulturwissenschaften*, 2/2010, 73-82, special issue on Japanese identity after the atomic bombings.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Alexandra Munroe, *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with the Yokohama Museum of Art, the Japan Foundation, the Guggenheim Museum, and San Francisco Museum of Art, 1994). The subtitle refers to Yoko Ono’s poem “Voice Piece for Soprano:” *Scream*.

1. *against the wind*

2. *against the wall*

3. *against the sky.*

22 On the deliberate combination of old and new, see Mara Miller, “Agency, Identity, and Aesthetic Experience in Three Post-Atomic Japanese Narratives: Yasunari Kawabata’s *The Sound of the Mountain*, Rio Kishida’s *Thread Hell*, and the anime Film *Barefoot Gen*, Minh Nguyen, ed., *New Studies in Japanese Aesthetics*, edited by Minh Nguyen (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014); for architecture, see Dana Bunrock, *Materials & Meaning In Contemporary Japanese Architecture: Tradition & Today* (New York, 2010).

Reiko Mochinaga Brandon

Reiko Mochinaga Brandon is a Japanese-born artist who has lived in the United States for several decades.

The power and complexity of her work and the multiplicity of her sources of inspiration make her work ideal for our study.²³ Finally, hers is *great art*, according to my definition: finding a form that is adequate to the expression of an important human issue.²⁴

To understand Brandon's work fully, it may help to recall Jung's notions of the symbol and the archetype, which captures humanity's needs – and solutions. While this definition deliberately includes several kinds of activities: the formulation of questions, the expression of emotional reactions and attitudes toward such problems, I believe Brandon's work goes further in that it expresses (a range of?) solutions to the excruciating existential problems facing Japan as a nation and Japanese individuals after World War II.

On a trip back to Japan with her American husband in 1980, Brandon told me, she found herself in a state of recognition she had not thought possible.²⁵ She had originally come to the U.S. as a Fulbright Scholar, returned to Japan for several years, where she met and married her husband, then returned to Honolulu to live with him, where she studied textile arts at the University of Hawaii at Manoa – leaving her Japanese identity behind. The conflict with her family over her choice of an American husband – one who had worked for the Occupation forces, no less (although her father had not fought in WWII, he had been a general in the Japanese Army) – may have assisted with this sense of separation from origins. This trip back home in 1980 found her identifying as a Japanese more strongly than before, and “inspired” some of the strongest work by any twentieth-century artist, her series of Guardian sculptures, among them *Winter Guardian*, 1987 (Plate 1) and *White Guardian*, 1986 (Plate 2).²⁶

Physical Description and Results/Effects

The Guardians are freestanding – three-dimensional sculptures ranging from five to ten inches high to two feet – incorporating materials of three kinds:

23 While generally accepting a definition as art “which is not merely superb formally but which has... significant human content,” I define great art as “universally understood to reveal the human condition” (32), some of which “offer[s] a whole society new ways of understanding itself and portions of itself and its situation, thus paving the way for political and other changes in the society – and [sometimes] eliminating the need for further [action of that type]...” (pace Bertram Jessup, *who require great art to be enduring*) (118), Mara Miller, *The Garden as an Art* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).

In addition to this article, I am writing about Brandon's work in “Re-Creating History and Memory: The Visual and Visceral Records,” *Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Memory*, Kenya Davis-Hayes and Roger Chapman, ed., under review.

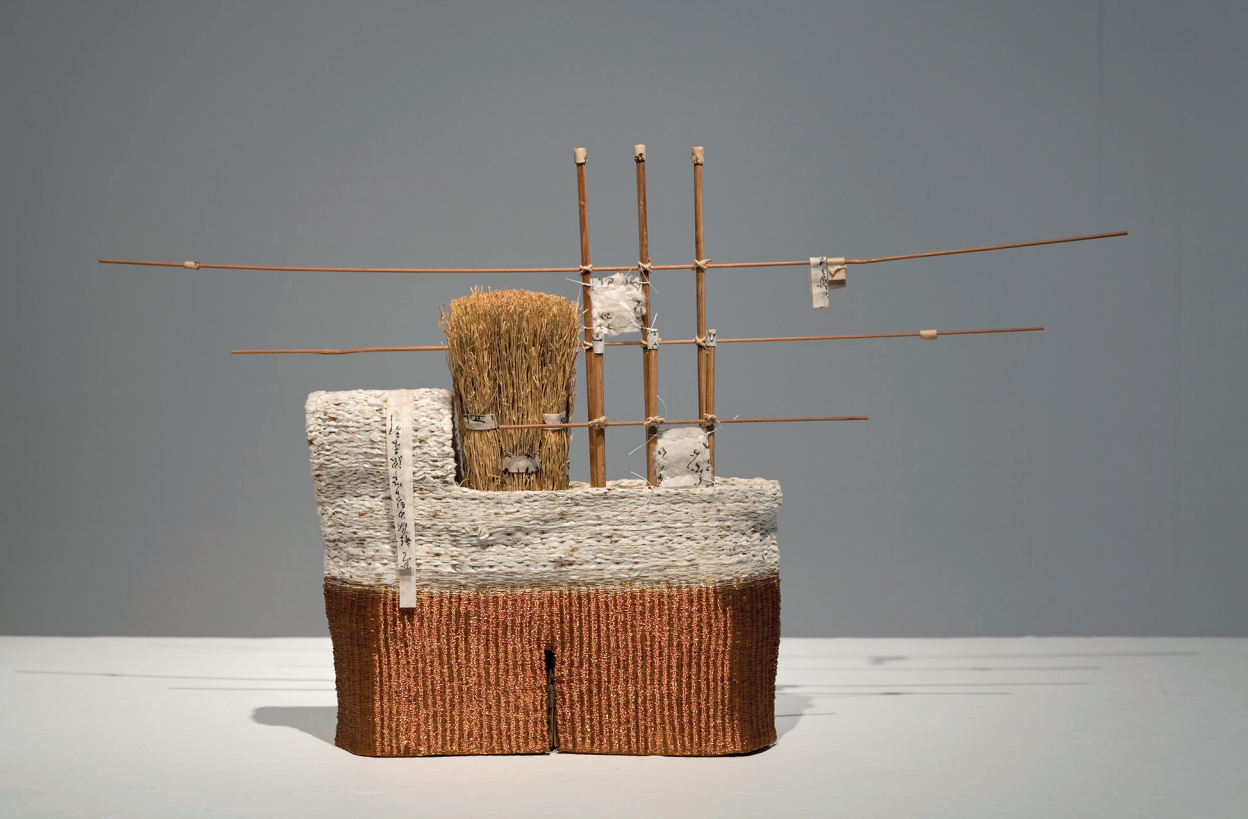
24 I proposed this definition in *The Garden as an Art* (State University of New York Press, 1993), Part III, 8-11.

25 Information about her life, materials, techniques, and her views of her art comes from an interview with the artist in June 8, 2014.

26 See Munroe 1994, 268 and plates 159, 160-1 and 160-2; Reiko Mochinaga Brandon, “Weaving Cultural Bridges,” *Shuttle, Spindle & Dyepot*, XIX, 3, issue 75: summer 1988, 72-73; The Morikami Museum and the Boca Raton Museum of Art, “Reiko Mochinaga Brandon,” in *Japanese-American Craft Invitational* (catalogue) (Delray Beach: The Morikami Museum, 1987); Marcia Morse, “Reiko Mochinaga Brandon: Bridging Two Cultures,” *Fiberarts: The Magazine of Textiles*, Sept./Oct. 1987, 14: 4, 16-17. Brandon also authored books on textiles during her years as the Honolulu Academy of Arts textiles curator.



1. R. Brandon, Winter Guardian, 1987



2. R. Brandon, *White Guardian*, 1986

completely natural straw and twigs, high-tech industrial copper wire of different gauges, and “low-tech” handcrafted paper. The copper’s strength and resistance, combined with the fine diameter of the wire and its natural pliancy, make it suitable as weft for Brandon’s tapestry or weft-faced weaving – weaving that completely hides the linen warp threads and provides a solid base of support for the more delicate and fragile natural materials in the top register. The middle register continues the tapestry, but gradually substitutes the paper-fiber weft, until the paper weft has completely replaced the metal – giving it “the upper hand,” we might say.

With the exception of the American wire, found at Sand Island, an industrial zone in Honolulu, the materials emanate from Japan’s “traditional past.” The paper comes from farmers’ account books she was given that were found in an abandoned village – one of many such left to decay as industrializing cities drew villagers to better-paying factories. These accounts were hand-written in the traditional *sumi* ink (aka “India ink”), used both for everyday writing and for artistic painting and calligraphy on hand-made paper; Brandon then cuts or tears the paper and hangs pieces of it in the sculpture (some of this is singed with a candle or electric burner), or reworks it, tearing it into strips and then twisting it into fiber. In that case the farmers’ original writing is lost to view, becoming a “hidden history.” She then sometimes dyes the woven paper, using natural dyes, or writes on it herself with *sumi*, tea, coffee, natural indigo or persimmon.

The upper register foregoes the solidity of the tapestry weaving for more scattered, isolated, seemingly random arrangements of the twigs, straw, and small strips of paper, whose asymmetry and delicacy suggest vulnerability into the future even as the stolidity of the base suggests a solid grounding. Brandon describes this process as “I let the piece sing its own stories.”

Inspiration

Brandon’s Guardian series thus brings together a lifetime of experiences, integrating passions felt as a child during events whose outcomes were still uncertain, with the perspective, knowledge of outcomes, and even wisdom of an adult. What does this example suggest about inspiration? First, in this case it is clear there were a number of different sources of inspiration. In a sense, the Guardians serendipitously bring together many facets of Brandon’s own biography: the industrial wire from her new American home, the weaving she learned as a young graduate student in fiber studies, the traces of traditional Japan still lingering during her childhood and encountered anew on her 1980 return, as well as her first-hand experience with fire-bombing that destroyed her home as well as an enormous city that reappears in the singing of the paper. If we are talking about inspiration in my second (“weak”) sense – the germ of the idea, the conception – must we not say that most of her life provided the inspiration for these pieces?

And does this not suggest that our key metaphor for the “weak” kind of inspiration, the kernel or germ, is misleading? Complex as the plants that arise from such a seed are, they are, like human embryos, the result of only two

sources of characteristics. But are we not talking, in the case of Brandon's art, about something more like a river, which has multiple sources and along whose course many different kinds of substances may enter?

With the exception of her training in fiber arts, these are experiences familiar to hundreds of thousands, even millions, of Japanese of her generation – as well as to Guernicans, Londoners, Germans, Iraqis, and others. Although their ultimate “dislocation” wasn't always geographical as it was in her case, the internal experiences of loss of home and culture, of growing up with substitutions (many of which “work” just fine) and of not even recognizing what you are missing, of maturing and making a life, of changing identity, of suddenly reencountering the lost identity unexpectedly, are widespread. Indeed, with the exception of watching one's home being bombed, much of this material – the losses, the shocks, the dislocations, the reinventions of identity – were familiar to her parents' and grandparents' generations as well – since the Meiji Restoration initiated the fundamental modernization processes. (And even watching one's house burn as part of the destruction of one's city was familiar to tens of thousands of victims of the Great Tokyo Earthquake of 1926.) What, then, accounts for the specificity of Brandon's work?

Materials, Form, Symbolic Power

Brandon took inspiration from physical materials. Consider the polyvalent discarded copper wire she ran across in an industrial district in Hawaii. It represents modernization, and industrial culture – and also, to her (she told me), America. This last symbolic identification may be specific to her, based on her finding it here and on the fact that she was looking for something that contrasted with the “traditional” and historic Japan she encountered on the trip that had prompted her new awareness of Japan and new sense of her own identity. I, by contrast, associate the copper wire as much with Japan in its modernization (Meiji period, 1868-1912; Taisho, 1912-1926; and early Showa, 1926-1989) as with America. Virtually all Japanese were absorbed during that extended time with questions about how to modernize, industrialize, Westernize – and some of this (a great deal, but by no means all) meant “Americanizing.” So from a Japanese perspective such industrialization may itself suggest an earlier contrast.

Beyond these cultural connotations, the copper wire also gives support to the entire structure when tightly woven (how's that for a symbolic connotation regarding America and industrialization?!). Its flexibility permits the work to be shaped so that it both is free-standing and accommodates an empty interior. (How different such pieces would be with a solid wooden or stone base, for example!) At the same time this emptiness represents Japan's inner emptiness at that time, expressing Japan's moral, political and even religious situation after the war, when religious and political leadership – military, social, and imperial – had been discredited, social institutions dissolved or reinvented, and whole communities and a dozen cities, destroyed. The numbers of the missing alone were staggering. How to rebuild? Should we not say that it was Japan's situation at the time that was one of Brandon's deepest inspirations?

Of course, emptiness in Japan is by no means a negative concept. There is a positive value to be ascribed to it – in the Buddhist metaphysical sense, and aesthetically, where “empty” or “negative” space (to use our English terms) suggests the fullness of the Dao and the context of calm serenity so important to truth and to aesthetic and emotional satisfaction. In this sense, Japan’s very ability to empty itself of what were after 1945 outmoded political institutions and abused cultural forms, became the foundation of the new society, permitting growth, rebuilding, reconnecting to core values, and reimagining new values. This symbolic wealth, the Buddhist and Daoist legacy, thus informs the sculptures, raising them to the level of symbolism.

Technique and Effects of the Body

Like traditional Japanese calligraphy (Jp. *shodo*), weaving on a floor loom (as opposed to a table loom) requires coordinating the whole body, torso and legs as well as arms, and one breathes with it. It typically involves one’s whole weight and balance system, and establishes a rhythm of its own (whose nature depends on the width of the warp, the type of shuttle used, the weight of the weft thread, the complexity of the treading pattern and the length of the units repeated). Tapestry weaving is slower, more painstaking, usually due to the representational images and geometric patterns, which do not factor here, however. But the fact of using metal, whose memory is so strong, requiring but a single act to bend it permanently (until another force changes its angle), makes this process even more painstaking, something Brandon says she accomplished only with a lot of practice.

The Chain of Inspiration

The most important inspiration regarding Brandon’s work is the inspiration it provides the viewer – at once immanent, very much of this world, and transcendent – referring us to ultimate realities, to values that transcend the immediate physical environment and social world to encompass the deepest past of the human spirit. If ever there was art that “transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, and evokes in us all those beneficent forces that ever and anon have enabled humanity to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night,” to quote Jung’s statement once more, it is Brandon’s.

Keiko Tsuji

Keiko Tsuji is another Japanese artist who weaves art on topics “inspired by” war and mass destruction. In her case, these are the atomic bombings, the nuclear testing on Bikini Island and the “3/11” “triple disasters” that hit March 11, 2011 – the earthquake, tsunami, and the release of radiation due to the partial destruction of the nuclear power plant at Fukushima. (“Meanwhile, [Tsuji writes] this year [2012] is the 60th anniversary of the hydrogen-bomb test in Bikini. Bravo Test was said to be 1,000 times more destructive than the atomic bombing in Hiroshima. The H-bomb has made the entire Earth ‘a victim of radiation exposure.’”) In her 2012 catalogue of her work, she writes, “...I was completely unable to get down to work after March 11. As a disaster artist,

I became powerless and helpless... I was overwhelmed by the rush of the Japanese character for the word 'sen' folding from the media reporting the disaster: *hosyashen* (radiation exposure), *jikko senryo* (effective dose), *kukan hosyassenryo* (radiation dose in the air), *teisenryo hibaku* (small dose exposure), *hosyassen* (radiation), *osensui* (contaminated water), *kyosen* (decontamination), *dojyo osen* (land contamination), *idenshi* (gene), *sensyokutai* (chromosome), *senryo* (dose), *kansen* (infection), etc. 'Sen' is a homonym that also means 'a line' in Japanese. I draw 'sens' or marks, on my fabrics, and for me, they are supposed to depict happiness..."²⁷ Her solution – which the text of her catalogue makes explicit – was to reconnect with the spirit world by means of woven silk work that connects her (body and soul) to the physical landscape and its spirits.

Thus we can say that not only the topic but the language of the post-disaster time inspired this work, language suddenly being used again (now in a non-war context) but also offering a powerful symbol, the line. In Japan, the art of the line, calligraphy, uses the same skills and materials (a pliant brush and *sumi* ink) for both writing and painting, that is, for denoting linguistic meaning, for aesthetic experience, and (because of the need to coordinate respiration, heart beat, and muscle movements through training over many years), for expression of the individual's body and spirit *at that very moment of drawing the line*. As a result, calligraphy is recognized as embodying (for the future, which will be the new viewer's present) the artist's body-mind (the term often used to translate the Japanese "*kokoro*"). In Tsuji's case, the line she draws over the landscape is of vermillion silk, woven to her body width (either her shoulders or her torso) (Plate 3 and 4).²⁸ Like calligraphy, it also incorporates (literally!) her body rhythms: "My textile works, which are woven out of my own existence ... are woven according to my own biorhythms, sometimes very tightly and sometimes with loosely inserted crosswise threads, so they change according to even slight stimulation from the world around them." This makes it literal in-spiration, literally "breathing in" or taking in spirit. Then we must ask, don't Brandon's *Guardians* similarly include the breath, the inspiration, of the long-dead farmers who wrote the accounts? In Tsuji's case, these are the spirits of the land itself; Yasuo Kobayashi asks, "What kind of indication on Earth is a piece of work carrying, in a forbidden place where the primitiveness of ancient time still remains or in a holy place in which supernatural power still seems to control."²⁹

Another source of inspiration for her is the natural landscape, which becomes her collaborator, her partner. She says, "[They] are fabrics that by themselves cannot represent completed expression."³⁰

27 2014 *Red like the spring water* (あかからあかへ。あるいわ火と水; *aka kara aka e. arui wa hito mizu*). All quotes are from this text unless otherwise noted. Japanese terms italicized by Mara Miller.

28 Kei Tsuji, *Drawing: Fieldwork Notes* (Tokyo: Soko Tokyo Gallery, 1992), 17.

29 Yasuo Kobayashi in Kei Tsuji, *Drawing*, 17.

30 Tsuji, *Drawing*, 10.



3. Tsuji Kei HI Red Silk at Water's Edge use



4. Tsuji Kei Red Silk in Water HI USE

CONCLUSION

The concept of inspiration is as useful today as it ever was. In fact, we may need it more now than in ancient times, when it was used to “explain” the inexplicable and when Plato’s confusion over the roles and importance of rules led to misleading divisions among the arts and a mistaken view of the artist’s sanity – and a way to dismiss her contributions.

Close examination of work by contemporary artists shows that inspiration is far more complex than is acknowledged by common usage, ancient philosophers, or even psychoanalysts and contemporary philosophy. Far from being a dichotomous either/or phenomenon, inspiration is various. It occurs in many guises – as gods, dreams, ideas, visions, materials, methods, sites, landscapes. It reveals itself all at once, intermittently, or gradually. It may present either the whole idea as a *fait accompli*, which the artist “merely” makes manifest, or as pieces at a time – which the artist may or may not have to struggle to realize. It may torment an artist with a vision that she must figure out. It has many sources, from active collaboration with a site or materials, one’s own body, the subject matter, the spirits of the past or of place.

Today, with the guidance of Jung’s theory of the collective unconscious, we can understand it better than ever – especially when we take evidence into consideration and don’t insist on making it fit one mold.

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**Singularity, Universality and Inspiration
in their Relation to Artistic Creation**

Abstract

This article opens its discussion of inspiration by giving an outline of the extended theory of singularity in aesthetic experience that has been presented in a number of lectures and papers given or written over the last two years by the author. The second section of this text discusses the sense in which singularity and inspiration can be brought together. A third section is dedicated to the relation between inspiration and the aesthetic experience of universality, which, according to the author's theoretical framework, can sometimes emerge after the experience of singularity.

Keywords: generality, inspiration, particularity, singularity, universality

For about 20 years – roughly between 1980 and 2000 – when I was developing my work as an artist, I wrote quite a lot about it and I gave several interviews. I must confess that during that period, in those texts and interviews, I never used the word inspiration. And this omission was on purpose. Not using the word was a deliberate way of wholly stressing the artistic action and the very few moments of absolute discovery that the artist can experience during her or his activity. This experience exists because that activity is being developed, and of course because the artist's attention is totally concentrated in her doing, waiting, so to speak, for that special instant of discovery. This discovery – so I used to think – is something that comes out of the work which is being done and, so to say, hits the artist at some level of her intelligence of the artwork; in this sense, the discovery should not be conceived of as a gift or a glimpse inspired by any factor situated outside the material process of plastic doing. By that time, such exceptional moments were already conceived as singular instants, but only by the end of that period – in 1998 and 1999 – have I been able to take the first steps in a comprehensive theory of singularity as a consequence of my interest in hermeneutics. For the present purposes, the interesting fact is that from then on the long tradition of reflection on the topic of inspiration could be reevaluated in the light of the theory of singularity, and the topic of instantaneous discovery in art now seemed much closer to inspiration than it did before, provided that the idea of the materiality of the process would not be abandoned.

I shall begin this contribution to the discussion on inspiration by giving a brief outline of the extended theory of singularity in aesthetic experience that I have presented in a number of lectures and papers given or written over the last two years. The second section of this text will attempt to discuss in what sense singularity and inspiration can be brought together. The third section will be dedicated to the relation between inspiration and the aesthetic experience of universality which, according to my theoretical framework, can sometimes emerge after the experience of singularity.

1. Aesthetic experience. From singularity to universality

From the point of view that I adopt, singularity is a fact of experience. This means that my treatment of this topic will not be grounded mainly on considerations originating from the field of logic. Logic can help us to understand some aspects of singularity but here it will not be given the foreground. On the other hand, the singularity of aesthetic experience can be understood from the point of view of the receiver of the artwork or from the point of view of the artist. These two perspectives have much in common, but they also have their own specificities. In this paper – and precisely because our aim lies on the connection between singularity and inspiration – I shall adopt only the point of view of the artwork's producer.

Singularity can be defined in a set of oppositions: singularity vs. particularity; singularity vs. generality; singularity vs. universality. It goes without saying that this set of oppositions also means there are other oppositions that can be of some interest to us, in spite of not directly involving the topic of singularity; this is the case namely of generality vs. particularity, generality vs. universality and particularity vs. universality. But we will not deal with these last oppositions as they have little to do with our main purposes in this paper.

The first opposition to be defined here will be the one between singularity and particularity, on the one hand because the two terms are quite often understood as synonymic or almost synonymic, and on the other because this will lead us almost directly to a first and basic understanding of singularity. I call particulars those facts of experience that basically do not communicate. They do not communicate with each other and they do not communicate with other facts of experience. Particulars of experience are so to say private and mute. If, in the development of her activities, the artist incorporates in her work immediate data of perception, or of imagination, which do not give rise to any type of plastic discovery capable of amplification in the creative process, then she is dealing only with particularities, which in fact can be accumulated, but will not – as such – be open to instances of communication (or, as I also call it, instances of movement or functioning) at the level of the artwork or of a set of artworks. This is what I understand as the muteness of the particulars of aesthetic experience. But particulars are also private, in the sense that they remain totally encapsulated in the individual's deepest regions of existence, incapable of establishing any active or reactive connections with experiences of

other human beings. Nevertheless, although I will not specifically address the problem in this paper, particulars of experience can sometimes be sufficiently unstable so that, under certain conditions, they may exceptionally evolve in the direction of generality or even in the direction of singularity and universality.

As long as particulars do not (exceptionally) evolve in one of these directions, and in spite of being sometimes unstable, they are fundamentally static. In a certain sense they remain outside the dimension of time. This is not the case with the singularities of aesthetic experience. Singulars involve an internal movement; they are essentially part of a process. We shall call this process a train of thought or a train of perceptual activity. Let us imagine that the artist, in the course of her activity – which is necessarily developed along the dimension of time –, maintains a homogeneous train of thought in a straight forward direction, and at a certain moment that very same train of thought meets an obstacle of some kind that does not allow for the progression to continue in the same direction. The interruptive effect of the obstacle can be brief or long, but the consequence will be that sooner or later the previous train of thought will be deflected, and a new direction of thought will be engaged. If the deflection does not take place and the artist does not overcome the obstacle, we can say that a particular of experience has established itself without being able to communicate. On the contrary, when the deflection does happen we can say that a moment of absolute discovery has taken place and the previous train of thought has assumed a totally new character. This instant of newness and radical discovery is what we should call a singularity of aesthetic experience. It can only happen in the course of a process which has a certain duration, but nevertheless it is a fact of what Deleuze has characterized as an *instantaneous velocity*.

Let us focus now on the opposition between singularity and universality. What is universality from the point of view of experience and, in particular, of aesthetic experience? Formulated in this way, the question immediately sets us apart from those philosophical traditions that try to understand universals exclusively from a logical point of view. My claim is that universals of experience do exist, and that they can be defined in opposition to general concepts and in a specific relation to the singulars of experience. I shall begin my argumentation by elucidating this relation.

To use a common expression, universals of experience occur whenever we get the sudden and illuminating impression that “we have seen it all.” Here another *instantaneous velocity* is involved, but it is quite different from the previous one, since the effect of universality is obtained by a leap, a constitutive discontinuity, and not by a deflection of the train of thought or of perceptual activity as was the case with singulars. We can describe the relation (and simultaneously the difference) between singularity and the effect of universality by means of a sequence involving continuity and discontinuity. Let us suppose that the artist in the course of her work has had an experience of singularity as we have described it above. It can happen that the new train of thought or of perceptual activity that she has now engaged in as a consequence of that experience goes on being developed until the moment when the type of novel

but nevertheless circumscribed discovery that she has experienced suddenly gives way to a second type of illuminating event that opens a whole range of new possibilities, an unlimited field of creativity, which on the one hand derives from the previous experience of singularity, but which on the other hand can only be attained as a result of a radical discontinuity in relation to the train of thought being developed after the experience of singularity. This discontinuity, to use an expression dear to Kierkegaard, can be called a *leap*. Such a leap, to be sure, is a fact of intuition. But, from the point of view I adopt here, it is a consequence of two instances: first, if there is not a previous course of work dealing with plastic or conceptual materials and providing the necessary inputs for artistic decision-making, the intuition, as a part of the artistic productive process, will not have a ground from which it can depart in its specific movement – the metaphor of the leap also means that a material basis is needed so that the elastic movement can take place; second, the previous course of work has to be shaped – or (in)formed – in such a way that we can understand it as discursive, not necessarily in the sense that it should be of a linguistic nature, but in the sense that it has to contain a certain set of internal connections that can be detected and described. When these two conditions are not met, the effect of universality may still exist but it will be of an “irrational” nature (as it happens in mystical experiences or in phenomena of conversion either religious or political). And when universality is basically irrational, an important trait of aesthetic experience will be missing: freedom. This means that the experience of universality – provided that it occurs as a discontinuity on the basis of a sequence involving the materiality of the work and the type of linkage that we called an experience of singularity – offers the artist an unlimited range of possibilities for the subsequent development of her work. On the contrary, the “irrational” universals establish a closed and narrow set of possibilities that can only stimulate repetition in the poorest sense of the word.

2. Singularity and inspiration

Inspiration can be thought of as an event that starts outside the artistic process and which interferes with this process at a certain moment later in time. This is not the main trend of my understanding of inspiration, but it exists, and I shall begin by trying to describe it.

From this point of view we are precisely at the level of the particulars of experience. A particularity of experience, for instance, on account of its repetition or precisely because of its obsessive isolation, can in some circumstances impose itself so strongly that it leads the artist – compulsively or not – to repeated use of certain data extracted from that particular experience. In such cases, the common usage of language tends to identify this use of particular data as a phenomenon of *inspiration*: the artist has been *inspired* by one aspect of the particularity of her experience.

When I say that this inspiration event starts outside the artistic process I am thinking of an artist who is already an artist leading an artistic course of work

of her own and who suddenly is lead to incorporate in that work something that derives from a particular experience which in itself is not primarily artistic. But the same applies to the non-artist who suddenly decides to undertake an artistic activity motivated by an experience of particularity of the same nature. The point is that in such situations it is not the artistic activity itself that gives rise to the experience of discovery involved in the productive work.

On the contrary, when a singularity of experience takes place, the inspirational event is of a completely different nature. In this case, the sudden discovery which happens for the artist and illuminates her work, presents itself totally anew and opens a whole set of previously unexpected possibilities; this does not flow from an external fact, but rather from the effect of deflection of the previous train of thought or train of perceptual activity which, as we have seen, is the consequence of an obstacle and of the insistence the artist places simultaneously on the overcoming of the obstacle and on the continuity of the process already in progress. In the experience of singularity no discontinuity is involved, but there is a fundamental change of direction (which is also to be evaluated as a change of sense or meaning) of the previous train of conceptual or perceptual activity. On the other hand, the deflection and the continuity of the process is only possible because the artist has had the experience and the consciousness of the obstacle and because she did not merely abandon the problematic event of meeting an obstacle, but instead she has persistently persevered in finding a way of getting rid of the obstacle without simply eliminating it artificially and without losing all the acquisitions she has obtained, namely during the process that led her to that precise obstacle. This means that the experience of singularity and its creative effects are brought about through the very sequence of work that the artist is developing. The singularity of aesthetic experience suddenly appears before the artist as a discovery emanating from her artistic activity, but also as a discovery that – at least partly – cannot be grounded in a positive manner or deduced from anything according to a logical process. In this sense, I would say that the singularity of artistic or aesthetic experience involves an element of *mystery*, something that can be described to a certain extent but that cannot be fully explained. And this is precisely what the singularity of aesthetic experience has in common with the notion of inspiration. We will need to come back to this conglomerate and to the mystery that it involves.

Traditionally, inspiration is depicted as a descendent movement. The Greek *epíphnoia* was conceived as a kind of blowing or breath coming from above, namely from a god. The fact that inspiration came from a divinity – the Muses or Apollo – was a manner of stating that the primitive origin or grounding of the movement was out of reach for human understanding; it was a mystery. And the fact that it was seen as a descendent movement only stated the very same mysterious character of the occurrence. What interests me in this moment is the fact that a modern conceptualization of inspiration, while dispensing with the interference of a divinity, can and should maintain the notion that the phenomenon is not totally explainable – or reducible to an exhaustive linguistic string – but at the same time will have to completely invert the direction of the event. The movement of inspiration is no longer descendent; on the contrary,

inspiration emerges to the surface out of the underlying sequence of work and thought in which the artist is involved. The movement is fundamentally ascendant.

The movement being ascendant also means that the metaphor of breath, which was originally at the root of the inspirational event, tends to disappear and be replaced by another type of metaphors: those of the semantic field of light. Thirty five years ago, in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Richard Rorty has shown very clearly – and critically – the importance of metaphors of light for what is usually called modern philosophy,¹ and in the field of arts and creative processes the concept of *illumination* put forward by Rimbaud is much more than a mere appendix to the poet's concept of poetics. In both fields, the typical blindness involved in the ancient metaphor of breath (or blowing) has completely lost its applicability. But the metaphors of light, in spite of Rorty's and other philosophers' criticism, have maintained a great deal of efficacy. What I have said in the first section of this paper about the illuminating effect of the aesthetic experience of singularity finds here its most striking consequences. The singularity of experience is illuminating precisely because it gives rise to an event of inspiration. Inspiration is the link here that connects the process of deflection, which we have described, with the subsequent artistic creative activity. From the point of view of artistic creativity, the consequences of the deflective moment cannot even be fully outlined if we do not recur to the concept of inspiration. And this is so because a deflection in the previous train of thought or perceptual activity can easily happen without consequences at the level of plastic or poetic doing; this is what happens, for instance, if the experience of singularity takes place in a viewer rather than in an active artist. The active artist needs – besides the experience of singularity – an impulse towards her own artistic activity, and this impulse is exactly what takes place when the singularity of aesthetic experience is accompanied by the experience of inspiration, and all the facts in which inspiration materializes itself at the levels of knowledge, emotion, will, and the activity of the body.

Now, the connective link between the singularity of aesthetic experience in the moment of the deflection and the inspirational impulse that we have just mentioned is nothing other than the moment of mystery we have detected above. I use the word *mystery* in a trivial, but nevertheless instructive sense. A mystery is a fact or a situation that we cannot explain, although it has happened or goes on happening; something that existed or persists in its existence in spite of the fact that we do not know anything fundamental about the emergence of such existence. Some mysteries can be solved; but I would say that those are not the really interesting mysteries from a philosophical point of view. What I find interesting here is the strenuous persistence of our ignorance towards the mysterious event. No matter what we do, no matter what we try, some events present themselves in an impenetrable thickness. They comprise a constitutive hiatus somewhere between what comes before that event and the event itself,

¹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and The Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), e.g. 36-39, 48, 189ff.

and there seems to be no logical operation, be it inductive or deductive, that can bridge that hiatus. This type of situation has been detected at certain moments in the history of philosophy. Leibniz, for instance, in his “*Meditationes de cognitione, veritate et ideis*,” spoke of a certain *nescio quid* which is deeply embedded in what he called *cognitio clara confusa*. Knowledge is clear if there is recognition. But the subject may not know why or how the recognition takes place; in this case the clear knowledge is confused or indistinct, in opposition to what Leibniz calls distinct clear knowledge, which happens when the subject, by means of characteristics (*per notas*), knows exactly why he recognizes the object. Leibniz gives an example of confused clear knowledge recurring precisely to the domain of art: painters and other artists can recognize what is right and what is wrong in an artwork, but it often happens that, when they are asked why, they cannot state the reason of their judgment, and say they miss something, they don’t know what, in the object which displeases them (*dicere, se in re quae displicet desiderare nescio quid*).² Our problem is, of course, not a question of something being right or wrong in an artwork. But apart from this, there is a striking parallel between Leibniz’s *nescio quid* and what we have been calling the mystery involved in inspiration. And this is so because Leibniz’s artist is dealing with something that is absolutely certain for him, in spite of ignorance of the reason why, exactly as the artist that we have been thinking about has an important amount of certainty regarding the direction that her work is going to take, in spite of her ignorance of a final cause for the moment of inspiration which has stricken her or of a fundamental connection between the process of deflection typical of the experience of singularity and that very same moment of inspiration.

The only thing that we can say about this connection is that it functions as a tendency. And the mystery resides precisely in the fact that a mere tendency, necessarily involving a cognitive or perceptive hiatus, can be as effective as to point distinctly to a certain creative path. If in this context I speak of a tendency it is because I would like to pinpoint clearly the opposition between this type of connection and any form of a sequential string where we are able to detect the whole set of links between a first causal moment and the final outcome of the sequence. A tendency-like movement such as the one we are dealing with here can be approximately described as an *inclination*, resulting from the discovery involved in the deflective moment of the singularity of aesthetic experience, towards a certain set of possibilities – rather than others – of the inspirational event. In a certain sense, we are talking here about a probability that the inspirational event takes on a certain form and exerts its influence in a certain direction. But a probability of this kind can be wholly contradicted by the mere fact that we never know for sure how the complex inclination-tendency will behave. The discovery resulting from the deflection and the inclination that the discovery provides only establish a field of variation where the tendency that we have mentioned is supposed to operate with relative freedom. We can

2 Cf. Gottfried W. von Leibniz, *God. Guil. Leibnitii Opera philosophica quae exstant Latina, Gallica, Germanica omnia*. J.E. Erdmann Ed., Berlin, 1839-40; (repr. Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1974), 79.

call this freedom a restricted one, since the inclination operates in one exclusive sense. But it is nevertheless a type of freedom taking place at the innermost core of the inspirational event, as it is obvious that the tendency, being only a tendency, moves inside a relatively wide range of possibilities, eventually motivated by factors that we cannot control, anticipate, or even describe in the aftermath of the event's outcome.

This situation seems important also from another perspective: the one known as the criticism of the subject in the artistic activity. From the point of view we adopt here, what we have called a tendency is something that is at work – namely in its free choices inside a range of possibilities – independently of the creative subject. On the contrary, the creative subject, who has been active in the continuity of her work prior to the moment of the singularity of aesthetic experience, and who will continue to be active after the intervention of the inspirational event, is so to speak totally passive in her apprehension of the deflection, of the inclination, and of the results of the tendency's activity when it exerts its choices in the field of possibilities opened up by the inclination. In the end, we find that there is a moment in which we can really say that the subject is no longer the artist but, on the contrary, the very core of the inspirational event. In this sense, we can understand how and why the criticism of the subject in artistic activity can go as far as to consider the work of art as the subject of the creative process, because if the inspirational event involves a subjectivity of its own and at the same time leads to the emergence of a definite artwork, then this artwork fully inherits the subjectivity of the free choice that is at play in inspiration.

3. Universality and inspiration

We face a new degree of complexity when we arrive at the problem of the relationship between inspiration and the universals of aesthetic experience. We will have to deal here with two main aspects of the problem: on one side, the *unlimited* set of possibilities opened by the universality of aesthetic experience and, on the other side, the fact that the discontinuity of the *leap* taking place in the constitutive process of a universal somehow duplicates the difficulties that we have met above when we tried to approach the moment of mystery involved in inspiration. In fact, the two aspects, as we will see, are not to be separated.

One of the differences between a singularity and a universal of aesthetic experience is that the deflection which gives rise to a new train of thought or perceptual activity determines a single direction, while the consequence of the leap typical of universals is a multitude of virtually unlimited possible directions. In this sense, an important question is raised about the connection between inspiration and this unlimited openness: is this absence of limits obtained only by means of the leap, or is it a consequence of an inspirational event taking part in the process, and somehow connected with the leap?

We do not want to confuse the leap with the inspirational event that takes place at this level. We have stated that the leap requires a previous sequence of effective artistic work that has to be understood as a discursive continuity constituting the material basis out of which the discontinuity of the leap can take place. And we have added that in this case and under such conditions, a universal of aesthetic experience can take place involving a fundamental freedom responsible for an infinite number of productive possibilities. But when we come to the problem of the relation between a universal of aesthetic experience and inspiration, we indeed have to go further in the characterization of the leap: we have to deal with the energies that are at stake in the process – those energies which in Leibniz’s expression were designated as *forces* (French: *force*; German: *Kraft*; Latin: *vis activa*). The leap takes place not through the effect of an obstacle, but because at some point along the train of thought and artistic activity, which results from the singular deflection, an amount of energy is accumulated in such a way that sooner or later an outburst becomes inevitable. This is what happens when the artist, after following for quite a while the direction suggested to her by the experience of singularity and by the inspirational event, starts to experience that she needs more than the mere repetition of something she already knows and dominates. From the point of view I adopt here this does not mean that the trend of thought and the course of artistic doing have lost their energy, but only that that energy – which has in fact been expanding – has possibly become paralyzing and fiercely wants to be redirected towards something else. At this moment of the process, this *something else* is totally unpredictable. In other words, the leap cannot be described in the same quasi-mechanical way in which we have described the deflection; on the contrary, the leap projects the artist to a realm of possibilities that at first sight may have almost no connection with her previous work. But the whole problem is based on this *almost*. And it is so because, from our point of view, the leap and the second kind of inspirational event that – as we shall see – accompanies it cannot happen without the previous course of work that we have pinpointed. This means that at least a *residual effect* of that course of work must be constitutive of the leap and persist after the efficacy of the leap, although perhaps in a transformed shape. In a certain sense we can adopt for this residual effect an expression dear to Vladimir Jankélévitch: it can be in fact conceived as an *almost nothing* (*un presque-rien*),³ but we should not forget that in art and in aesthetic reflection an *almost nothing* is certainly much more effective than any kind of massive event.

The outburst deriving from the energetic tension that we have pointed out as being part of a relatively late moment in the process, which follows the experience of aesthetic singularity, includes elements from the course of work leading to that explosive event. What these elements can exactly be stays out of our present concerns; it is enough to say that they can be formal, conceptual or even technical. The important fact is that such elements are simultaneously part of the artist’s *language*

³ Cf. Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le Je-ne-sais quoi et le presque-rien*, v. 1-3 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1957; 2e éd. aug., Paris: Seuil, 1980).

and part of the difficulty that the artist experiences in pursuing her course of work. When the leap finally takes place, the artist will be able to recognize the elements that have survived the explosion. But what exactly gives rise to the outburst? And how exactly does it happen? Here we are faced with what we can call the *second mystery* in the creative process. All we can say is that an accumulation of energy – which takes place in the material activity of the artist, and should not be seen as a mere psychological event taking place in the artist's *mind* – attains at a certain moment a peak of tension so high that the outburst becomes inevitable (this, of course, presuming that the artist does not simply give in to the repetitive flow of strict sameness). This explosion is what we have called the *leap*. This means that the leap is not unidirectional and does not have a defined ground for its landing. It starts from a material basis and it attains a state of quasi-vacuum where only scattered particles of the previous course of work can be detected: the state of the *almost nothing*. But this *almost nothing* is exactly what is needed for the intervention of the *second moment of inspiration*. The state of the *almost nothing* is not a totally blind or mute territory where no choices can take place. It is – recurring once again to Leibniz's language, namely in the Preface to his *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* – a territory of *small perceptions* (also called by Leibniz *insensible perceptions*) where it is only necessary that the artist can isolate a particle or set of particles (thus transforming the *insensible* into something sensible) to be able to have a completely new experience of total illumination, which is what we have called the aesthetic experience of universality. And this is the terrain of the second moment of inspiration: to isolate a particle or set of particles or to transform an *insensible perception* into a sensible one is no longer the leap itself, but a new event taking place in the aftermath of the leap and because of the leap, although without having a completely fixed relation to the leap. This means that the leap does not determine the isolation of the particles and consequently it also does not determine the effect of universality that follows the act or acts of isolation. This second moment of inspiration then opens up an infinite field of possibilities through the fact that an *almost nothing* can turn into an *almost everything* which can be equated with an extremely wide field of action for the artist's freedom of choice.

The question regarding how an *almost nothing* can change into an *almost everything* is once again a mystery. But this mystery can be understood to a certain extent if we remember Leibniz's words about the *small perceptions*. Leibniz writes the following in the text we have mentioned above (the English translator uses "tiny perceptions" rather than "small perceptions"):

These tiny perceptions, then, are more effective in their results than has been recognized. They constitute that I don't know what (*ce je ne sais quoi*), those flavours, those images of sensible qualities, vivid in the aggregate but confused as to the parts; those impressions that are made on us by the bodies around us and that involve the infinite; that connection that each being has with all the rest of the universe. It can even be said that because of these tiny perceptions the present is big with the future and burdened with the past, that all things harmonize... and that eyes as piercing as God's could read in the lowliest substance the universe's whole sequence of events.⁴

4 Gottfried W. von Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding, Preface and Book I: Innate Notions*, trans. Jonathan Bennett, last modified April 2008, <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/leibniz1705book1.pdf>, 6.

As a matter of fact we only need to recognize this enormous efficacy of the *almost nothing* – or of the *small perceptions* – to accept that inspiration, universality, and infinity can combine effectively in a total theoretical picture which enables us to understand the extraordinary wide range of choices that at certain moments can stand before the artist. And this wide range of choices has to be thought of as a level of complete freedom, quite different from the one we have met when we were dealing with singularities and the first inspirational event. At this level, artistic freedom is so wide that the artist can move in several directions at the same time, as we can observe in many contemporary artists who, after having begun their careers within a more or less restricted range of experiments, have been able to immensely multiply their directional perspectives and even create different sets of works that according to a more traditional point of view would seem to be contradictory. This multidirectional type of work in contemporary art is exceptionally striking and I believe that artists such as Gerhard Richter, Bruce Nauman, Pedro Cabrita Reis or Wolfgang Tillmans, just to mention a few, have in different manners undergone an aesthetic experience of universality in-formed by one or several inspirational events of this second level that we have been describing. The constitutive dispersive character of these artists' oeuvre and its frontal attack against the reductionism of unity and of a poetic logos centered on itself would not be possible without what we have called an outburst and the myriad of *small perceptions* involved in the action of the second level of inspiration.

I would like to conclude with a remark on the topic of the subject parallel to the one above, discussed at the end of the second section of this paper. One can say, using Nietzsche's expression, that there is a *will to power* which is active in the process that we have tried to approach in this third section. What is problematic is to locate it exactly and to determine who – or what – is its subject. We have seen that the artist experiences a situation in which the train of thought or perceptive activity deriving from the experience of singularity is no longer effective. This is a constitutive moment of passivity. But this passivity does not stop here. It goes on during the event that we have called an explosion and that we have identified with the first moment of the leap. During this first part of the leap, the artist does not even know where she is going to land. This means that, until then, the *will to power* contained in the expansion of energy and in the outburst of tension has a subject, which is not the artist, but the process itself. But we are not yet at the end of the process. After the explosion, the artist only recognizes scattered remains of that event, which in a certain way could be identified with Horace's *disjecta membra poetae*. So, the artist remains passive. But where the *will to power* shows itself in its whole plenitude is in the moment when the remains from the explosion – the *almost nothing* or the *small perceptions* – become activated and start exerting their function, which is to show that they can transform themselves and appear before the artist as isolated particles of a universal whole. This means that, until this moment, the subject has always been the process itself and, in the last part of this process, the entire subjective efficacy resides in the *small*

perceptions. The artist only intervenes actively as a subject when she is finally able to collect the pieces and start working with them, something that would not happen if the isolated particles did not present themselves integrated in a universality of experience. From this point of view, we can say once again that the artworks that start to be produced by the artist at a certain moment after the explosion and the inspirational event would not exist without an autonomous basis, which is constitutive in their process of production. In other words, the artwork is in itself a result of a subjective process which is to a large extent alien to the artist. And in this sense we can now add that the artist is a product of the universality of aesthetic experience and of the inspirational events that are connected with such universality.

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Inspiration, Kenosis, and Formative Thinking about Art

Abstract

This paper endeavours to mount a case for a specific study of inspiration within 'the system' that art has largely become, by offering the concept of kenosis. The term kenosis is taken to imply a twofold dynamic, a 'self-emptying' and a 'being-emptied,' oriented towards a greater creative fulfilment. In proposing a direction for creative activity at the level of formative thinking, I raise these questions, among others: Can there be some mediating territory between different sources of inspiration, external and internal, which may be thought to take-hold-of an artist from within? Can this taking-hold be construed as a self-divesting model of inspiration? And how might kenosis mitigate art's self-sufficiency within the contested space of inspiration versus non-inspiration for art and its practices? I have proposed a philosophical assessment of art's place in the human account of reality, of art's self-proclaimed liberation, and an account of the key concepts of 'detachment,' Abgeschiedenheit, and 'letting-be,' Gelassenheit, for substantiating kenosis in contemporary creative terms.

Keywords: *art, contemporary art, inspiration, kenosis, 'detachment' (Abgeschiedenheit), 'letting-be' (Gelassenheit), Eckhart, Heidegger, Levinas, Nancy, Barthes*

This paper concerns the so-called problem of inspiration in the changes, which are seen to exist in the unfolding and understanding of art from a broadly philosophical perspective. It considers to what extent there is the possibility of introducing contemporary notions of creative inspiration and their bearings in/for modern philosophy, and whether such approaches and appraisals can be relevant to the art of our own times; and whether a 'space' for art and its discussion can admit any reference to a *transcendent* element of some kind, to an external source of inspiration, whether operating obscurely or obliquely in such practices; or whether the art of our time must still be conceived in terms largely self-explanatory and self-sufficient. Indeed, to quote the editor of this volume, whether a mechanism of reference to any external source of inspiration, such as the transcendent, "has the capacity to grow into a disclosed and consciously explored, even dominant fact, shaping the direction of change

in the arts?"¹ Here one is charged with bringing the philosophic venture and the artistic impulse closer together, to become aware of the conceptual and experiential possibilities of an uncommon enterprise: to articulate art in praise of *mind* and *hand*.

Etymology of the term Inspiration

By way of entry into the discussion, the word *inspiration* itself is derived from the Latin, *inspirare*, 'to breathe in,' 'to inhale.' The Oxford English Dictionary defines inspiration as: "a supposed creative force or influence on poets, artists, and musicians, stimulating the production of works of art; a person or principle stimulating artistic or moral fervour and creativity; stimulation by a divine or supernatural agency or influence; a sudden brilliant, creative or timely idea; a drawing in of breath: inhalation." With such a definition in mind, how may the dynamic of the term *inspiration* be found, determined, or even countermanded, in and by the artistic activity and creative works of contemporary times? To gain some entry into the nature of 'thinking' about art in relation to inspiration, we will commence with a Medieval philosopher on the nature of the 'understanding':

The understanding always works internally. The more refined and immaterial a thing is, the more powerfully it works internally. And the more powerful and refined the understanding is, the more that which it knows is united with it and is more one with it. This is not the case with material things – the more powerful they are, the more they work outside themselves.²

I will have more to say about Eckhart's thought in relation to 'detachment' (*Abgeschiedenheit*) and 'letting-go' (*Gelassenheit*), two concepts which may be conceived as having a bearing on my interpretation of *kenosis* (as 'self-emptying' or 'self-being-emptied') in the setting of art-making, as well as a more specific bearing on Heidegger's enlistment of 'letting-be,' *Gelassenheit*, in relation to what he calls *essential thinking*. But here, let us take as a starting point, this remarkable insight on 'the understanding' from Meister Eckhart. For it seems that until we come to some deeper comprehension of *understanding* itself (to *under-stand* is to 'stand under': to think, to perceive or apprehend), the equally taxing project of *thinking* about art will never offer up the possibilities of inspiration considered as an internal or external source of articulation in thought or practice. Indeed, there may yet be the kind of understanding which is a *prefiguration* of inspiration, to the extent that the human understanding is capable of becoming united with the object of its knowledge; of being *inspired* by it; but it appears to operate internally, according to Eckhart, and therefore secretly, and in a hidden way. Inspiration appears to be either an undisclosed and highly idiosyncratic thing, peculiar to the individual as a sort of personal

1 Bogna J. Obidzińska, Editor, *Art and Philosophy*, forthcoming issue, December 2014, cited in a communication to me, November 2013.

2 Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher*, Bernard McGinn, Ed. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 259.

possession, or else a common external resource from which many individuals may draw, simply by summoning up some impulse within themselves.

Rather than evoking an 'embarrassed smile,' can the principle of inspiration, unpredictable as to its time, its utterances and influences, still elicit a more profoundly moving account of human experience and expression? Can inspiration be something tracked or merely *traced* in the circumstances and conditions of contemporary practice? I hope to develop such questions in due course.

Moreover, A. G. Sertillanges may be right in recommending certain considerations to the thinker which can have far-reaching effects: he suggests

a certain passivity of attitude which corresponds to the nature of the mind and of inspiration. We do not know very well how the mind works, but we know that passivity is its first law. Still less do we know how inspiration comes; but we can notice that it utilizes our unconsciousness more than our initiative...

Try to project your thought into the object of knowledge, not to keep it within yourself... You must look through the mind in the direction of things, not into the mind, which is more or less forgetful of things. In the mind we have the means of seeing, not the object of sight: let the means not distract us from the goal.³

Looking 'through the mind in the direction of things,' to the being of things thought and made, is wise counsel as we consider the possible scope of inspiration in philosophical discourse. For if we cannot know directly 'how inspiration comes,' but that it somehow 'utilizes our unconsciousness more than our initiative,' as Sertillanges attests, then certain questions arise for us in examining the complexities of invoking inspiration in contemporary practice, for now there appears a contentious space, a marked demarcation, between inspiration and art's so-called 'self-sufficiency.' Indeed, and by extension, is any claimed 'originality' on the part of the artistic personality merely a cipher for some external source of inspiration, or can it be internally generated? If so, what is its possible value to the individual and to others, to appreciative society at large, if what is simply implanted in the individual is devoid of the trials of longing and labour? Is inspiration something given from 'on high' as some transcendent avowal or promise, or is it something arising from the human subject and any natural giftedness or skill he/she may possess?

And a further question suggests itself. According to Hegel, skill in artistic production "comes not by inspiration," but is solely the province of "reflection, industry and practice"; indeed, the higher an artist's achievement, Hegel attests, the more *profound* should be his investigations of heart and mind, which remain unknown "without learning them," and which "are only to be fathomed by the direction of a man's own mind to the inner and outer world." Such terms and conditions were exemplary requirements for Hegel, undergirding and reinforcing his creative individual as a "thinking consciousness."⁴

Moreover, the direction of our minds towards 'the inner and outer world' would suggest an inwardly or outwardly born incentive, coming not, apparently,

³ Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods*, Mary Ryan, Trans. (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 132.

⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, Bernard Bosanquet, Trans. (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 35.

by inspiration, but by some autonomous divining, willed by, or granted to, the individual, by means of which skill, reflection and industry become manifest in the works of artistic production as expressions of the fathoming of mind and heart. Noble sentiments in themselves, but do they still have resonance for thinking about contemporary artistic activity today, which seems such a heteronomous practice, overladen (or is it overburdened?) with the assertions of self-consciousness. I hope to draw out some implications from these questions. But here, some contrasts with Heidegger.

Heidegger and 'What is Ownmost to Art'

I turn to Heidegger in order to show that, not that he was particularly interested in notions of inspiration or its manifestations, but that he suggests what I would call, *intus legere*, a 'reading-inside-things,' itself a *habitus* of mind in the attempt to *think Being*. Indeed, Heidegger's seminal project was in part a radical questioning: the *overcoming* of metaphysics, and simultaneously the overcoming of *aesthetics*, which also means "overcoming a certain conception of beings as what is objectively representable." For Heidegger, the overcoming of metaphysics and consequently aesthetics, "means freeing the priority of the question of the truth of being in the face of any 'ideal,' 'causal,' 'transcendental' and 'dialectical' explanation of beings." Such a move is not an ousting of existing philosophy, Heidegger argues, but rather "the leap into its first beginning."⁵

Could such an impetus be transposed to the conditions and happenings of contemporary art, in that some kind of inspiration might be accorded to this very *withdrawal* from any explanation of creative practice, which might accede to external sources, whether ideal, causal, transcendental and dialectical? Is this demeanour of the artistic human subject, this refusal to accommodate such sources, itself a virtue, a liberation, for creative action? And what might be the costs of jettisoning any access to such sources? Perhaps a partial explanation may be found in what Heidegger now proposes as 'ownmost,' or proper to the sphere of art.

What Heidegger posits as ownmost is what is *proper* to art, as such, and which, accordingly, enables thinking in relation to art. Situated in respect of Western art and its works, this ownmost begins to align itself as a freeing mechanism: that is to say, with freeing the truth of being over against any 'ideal,' 'causal,' and 'transcendental' and 'dialectical' explanation of beings. What Heidegger calls the 'lack of art,' is a phenomenon over against which stands, or arises, the ownmost. I quote this remarkable passage in full:

The lack of art here does not arise from incapacity or decadence but rather from the power of knowing that the essential decisions through which that [knowing] must pass which up until now seldom enough occurred as art. In the horizon of this knowing, art has lost its relation to culture...

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*, Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, Trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 354.

Lack of art is grounded in knowing that the exercise of perfected capabilities – even according to the highest measures and models that have existed up to now – from out of the most perfect mastery of the rules can never be ‘art’; that the planned furnishing for producing such that corresponds to existing ‘artworks’ and their ‘purposes’ can have wide-ranging results without ever forcing, out of a distress, an originary necessity of what is ownmost to art, namely putting the truth of being to a decision; that a dealing with ‘art’ as means for an operation has already placed itself outside what is ownmost to art and thus remains precisely too blind or too weak to experience the lack of art or even to let it merely ‘count’ in its power for preparing for history and for being allotted to being.

Lack of art is grounded in knowing that corroboration and approval of those who enjoy and experience ‘art’ cannot at all decide whether the object of enjoyment stems generally from the essential sphere of art or is merely an illusionary product of historical dexterity, sustained by dominant goal settings.⁶

In this complex passage, what is this ‘ownmost to art,’ such that it puts ‘the truth of being to a decision’? Heidegger implies that if art is employed as an ‘operation,’ as a mechanism of ‘engagement’ with things not properly belonging to art, such as corroboration and approval on the part of those who manage it by ‘dominant goal settings,’ and who thus immerse themselves in *jouissance*; such as these make a decision contradictory to the essential sphere of art; hence, something is lost: this is art’s *lack*, a lack which is neither constitutive nor restorative of art to culture. Here, as Heidegger attests, ‘art has lost its relation to culture,’ and thus to a humane comprehension of culture.

Does what is ownmost to art eliminate the possibility of its enjoyment as art? Is the enjoyment and experience of art simply an *illusionary* or illusory product? What is his meaning here? Might we conjecture a veiled reference to some ‘mode’ of inspiration within this ownmost of art? What is its relationship with any external source of inspiration, to a transcendent element of any kind, though operating obscurely? And might this ownmost be some mode of *understated* inspiration?

Stress is laid here on what Heidegger calls *the arising of art itself*; for in asking the question whether art-activity, or art and being active in it, or “letting what is ownmost to art itself first come forth as necessary,” Heidegger is asking whether being active in art, including art-making, is consonant with different layers and directions of grounding the necessary ‘arising’ of art.⁷ What we have to achieve, if we can, is a movement away from any ‘externalization’ of art as an art-product, and thus safeguard art within its own(most) terrain of being and expression; to restore to art a thinking practice which is thinking the decision *for* art.

A French Connection: Levinas and Nancy

At this point I turn to a reading of ‘Art and Criticism’ in the context of *Reality and Its Shadow*, by Emmanuel Levinas. I raise here the notions of art as poise

⁶ *Ibid.*, 355-356.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 356. Cf. also: Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Albert Hofstadter, Trans. (London: Perennial Library, 1935/1975); and Joseph Kockelmans, *Heidegger on Art and Artworks*, Phaenomenologica, Vol. 99 (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985).

and counter-poise, placement and displacement, and how we can proceed to define inspiration *with words* and its connectedness with art, when this thing called Art, for the *truthful* artist at least, essentially eludes the reach of description, discourse and critique, even the relational and the rational; when to get at what is inside art really entails 'looking out from art'.

In this respect, Levinas begins with ordinary perception. He argues that:

"What common perception trivializes and misses, an artwork apprehends in its irreducible essence. It thus coincides with metaphysical intuition. Where common language abdicates, a poem or a painting speaks. Thus an artwork is more real than reality and attests to the dignity of the artistic imagination, which sets itself up as knowledge of the absolute..."⁸

Moreover, speaking of the 'critic' of art, he exclaims:

"[a critic] can be defined as the one that still has something to say when everything has been said, that can say about the [artwork] something else than that work. One then has the right to ask if the artist really knows and speaks. He does so in a preface or a manifesto, certainly; but then he is himself a part of the public. If art originally were neither language nor knowledge, if it therefore were situated outside of 'being in the world,' which is coextensive with truth, criticism would be rehabilitated. [Criticism] would represent the intervention of the understanding necessary for integrating the inhumanity and inversion of art into human life and into the mind..."⁹

The inference here is that the critic inevitably says something *else* in terms other than the work, but that the artist knows and speaks, by way of an address, only what the work will allow him to know and to speak.

And yet:

The Artist stops because the work refuses to accept anything more, appears saturated. The work is completed in spite of the social or material causes that interrupt it. It does not give itself out as the beginning of a dialogue... a work would not belong to art if it did not have this formal structure of completion, if at least in this way it were not disengaged.

Is to disengage oneself from the world always to go beyond, toward some region of Platonic ideas and toward the eternal which towers above the world?

To go beyond is to communicate with ideas, to understand. Does not the function of art [therefore] lie in not understanding? Does not obscurity provide it with its very element and a completion *sui generis*, foreign to dialectics and the life of ideas? Will we then say that the artist knows and expresses the very obscurity of the real?... Does not the commerce with the obscure, as a totally independent ontological event, describe categories irreducible to those of cognition?¹⁰

I have quoted extensively from Levinas, for such thinking appears compelling in its import for the art of contemporary times. And what of the notion of 'obscurity'? Is it so evidently the province of art and artists to know and express the 'very obscurity of the real'? If so, then the function and role of art would appear to lie in 'not' understanding, lie in an incomplete completeness, but at what costs for itself and for the receivers of art?

Moreover, Levinas wants to show this 'ontological event' within art. "Art does not know a particular type of reality," he argues, rather it contrasts itself with knowledge. Art "is the very event of obscuring," he says, "a descent of

8 Emmanuel Levinas, "Reality and its Shadow," in: *A Continental Aesthetics Reader*, Clive Cazeaux, Ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), 117.

9 *Ibid.*, 117-118.

10 *Ibid.*, 118.

night, an invasion of shadow." In contrast with theology, "art does not belong to the order of revelation; nor does it belong to that of creation, which moves in just the opposite direction.¹¹ What is this opposite direction of art? Can it really be said that 'creation,' human creation, moves toward a non-revelation, a concealing? That it even moves toward a non-creation? Consider Picasso's statement: 'painting [for me] is a sum of destructions'; a movement toward some uneasy co-existence with reality, even with the resistances of an artist's materials in coming 'to be.' To repeat: What is this *opposite* direction of art? I would signal here my own interpretation of *kenosis* as a space and condition for art's happening, for the sake of 'a truth' of art.

More on this term and its implications shortly. First, let us turn to the thought of Jean Luc Nancy, which seems to posit a kind of 'negative' or 'inverse' inspiration; the kind that appears concealed from contemporary art *itself*, and as having what Nancy calls a 'double specificity.' His analysis here evokes ideas of 'art and desire,' and of their incommensurability.

Nancy: Contemporary Art and its Quarrel

Let us begin by quoting from his *Philosophical Chronicles*:

Art is the name for a practice with a double specificity: it can be identified, in the final instance, only in terms of works (productions, constructions, creations, tangible things), and not in terms of categorized objects (as would be the case with knowledge, power, salvation, happiness, justice, etc.); on the other hand, this practice has its unity only in the unity of its concrete modalities (painting, music, cinema, performance, etc). The specificity of 'art' is thus found twice over in exteriority and in diversity, or even in disparity: it has neither the categorical unity of the object, nor the intuitive unity of the sensible work...

Thus contemporary art, with its quarrel, brings forth a desire that is neither the desire for an object nor the desire for a meaning but a desire for feeling and for feeling oneself feel – a desire to experience oneself as irreducible to a signification, to a being or an identity. A desire to enjoy in sensibility, the very fact that there is no unique and final form in which this desire would reach its end...The desire for art – like the dream-wish, and perhaps...like the dream-wish of the community or...of the 'us' – would then be the desire beyond every sensible object, the desire for the sense of desire itself.¹²

Contemporary art, on this analysis, has its 'quarrel,' in that it brings forth the kind of 'desire' which is neither a desire for the things of art, nor for existential meaning, but rather a desire for 'feeling,' and for 'feeling oneself feel.' Insofar as there *is* a desire for art, it appears as a desire 'beyond' art, beyond 'every sensible object' or any manifestation of art as style or taste; a desire 'for the sense of desire itself.' But how is this not simply an accumulation of affective states in the experiencing subject, devoid of reflection on *why* it has this desire beyond any object in any case? Is such desire not a *negative* inspiration in the context of contemporary art, if it is so succinctly the raw material of irreducibility to being and identity? Has art, on these terms, not been *reduced* in favour of irreducibility of the subject?

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹² Jean Luc Nancy, "Philosophical Chronicles," in: *Perspectives in Continental Philosophy*, Franson Manjali, Trans. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 60-63.

If we are, as Nancy maintains, impelled towards 'an overflow of meaning,' is this not a vehicle of inspiration? Would such inspiration have to be posited as an immaterial thing or essence, which, by the occasions of desire, finds its empathic way into material things and practices? How might we achieve this, and is such inspiration – *being inspired* – something we are given *to be* by some thing or someone other? Is art, then, the means of being bestowed by a sympathetic inspiration from *outside* ourselves? Does art simply and truly function to this end?

I have raised Levinas' issue of the *opposite* direction of art, and I signalled my own response of *kenosis* as a space and condition for art's happening for the sake of 'a truth' of art. Here I acknowledge Nancy's argument that we have an *urgency* to give ourselves an 'overflow of meaning'; to sense and feel according to "a truth" that *no* meaning can saturate; but this exigency must expand beyond its own limits, must accept 'a truth' within reach, if, as I propose, *kenosis* is to have its grounding and its discharge in the conditions of creative living.

Let us in the given context return to certain fundamental questions raised at the outset of this paper: Can there be some *mediating* territory between different sources of inspiration, external and internal, positive or negative, which may be thought to take-hold-of an artist *from within*? Can this taking-hold be construed as a self-divesting model of inspiration? And how might *kenosis* mitigate art's self-sufficiency within the contested space of inspiration versus non-inspiration for art and its practices? I will endeavour now to negotiate these issues by situating *kenosis* and its implications for thinking and practice.

Kenosis as a Model for Thought:

Firstly, *kenosis*, properly understood, from the Greek, means 'self-emptying,' 'self-abasement,' or 'renunciation'; that is, a divesting of the status of a superior nature in taking-on the condition of a lesser one; a setting-aside of power in favour of identification with someone or something in a more dependent state. Such are its meanings in mythical or theological terms. But has it any relevance for philosophical thinking about creative practice? And in the context of this paper, what are its possible ramifications for contemporary debates about 'inspired' artistic values and activities?

Philosophically, any supposed *mediating* or *intermediate* territory arising between different sources of inspiration, external and internal, has either been by way of some 'intercession' on the part of the Ancient Greek Muses, or as arising within the individual as an impulse self-induced, such that artworks are 'released' into life, or are 'given birth to.' I would argue that this process can be identified with the term *kenosis*, something released in its emptying-out, a self-emptying, or a being-emptied, oriented towards *taking-up* a greater fulfilment. Such an orientation also raises the issue of creative *responsibility*.

Rather than proposing the question: 'who is responsible for creation?', perhaps we should ask: 'who *takes* responsibility for creation?' Who takes responsibility, the artist or the defining institutions, art critics, historians or philosophers,

who surmise *what creation is*? Is it personal, trans-personal, social, ethical or political? For who *takes* responsibility not only involves individual volition, but also the collective decisions of influential individuals. It would seem to harness a greater potential for meaning, and its living embodiment, to suggest that the artist who takes responsibility for his/her artistic creations is taking *that* on by being self-forgetful, by stepping back, by waiting patiently for some delayed, more comprehensive gratification. Such is a feasible role for *kenosis* in contemporary practice. But what of its relations with actual creative work?

As Roland Barthes has argued, the work of a practicing artist raises these questions:

What are others for me? How am I to desire them? How am I to lend myself to their desire? How am I to behave among them? Uttering each time a 'subtle vision of the world' (thus speaks the Tao), the artist 'composes' what is alleged (or rejected) by his culture and what his own body insists on: what is avoided, what is evoked, what is repeated, or again: forbidden/desired: that is the paradigm which, like two legs, enables the artist to walk, 'insofar as he produces.'¹³

Insofar as an artist produces, his work is a vehicle for *composition*: for addressing those desires put to him by prevailing culture. His work, ideally, is an interrogation of that culture, and a return to it, in predominantly *self-forgetful* terms. For in forgetting himself inspiration might be 'rehabilitated,' to renegotiate Levinas' terms. What he said of criticism might be accorded to a specific state of inspiration, which could thus represent an 'intervention,' a necessary move "*for integrating the inhumanity and inversion of art into human life and into the mind.*"¹⁴

This self-forgetfulness would seem to be in direct contrast to the *supposed* work of 'no-artist,' with one "who is transparent to critic, audience, curator, and is 'disclosed' in art forms"; this "no-artist brings [the] totality and self-sufficiency of artistic creation further to the forefront"; and any talk of "inspiring agents, regardless of their status, are known and revealed"; thus, "little space [is left] for naïve questions about what inspired particular works."¹⁵ The task here is to contrast this 'uninspired' art with a philosophy which is neither fanciful nor phantasmal, but rooted in rigorousness in what it thinks about, namely 'art,' such that it be adequate to the task of thinking through present-day art-making. Here *kenosis* may point the way, if it be heeded, to a new territory, one which may surface as a new 'inspiring agent.'

Kenosis and Transcendence

As it was put to me, might this new territory "surface as an in-itself-transcendent element of the structure?"¹⁶ If there is a suggestion here of something transcending human experience, of an exalted or visionary language, or even

13 Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, Richard Howard, Trans. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 173.

14 Levinas, "Reality...", 118.

15 Bogna J. Obidzińska, cited in a communication to me, November 2013.

16 *Ibid.*

of a *supernatural* agency finding its way into immanent life, then we have to countenance an evident unpredictability and uncertainty in any such *breaking-open* of a space in the realm of the human. This can be proposed by a confidence only the few and the rare can muster. However, if the surfacing or the opening-up of the transcendent is an *invigoration* for thought and practice, then we would have to be persuaded that the secularizing tendencies of Western culture have not entirely succeeded in *disintegrating*, even *disembodying*, the sacred, and that the sacred must now communicate itself by an apparent contradiction, by some definitive self-emptying, by taking on the character of *kenotic occurrences*, whereby such happenings become *events* with an eventfulness and a fullness without reserve.

However, there are some risks in importing a theological term like *kenosis* into the conditions of contemporary philosophy, not the least of which is its *intelligibility*. One reason is that it would seem to oppose the stance of traditional Western metaphysics and its engrossment *with beings*, with a counter-argument of the *priority of Being*. That is to say, *kenosis* arises as it *seeks Being* while questioning the all-pervasiveness of *beings*. Moreover, *kenosis* should not be overburdened with too much theorizing; we should start to think generously *with* the concept, though it should not be extended to unlimited phenomena lest it be sapped of necessary energies. Somehow, we have to telescope our thinking in order to focus more acutely on the substance of its unfolding. One such operation would imply that, rather than accepting too hastily any proclaimed disintegration of the transcendent as *the* kenotic occurrence *par excellence*, we might actually visualize it as a drawing-near, a coming-close of the transcendent, its taking-up of a dwelling place within human activity as a *self-divestment* worthy of acceptance: a divesting of power or authority for the purposes of a transformation *into* human affairs.

Kenosis, the Space of Art, and 'the Self'

Moreover, any exploration of *kenosis* as a space and condition for art's happening has to address a counter-position: that of 'crypto-self-withdrawal.' It is argued that there is "a lot of crypto self-withdrawal happening these days; artists are often not aware of it; their identities have been mediated by the external that is not transcendent, but social, or political; their expression [therefore] is heteronomous, not in the sense of a conscious submission to a 'muse,' but of submission to a demand of the receiver, being a sophisticated social machinery, and in a sense under duress."¹⁷

In light of this, it is important to distinguish between crypto self-withdrawal and self-forgetfulness, or what I would call 'positive *kenosis*.' Self-withdrawal, whether adverted to or not (crypto), is essentially a 'distancing,' 'a drawing away from,' as the term implies; it is a turning aside from any positive *kenosis*, envisaged as liberating the self from bondage to accepted forms or formulas,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

whether of art or life; that is, 'self-withdrawal' is a turning aside to embrace, willingly or unconsciously, a largely *negative kenosis*, where what is emptied out is any advertence to an external or transcendent movement of inspiration, which may simply result in an artist becoming a *cipher* for shifting moods and undifferentiated states of consciousness, whether his own or those of wider society.

To withdraw also has the sense of to 'discontinue,' 'cancel' or 'retract' from an obligation (eg. 'he withdrew his support'); an act of self-withdrawal draws one away from any larger field of obligations. Indeed, if the artist's identity is merely something 'mediated' by external forces such as the social or political, then this *is* what is meant by being *under duress*. I have no wish to psychologize here, but the distinction between self-withdrawal as a state of relaxed indifference, or even of anxious or perplexed compliance, and that of positive self-forgetfulness is, to my mind, a compelling reason to offer kenosis a place in contemporary thinking about art.

Furthermore, "if art is something which must be destroyed, a proposition common to many experiments of Modernity,"¹⁸ Barthes says, can destruction somehow lie at the heart of inspiration: as a doing away with, a cleansing, a stripping bare, to reveal *truth*? If so, what kind of inspiration is this? Is it in the name of the *agents* of inspiration, those claiming no particular ontological status for their work, or devoid of transcendent reference?

Furthermore, in another context I raised the following observations which still have a bearing here. Any noteworthy aesthetic philosophy, I argued, must not only adopt a critical position, validating the questioning artistic personality; it must also disclose the space wherein the conscientious artist can become a 'truth teller' within the community. It can encourage a social engagement with art by means of created works, which *challenge* or *provoke*, albeit in the interests of truth: *a-letheia*, truth's 'de-concealing.' This domain of invocation, and of potential *kenosis* (or 'self-emptying'), may yet become a vehicle for cultural rectitude, exemplified in the artist who assigns his/her work to the restoration of the human spirit in its life-affirming properties: by being a marker of those provocations of *the Good* which take the shape of humane virtue. The crucial task before us is to regain our sense of the truth-telling capacity of an artist's being – a deeply intimate way of going about a formally critical task – and to substantiate art's essential 'way of being' in the world as a transforming value.

Moreover, if Barthes is correct in arguing that for Popular Art "it is important that things be finite, not important that they be finished, that a work [not] be given the internal organization of a destiny (birth, life, death),"¹⁹ then this may be said of much contemporary art, that it disavows, avoids, empties out. Does contemporary art, then, exercise some 'reverse' drive, disrupt the internal organization of a cultural or social destiny? If the axiom of popular art is its 'repetition,' all doing much the same thing, the popular becomes the great leveller of morals, and thus any neglect of the roots of inspiration, as a source

18 Barthes, *The Responsibility...*, 198.

19 *Ibid.*, 200.

within oneself, or as a transcendent value, is a failure to initiate a social or civic morality within art.

By contrast, perhaps, we should look to High Art, so-called, to institute any needed inspiration: to offer an alternative to a purely carnal ground for creativity, which has hitherto served to undermine the essence of contemporary art. For if most of contemporary art and its theories seem 'supremely self-aware,' then this can only have been at the cost of an artist's deeper vocation to an inalienable expression: to release into life, give-birth-to, those richer transfigurations which significant art alone can give to the human spirit.

Kenosis and Contemporary Art

It should be evident by now that my use of the term *kenosis* in the context of a philosophical assessment of contemporary art is both complex and difficult; for its defence is dependent upon a number of shifting factors, not the least of which is whether artists themselves would support such a notion in regard to their work, or whether it is simply too foreign a concept to be relevant to artistic thought and practice. However, allowing for any theoretical misplacement of the term for art, it has nonetheless aroused interest in contemporary circles which treat of the relations *between* art and philosophy, and for the purposes of this paper I hope it may open-up further dialogue with art practitioners. But in this day and age, it will be argued, what artist would willingly engage in a self-emptying process or accept being self-forgetful, especially in such artistically competitive times, unless it were for the sake of some *truth of art* deeply imbedded in his/her nature, and in what might such truth consist, if it did not also bring with it some prospect of recognition and success, the fruits and rewards of work, for are not these the necessary accompaniments of artistic liberty?

Furthermore, we have come to a position where some clarification of the term appears necessary. In order to avoid any continuing ambiguity, I take *kenosis* to mean the act(s) of emptying oneself of some 'internal' content or substance and, a 'being-emptied (out)' of this internality by some other source, influence or subject; *some other source* being taken here to mean any external influence or transcendental source or subject having the powers of an *agent*, a freeing-agent, as distinct from the powers of coercion and constraint. *Kenosis* may then be conceived as not simply a movement of 'self-abandonment' or 'self-denial,' although it requires these dynamics for its mature evolution; and it would seem so for the further purpose of delineating a space for 'a reality' of some sort to emerge into the open; the reality being such things as: issues, narrations, situations, people, paints, matter, medium, as has been suggested. Insofar as the concept of *kenosis* is a valuable one, operating in different modes, then it may conceivably generate a space *for itself* in the art world, and so an aspect of this disclosure afforded by *kenosis* involves an exploration of more conceptual possibilities.

Moreover, some reference to concrete creative practices would make the concept of kenosis more substantial, in the sense that an audience, a spectator, or a receiver of an artwork also enters into the condition of co-creator and co-constitutor of *meaning* in art, along with the artist. How might this be situated in the context of *kenosis*? I cannot claim to speak *for* any artist, nor can I highlight any particular artwork, which might demonstrate ‘the how’ of the working of kenosis. An artist does not require any exterior defence, by way of some philosophical judgment for his/her work, which seems on the surface to deny the creative self in the very revelation of art and artworks. So the possibility of citing individual artists and their works, their motivations and self-assessments, as demonstrative of kenotic processes, is beyond the scope of this present paper. However, as I have indicated, insofar as artists sympathetically engage with the concept of kenosis in relation to their work, then some ensuing discussion and debate would be welcome.

Having said this, if kenosis is taken to mean or suggest a *being emptied-out* by some other source, influence or subject, then this latter seems the most confronting, replete as it is with an emptying out of the human will, with the requirement of complete ‘detachment’ in regard to the processes and the fruits of one’s labour; something which is compelling for thinking about art *in relation to* inspiration. In the present enquiry, I surmise that in reality, in its lived constitution, kenosis insists on being different in kind and degree from simple self-withdrawal, and is *more* than an act of self-abandonment or self-denial. Kenosis would seem to undergird any acts of a self-conscious self with the demand (or implicit command) for a deeper submission to the conditions of human *audacity* (of audacious living) in both material and spiritual terms. Here kenosis must be postulated at the level of depth, not mere appearance. Kenosis discloses itself as a phenomenology of intimacy bearing its conceived subject-matter out of *inwardness*.

Kenotic Occurrence: Eckhart and Generation

In order to further instantiate my use of a kenotic model, I return to Meister Eckhart and his reflections on the nature of ‘generation’ and ‘change.’ Later, I will introduce his concept of ‘detachment’; the basis of detachment, *Abgeschiedenheit*, is a willingness to forego the will, to embrace a kind of ‘will-less-ness’ in seclusion or solitude, to undergo kenosis; and *Gelassenheit* (a letting-go or releasement), a kind of ‘will-less thinking,’ an essential or meditative thinking, as Heidegger would later propose it to be. At this stage, however, let us commence with the following passage from Eckhart:

[E]very action of nature, morality, and art in its wholeness possesses three things: something generating, something generated, and the love of what generates for what is generated and vice versa...Generation’s purpose and final cause is existence – that what is generated should be.²⁰ [Moreover] it is clearly evident that every agent of nature, morality, and art in general intends as the goal and repose of its whole action...that its effect exist and receive existence...Existence is through the substantial form and generation. Everything which precedes that is dissimilar – the

20 Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart...*, 150.

agent always finds something not its own in it. This is why it hates it and gets rid of it through the process of change until it finds itself in the offspring through generation...Every agent and subject of generation intends [to make] another something like himself.²¹

Eckhart speaks of 'every action...' constituted of some wholeness or completeness as possessing three things: a generating agent, the thing generated, and the consequent love or attachment for what is generated or 'made.' The act of generating or making is that *what* is generated or made "should be." An artist, it may be surmised here, creates a work that 'it might be.' Similarly, kenosis may be interpreted here as the working-out of *change* until a work, an artist, a human life, *finds itself*, himself in the offspring through generation or *production*. Indeed, whatever precedes substantial form and generation, which is *dissimilar* to it, according to Eckhart, such an agent 'always finds something not its own in it.' This is the reason why he detests it, and wants to expel it, though change, until the agent *finds itself* in the making. And then the curious idea that every agent intends to make 'another something' like itself. Could it be an act of kenosis, this getting rid of, this emptying out, of what is not its own, through change (if not exigency), such that what comes forth in the (final) making is something 'like himself'? Kenosis then has the character of a disassembling or a reworking of *dissimilarity*, such that it appears more *like* the agent who creates it.

Furthermore, Eckhart defines *creation* as the conferring of 'existence after nonexistence'; by which he means:

in its essential or original cause a thing has no existence, and the same is true of the art and intellect [of the artist]. All things are ... in the mind of the maker...they do not have any of their formal existence until they are causally produced and extracted on the outside in order to exist...As far as its formal existence goes, any external thing is mutable, creatable, and created... [One] should know that every agent makes something like himself.²²

I highlight the significant idea that every agent makes something 'like himself.' This *likeness* looks like the one who instils something of his own into it. A simple example is that of human reproduction: a human agent, a father, reproduces some aspect of himself, some likeness to himself, in his offspring, his children. He furthers himself, so to speak, in acts of pro-creation and generation. In this sense, a father, as generator, is an agent of the prolongation of his own kind. May we conjecture, then, that a work of art or a literary work is not unlike the one who makes it, the true essence of its formal aspect being fashioned into existence? For as Sertillanges says of the writer: 'what comes out of me must *resemble* me,' must take on some aspect of my inner disposition, must be grounded in this disposition so as to resemble it.

Moreover, for Eckhart, creation is the production of things out of *nothing*. This production of created things, *pro-ducere*, 'to lead into being,' is raised in the following example:

[Here] everything that generates and in general every agent has the existence of its effect as the necessary goal of its action. This is where it comes to rest...When the [act of] existence is

21 *Ibid.*, 151.

22 *Ibid.*, 148-149.

received and accepted, every agent rests from its work and is pleased with it...This is why joy in a work is the sign of a habit that has been generated...Once again, this is why in the change or disposition which precedes the act of existence that comes about through generation there is always labour, difficulty, resistance, motion, and unrest due to the absence of the existence which the agent intends as its goal. When it [existence] is received through generation, every motion ceases. Delight, love, and rest follow.²³

Eckhart believes that in and with the change, which precedes the acts of existence 'there is always labour, difficulty, resistance, motion, and unrest due to the absence of the existence which the agent intends as its goal.' But when existence, some existent thing, is received through generation, all these seemingly contradictory movements of resistance and unrest come eventually to rest – in delight; as if, by some divining of the creative person, all that resists the repose of received existence begins to fall into place as a composed whole. I suggest that what he describes here is an instance of *kenotic occurrence*: that the artist is instrumental in the workings of change, the emptying and transforming properties of change, which rectifies (or restores) the 'absence' of an existence to its place as *presence*, and thus substantiates repose in the completed composition of a work. The impetus for artistic creation is then, that a work *might be*: that it possess external, inhering existence outside, alongside, both the artist and receiver of the work.

Eckhart and Detachment:

Let us turn now to a theme, which is paramount in Eckhart's thinking – the concept of detachment, *Abgeschiedenheit*. Detachment, in principle, is that which leads a person to where he/she is most 'receptive.' According to Eckhart:

[A]s far as my reason can lead and instruct me, I find no other virtue better than a pure detachment from all things; because all other virtues have some regard for created things, but detachment is free from all created things.²⁴

He then proceeds to define detachment as that which remains *within itself*:

Perfect detachment has no looking up to, no abasement – not beneath any created thing or above it. It wishes to be neither beneath nor above; it wants to exist by itself, not giving joy or sorrow to anyone, not wanting equality or inequality with any created thing, not wishing for this thing or that. All that it wants is to be... So it is that detachment makes no claim upon anything.²⁵

Further, he quotes Avicenna:

The excellence of the spirit that has achieved detachment is so great that whatever it contemplates is true, and whatever it desires is granted, and whatever it commands one must obey.²⁶

And then, Eckhart emphatically declares:

23 *Ibid.*, 149.

24 Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart, Selections from His Essential Writings*, Emilie Griffin, Ed. (Mahwah, Paulist Press, 2005), 104.

25 *Ibid.*, 106.

26 *Ibid.*, 107.

And you must know that to be empty of all created things is to be full of [the divinity], and to be full of created things is to be empty of [the divinity].²⁷

I draw liberally on Eckhart's account of detachment in its essential features, yet it seems to be a distinctly improbable movement *for* contemporary man. For the task is to somehow address contemporary individuals with the most sobering prospect of all: to willingly accept what appears to be a limiting character: a spirit not just of humble demeanour, but of outright abnegation of self. And the most taxing component of all: *emptiness*; to be willingly empty, to be made empty, of all created things, which is also, paradoxically, to be made full, to be replete with divinity or transcendence. If this is a movement required of those who devote themselves wholeheartedly to an interior way of life, how can we make sense of it in the flux of contemporary living? More especially, what are its likely manifestations, its requirements, for artistic individuals?

Some further definitions are needed: The German word *Abgeschieden* means 'seclusion' or 'retirement'; *Abgeschiedenheit*, defines one who is 'solitary,' 'secluded' or 'retired.' So the impetus of one who is *detached* is to be impelled towards a state of solitary seclusion; not just physical seclusion but a certain solitariness of mind and heart; one in which the possibilities of detachment are enacted for one leading a serious contemplative or meditative life. Here we have some prospect of enticement for the creative individual: for most artists know and value the 'space' which solitude and relative seclusion open-up for their creative work: such a space enables *the work* to come-forth, to breathe, to be inspired or inspirited. But how are we to make deeper sense of the kind of *emptiness* Eckhart proposes for an artist? Is it possible, indeed, profitable, for a contemporary artist to be entirely *neutral* in regard to his life and work, such that *perfect detachment* 'has no looking up to, and no abasement,' and is neither 'beneath nor above any created thing'? Such detachment does not wish for this or that; all that it wants is *to be*, making 'no claim upon anything.'

In making no claim upon anything, or anyone, can an artist nonetheless expect to 'make it' in the conflicted atmosphere of the contemporary art world? Only so, I would argue, if the work of art alone has the power *to speak*, to make an address, from inside itself; and this must be fashioned through some measure of abnegation of the self or self-will, some emptying out of the artist's content or substance, which is more than an expressionist drive, but subsists rather in an *un-conflicted* way of being and creating. And what will enable this to happen, for some essential thinking and making to occur, is precisely that 'letting-go' or 'letting-be' which signals *Gelassenheit*, our next theme for development, principally in Heidegger.

Heidegger and *Gelassenheit*:

If for Eckhart, *Gelassenheit*, 'releasement' or 'letting-go,' was inextricably bound up with a *non-willing will* and with detachment, then the same term in

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

Heidegger concerns itself with a kind of *essential* thinking: a thinking *on the way*, a path toward some *future thinking*. As Barbara Dalle Pezze has argued:

Gelassenheit [may be] experienced as the essence of thinking, a thinking that is not intended as representing, as self-determining thinking, but is conceptualized as “meditative thinking.” Meditative thinking is the kind of thinking that thinks the truth of being, that belongs to being and listens to it. To understand *Gelassenheit* as the essence of thinking means to have a different and more radical insight into the essence of who we are.²⁸

Here meditative thinking is an attempt to enact what Dalle Pezze calls, ‘a thinking transformation,’ one which will enable us to go *towards* *Gelassenheit*, a pathway on which a different conception of our ‘innermost being’ may be hinted at. While thinking as a representing belongs to the context of the will, it is still in thrall to a kind of subjectivism which *Gelassenheit* wants to subsume. As Dalle Pezze points out:

Gelassenheit, as the essence of future thinking, does not belong to the realm of willing. What characterizes the search carried out in Heidegger’s *Conversation* [on a Country Path about Thinking] is the fact that the context of the search requires distance and detachment from the traditional context in which thinking is related to willing. The question of the essence of thinking, posed in terms of *Gelassenheit*, is in fact a question about the essence of thinking as a “non-willing” [Nicht-Wollen].²⁹

In Heidegger’s *Conversation*, a tripartite dialogue ensues between a scientist, a scholar and a teacher about the *true* nature of thinking. As Heidegger puts it: “*the statement that the nature of thinking is something other than thinking means that thinking is something other than willing. And that is why...what I really wanted from our meditation on the nature of thinking, I [the teacher] replied: I want non-willing*”³⁰ Further, Heidegger states that by this non-willing ‘I willingly renounce willing.’ By “renouncing willing,” he says, “*we may release, or at least prepare to release, ourselves to the sought-for essence of a thinking that is not willing*”³¹ Indeed, as John Caputo puts it, we need to pass through this phase, because it is a “*preparation for the final stage of release-ment where we have left the sphere of willing behind altogether, where man, as with Eckhart, has no will at all.*”³² Such a non-willing is a first decisive step towards *Gelassenheit*, as Dalle Pezze argues:

By willing not to will, we move one step closer to *Gelassenheit*. Letting go of our willing is the first step that allows *Gelassenheit* to “wake up” [*Erwachen*] in ourselves. It is not, though, that we act to wake it up. Actually this is not at all a waking up. As Heidegger points out, it is an “awakening of release-ment,” in the sense of “keeping awake for release-ment”...Keeping awake for *Gelassenheit* means to let-go of willing, in order to contribute to the “awakening” of *Gelassenheit*....By letting-go of willing, we let ourselves be in the position of being let-in into *Gelassenheit*.

28 Barbara Dalle Pezze, “Heidegger on *Gelassenheit*,” in *Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 10, 2006.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Martin Heidegger, “Conversations on a Country Path about Thinking,” in *Discourse on Thinking*, John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, Trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 58-59.

31 *Ibid.*, 59-60.

32 John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 171.

What we face here is a twofold mode of releasement:...we need to let-go of thinking as a representing that tends to explain everything in terms of reasons. This letting-go means that we keep ourselves awake for releasement which [also] means that we open ourselves to something, a 'mystery' that...is actually be-ing itself, and is that which lets us in into *Gelassenheit*.³³

As *Gelassenheit* is called to be "from somewhere else," as Dalle Pezze suggests, it is 'let-in' *within* ourselves. While we must recognize that *Gelassenheit* is not something which we can determine or define clearly as a whole, as Dalle Pezze says, because it "*will continue to be hermeneutically the same and something different,*" it may nevertheless allow us to "*abide in a kind of secure vagueness, in which our thinking will be at rest and dwell.*" Indeed: "*Once we free ourselves from willing, we prepare ourselves for the 'awakening of releasement'; the more we detach ourselves and we 'wean ourselves from willing,' the more we contribute to the 'awakening of releasement.'*"³⁴ In summary, Heidegger proposes a renunciation of willing in order that we may release, or prepare to release, ourselves to the 'sought-for essence of a thinking that is not willing.'

Thinking towards *Kenosis*:

By extension, can there be a sought-for essence of a thinking *towards* *kenosis* which takes shape as a non-willing? For the two-fold mode of releasement characterized by Dalle Pezze has its parallel, I would suggest, in the two-fold mode of *kenosis* I have argued for thus far: a self-emptying and a self-be-ing-made-empty. As releasement or letting-go is simultaneously a 'letting-be,' and appears characteristic of *Gelassenheit*, so also may *kenosis* be construed as a *setting-in-place* outside itself, whereby conscious reasoning is dispensed with, hollowed-out, in the interests of a setting-in-place of a *dwelling-space* for thinking and making. Such a space ideally opens up a non-willing making as a *pouring-out*, whereby what is emptied out is what is most foreign to it, so that it may be filled with what is most proper to it: an *allowing to be* of what is its very own, its ownmost.

Finally, if we may conceive an artist's *will-less* painting, writing, composing or performing as a *sum* of renunciations, as an emptying out, not simply as an erasure of things in their un-making, but rather as a re-working or re-making in order to bring something vital and luminous into play; and if thinking is an adventure towards the un-thought, which is also in its essence something 'claimed by Being,' as it was for Heidegger, and if *kenosis* may be conceived as the singular advent of an un-making, to its being reclaimed in/for material fact so as to be made full again, then we may now posit *kenosis* in terms of a non-subjective self, a *kenotic self*, in its release from any representational thinking into a more authentic relation with the *mystery* of be-ing itself and with the world, and thus a more potent means of exchange with, and discharge into, the vicissitudes and eruptions of creative life.

33 Dalle Pezze, "Heidegger...."

34 *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Can kenosis be conceived as a self-divesting model of inspiration? If contemporary art appears threatened by talk of inspiration, it is due to the fact that particular works, movements and styles are seen as the legitimate locus of purely human decisions and makings. What need have we to appeal to a source outside ourselves for any justification of what artists do? Such a line of argument is difficult to counter. However, the question of inspiration cannot be held at a discount, if what is meant by inspiration is being open to something *greater* or *other* than oneself, in the trust that something be given, bestowed and welcomed in the name of a truth of art, even by some transcendent verity.

Here we need to recognize that any alternative in the shape of *no artist*, is really *no work* at all, just as any concept of 'lack of author,' unless it is an acknowledgement of professed anonymity or kenosis, is similarly beleaguered. However, self-sufficiency willingly engages self-deception, in that any question regarding the inspiration standing at the origin of the concept of contemporary art as self-sufficient must also allow art to speak for itself; 'letting what is ownmost to art itself first come forth as necessary,' as Heidegger encourages us to do; for in permitting art itself to first come forth in this *necessary* way, we may be less inclined to unqualified assumptions regarding its self-sufficiency.

It might be argued, therefore, that it is by an adherence to its beginnings *in an origin*, by the taking-up of an inspiration not simply enjoined upon it by an art historical tradition (the past of art always has it relays to the present), that contemporary art may map out a renewed landscape for itself. Rather than adhering to some *quasi* inspiration, which has all the marks of aesthetic narcissism, and rather than art being created with an absence of the Muse, from a decided lack of the artist's relation with another, or with a significant or transcendent other, we might well endorse a *self-divesting* kenotic model of inspiration: one oriented towards an in-dwelling in the space of repose opened up by a spontaneous, will-less, self-less, art making.

Along Heideggerian lines: What task is reserved for thinking *at the beginning of art*? The question seems critical enough for contemporary practice today, for the thinking that arises from the place of art in society is crucial to the experience of art and its survival. Art's flourishing will be proportionate to its quality, and its quality will be determined by the impact of its beginning. If it is the aim of thinking to provide a reflective basis for contemporary practice, then in these uncertain times the task of the artist is to draw-forth works from a seemingly incompatible dimension: *invisibility*, from the *givens* of Nature and the human. If this is proper to the sphere of art, then it may signal a qualified but as yet untested inspiration in the self-assertive conditions of contemporary practice.³⁵

Finally, it is in the inclining of the *created thing* itself toward our thought, as if the very thought *of us* were held within it, which enables us to speak of

35 Cf. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of Art and the Destination of Thinking," in *Distanz und Nähe* (Festschrift für Walter Biemel), cited in *Reading Heidegger, Commemorations*, John Sallis, Ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1972/1983); and Martin Heidegger, "What Calls for Thinking," in *Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings*, D. F. Krell, Trans. and Ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1964/1993).

thought at the beginning of art. The beginning of art is the joyous enchantment of what is given to the mind and heart to be and to accomplish in the realm of the human. What is thought, and thus made, is the *gift* given to us in thinking back towards that which in the first place draws us toward itself, and thus holds us in *the way* of thinking. One may reasonably conjecture, but not without hope, that contemporary art, with its inchoate and fluid entities in the labyrinth of theory it has created for itself, having seemingly refused the restoration of things to an *original* state, may also have forfeited its claim to hold us in an abiding path of thinking. Moreover, in relation to any disclosure shaping the direction of change in contemporary arts practice today: do we assume such change is happening, and in *what* direction? Like every origin for art, intended or hidden, the question begins *with a beginning*.

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CREATION BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT

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Image and Act: Bergson's Ontology and Aesthetics

Abstract

Richard Rorty left philosophy with a debilitating array of restrictions upon what it could really accomplish (at least, without committing the old mistakes that had rendered it irrelevant to the world). But Rorty placed a new emphasis on aesthetics, especially literature and the process of creating new language. I argue that retrieving the ontology of Henri Bergson can provide a robust basis for a general aesthetics that can carry successfully the kind of philosophical burden Rorty placed upon it. In this essay I retrieve Bergson's ontology in the context of a philosophy of art and I assemble it in a way he never did himself, to show, in part, how this way of thinking can expand our present ideas about aesthetics into other empirical domains.

Keywords: *body, consciousness, creativity, image, memory, space, time*

I.

It is hard to deny, I think, that Richard Rorty's aesthetics, if it can even be called that, is anemic at best and useless at worst. We cannot "literarize" ourselves to a better future, even if it is also true that good books are an irreplaceable part of what fuels progress and hope, however these are defined. Can we go back to aesthetics before Rorty and retrieve those valuable strands of thought that were being offered for the sake of recovering a more robust aesthetics? Clearly Richard Shusterman has done great service, drawing especially upon Dewey and Merleau-Ponty. Crispin Sartwell has done something similar, practicing a post-Rortyan literary aesthetics in a fashion that applies and improves upon Rorty's own general drift in aesthetics.¹ Even with these two fine examples of a more robust

¹ See especially Crispin Sartwell's newest book, *How to Escape: Magic, Madness, Beauty, and Cynicism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014). This is an outstanding collection of aesthetic explorations in a Rortyan vein.

“post-Rortyan” aesthetics, I think something more is needed. Neither Shusterman nor Sartwell has, at this point, offered a *formal* ontology of a sort that follows from their excellent descriptions of art and artistic creation. That ontology is needed and it will have to be a *process* ontology – or, if one prefers, a temporalist ontology.² In the old days, this would have been called “metaphysics,” but if that word cannot be safely retrieved, then “ontology” will suffice.

The ontology that is needed must be empirical (indeed, radically empirical), descriptive, temporalist/processual, and it cannot be at the mercy of concepts, representations, or any kind of necessity (logical, epistemological, metaphysical). Thus, transcendental arguments are inappropriate. This must be a cross-disciplinary ontology, guided as much by artistic and creative practice as by criticism and previous theory. Its value must be estimated by its power to transform individual and collective experience, to generate social hope, and to encourage reform and renewal while preserving those values without which our human solidarity, such as it is, cannot be maintained. The discovery and articulation of a pre-cognitive ontology must be undertaken as a part of liberating and transforming our civilizations.

The ontology needed for a post-Rortyan aesthetics is, in my view, something that runs along the lines of Bergson's aesthetics (although it can and should be supplemented with critical philosophies of culture, such as Cassirer explained). Bergson's view can be summarized in three parts. First I will show how his use of the “image” offers a provisional ontology for aesthetic thought. Second, I will discuss the relationship between instinct and intuition in his evolutionary description of the empirical ground of images, and I will also explain how the images of our inner lives relate, empirically, to those images that make up our domains of action. And third I will examine the brief remarks Bergson makes on aesthetic thought in his only explicit and extended discussion of that topic, in his essays on laughter and the comic, to show their relation to the accounts of image, instinct, and reflective intuition (archetype). Then I will situate Bergson's account within the view of “art” which shores up its trans-disciplinarity (especially its transcendence of Philosophy and philosophical aesthetics, placing it outside of Rorty's criticism without depriving it of a robust theoretical character). The result will be an aesthetic theory that avoids the traps Rorty helped us to understand.

II. The Flux and the Body: The Ground of the Image

Bergson's ontology is an ontology of images rather than, say, events (as one would find in Whitehead, Langer, and Dewey). The difference is crucial here. Bergson does maintain, as do these other process thinkers, that time flows in nested, overlapping hierarchies of duration.³ The flux has many levels of order

2 Sartwell has confirmed my surmise in conversation. I would be surprised if Shusterman disagrees.

3 See Pete A.Y. Gunter, “Temporal Hierarchy in Whitehead and Bergson,” in *Interchange*, 36:1-2 (2005), 139-157. Bergson began his career with this ontology already in place (see Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, authorized trans. F. L. Pogson (London: Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1910), 9), and it is not an

immanent within it, but human beings can *make use* of only a small portion of these forms of order. Most of what flows is not suited to our limitations. Thus, an ontology of events obligates itself to characterizing and taking account of aspects of the universe that are beyond our ken – of no conceivable *use* to us. From Bergson's point of view, such an ontology is recklessly excessive. We think about the world *in order to act* in it, and proper method generalizes from our experience aiming at the minimum account of what exists within our ken. Thus, there is a practical limit on Bergson's radical empiricism. Those modes of immanent order within the flux that can have no important overlap with the modes that inform our action are not of philosophical concern to us. Hence, as we shall see, he characterizes the "image," based on what serves utility from the standpoint of the limits of finite, human action. Bergson calls this a "common sense" limitation. (MM 10-11)⁴

The flux, insofar as it grounds the "image," in Bergson's special sense, consists of many kinds of pulses and vibrations of energy, and these energies move in wildly different temporal modes. Just to take the most familiar, we all know that light-energy travels faster than sonic energy, which is what makes it so wonderful to sit in the right field bleachers and see a professional baseball player hit the ball and then, a quarter of a second later, to *hear* one of the sweeter sounds ever emitted in the cosmos, the crack of milled Ash against cowhide and cork, colliding at over 300 kilometers per hour. The aesthetics of the delay is as much a part of the enjoyment and value of the experience as is the outcome, the "having of a hit, as a whole image." But apart from the energistic propagations of light and sound waves, there are dozens of other modes of energy pulsing through the flux at every sort of level of generalized and particularized existence, from the boring, repetitive background radiation (which comes as close to pure "matter," in Bergson's sense or simple repetition, the material tendency), up to the pulsars (a macro-level, precise repetition of a rotating neutron star, but far from a temporally monolithic "thing," since it emits radio waves, x-rays, and gamma rays, as well as visible light), and everything in between. All of this cosmic repetition overlaps with our domain of action in some ways – for example, we can see the stars, and for Bergson, seeing something means including it within one's field of action, virtually. We *do not* see what we cannot act on, in principle, and everything we *do* see is arranged in a visual field before us with the meaning of "distance" being the number of movements the body will have to perform to act upon an "image" in that field. (MM 20, 31-32, 57, 144) But not all images are primarily visible images. Indeed, the *visible* character of some images has nothing directly to do with *why* they are called images. (see MM 43) I will frame Bergson's account of the image in detail in the next section, but for now, let the word serve as a functional indicator of some portion of the flux that can be acted upon, at least in principle.

accident that among his earliest arguments for the reality of qualitative intensities as the proper units for understanding our experience of real duration were aesthetic experiences (see TFW 11 ff.).

4 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, authorized trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1988 [1910]), used throughout the whole article.

To be a physical being is to localize and to create a disequilibrium in the flux by slowing some variable collection of those energies into a pattern for a durational epoch or some kind, before releasing them back into their respective modalities, either for decay or further propagation.

To be a living or organic being requires not only a slowing and collecting of energies moving at variable rates or propagation in the flux, but life requires also a reduction and recombination of those energies into an astonishing pattern of overlapping and more or less harmonic sympathy of vibration, surrounded by what Bergson calls a "zone of indetermination" (MM 39), which is populated by *all* that the living body can act upon through one or a whole series of diastolic and systolic movements. (See MM 30) So far as we know, only within and accompanied by zones of indetermination is "perception" an actual occurrence in the natural world.⁵ The perceptions of living organisms can be described as symbols of experiences not had, through the inaction of the body (MM 144). The fact that perception is associated in a fundamental way with *inaction* is an important point for our later discussion.⁶

More could be said about the relation of the flux and the living organism. If the point be granted that Bergson's account intends to be thoroughly naturalistic and indeed, it is *radically* empirical (see MM 12, 75, etc.), in the sense articulated by William James.⁷ The point about radical empiricism is important for our purposes, since I think that radical empiricism, as an orientation on philosophical inquiry, is the best (perhaps the only) way really to avoid Rorty's better criticisms of philosophy's pretensions as a mirror of nature. The idea of "experience" may be difficult to reconstruct without giving in to the dogmas of empiricism, but radical empiricism does not begin with those dogmas.⁸ Radical empiricism deflates in philosophy what must be deflated for the sake of fact, holding fast to particular fact as experienced, but it does not deflate the

5 There are detailed accounts of what Bergson means by perception from various perspectives in all of his major works. The account that most closely corresponds to what I am saying here is in *Matter and Memory*, 44 ff. But it is important to remember that the various major works ask fundamentally different questions. The account in *Time and Free Will* comes closer to being a *phenomenology* of perception and its relation to consciousness, while *Matter and Memory* is an epistemology, arching toward ontology – addressing what perception *is* insofar as it contributes to knowledge and how we can account for the existence of perception without making epistemological mistakes. *Creative Evolution* seeks the origins of the forms of perception we find in ourselves and among all living organisms, while also asking after the ground of life. These are related but importantly different questions. I see no serious tensions among the various accounts of perception Bergson provides. Properly contextualized, each view contributes to an overall philosophical view that is subtle, complex, and as consistent as one could reasonably hope.

6 It is also not an accident that the narrowness or width of *personality* is associated by Bergson with the relation of activity to inactivity, with the range and tonality of *possible* action. Active people have narrower highly toned personalities, corresponding to a wide field of available immediate action; inactive people have broader, richer, more nuanced grasp of a smaller field of action. (MM 13-14) Both are aesthetically valuable of course, but in different ways. This point is also related to his assertion that "the object of art is to put to sleep the active or rather resistant powers of our personality and thus to bring us into a state of perfect responsiveness... In the processes of art we shall find, in a weakened form, a refined and in some measure spiritualized version of the process commonly used to induce the state of hypnosis." (TFW 14)

7 See William James, *The Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott, "A Pluralistic Universe," (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 808.

8 I refer to Quine's famous essay, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *Philosophical Review*, 60 (1951), 20-47, and anthologized many times thereafter.

whole *activity* of philosophy. Bergson's radically empirical, naturalistic account of the image, as the transient pattern in the variable flux, is as close as we can get, in my view, to grounding a responsible, fallible ontology that promises to leave intact our *experience* of value – and, in this case, aesthetic value, both as creating and receiving the created temporal patterns of others.

III. The Experience of the Image

We move now to what Bergson calls the "system of images" and their characters. Here we find an important distinction between a body and *my* body (see MM 47), the latter being a *privileged* image in the system of images. But in the passage cited here, Bergson continues, saying that *my* body (for me) and *your* body (for you) "is a pointed end, which our past is continually driving forward into our future. Whereas my body, taken at a single moment, is but a conductor interposed between the objects which influence it and those on which it acts, it is, nevertheless, when replaced in the flux of time, always situated at the very point where my past expires in a deed." (MM 78) Note that the past "expires" in the act, the deed, which might be called a "decision" in the literal sense – a "cut" in the flux.

We thus come to the structure of the act as *an* image *among* images. Bergson says that an image is *less* than an idea, as the idealists speak of these basic units of being, and also *less* than a thing or object, as realists are wont to posit as the basic units of the cosmos. As less determinate, the image is richer in both content and structure than the idea or the thing. He argues, conclusively in my view, that neither ideas nor things/objects can be parts of our experience as it is *had*. Rather, we employ memory to finish what is unfinished in our perception (where idealists and dogmatic empiricists roam) or our zone of indetermination (the playground of realists).

This situation gives realists problems with "the present," which they habitually hypostatize in order to ignore the incomplete character of the images they care about and offer as exemplars of "the real." In truth, these "things" are objects no more "complete" than anything else that comes from the flux. On the other side, we have dogmatic empiricists insisting that our perceptions can be simplified into qualities or primary and secondary characters that somehow (magically?) exhaust what we can know or experience about them. Thus, a percept is a sort of finished primary *idea*, a completed building block, an irreducible surd (conveniently fitted in advance for a theory of knowledge). They ignore the fact that the experience *as had* contains no such completed parts and that they, likewise, use memory to complete the image *into* a percept or simple idea instead of the "thing" or "object" favored by realists. Idealists fare no better, then, substituting the "idea" for the "thing" or "percept," and needing an account of how factually *incomplete* action, whether perception or thinking, can fill out an image into a determinate concept, or an inexhaustible idea of reason, or something similar.

In our experience *as had*, we work with images that *can be* completed in any of these ways – as ideas, concepts, objects, things, primary percepts, etc. – but we are under no absolute imperative to “complete” any of them. Action not only does not require that we treat images as completed units, it ignores all such virtualized completions in treating the image as the functional *unit* of all our actions. Hence, to act is to act *upon* images as *parts* of a system of images. To fail to accept this starting place is to court ideology and other pathologies of consciousness, philosophical, psychological, epistemological, phenomenological – it is the misuse (*and* the uncreative use) of memory. It supposes that the past has a power and influence over the meaning of the present that it does not have. As Bergson says, “habits formed in action,” that is, living memory brought to bear on present experience, “find their way up to the sphere of speculation, where they create fictitious problems,” so a corrected metaphysics that treats images and the image system as the basic grid of action, “must begin by dispersing this artificial obscurity.” (MM 16)

How, then, can we describe this system of images without illicitly relying upon completions that are misuses of memory? Bergson offers a way. Imagine that the present is really just the space of actions you *could* perform. “Distance,” then, is measured by the number of muscular contractions required to make use of that virtual “space.” Thus, to exist in a “present” is to be surrounded by a virtual space of action, a zone of indetermination, images you might or might not act upon, the relative “distances” of which are really only comprehensible with reference to the effort you *would* have to expend, and the duration it *would* require, to make use of that “space” (the present). Anything you cannot act on by means of contracting your muscles isn’t *really* part of your “present.”

Now, imagine that the whole of the “present” is a *plane*, in the geometrical sense. But the bothersome plane is *moving*; it recedes from your effort in proportion to the effort expended. The more effort you exert, the faster it recedes. The less effort you exert, the closer it comes and widens and broadens into a collection of images that you can *enjoy*.⁹ The only point of contact between an agent and his/her “present” consists in those contractions being enacted at the moment, whether that action be praying, drinking, cussing, or straining one’s brain to think about the meanings that always lie in the unthought background of our thinking.¹⁰ Thinking is also an effort, a kind of action, that forsakes *most* of the system of images for the sake of a paltry few and their relations. The *more* acuity there is in the thought, the *less* of the image we can grasp with it. This is the process of abstraction. The logician sees only a tree, in the conceptually determined sense. The artist sees a great deal more of the same image, saturated with ambiguity and possibility.

Still, the actor, whether logician or artist, always has *some* point of contact with the receding plane of the present, while *most* of that plane remains mere

9 This is a term much more common in Whiteheadian than in Bergsonian parlance. The term, for Whitehead, has to do with the depth of satisfaction achieved by the concrecence (but not the transition) of an actual entity in its valuation of its actual world. See Randall Auxier and Gary L. Herstein, *The Quantum of Explanation: Whitehead's Radical Empiricism*, chs. 7-9, forthcoming.

10 See Foucault’s famous distinction in chapter 9, “Man and His Doubles” in *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 1989), 330-374.

potential for action. Part of what makes artists psychologically delicate and epistemologically unreliable has to do with too much freedom within the system of images. And there is regret shooting through each and every enactment, since the cost of acting is cutting off *other* actions which *might have been* preferable, or at least more beautiful. Here there is an immediate encounter with the image system as a receding plane of the present as *possibility*.

Bergson's well-known example of our experience of watching the ice skater leap and twirl, and if she is graceful (and indeed this is the *meaning* of "grace"), our temporal experience is extended into the future, where we see the jump successfully completed, and then when she lands in our actual system of images, we feel as if we have willed the entire sequence. It is possible to act upon a receding plane of the present in ways that stretch it beyond the actual images and ever so slightly into the future. When the ice-skater falls, we are stunned for a moment, pervaded by a sense of unreality. How can the act anticipated *fail* to be the act experienced?

Let us continue the inquiry, respectfully, then. How much of what is in your "present" (that is, the space of possible action you currently perceive as a zone of indetermination) are you genuinely acting on, right now? Not much, right? The part you are acting on, by physical movements and effort, constitutes your point of contact with the receding plane of the present. You are not *conscious* of that part, but you do *feel* it, as resistance, and you *will* be able to be conscious of it as soon as it is far enough in the past for your central nervous system to process the feelings of resistance (and stimulation) into a synesthetic *feeling of the whole*. The receding plane of the present, as a system of images, has some solidity, then, consisting of whatever can be held in a single duration by the actor or agent (and it is good to remember that the moving plane defines what it means, at a minimum, for anything to be a solid, in the geometrical sense; it is how, in processual thinking, two dimensions become three).

If we take an act of consciousness as determining, for some purpose (usually for the sake of thinking), the solidity of the receding plane of the present, then its solidity is a couple of seconds (since a single act of thought can't usually be extended beyond a couple of seconds). But if we take continuous muscle contractions, each building upon the last in a way Bergson would call "graceful," as in our example, it is possible to imagine entire gymnastic routines or skating programs or symphony performances as being *one* unified action, meeting a relatively "thick" plane of the present. It is as if the entire continuity were spread out upon a single plane, and, physically speaking, it *is*. But we cannot *think* it that way. Thinking refuses to remain engaged with the receding plane of the present for more than a very short span. But physical effort, whether individual or collective, easily surpasses that limit. Indeed, the limits of *thinking* a physical act are themselves *a part of the act*. Thinking can employ forms – concepts, ideas, intuitions, and the like, to compensate and counteract the effects of the various discontinuities inherent in the act of creating spaces of thought, but the real continuities of action *are themselves the limits*, as far as we know, of such substitution. Even where we can no longer think, we often can still act, but where action is *completely* arrested, thinking will lack a fabric to support itself.

Where no *action* is possible at all, neither is any *thinking* possible. Inhibiting the body may lead, temporarily, to increased thinking, but that is the inertia of past action, as habit, overrunning the present situation. With no physical movement at all (including, for example, respiration), the organism ceases to function, vitally, in just a few minutes; thinking becomes clouded and desperate and gradually comes to be arrested altogether. Organisms must move in order to live; organisms with centralized nervous systems must move *against* resistance to become conscious of things or objects within their zones of indetermination.

What is crucial for our purposes is not what finally determines the thickness or thinness of the space of the present. What is crucial is that we must be able to imagine the *meaning* of an "actor" or "agent" as a *center of action*, chasing a virtual and variable space of possibility, a receding plane, some of which may be acted on before the plane is wholly out of reach and some of which may be reserved for acting upon through a *series* of actions corresponding to a series of present planes, transformed, indeed, but not so radically as to place beyond the reach of action those objects or ideas that lure our feeling to their promised solidity.¹¹ Sometimes the plane of the present is sufficiently transformed as to frustrate my action, in deed or in thought – I reach for the glass but do not succeed in apprehending it; it falls and breaks. The projected completion of my act of drinking is arrested. Other times, I succeed and the act falls into the past, unnoted and unremembered *because* I succeeded. Our access to memory depends, if not quite upon failure, upon imperfect success in the relation of act *experienced* to the act *projected* ahead in time. Bergson believes that consciousness is created in the difference arising from the dissonance of act and projection and the way in which we never quite perfectly anticipate the solid resistance we get from acting – at least not in instances of action we can *remember*. This is as much the case for thinking-as-action as for physical exertion. We all do both all the time (in fact, we do nothing else, as far as I know).

If you imagine the receding plane of the present as *sinking*, descending away into an infinite depth of futurity, and if you imagine the point of action, the zone of indetermination, as a vector, a tendency-arrow that chases that plane and leaves a sort of comet's tail of past deeds behind it, you have Bergson's image of the relationship between memory (the comet's tail) and perception (the space of the present, as qualified above). If you could *ascend* back up the arrow's path, regressing in lived time or "duration," all the way into the deepest past, you would have *pure memory*. The further back you move, the more static the images become until none of them moves at all. No one who is awake can "remember" the images that are so deep in the past as to be almost utterly fixed, relative to the present, but that does not mean these images are not active. They are archetypes and we encounter them in dreams, for example, which, according to Bergson, is a deep kind of experiencing of the past, but not limited to the past as it is associated with my own individual actions. We dip into the past of the race, the species, all the living, when we dream. There are other modes of access, apart from dreaming, to the past as memory images,

11 Solidarity and lure are discussed in Auxier and Herstein, *The Quantum of Explanation*, esp. ch. 7.

but the point is that artists really *are* “remembering” the images they create, while also perceiving the materials available for re-manifesting those images in novel configurations the present.

On the other hand, if you could spread a *single* action over the entire receding plane of the present, you would have *pure perception*. This would be a total, wholly integrated arrangement of *possible* action, perceived in perfect clarity, with no requirement of a finite action that makes the rest disappear into the background. In such a condition, the presence of memory (past images) would exert only a minimal influence upon action, although they would be available. Perception in the present of the possibilities for acting in the present makes possibility palpable and makes actuality into suggestion rather than determinate exertion upon the center of action. You, as a finite human actor, wouldn’t want either pure memory or pure perception, even if you really could experience them. They are tendencies only. Neither one of these can be enacted in a purified way, but there are perceptually richer “presents” in proportion as there are “presents” impoverished by over-weening memory, or by overwhelming perception. Rich memory comes at the cost of an impoverishment of perception and vice-versa.

In reality, all we ever get is a small point of contact between the past and the present, and an especially thick action simply has a broader perception and/or a longer duration, achieved by bringing more of the past to bear on the receding plane of the present. An especially thin present has to do with less perception and more with memory. In thinner, repetitive actions, such as sleeping, repetitive exercise, working on a factory line, and the like, more of the past pervades the present (only that part relevant to performing the repetitive task), so that even our consciousness of the receding plane of the present dissipates to something almost ephemeral.

If you can see, in your mind’s eye, that descending plane of the present with its chasing vector, and the comet’s tail spreading out behind the vector as it is becoming diffused into an increasingly indifferent past, I now want you to imagine that vector *as a cone*.¹² Everything *within* the cone once *touched* the present, and everything beyond it remained virtual, merely possible for the actor who chased the plane. Within the cone is “memory,” the *actual past*, for that actor, which is to say that *within* the cone is the whole of past action, while beyond that cone is the might-have-been. The might-have-been is neither strictly mine nor yours, but rather is part of what the past is *made of* for any actor whose receding plane it belonged to. Neither is the actual past *strictly* mine or yours alone, since an infinite series of actions stretching backward also brought us into actuality.

Following our understanding of solidity and solid geometry: If you could take a conic section of the “past” which is precisely *parallel* with the receding plane of the present, that moment now past which just was the configuration of the plane a few seconds before now, you would recover an actual slice of the past, a moment with some qualitative, epochal thickness, all the actions and all their internal relations.

12 For Bergson’s drawing of this, see MM 162 [210].

Fiction, according to Bergson, is what results when a conic section is taken from memory that is *not* parallel to the receding plane of the present. Fiction involves treating *as if* they were simultaneous a set of possibilities and actualities that never existed as a system of images together on *any agent's* plane of the present. The conic sections that are most closely parallel to the plane of the present, for the setting of the story, will be the most *historical* pieces of fiction. Umberto Eco's most recent novel, *The Prague Cemetery*, is a fine example of how close one can come – every event described in the novel *happened*, except for those performed by the one fictional character in the novel, Simone Simonini. I doubt that Eco was consciously attempting to press the envelope of *fact* as Bergson describes it. Nevertheless, the point is that creating a narrative requires that we connect successive planes of the present, and if we treat even a single pair of images as belonging to the *same* plane of action that were never in *any actor's actual* plane, we are fictionalizing the past. That is Bergson's understanding of fiction (see MM 168-169 [219-221]).

Fiction affects everyone who tells a story, however empirical, but it also affects artists and philosophers. The images offered by artists in performance and as artworks are fictions in the relevant sense – they are virtualized insofar as they never precisely existed as actions anyone performed, but rather they depict closely what never actually co-existed. (Even live-action photography fictionalizes by framing and by reducing the scope of the action performed to only a tiny instant of its genuine duration.) Philosophers similarly theorize about what has never quite really happened, but might or might have. Otherwise they would be historians.

This fictive structure pervades our present actions because the past survives in the present, which is to say that memory pervades and organizes perception, and memory is no respecter of conic sections that parallel the plane of the present. Memory substitutes its images for the genuine plane of the present by supplying memories that will suffice to aid present action. So long as the memory images approximate to those constituting the system of images in the present, action upon the past *as if* it were the present is not usually too discordant with what would be enacted in the genuine perceptual present. As we age we make this substitution more and more. By the time an agent grows to maturity, he or she perceives precious little of the receding plane of possible action. Rather, we look about us and we are mainly employing our fictive memories as substitutes for our perceptions. We don't usually care precisely when in course of the past the images we are aware of came to have the order they now have. We lump a trillion temporal distinctions into a single flooded plane of present possible action and ignore all possibilities that have no distinction for us in our own pasts.

Philosophers are among the worst perceivers, but among the best rememberers. As Bergson says: "This survival of the past *per se* forces itself upon philosophers, then, under one form or another; the difficulty that we have in conceiving it comes simply from the fact that we extend to the series of memories, in time, that obligation of containing and being contained which applies only to the collection of bodies instantaneously perceived in space. The fundamental illusion consists in transferring to duration itself, in its continuous

flow, the form of the instantaneous [conic] sections which we make in it." (MM 149 [193])

The body itself contains both memory and duration and so becomes a kind of temporally extended conic section in the relation between the past and the present. As the center of action and the point of contact between the receding plane of the present and actual memory, the body is a *special* image in the "system of images" (perception and memory *together*), as I have indicated above, "but this special image, which persists in the midst of others, and which I call my body, constitutes at every moment, as we have said, a [conic] section of becoming. It is then the place of passage of the movements received and thrown back, a hyphen, a connecting link between the things which act upon me and the things upon which I act..." (MM 151-152 [196]; see also MM 161-162 [210-211])

IV. Creativity and the Inner Life

If I have succeeded in what I set out to do in these first two sections, we have now an ontology of the image and a basis for understanding what action *is*, as an aspect of dealing with the system of images. All of this has been explained without need for reference to the inner life of organisms (images with bodies that remain constant through any given series of transformations of the receding plane of the present) or reference to other active images in the system of images. It is important that the ontology and the account of change and variable patterned transformation of the flux be carried out without appealing to the inner lives or motive forces or wills or intentions of the other images that act. Not only does such a description avoid the traps of representationalism, but it also places us on a path to *discuss* the inner lives of organisms in a radically empirical, thoroughly naturalistic way. It follows from the discussion to this point, and indeed it is Bergson's view, that consciousness has to do with the way that the past is retained by storing energies in the body without releasing them in action.

The result of this is that the zone of indetermination in the system of images that surrounds the special image I call "my body" becomes increasingly refined and distinct in proportion to the extent that memory can flood the system of images and determine it as an environment *for* the special image, i.e., that the image system takes on the dynamic forms that answer to precisely the types of actions the special image *could* carry out. Perception is, then, a variable relation between the past, present and future defined by a capacity to project the past onto the present for the sake of future actions (most of which will never be carried out, in your case, since your complex centralized nervous system can delay action indefinitely), with a relatively invariant center (meaning that we can always find that center, no matter how much it is transformed by its actions). Your zone of indetermination in the system of images becomes, for the purposes of action, a space of things (or objects), graded in their relevance by the effort that would be required to act on them, or be acted on by them

(including thinking about them, which is the substitute for acting on them). But the same sort of situation goes equally for all organisms, or indeed, for anything with a body, i.e., a special image that can remain relatively constant through a series of transformations. To some degree, this holds for *all* images, which is to say that all images have both memory and perception, but for most images the constancy of the center is guaranteed by repetition alone (i.e., the matter-tendency) and the type of action provides no motility. The interesting images in the image system are the ones that hold their constancy through a greater emphasis upon memory than upon matter.

As Bergson says:

Could reality come into direct contact with sense and consciousness, could we enter into immediate communion with things and with ourselves, probably art would be useless, or rather we should all be artists, for then our soul would continually vibrate in perfect accord with nature. Our eyes, aided by memory, would carve out in space and fix in time the most inimitable pictures. Hewn in the living marble of the human form, fragments of statues, beautiful as the relics of antique statuary, would strike the passing glance. (L 150)¹³

Here Bergson is bringing to bear on the question of “what is art?” the way the image system might be presented to human beings as a world of objects *if* there were no importunate veil mediating, stubbornly, between consciousness and our senses, on one side, and our world on the other. We would then see statues (and paintings, and the ballet, etc.), in the fragments of images in the image system. Yet, overcoming the veil of mediation is more than we can accomplish. As he continues:

All this is around and within us, and yet no whit of it do we distinctly perceive. Between nature and ourselves, nay, between ourselves and our own consciousness a veil is interposed: a veil that is dense and opaque for the common herd, – thin, almost transparent for the artist and the poet. What fairy wove that veil? Was it done in malice or friendliness? (L 151)

It is important that Bergson pauses, corrects himself in saying there is a veil between us and nature – there is, but that is an effect of a more difficult problem, which is the veil between our bodies as centers of action, as part of the system of images, and our *consciousness* thereof. We have described above the ontology that stresses the essential continuity of the body as an image and the system of images – which for some purposes we may call “nature,” if by that we mean all the patterns in the system of images we could possibly act upon. Whether there is anything we should call “nature” *beyond* that limit seems like a metaphysical question in the occult sense, and it is not a concern for radical empiricists, except insofar as we must remain open to it as possibility.

Yet, in refining his assertion, Bergson poses the question of the *inner life*, especially of complex organisms. These are organisms with nervous systems that allow them to delay acting upon things or objects in their zones of indetermination, nervous systems that project the past onto the system of images in more and less determinate ways, the less determinate being called “intellect,”

13 Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, authorized trans. Cloudeley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: Macmillan, 1911), used throughout the article.

which creates spaces of possible action, and the more determinate ways called “instinct,” the inexorable drive to act almost immediately on images as universal exemplars of necessary relations, as if these images were *objects*, i.e., wholly determinate repetitions of their archetypes without variation of any kind.¹⁴

The zone of indetermination for intellect, by contrast, becomes a space of play and possibility, with objects transforming into their plurality of possibilities before the arrested eye of that body that resists acting. Yet, having offered the radically empirical ontology, we still have not confronted the reason for the existence of a veil between our inner lives, our consciousness and senses, if you will, and our lives as acting bodies in a zone of indetermination, or as a special image (“my body”), a center of action, in the system of images.

The question of the inner life, and hence, the way artists and poets experience the veil as thin, is what transforms Bergson’s aesthetics (as I have now brought it together) into a philosophy of art. I left out a crucial sentence in the passages I quoted above. After Bergson points out how images would be for us like statues as beautiful as the fragments that survive from the ancients, he says:

Deep within our souls we should hear the strains of our inner life’s unbroken melody, – a music that is oftentimes gay, but more frequently plaintive and always original. (L 150-151)

This is to say, we *would* hear this music if not for the veil between our consciousness and ourselves. But in fact we don’t hear it – or rather, *most* of us don’t. He offers this as the reason why our veils are so thick:

We had to live, and life demands that we grasp things in their relations to our own needs. Life is action. Life implies the acceptance only of the utilitarian side of things in order to respond to them by appropriate reactions: all other impressions must be dimmed or else reach us as vague and blurred. I look and I think I see; I listen and I think I hear, I examine myself and I think I am reading the very depths of my heart. But what I hear and see is purely and simply a selection made by my senses to serve as a light to my conduct; what I know of myself is what comes to the surface, what participates in my actions. My senses and my consciousness, therefore, give me no more than a practical simplification of reality. (L 151)

In the case of action in moving my body, I select images *for use*; in the case of thinking as an action of self-examination, I attend to the work of memory only as it aids that action. The rest is dim and opaque. This is to say that instinct never loses its grip on us except insofar as we can afford *not to act*, and not acting is counter to the requirements of life. The arrest of action is, in itself, a kind of

¹⁴ This is the sense in which Hegel, for example, treats “sense certainty” saying that “those who assert the truth and certainty of sense-objects... should go back to the most elementary school of wisdom,... [the initiate who] not only comes to doubt the being of sensuous things, but to despair of it; in part he brings about the nothingness of such things himself, in his dealings with them, and in part he sees them reduce themselves to nothingness. Even the animals are not shut out from this wisdom but, on the contrary, show themselves to be most profoundly initiated into it; for they do not just stand idly in front of sensuous things as if they possessed intrinsic being, but, despairing of their reality, and completely assured of their nothingness, they fall to without ceremony and eat them up.” See Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 65 (paragraph 109). What Hegel describes here is very close to what Bergson means by the word “image” and, being treated in its pure universality, we act on it without mediation as a universal – and this is “instinct,” in Bergson’s sense.

death, a stoppage of the flow that sustains life. Thus, the cost of encountering a space of possibility is inaction, a momentary cessation of life, exerting our vital energies in resisting the entire flow. The result of such resistance is that the zone of indetermination fills out in richer perception in proportion to our ability to delay acting on it and hold back the mindless flood of memory onto the plane of the present at the same time. What occurs in these moments is reflection, which is a virtual image of what would be happening if we were acting, whether upon the space created by not thinking, or the empty virtual objects that appear when we refrain from acting. This is what intuition intuits – what is not actively thought (reflective intuition) or what is not actually done (sensuous intuition). Intuition is made of possibilities, real possibilities, but on condition of their not being thought as objects of thinking (e.g., as determinate concepts), or being enacted in the economy of useful sensuous action. You only intuit what you have never determinately thought or acted on. Yet, such intuition can become a part of subsequent action when we have released our bodies into the sensuous flux and our thinking into the more rarified processes of cognition. These intuitions, as contributors to subsequent thinking and acting, become insights and novel movements (and what is an insight except a novel movement of thinking?).

It is possible, then, to refine our genuine possibilities for acting (and thinking) along certain lines by undertaking increasingly refined actions upon them – the development of technique, which is as valuable to artists as to politicians, hunters, footballers, or any other kind of human undertaking that focuses a *reflectively* refined perception upon a course of action or of thinking.

It cannot come as a surprise to anyone with even a passing familiarity with Bergson's philosophy that his account of intuition is at the heart of his aesthetics, just as it functions as the center of his epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. When it came time to discuss the lives of *human beings*, as they are shared across disparate places and distant generations, Bergson chose to address the various associated issues through the philosophy of culture. Without going deeply into what culture might mean for Bergson (he is never wholly clear, in my view), we can summarize quickly by pointing out the images in the zone of indetermination for human action which appear in our perception as "objects," are taken by us as *symbols*, and their symbolic standing is a great part of what veils their "natural meaning," i.e., what they *would* mean if we could poke through the veil of utility upon which all our thinking and acting is bent.¹⁵

Bergson's aesthetics stands in contrast to many other views precisely because he does not regard the artist as a person with some sort of expertise in the arrangement of symbols, but as a person who can see (i.e., think and act) *through* the layers of crusty images, the enculturated symbolism, the tendency toward pure memory. The artist touches, by way of intuition (both reflective and sensuous) what is *in* the zone of indetermination as creative possibility for

15 Here it is good to remember the two principles Bergson articulates in the Introduction to *Matter and Memory*, viz., the psychological principle that all mental functions are turned toward action, and the metaphysical principle that past actions have a nasty habit of becoming objects of speculation with which we create fictitious problems. (See MM, 16 [xvi-xvii].)

perception, describing an arc in the *direction* of pure perception, while holding back memory and holding off utility to create the space of novel thinking and action, and allowing intuition to do its work. There is a freedom of action in the zone of indetermination for the artist that lies within the power of all of us, but is exemplified in the action of the artist.

The question, then, is what is the artist doing that brings the past into the present in such a way as to lay open the zone of indetermination as a pattern of perception that recovers what is inherent or immediate in the image system. We now arrive at the most important point about intuition, in Bergson's sense. Bergson held that intuition *is* instinct that has come to be *detached* from its direct and immediate association with life. In example after example, Bergson showed that the manipulation of life as *material process* was the immediate employment of "instinct." Instinctive action exploits the reliability of repetitive pattern in both the physical and the more complex organic world. Nothing complex can endure for long without exploiting patterned repetition, with the organic repetitions built from and depending upon the physical repetitions. Novel and complex patterns of order are concretized by taking advantage of the systolic relaxations of physical and organic systems of images, which provide a lapse of indetermination during which subtler and less stable repetitions may occur. Overlapping hierarchies of duration are everywhere observed in what we call nature, and there seem almost no limit to how subtle, unstable, and rapid a vibration might be that can be inserted into a longer, slower, more extended pattern of vibration. Every image in the image system is such a collection. Bergson attributes to the *élan vital* the work of inserting such life into the lapses, but we will not pursue that hypothesis here. (See CE, 126-128¹⁶) The point is that this really happens, whatever the agency or reason.

Still, the presence of possibility, as a might-have-been, in the fading reflective intuition must be structurally analogous (or something stronger) to the fading image from the image system. They could not be different in kind, and likely, the latter contains the former as a subtle set of unifiable variations that could be inserted into the lapses of the macro-structure of the image system. Thus, *my* possibilities for action, even when they are inhibited, are very like *the* possibilities for the acting of my body in the zone of indetermination that is the proximate and non-proximate structure (i.e., distance) in the receding plane of the present that confines the image system.

We may now say that an intuition, both in the way we *feel* it as it passes away, and in the way we can *imagine* it in recollection, whether visually, aurally, or in some other way, is a humanized version of "memory," in Bergson's sense. Because the image is public, the sensuous intuition that *is* the fading of that image, passes away in different animal bodies that have shared a present with that image. Thus, the fading and the intuition is grounds overlap in different animal bodies. Something analogous holds for reflective intuitions, the inner images of thinking that did not quite reach the clarity of an object of thought.

¹⁶ *Creative Evolution*, authorized trans. Arthur Mitchell (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983 [1911]).

These overlap less from one human being to another, but their overlap is crucial for shared aesthetic judgment to occur.

This structural overlap of intuitions deriving from sensation, being the negative outline that surrounds our perception, is therefore irreducibly social. This is not due to our biology alone, but due to the way that images endure, survive, and fade. There is very little difference, in the grand scheme of things, between the actions I can perform or inhibit and those available to others. Thus, every action I inhibit is also counterbalanced in the past by the fact that many other humans actually have *done* and *are doing* what I have *not* done and never will do. I participate in their actions vicariously. My intuition of a might-have-been, an action I did not perform, is still part of memory insofar as some other image enacted that possibility, and while I merely intuit that act, some other enduring creature genuinely remembers it. This is the genuine empirical meaning of *methexis*, participation, and this account explains why that idea has gained so much purchase in our intellectual history. We do indeed participate in *forms* of action, i.e., generalized ways of acting that fall under memory itself. But it would be closer to accurate to say that the collective images of *unenacted* possible actions that form the negative outline of our actual history are really experienced as “archetypes,” in Jung’s sense, or “imaginative universals” in Vico’s sense. For Bergson, as we mentioned earlier, when we dream, we sink into this structural domain of archetypes or collective dream images. In dreaming it matters not at all to which special image (i.e., body) an intuition belongs. This fact of our experience also explains our aesthetic delight and thrill in seeing another human being or an animal enact something we cannot do ourselves.

As fascinating as all this is, the question, now that we have a basic sense of what a reflective intuition is. It is the result, Bergson says, of the long association of instinctive action with inhibition in living creatures that emphasize the tendency to use intellect – to spatialize and perceive the space – *instead* of acting. They are sublimated in images. Thinking, then, is a kind of second sight that draws upon the organization of the body and upon the structure of actions *not* enacted, and thus forming virtual thoughts that seem like analogues of the sensuous images in our zone of indetermination, only paler, occupying only a virtual space. Thinking, for Bergson, is always about the past, but, as with reflective intuitions and unreflective intuited feelings, it can become a contributor to forming a *substitute* for the actual future and enables us to anticipate a likely configuration of images in the image system. This *generalized* world is the one we inhabit almost all the time, Bergson holds. “We move amidst generalities and symbols, as within a tilt-yard in which our force is pitted against other forces; and fascinated by action, tempted by it, we live in a zone midway between things and ourselves.” (L 154)

But what is the value of reflective intuition for creating or experiencing a work of art? Clearly the process of creating works of art draws upon certain extremes of intensity in acting on the image system, utilizing feeling, intuition (both reflective and unreflective) and thinking. There is in artistic activity an intervention in the image system that reminds us of some possibility for moving

our bodies that we have not expected to enact ourselves or even to see enacted in the image system. Who is the artist? Bergson says:

From time to time, however, in a fit of absentmindedness, nature raises up souls that are more detached from life. Not with that intentional, logical systematical detachment – the result of reflection and philosophy – but rather with a natural detachment, one innate in the structure of sense or consciousness, which at once reveals itself by a virginal manner, so to speak, of seeing, hearing, or *thinking*. Were this detachment complete, did the soul no longer cleave to action by any of its perceptions, it would be the soul of an artist such as the world has never yet seen. It would excel alike in every art at the same time; or rather, it would infuse them into one. It would perceive all things in their native purity: the forms, colours, sounds of the physical world as well as the subtlest movements of the inner life. (L 154, my emphasis)

No such perfect detachment exists, of course. The veil of attachment to life is lifted only partly and accidentally among some of us in some ways, but it is not unimportant that Bergson has included *thinking*, along with seeing and hearing, among the powers of action implicated in human creativity. There is a thinking that is more than *artful*, it is a kind of *art*, a mode of art, and it is not the sort that philosophy and logic and systematic epistemology produce in us. But Bergson intimates that the arts would be a unity of perception if ever there could be a complete detachment from the way that life commands action in our instinctive being. But in the movements of the image system, the human artist moves within a limited domain and “little by little he insinuates [his seeing, hearing, thinking] into our own perception, baffled though we may be at the outset.” (L 155) The result is that “for a few moments he diverts us from the prejudices of form and color that have come between ourselves and reality. And thus he realizes the loftiest ambition of art, which here consists in revealing to us nature.” (L 155)

Art reaches its deepest into us when it ceases relying upon words and borrowing the structures of language and the conceptual spaces defined thereby; art goes deeper when it is grasping “something that has nothing in common with language.” Rather:

...certain rhythms of life and breath that are closer to man than his inmost feelings, being the living law – varying with each individual – of his enthusiasm and despair, his hopes and regrets. By setting free and emphasizing this music, they [the artists] force it upon our attention: they compel us, willy-nilly, to fall in with it, like passers-by who join in a dance. And thus they impel us to set in motion, in the depths of our being, some secret chord which was only waiting to thrill. (L 156-157)

Art then is not an imitation of life, although it draws on the way that the images generated for our inner lives through the inhibition of our actions that overlap with the actions that *others* enact, or that we ourselves enact *later*. There is something to the insight about imitation as the ground of art that is irreducible in our experience, but to have that insight, that reflective intuition of a thought we never quite *had*, coagulate into a dead Platonic form or completed idea is the very opposite of what the imitation means and portends, in art or in life. And there is definitely *expression* in the creation of art, but it is not the causal will of the inner life of the artist, nor any arrangement of intentions

for the work; expression is the collection of acts by which the work is brought into the image system as a kind of movement, a dynamism that impels our participation, for a moment.

These are natural rather than conventional or philosophical accounts of imitation and expression, and in no way do they fall into the trap of representationalism. The key difference is that Bergson looks for art in our experience below the level of language. Bergson respects language very much, and art that draws upon its structures, among those who “contrive to make us see something of what they have seen: by rhythmical arrangements of words, which thus become organized and animated with a life of their own, they tell us – or rather suggest – things that speech was not calculated to express.” (L 156)

In this way of naturalizing perception, action, creativity, imitation, expression and all the tropes of Western aesthetic theory, Bergson describes a path forward (and around all the fruitless old disputes) into a future that is intellectually responsible, radically empirical, and available to the contemplations of all who create and who enjoy the outcomes of artistic endeavor.

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The Inescapable Inspiration of the Artist: Imagination¹

Abstract

This article presents the way in which the role of imagination as a driving force of artistic creation has undergone a dynamic process up to this day. Unpopular in Antiquity and throughout most of the Middle Ages, the use of imagination changed in the so called Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes at the end of the seventeenth century. The role of the imagination exploded with Romanticism, only to be suppressed by the Avant-garde and Conceptualism. However, as Arthur Danto remarked in his last book, art is more than an embodied concept; it is also a "wakeful dream." Following motifs like Don Quijote or the dantesque "kiss of Paolo and Francesca," recurring in modern literature, the article traces the boundary that separates a sufficient amount of imaginative power from its excess, that serves artistic creativity or dissipates it, respectively.

Keywords: *conceptualism, creation, fantasy, imagination, inspiration, literature, Romanticism*

In the past half century, or perhaps some time more, almost all traditional aesthetic categories have been discredited: the ideal of beauty, the concept of art, autonomy, the artist, the work of art. All of these concepts – like the classic institutions and the once so self-evident authority of the critic – became subjects for discussion.² Skepticism, both universal and radical, regarding all major aesthetic principles made it inevitable that the world of art would become increasingly concerned with the question of what is – and what is no longer – to be considered art.

One of the leading thinkers in this field was Arthur C. Danto (1924-2013). In his work he analyzed how art (mainly visual arts) gradually became more and more conceptual. His frequently used example is Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964), which so resembled genuine soap boxes that they could no longer be understood as art without a theory of art.³

Such an approach seems miles away from various romantic notions of art that had appeared quite authoritative in past centuries. Due to the growing

1 Ideas developed in this paper were initially studied in Maarten Doorman, *Paralipomena: Opstellen over kunst, filosofie en literatuur* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007).

2 Cf. Marc Jimenez, *La querelle de l'art contemporain*, folio essays (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

3 Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). Danto, *Art after the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). Cf. David Joselit, *After Art* (Princeton / Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013).

importance of reflection, the autonomy of art was indeed undermined. As Arthur Danto provocatively stated, relying ironically on Hegel, art eventually turned into philosophy. As a result of this, fundamental principles of art implicitly came under pressure – especially the romantic conception according to which art is ultimately traceable to the expression of the worldview or state of mind of individual artists. Expression, inspiration, and imagination were gradually assigned a secondary role in this conceptual approach.

However, in an attempt to distinguish between what constitutes art and what does not, Danto in his last book, *What Art Is* (2013), implicitly arrived – albeit via a detour – at such romantic notions again. The reason is that he no longer defines art merely as *embodied meanings*, as in his previous work, but adds a new element: in his view, art, apart from being a meaning (1) that is embodied (2), is also a *wakeful dream* (3).⁴ This is a step forward, insofar as art as ‘embodied meaning’ represented far too broad a definition, for it would even include traffic signs. On the other hand, the concept of a ‘wakeful dream,’ i.e., something dreamlike about which we can think and speak with one another, brings us closer to the romantic conception of art, in which the inspired artist appeals to the imagination of both himself and of the viewer, reader, or listener.

Until the Eighteenth Century, imagination and inspiration had been an unimportant factor in art, philosophically speaking. The *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* caused that to change. In this debate, poets such as Boileau and La Fontaine argued that antiquity could at most be emulated but never surpassed. Modern artists such as Fontenelle and Perrault, however, objected that this unchanging ideal of beauty was problematic. Man is not growing better all the time, Perrault said, any more than lions in Africa have become more civilized – but people do build on results from the past. The fact that this revolutionary idea has now become a truism is due to the obviousness of imagination since the romantic era. Until the Eighteenth Century, the existence of values as something absolute and immutable was taken for granted, and the ability to invent new things was not valued positively. Or rather, only valued positively insofar as it contributed to the perfection of what had already been given in principle.

In Charles Perrault’s *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* (1688-1692), however, we encounter more or less for the first time the thought that criteria in art depend on taste (‘bon goût’), and are therefore co-determined by the time in which they occur. Was there not among the Greeks themselves already a difference between Ionic, Doric and Corinthian style principles? Did we not need, therefore, a distinction between ‘beautés universelles et absolues’ and a ‘beau relatif’ that was tied up with a particular time and which had been created by people? In other words, in addition to *imitatio* (imitation), was not also *inventio*, the inventing of something new, crucial for the arts?⁵

4 Arthur C. Danto, *What Art Is* (New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2013), 46ff. For the inevitability of Romantic notions in art, see Maarten Doorman, *De romantische orde* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2004), chap. 5-6. Cf. Arthur C. Danto, *Embodied Meanings: Critical Essays and Aesthetic Meditations* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1994).

5 For the preceding, see Maarten Doorman, *Art in Progress: A Philosophical Response to the End of the Avant-Garde* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 30-43; Hans Robert Jauss, “Aesthetische

In England, the positive valuation of imagination in the Eighteenth Century emerges from a debate about taste and the sublime. Against traditional attacks on supernatural phenomena in literature – i.e., the ‘fairy way of writing,’ the positively-valued, spontaneous creative power of the poet is now brought to bear. Thus Shaftesbury ascribes to the poet ‘genius’ and ‘originality’ and calls him “a second maker, a just Prometheus,” the kind of observation that eventually leads to William Blake’s radical conception. In a reversal of Plato’s mimesis-thought, Blake refers to imagination as precisely “the real and eternal world of which this vegetable universe is but a faint shadow,” which brings us to the romantic era in all its glory.⁶ Here inventing is no longer lying, but indeed speaking the truth. One can only rely on the heart and the imagination, as John Keats believed: “What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not [...]. I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consequitive reasoning.”⁷

In Germany in the Eighteenth Century, imagination became more widespread, partly under the influence of debates such as the ones that took place in England. Johann Gottfried Herder characterized man as a microcosm of creative power, as ‘an imitative God’ who, it is true, does imitate, but who is at the same time ‘a second Creator.’⁸ And in his influential *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1793), Schiller contends that the instinct for play bridges the gap between theoretical thinking and the realization of ideals. The aesthetic mind – i.e., inspiration and imagination – brings optimal harmony to life and society.⁹

With German Idealism, imagination soared high from the turn of the century onwards. While for Fichte, creative activity – which is at the basis of reality in the subject, the ‘I’ – is presupposed, we see the exact opposite in Schelling, for whom creative nature precedes all knowledge. Yet, remarkably enough, the imagination of the artist is crucial to Schelling, because for him the creative activity of nature is identical with human creative activity, a view that can also be found in August Wilhelm Schlegel and Wackenroder. It is precisely in art that the world and the ‘I,’ the conscious and the unconscious, nature and spirit, appear as one. In Schelling’s then-influential work there appears once again the idea that imagination brings truth. Realistic paintings are less real and true than

Normen und geschichtliche Reflexion in der Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes,” in Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes en ce qui regarde les Arts et les Sciences* (München: Eidos, 1964), 8-64 (‘Einleitung,’ 47ff).

6 René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, Vol. I, *The Later Eighteenth Century* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), 109-110. Cf. James Engells, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, 1981), 48.

7 Letter to Benjamin Bailey (November 22, 1817), cited in Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present* (Tuscaloosa/London: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 255. Cf. C.M. Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination* (Oxford/London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 7ff.

8 Cf. Engells, *The Creative Imagination*, 217-43; H. Madland, “Imitation to Creation: The Changing Concept of Mimesis from Bodmer and Breitinger to Lenz,” in R. Critchfield and W. Koepke, eds., *Eighteenth-Century German Authors and Their Aesthetic Theories: Literature and the Other Arts* (Columbia, South Carolina: Camden House, 1988), 29-43; Erich Ruprecht, *Geist und Denkart der romantischen Bewegung: Durchgedacht bis zur Gegenwart* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1986), 37ff.

9 Friedrich Schiller, “Ueber die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, in einer Reihe von Briefen,” in *Schillers sämtliche Werke im zwölf Bänden* (Stuttgart: Verlag J.G. Cotta, 1887), vol. 12, 3-105.

pictures that leave behind classical *imitatio* and appeal to imagination.¹⁰ Poetry is quite the reverse of an imitation of nature, Novalis says, in an opposition of opposites that is so typical of romanticism.¹¹ But how does this imagination inspired by the artist work?

Take the famous scene at the beginning of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, the moment when the poet along with his guide, Virgil, descends into the second circle of hell. It is dark. The wind is blowing. Moaning adulterers are being chased around like withered leaves by a storm – the way in which they were driven by their passion while alive. Finally, at the end of the fifth canto, amidst howling whirlwinds Dante succeeds in addressing a couple clinging to one another. The beautiful Francesca da Polenta, crying, tells him how she once was sitting with Paolo while reading *Lancelot*, and how they had looked at each other and blanched when they came across the passage in which Lancelot pressed a kiss upon the sudden smile of Queen Guinevere. Without realizing it, Francesca and Paolo also kissed one another. Then follows the beautiful understatement: *quel giorno piú non vi leggemmo avante* – that day we read no further.¹²

This 'wakeful dream' has been an inspiration for many works of art: from Ingres's painting depicting the deceived husband emerging from a dark background, about to stab the adulterous couple to death (*Paolo and Francesca*, 1819), to Auguste Rodin's famous sculpture *The Kiss* (1886), to several operas, including one by Rachmaninoff, all the way to *Francesca da Rimini* by Gabriele D'Annunzio (1901). The power of those lines has dwelt in the inspired imagination since the romantic era. The origins of this, of course, lay in the manner in which Dante – with a few words, in a rhyme scheme as rigid as it is smoothly flowing – evokes those hellish scenes which since the Eighteenth Century would be called sublime. He then suggests how passionately the two will fall into one another's arms, without using any words other than that they never returned to their reading. This is a stylistic trick that appeals to the reader's imagination and causes it to immediately fill in what is missing. Art compels the reader, viewer, or listener to create their own representation, which for exactly this reason works with the inescapable directness of the dream.

And finally, imagination blossoms within those lines by revealing how the imagination of someone else, i.e., the author who composed the adventures of Lancelot and Guinevere, can enchant reality so deeply that Francesca and Paolo can no longer offer resistance to the feelings that they had encountered. Dante's contemporaries and later readers of the Renaissance would have been

10 Beardsley, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present*, 231-34; cf. Mayer Howard Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1971), 209-11. For A.W. Schlegel, who wonders, when mimicking nature, "warum man sich quälen sollte, ein zweites jenem ganz ähnliches Exemplar von ihr in der Kunst zustandezubringen," see Paul Kluckhohn, *Das Ideengut der deutschen Romantik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1966), 161.

11 Paolo d'Angelo, *L'estetica del romanticismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 96; cf. 64ff., 118-22. Cf. Gabriele Rommel, "Imagination in the Transcendental Poetics of Novalis," in Frederick Burwick and Jürgen Klein, eds. (Amsterdam-Atlanta: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1996), 95-122. For similar views, see the Schlegel brothers in Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 74ff.

12 Dante Alighieri, *Inferno* (Milano: Ed. Emilio Pasquini, Antonio Quaglio, Garzanti, 1982), Canto V, 70-142, 48-53.

carried away by this kind of imagination, though presumably to a lesser extent and in a different way than we readers since the romantic era. For those earlier readers took far more seriously the condemnation of imagination that is expressed in this story than we do now, as uncritical admirers of fantasy and inspiration – if we still notice that condemnation at all. The moral message of the passage – that you ought not let your mind be overtaken by books, i.e., by imagination – has barely touched our hearts for two centuries.

One would rather add a bit more imagination from the literature. So, Jorge Luis Borges, in *Nueve ensayos dantescos* (1982), interprets the scene as an expression of Dante's desire for Beatrice. The fact that Dante loses consciousness in this scene results not from pity and shock, but from the extreme desire to forever be close to her, just like Paolo and Francesca – even if it were in hell, driven on by relentless cyclones. So strong is Dante's imagination, says Borges, that he is jealous of these two unfortunate lovers, who are at least still together and know they covet each other, whereas his beloved remains inaccessible.¹³

We know quite well, of course, that Borges is an author who is eminently obsessed with the role of imagination: his stories defy our sense of the real, challenge reality by testing the borderlines between dream, fantasy, memory, reportage and essay. Therefore it comes as no surprise that Borges gives no notice to criticism of the imagination. But such criticism does not really fit into our worldview anymore anyway, because imagination and inspiration have become a fundamental trait of our culture. In other cultures, and for the romantic era, so outside the romantic order in which we now live, they are questionable capacities.¹⁴ They arouse desire and then leave us disappointed. However, for the last couple of centuries such moral disapproval has been unthinkable within the now almost worldwide Western culture. How we could maintain ourselves without imagination is hardly conceivable – and if we did want to imagine it, we would be forced to appeal quite strongly to precisely that imagination.

Think of the adventures of Don Quixote. He identifies so strongly with the heroes of those knightly romances that had become outlandish by Cervantes's day – with the dragon-slayers and the almost mythical singers of courtly love – that he attacks sheep that he mistakes for the enemy's army, sings the praises of a homely peasant girl whom he mistakes for a lady, and fights windmills because he thinks them to be evil giants. His imagination has run wild during sleepless nights of wondrous reading. When the barber, the priest, a niece, and his housekeeper decide to burn his library for the sake of his health, it causes us to react with dread.¹⁵ We associate such things with totalitarian practices and with censorship, so often contested since the Enlightenment. Now Cervantes does not entirely sympathize with the bookburners who have been called to life by himself: his own *Galatea* appears to be among the very volumes to be destroyed. However, Dante's moral opposition to the temptation of imagination played just as strong a role to Cervantes's readers as the pleasure of its

13 Jorge Luis Borges, *Nueve ensayos dantescos* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1982).

14 Cf. Maarten Doorman, *De romantische orde* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2012).

15 Miguel de Cervantes, *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha I* (Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1978), chap. 5-7.

excesses. It was education *and* entertainment. Since the romantic era all of that has changed completely.

The German Romantics saw precisely in the excesses of fantasy a value, an attack on the superficiality of a petty bourgeoisie stifled by moral dogmas. According to thinkers like Schelling and Schlegel, Don Quixote taught us how literature, i.e., imagination, was able to help rid the world of its unambiguity and meaninglessness. Cervantes's knight changed from the kind of cartoon character that one laughed at into a tragic hero who – because he elicited a smile from us – personified melancholy all the more. As Byron wrote: "Of all tales 'tis the saddest – and more sad, / Because it makes us smile." Byron chooses sides here in this thirteenth canto of *Don Juan* a few lines later, in favour of the hero Don Quixote and against his creator Cervantes, whose ridiculing of the imagination does not please him at all:

*Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away;
A single laugh demolish'd the right arm
Of his own country; – seldom since that day
Has Spain had heroes.*¹⁶

Romanticism transformed the book *Don Quixote* from a masterful critique of the imagination into the exact opposite: the ultimate hymn to it. Don Quixote became a tragic hero, and his struggle has since grown into an attack on an unimaginative, uninspired world to which he does not want to surrender. It is the defense of the imagination rejected by society. And it won ground gradually: with novels, paintings and theater, and later film and television, advertising, the internet and games.

Since the imagination became more positively valued in the course of the Eighteenth Century – and in romanticism started to become the ultimate human capacity for animating the world and life – desire and the entrepreneurial spirit were spurred on in all fields. To what extent can we therefore still understand the question that seems to have disappeared as a result of the romantic upheaval; to what extent is the criticism of imagination still relevant? A thinker who has been trying to answer that question is the philosopher and anthropologist René Girard. In his view, our culture is imbued with what he calls the *romantic lie*, the imitation of models from the imagination. According to Girard, authenticity is a fiction, since all of us continually identify with others – or, to use this thinker's vocabulary, we mimic them. The 'mimetic desire' is beautifully illustrated in great novels, says Girard. Don Quixote is pushed into action by imitating the lives of his examples: Amadis of Gaul and Lancelot and all those others.¹⁷ The love of Paolo and Francesca constitutes another of his fine examples: the kiss that has been imagined thanks to the book becomes real as a result of that imagination. This is something which, since the romantic era, is a little disconcerting: that love must be aroused by reading. Were not books 'a dull and endless strife,'

¹⁶ Lord Byron, *Don Juan: The Sixteen Cantos* (Halifax: Milner and Sowerby, 1837), Canto XIII, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/21700/21700-h/21700-h.htm>.

¹⁷ René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961).

according to Wordsworth's famous lines in "The Tables Turned," part of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798)?

Girard's criticism of the imagination seems like an exception, but it is apparently not entirely absent from the romantic vocabulary. In more recent literature such criticism again becomes more prominent. An already almost classic example is Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* (2002), in which a fanciful girl accuses others and ruins them. But the book itself is her account, thus revealing the novel to be a deception of the imagination and leaving everything unreliable. In a completely different way, the work of the French writer Michel Houellebecq shows us what the ever longed-for cry of 'imagination in power' has given us: pornography, sexual exploitation, and loneliness. In various other ways the imagination has been under fire for years in numerous films and in many forms of art, a trend that has only been exacerbated by the explosion of images in the new media. Imagination is displaced in this way by recycling existing images into new configurations.¹⁸

A world without imagination is simply unimaginable: we would not be able to solve problems and would live like machines. Rather, it is the over-appreciation of the imagination, its excess, that causes suffering – as when Paolo weeps bitterly while Francesca reminds him of the blissful memory of their first kiss, whereas now they will whirl through hell forever. And Dante faints because he can imagine their future suffering so very well. It is too vivid a representation of what was the past – melancholy – and of what lies ahead – misplaced utopianism, vain hope, or fear of what may come. Animals, for example, suffer much less than humans, says Arthur Schopenhauer, since they know no yesterday and no tomorrow, and therefore can not call to mind the horrors of the past, nor imagine with fear and trembling what kind of things may take place tomorrow.¹⁹

At the same time, however, the imagination is a blessing, morally speaking: a blessing that allows us to empathize with the suffering of others. It is a crucial capacity that allows us to condemn, prevent, and combat cruelty. Precisely amidst a plethora of images, projections, interpretations, and other manifestations of the imagination, it is through the imagination that you can mobilise yourself to fight its own excesses, just as Cervantes and Danto once did. An example of this point of view is what the philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman describes in his book *Images malgré tout* (2003).²⁰ It discusses four photographs that had been taken by prisoners of a *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz. Those pictures, which had been smuggled out, show something of a reality that cannot properly be grasped. They present the truth of something that is unimaginable, and thus help you to imagine something of the unimaginable. In order to know, so the book begins, you must be able to imagine something. This is not a simple postmodern relativisation of truth. It points out that the truth often only comes about with difficulty, and that here imagination plays a vital role.

18 See Joselit, *After Art*, passim.

19 Arthur Schopenhauer, *Zürcher Ausgabe. Werke in zehn Bänden* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1977), vol. 9, 319ff.

20 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout* (Paris: Minuit, 2003).

This is still relevant to contemporary art, which can *a fortiori* stimulate such imagination in the direction of truth. In contrast to the early Danto's view, Andy Warhol's art cannot be traced back to a 'theory': it is also a product of imagination – inspiring imagination, though Danto calls it 'wakeful dreams.'²¹ This is not unbounded hallucination: imagination is embodied in things with meaning. Imagination is both vital and lethal, in art just as in life. Actually, Don Quixote's is, in a stunning way, up-to-date. Just like those lines from the *Divina Commedia*. They show that imagination is like water. We cannot do without, but we can also drown in it.

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21 Danto, *What Art Is*, 48.

Ștefan-Sebastian Maftei

**Cosmopolitanism and Creativity in the Romanian avant-garde:
The First Two Years of the *Contimporanul* Movement (1922-1923)¹**

Abstract

The study focuses on two major points. The first point – considering that our major thesis is that cosmopolitanism as an explanatory framework seems to offer a new way of interpreting the social, political and aesthetic transformation within the modern artworld at the beginning of the 20th Century – seeks to put to work new theoretical paradigms of cosmopolitanism in order to explain the history of the avant-garde. The second focal point of our research will apply the theory of creative cosmopolitan imaginary to the cosmopolitan milieu of the Romanian interwar avant-garde group “Contimporanul.” We consider 1922 and 1923 as the period of the highest aesthetico-political development of the Romanian avant-garde.

Keywords: *cosmopolitanism, avant-garde, creativity, Romania*

Introduction. Cosmopolitanism as an Elusive Concept

A standard view on cosmopolitanism is that it generally supports the idea that all human beings should be “citizens in a single community.”² Nevertheless, it seems that cosmopolitanism, when put to the test, is quite an elusive concept – at least historically or politically, if not theoretically.³ Some historians⁴ agree that the roots of cosmopolitanism as a notion are Greek and Roman, and that Antiquity understood it as mediating “the tension between global and local, universal and particular.”⁵ Throughout modern history, the concept of cosmopolitanism has been historically and politically related to the emergence

1 Unless otherwise specified, all translations from Romanian are my own. Fragments of this text have appeared in my “Is Cosmopolitanism a Feasible Paradigm for Understanding Modern Art? A Methodological Proposal,” *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 149 (2014), 513-17. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their helpful comments during the early stages of the writing of this paper.

2 P. Kleingeld, E. Brown, “Cosmopolitanism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*, accessed 2.07.2013, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmopolitanism/>.

3 See Ulrich Beck, “The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies,” in *Theory, Culture and Society* 19-2002, 17-44, which will be discussed in the following.

4 Michael L. Miller, and Scott Ury, “Cosmopolitanism: the end of Jewishness?,” in *European Review of History – Revue européenne d’histoire*, vol. 17 no. 3 (June 2010), 337-59.

5 Miller and Ury, *Cosmopolitanism: the end of Jewishness*, 340.

of the nation-states. From the 19th Century onwards, "cosmopolitanism" has been explained as the *opposite* of nationalism within the political life of the European nation-states; it was just a side in the conflict between the universal (cosmopolitan) and the particular (national).

Many twists and turns took place with cosmopolitanism in the political arena of 19th- and 20th-Century Europe. Historians, such as Friedrich Meineke in his *Cosmopolitanism and the National State* (1907), explained cosmopolitanism as a "necessary step" towards nationalism. At the beginning of the 19th Century, the national state was considered to be an end in itself and also a safeguard of cosmopolitan values. Precisely at the same time in history, the more and more aggressive anti-Semitism of the European elites began to associate cosmopolitanism with a "Jewish" political view. The concept became a political weapon of the anti-Semitic propaganda arsenal in the Nazi occupied Europe but also in the Soviet Union after 1949.⁶

It is immensely difficult, even nowadays, to agree upon a definition of "cosmopolitanism." One of the leading voices of the "new cosmopolitanism," the German sociologist Ulrich Beck,⁷ acknowledges that cosmopolitanism is rather explainable as a *process* than as an outcome, using the term "cosmopolitanization" instead of "cosmopolitanism." He stands for a "de-territorialization" of cosmopolitanism, stating that "cosmopolitanism is another word for disputing about cosmopolitanisms,"⁸ thus eliminating the ideological paradox of cosmopolitanism, the "-ism," from "cosmopolitan." He concludes, that "there are no generalizable characteristics which allow it to be clearly distinguished" from other notions, such as multiculturalism, and that, in the end, the "vagueness and equivocalness of [its] definition"⁹ gives it a positive advantage.

Cultural Diversity, Modern Art, the "Cosmopolitan" Artworld and Beyond

It appears that the influence of the cosmopolitan way of life upon the modern arts began around the start of the 19th Century. With the impact of international trade and international travel, different cultures, styles and ways of life exerted a powerful influence upon the metropolitan life of major cities, especially in the case of nations that had large colonial empires overseas, but not exclusively.¹⁰ The birth of a *social* and *cultural* cosmopolitanism is generally connected with the European imperialisms of the 19th Century and with the development of

6 *Ibid.*, 347.

7 Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies," 17-44.

8 *Ibid.*, 35.

9 *Ibid.*, 36.

10 Cosmopolitanism is specific to all imperial capitals of the 19th and early 20th Centuries: Paris, London, Vienna, Berlin, and also New York, Istanbul or Saint Petersburg. On the subject of cosmopolitanism in the literature of the Victorian age, see T. Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). On the subject of cosmopolitan Paris and the adoption of "foreign modernisms" in art, see Ihor Junyk, *Foreign Modernism. Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Style in Paris* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

the metropolitan cities in Europe which were also capitals of empires, such as Paris, London, Vienna, Berlin.¹¹

Recent studies¹² have emphasized the presence of an “aesthetic” or “cultural” cosmopolitanism in our contemporary globalized societies, a cosmopolitanism located “at the *individual* level,” defined as a “cultural disposition involving an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness towards peoples, places and experiences from different cultures, especially those from different ‘nations’ (...) or as having taste for ‘the wider shores of cultural experience.’”¹³ This attitude of openness will transform the political idea of a *cosmopolis* into a cultural idea, a “place or political space that encompasses the variety of human culture. It *promises* [*emphasis mine*] the potential to meet and become acquainted with all the strands of cultural diversity. The cosmopolitan is therefore someone who can cope with *unpredictability* [e.m.]. Cosmopolitans know what is expected in different cultural settings and can move between them with confidence and assurance.”¹⁴ This cosmopolitan view effectively tells us that the terms *culture* and *cultural identity* must be read anew, methodologically differently, in a “glocal world” (Roland Robertson) whose realities are transforming, perceptibly or not, our major ways of looking at it. It is what I would define as an application of Beck’s idea of “cosmopolitanization” to the field of culture. The example of Motti Regev,¹⁵ discussing the “ethno-national uniqueness” or “authenticity” of a local music as (paradoxically) a phenomenon of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, is a good example of dismissing the distinction (exclusion) between “our own culture” and the cultures of “others.”¹⁶

We may see a cosmopolitan lifestyle as informing modern art in a fundamental manner starting from the Industrial Revolution onwards. Certain features that may be seen as *cosmopolitan* will circulate from the *social* and *cultural* sphere to the subsphere of the modern arts. Ihor Junyk¹⁷ sees *hybridity*, *transience*, *metamorphosis* and *openness* as cosmopolitan features relevant to the Parisian artistic works of the avant-gardes at the beginning of the 20th Century. These developed, within the French culture, a version of “foreign modernism” that is marked by an increasing tendency towards inter-cultural hybridization and towards challenging the prerequisites of a traditional French academism. Junyk would observe the same tendency in other cases, such as Rainer Maria Rilke’s prose and poetry,¹⁸ whose “uncanny” modernism adopts classical, historical

11 On the issue of colonial empires and culture, see Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (NY: Vintage, 1993).

12 Cf. Motti Regev, “Cultural Uniqueness and Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism,” in *European Journal of Social Theory* 10 (1), 123-38; Nikos Papastergiadis, “Glimpses of Cosmopolitanism in the Hospitality of Art,” in *European Journal of Social Theory* 10 (1), 139-52; David Chaney, “Cosmopolitan Art and Cultural Citizenship,” in *Theory, Culture and Society* (2002), vol. 19 (1-2), 157-74; Mica Nava, “Cosmopolitan Modernity. Everyday Imaginaries and the Register of Difference,” in *Theory, Culture and Society* (2002), vol. 19 (1-2), 81-99.

13 Regev, “Cultural Uniqueness and Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism,” 124.

14 Chaney, “Cosmopolitan Art,” 158.

15 Regev, “Cultural Uniqueness and Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism,” 124 ff.

16 *Ibid.*, 125.

17 Junyk, *Foreign Modernism*, 7 ff.

18 Ihor Junyk, “‘A Fragment from Another Context’: Modernist Classicism and the Urban Uncanny in Rainer Maria Rilke,” in *Comparative Literature* 62:3, 262-81. Rilke is another example of the cosmopolitan

themes and tropes precisely in order to challenge not just the classical model, but also the modern one, defined by Baudelaire as “ephemeral, fugitive and contingent,” yet sometimes too unilaterally confined to its own values, themes and styles.¹⁹

This challenging of the mainstream, traditional notion of culture by these localized yet cosmopolitan cultures²⁰ goes hand in hand with a shift in the appreciation of culture by the modern public. Thus, due partially to social and economic transformations, partially to the impact of technology and science, the modern public will begin to associate authentic cultural value with novelty and not with tradition anymore: what has been disseminated ever since by the “cultural industries” and the “systems of scholarly knowledge” will emphasize the “novelty” over the “traditional.”²¹ However, the impact of the cosmopolitan lifestyle in the arts is *not* to be related to the myth of the autonomous or independent artistic creation, which has informed the image of the modern “artworld.”²² The *individual artistic creativity* thesis pertains to an essentially non-cosmopolitan worldview: it emphasizes the stark identity, the authenticity of the artist, continuing to uphold the basically conventional view that there is a certain inclusion/exclusion mechanism that functions inside the subfield of art, and that the artworld legitimizes itself through its alleged aesthetic autonomy (Kant).²³

The emergence of a cosmopolitan “heterogeneity” of tastes within the artworld during high modernity is only a small part of a larger picture. If we follow the *cosmopolitanization* thesis thoroughly (Ulrich Beck), the cosmopolitan trend has everything to do with the constant challenging of the notional divisions/exclusions in relation to the artworld in modernity. These delineations have kept the modern notion of the artworld within its known confines: national/international, European/non-European, art/non-art, artistic/non-artistic objects, aesthetic/non-aesthetic objects, artist/non-artist, creative activity/non-creative activity, informed/non-informed spectator. Yet, from the 19th Century on, modern art constantly kept challenging and changing its own identity. The

intellectual. He represents the typical “uncanny” foreigner of high modernity. He saw himself as “strange to everyone, like one dying in a foreign land, alone, superfluous, a fragment from another context” (quote in Junyk, *op. cit.*, 273).

19 Quote, in Junyk, “A Fragment from Another Context,” 263. Baudelaire himself challenged the glorifying view of modernity as a historical epoch by arguing that “every old master has had his own modernity” (*idem*, 277).

20 There are interesting analogies between the situation in early 20th-Century avant-garde cultures and the contemporary status of cultures, cf. N. Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), chapt. “The Deterritorialization of Culture;” “The Limits of Cultural Translation,” 100-45.

21 Regev, 133.

22 I use the term “artworld” as a mindful reference to Arthur Danto’s theory, to the fact that the modern work of art is to be seen not as the unique, single embodiment of its meaning, but in the context of an “interpretive community” (Stanley Fish) pertaining to the artwork, a community which is comprised of the artwork itself, the artist, the critic and the public in general. On the subject of the birth of the modern public and the role of the public and the critic in shaping an aesthetic public sphere in the 18th Century, see J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1991), 31 ff.

23 On “autonomy,” see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, transl. P. Guyer, E. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 27-28, 164, 187, 195.

advent, on one hand, of new artists, new establishments, new publics, and, on the other hand, of new genres, new subjects, new styles, new techniques and new foreign influences in the modern arts has transformed the very nature of the artistic subfield and challenged its identity. It seems that the presence of a process of cosmopolitanization in the arts themselves is much more pervasive than the “banal”²⁴ cosmopolitanism of different cultures, different subjects or different styles mixed into and captured by the same artwork.²⁵ Thus, our thesis about the cosmopolitanization of the Avant-gardes goes beyond considering the avant-garde as a mere side-effect of 19th-Century cultural circulation.

Although the historical political and social conditions for the development of a cultural and artistic cosmopolitanism cannot be overlooked, since these shaped the background on which arts and their cosmopolitanism flourished,²⁶ avant-garde seems to be more than just this. Nikos Papastergiadis²⁷ speculates upon the possibility that aesthetics itself provides us with an “imaginary constitution of cosmopolitanism through aesthetic practices,” i.e. “a cosmopolitan worldview produced through aesthetics.”²⁸ Appealing to the concept of a “cosmopolitan imaginary,” he stresses that “the process of world making” itself is a “radical act of the cosmopolitan imaginary.” He views imagination as a “faculty for both representing and creating realities through the form of images.”²⁹ This reliance on the imaginary gives art the faculty of not only creating out of its own cosmopolitan images new “orders of politics”³⁰ but, we suspect, also of transforming itself during the process of creating new images.

This idea of “cosmopolitan imagination” is to be found and explained further in Gerard Delanty’s *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*,³¹ where the author emphasizes the reading of cosmopolitanism that envisions it as a critical and self-critical perspective pertaining to the processes of self-transformation that appear in the encounter with the Other. Delanty speaks of self-transformation as the explanatory paradigm of cosmopolitanism, a process where the Self and the Other co-exist, both being transformed during the process of cosmopolitanization.³² The encounter between the Self and its Other is neither “nativism” nor the “adoption of the culture of the Other.” It is a “self-transformative”

24 Beck, “The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies,” 28.

25 A development in a different direction of this thesis appears in my “Is Cosmopolitanism A Feasible Paradigm for Understanding Modern Art? A Methodological Proposal,” in *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 149 (2014), 513-17.

26 Theda Shapiro, *Painters and Politics. The European avant-garde and Society, 1900-1925* (New York: Elsevier, 1976). Theda Shapiro, in her comprehensive survey of the contacts between politics and the European avant-garde of the early 20th Century, admits that anarchism, pacifism, collectivism and humanitarianism were tendencies embraced by almost all the members of the pre-war and post-war avant-gardes (with the exception of the Futurists) and that a common transnational humanitarianism proliferated in their art. Cf. Shapiro, 114 ff.

27 N. Papastergiadis, “Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism,” in: Gerard Delanty (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitanism Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 220-32.

28 Papastergiadis, *Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism*, 221.

29 *Ibid.*, 221, 229.

30 The thesis appears in Jacques Rancière’s *Le Partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique* (2000), which Papastergiadis quotes.

31 Gerard Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination. The Renewal of Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), 2009.

32 *Ibid.*, 11.

moment that distinguishes it from “a simple matter of diversity or transnational movement.”³³ Thus, *creativity* becomes the synonym for cosmopolitanism in this context, since cosmopolitanism could only be a “creative” cosmopolitanism “entailing the opening up of normative questions within the cultural imaginaries of societies. In this sense, cosmopolitanism refers to an orientation that resides less in a specific social condition than in an imagination that can take many different forms depending on historical context and social circumstances. Conceived of in terms of an imaginary, it is not then a matter of an ideal that transcends reality or a purely philosophical or utopian idea but an immanent orientation that takes shape in modes of self-understanding, experiences, feelings and collective identity narratives. The imaginary is both a medium of experience and an interpretation of that experience in a way that opens up new perspectives on the world.”³⁴

In another text,³⁵ Papastergiadis acknowledges that the cosmopolitan imaginary which is at work in the artfield is not a ready-made frame for the cosmopolitanism of contemporary arts: “a cosmopolitan imaginary is not an abstract ideal, a speculative vision of the future, nor even the necessary illusion that spurs contemplation of a better life. The cosmopolitan imaginary is the proposition of new forms of worldly existence. These forms are not bound by the outcomes imposed by the regulative mechanisms of globalizing forces, nor are they produced through the corporatised assemblage of transnational exchanges. The form of the cosmopolitan imaginary starts with the creative ideas and critical attitudes that artists and ordinary people use in their daily reflections and worldly engagements. Therefore in the beginning of globalization there is also a cosmopolitan imaginary.”³⁶ Art serves as the benchmark for funneling future political and ethical equality. It does not, however, create this equality by itself; it only stimulates it within its imaginative spectrum. Because Papastergiadis does not find cosmopolitanism in the arts as a project of a social order proposed by the artists’s work, he only identifies several “tendencies” that are “shaping the trajectories of contemporary art”: denationalization, reflexive hospitality, cultural translation, discursivity, and the global public sphere.³⁷ Yet, the tool for this imaginative projection of the arts to their public and to the world eventually is the realm of the aesthetic itself, through the aesthetic feelings which are “shareable to others.” As a consequence, cosmopolitan imagination is a product of the whole artworld as an interpretive community, not just a vision projected from an artwork. Because art always “translates its own singularity into the form of universality,”³⁸ it also energizes the possibility that these tendencies may become active. These aesthetic potentialities also enhance ethical potentialities in the artworld, because feeling is the basis for the grasping of moral and eventually political equality.

33 *Ibid.*, 13.

34 *Ibid.*, 14.

35 Papastergiadis, Nikos, “Cosmo-Aesthetics,” online at: <http://www.sommerakademie.zpk.org/de/fruehere-akademien/2010/reader.html>, accessed 1.11.2014.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*

The Cosmopolitanism of the Romanian Avantgardistic Journal *Contimporanul*

Following this line of argument, we speculate that the early 20th-Century Romanian avant-garde known as the “*Contimporanul* group,” forged in a small but cosmopolitan milieu of former émigré artists, of which a large part were Jewish intellectuals, proposed an art where *self-understanding, experiences, feelings* and *collective identity narratives* (Gerard Delanty) articulated an early, not globalized, yet highly creative, cosmopolitan imagination. Some of the tendencies which are clearly visible today in our contemporary artworld, such as *denationalization, reflexive hospitality, cultural translation, discursivity* (Nikos Papastergiadis) were signaled by the words and deeds of that avant-garde. We also argue that this cosmopolitan imagination at the beginning of the 20th Century was energized by at least two aspects: the relation of these avantgardists to the kind of humanistic, early 20th-Century cosmopolitanism which was so common to the avant-gardes in Europe at that particular time, but also the ways in which artistic practices were harnessed within the small but highly dynamic community. As such, we considered that the cosmopolitan tendencies present within the world of this particular group are best describable under the idea of a “cosmopolitan imagination” that synthesizes local and international cultural elements in a local yet internationalized artistic sphere, fosters hybridity and cultural translation, rejects nationalization, and encourages reflexive hospitality, being highly critical of both the “Self” and the “Other” as kept apart in a mere relation of cultural diversity.

Starting out around the middle of the 19th Century, with the return to the home country of the first generation of Romanian intellectuals schooled at the universities and art academies of the West, Romanian artistic modernism in literature and visual arts was rather uneventful, marked at first by the imitation and assimilation of Western models and styles.³⁹ On the other hand, the contact with the West sparked a revolt of the intellectuals against the shallow imitation of Western models. This effect created the nationalistic vibe inside Romanian literature and visual arts at the end of the 19th Century. The nationalistic intellectuals contributed, directly or not, to the emergence of a distinctive type of idealized cultural nationalism that had a tremendous impact upon early 20th-Century Romanian politics.⁴⁰

The first signs of Romanian avant-gardistic modernism appeared around 1912, with the publication of the symbolistic journals *Simbolul* (*Symbol*), and *Chemarea* (*Call*), in 1915. The names associated with these journals are those

39 For analyses of Romanian visual, architectural and literary modernisms during late 19th and early 20th Centuries, see: Erwin Kessler (ed.), *Culorile avangardei. Arta în România 1910-1950/Die Farben der Avantgarde. Rumanische Kunst 1910-1950/Colours of the Avantgarde. Romanian Art 1910-1950*, Institutul Cultural Român, 2007; S.A. Mansbach, “The ‘Foreignness’ of Classical Modern Art in Romania,” in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 80, no. 3 (Sep. 1998), 534-54; Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East. The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2006); Roland Prügel, *Im Zeichen der Stadt. Avantgarde in Rumänien 1920-1938* (Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau, 2008).

40 On the origins of cultural nationalism and autochthonism in Romania and its history throughout the 20th Century, see Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism*, University of California Press, 1991; Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

of Sami Rosenstein (later known as Tristan Tzara), Ion Iovanaki (pen-named Ion Vinea), and Marcel Iancu (Marcel Janco). It is also widely known that the Romanian avant-gardes of the 20th Century were peopled regularly by “foreigners” (Germans, Macedonians, and Hungarians) and particularly by Jews. The Jewish artists were a large presence inside the small circles of “avant-garde” artists that were active in Romania before and after the War of 1914-1918. Staying in Zürich during the War, Tzara and the brothers Janco met Hugo Ball, Richard Huelsenbeck, Emmy Hennings, Hans Arp, Raoul Hausmann and others and staged in 1916 the first Dada *soirées*. In short, Tzara, Marcel Janco and others became the co-founders of European Dada. Their contribution of hybridizing Romanian and Jewish cultural motifs with, at that time, cutting-edge modernism, is present throughout the Dada productions in poetry, drawings, costumes, and masks.⁴¹

After the First World War, some of these Romanian Dadaists relocated to the “Greater Romania” – now comprising the historical regions of Transylvania, Banat, Bucovina, and Bessarabia. The Dadaists were joined by other Romanian *émigrés* from France and Germany, such as Max Herman Maxy, Corneliu Michăilescu, Hans Mattis-Teutsch, and Milița Petrașcu. However, the atmosphere in the home country was far from favorable to them. Their progressive views were set on a collision course with the establishment’s cultural nationalism. After the end of WWI, Romania embarked on a process of forging a new sense of its own identity through an extensive campaign of cultural ethnic nationalism. This cultural nationalism virtually ignored the other minority cultures. On the same course with ethnic nationalism, anti-Semitism grew rapidly into an official cultural and political doctrine.⁴² The political and cultural elite of Romanian nationalists, even before WWI, viewed “modern civilization” as “urban, fragmented, mercantile, materialist, capitalist, liberal, rationalist, individualist, selfish, atheist, cynical, *cosmopolitan* [*emphasis mine*], internationalist, Bolshevik, estranged, uprooted, improvised, *sterile* [*e.m.*], prosaic, artificial, ignoble, sinful, illegitimate, disloyal, sick, and ugly.” The opposite, obviously, was “national culture,” deemed as “rural, communitarian, unitary, autarchic, idealist, agrarian, conservative, intuitive, collectivist, altruist, profoundly Christian, traditionalist, rooted in country soil, *creative* [*e.m.*], poetic, noble, virtuous, brave, loyal, healthy, beautiful.”⁴³ Some nationalists advocated a cultural “national offensive” or a cultural “revolution,” which was to be considered as an anti-bourgeois, autochthonistic revolution. Their aim was to fight the “contagion” of sterile, liberal, progressive modernism that had crippled the “soul” of the true “Romanian culture.”⁴⁴ Nationalists saw “cosmopolitanism” as a word of opprobrium and used it as a political weapon. To the Romanian avant-garde artists, this *ethos* was the official ideology of a proto-fascist, authoritarian State. Thus, not unexpectedly, the founders of

41 For a comprehensive description, see Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East. The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*.

42 On the development of ethnic nationalism and Anti-Semitism in Romania before and after World War I, see Răzvan Pârâianu, *Culturalist Nationalism and Anti-Semitism in Fin-de-Siècle Romania*, in: Marius Turda and Paul J. Weindling (eds.), *“Blood and Homeland”: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900-1940* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007), 353-73.

43 Răzvan Pârâianu, *Culturalist Nationalism and Anti-Semitism*, 359.

44 *Ibid.*, 361.

the new journal *Contimporanul* (Present Time), Ion Vinea and Marcel Janco, turned their progressive modernism into an aesthetic and political *fronde*. In the first years of *Contimporanul*, writers and artists, such as Tristan Tzara, Ion Minulescu, Beniamin Fundoianu (Benjamin Fondane), Ilarie Voronca, Panait Istrati, Felix Aderca, H. Mattis Teutsch, Constantin Brâncuși, M.H. Maxy, Arthur Segal, Camil Petrescu, Tudor Arghezi, Eugen Filotti, Andrei Braniște, and Dem. Theodorescu would contribute to the journal with texts and illustrations.

The first two years of *Contimporanul* (1922-1923) were probably the golden years of the newly born Romanian avant-garde. After 1918, these artists would turn the interwar capital Bucharest into an “international capital of modernism” (Mansbach). The writers of *Contimporanul* supported moderate socialist views and contested the authoritarianism of Bolshevism, although the Russian avant-garde⁴⁵ was highly praised, as well as the idea of a socialist Revolution.⁴⁶ The name *Contimporanul* recalls the name of a leftist publication that appeared in the 19th Century.⁴⁷ The journal appeared irregularly, and had 103 numbers, from 1922 to 1932.

Contimporanul started as an active forum against autochthonistic politics, corruption and anti-Semitism. The political texts of 1922 attacked, for example, the government’s imposition of constraints on press freedom and the disorganized and corrupt administration of the newly gained territories of Romania.⁴⁸ Other texts criticize the Statist measure of nationalizing Romania’s soil by the government, as a sign of corruption.⁴⁹ One text by Eugen Filotti⁵⁰ criticizes the politicians’ discriminatory and duplicitous treatment of religious minorities (in this case, the Romanian Greek-Catholic religious minority in Transylvania). A particular attention is given to the suppression of minorities and the discrimination against the Jews. Titles such as *Minorii și minoritățile* (Minors and the minorities) (no. 32, Feb. 24, 1923),⁵¹ *Numerus clausus* (no. 32, Feb. 24, 1923),

45 See “Avantgarda rusă” (*Russian avant-garde*), in *Contimporanul* (June 10, 1923, no. 42).

46 See Crysaor, “Constituția orbilor” (*The Constitution of the Blind*), in *Contimporanul* (no. 29, Feb. 3, 1923): “The small states crumble into bankruptcy. And, over the emerging chaos, we hear Lenin’s invincible laughter. In Romania, a group of politicians are building, in preparation for the coming storm, a bureaucratic fence made of printed, sanctioned and promulgated paper. Irrra!;” see also “Sărbătoarea Revoluției” (The celebration of the Revolution), *Contimporanul* (no. 41, May 6, 1923).

47 S.A. Mansbach, “The ‘Foreignness’ of Classical Modern Art,” 552.

48 H.St. Streitman, “Libertatea presei” (*Freedom of the Press*), in *Contimporanul*, no. 17, 11 nov. 1922; I. Vinea, “Politicienii, presa și ziaristii” (*Politicians, Press and the Journalists*), no. 6, 8 July 1922.

49 I.C. Costin, “Brătienizarea subsolului” (*The nationalization of the soil under the rule of Brătianu*), in *Contimporanul*, no. 6, 8 July 1922.

50 Eugen Filotti, “Ortodoxie” (*Orthodoxy*), in *Contimporanul*, no. 16, 4 Nov. 1922: “(...) Mr. Iorga persists in saying that the Orthodox denomination can be confused with the Romanian nation and the Romanian State. (...) The Greek-Catholic Church does not recognize Orthodoxy as a State religion, and asks for a full equality of religious rights among all the religious denominations (...).”

51 St. Antim, “Minorii și minoritățile” (*Minors and the Minorities*): “In 1866, when the Jewish question had been first debated, there were beatings, there were windows smashed, a synagogue had been demolished. In 1879, when the issue has been revived by the talks around the amendments to the Constitution, there were Anti-Semitic crimes again. Nowadays, when a new Constitution is being debated, the mob in the streets shouts once more. The only difference – probably demanded by progress – between then and now is that, at the moment when there were not enough students in our Universities, the shouting was done by the populace in the streets; but today, when we are blessed with large numbers, tens of thousands, in our Universities and colleges, our generous today’s youth has embraced the cause of yesterday’s mob, with all the blood boiling in their heads. In a sinister vein,

Profesorii antisemiți (Anti-Semite Professors) (no. 35, March 27, 1923), *Evreii și huliganii* (Jews and Hooligans) (no. 33, March 3, 1923), *În jurul unei cauze* (About a Cause) (no. 29, Feb. 3 1923), *Cultură și anti-Semitism* (Culture and anti-Semitism) (No. 30, Feb. 10, 1923), and *Et in Arcadia Fasciae* (no. 42, June 10, 1923) show particular concern for the fate of the Romanian Jews in the troubled times of interwar anti-Semitic campaigns.

Analyzing the perils for Europe's democratic life also meant including a condemnation of the emergence of a young Italian fascism, already in 1922, when Mussolini came to power in a coup against the Italian king. The article *Holera fascistă* (*Fascist Cholera*), signed by H. Verzeanu and published in *Contimporanul* no. 16 (Nov. 1922) states:

(...) The Italian Fascism (...) seems to be a chauvinistic-terrorist movement, and it is dangerous not only to Italy. Keeping in mind its strengths and its capabilities, we have reasons to believe that Europe and especially the countries which were defeated in the War have all the motives to fear Fascism. It is thus not completely unexpected that the Hungarians organize Fascism in their own country (...) and let us not be content with the fact that the Germans, which are, for the moment [1922 – *translator's note*], in a lot of trouble, do not act. Fascism is a mirage, full of temptations, as well as Bolshevism. Mussolini has explained, in a recent vehement speech, what do the Italian Fascists want and how do they see things (...) The leader of the Italian Fascists chooses carefully his own people, and he is certain that the 'vague and hesitating public opinion' will be easily drawn to the Italian Fascism. And the danger is as great as Mussolini has declared that the issue at stake is an issue of force. Fascists will need to prevail even if they will have to resort to violence alone. (...) If D'Anunzio succeeded in taking Fiume, without serious opposition, and if Mussolini has succeeded in overthrowing the Italian government by force, thus taking the King prisoner, is it surprising that the Fascist cholera will try to spread throughout the entire Europe? War has accustomed us to so many surprises; it would not be absurd for us to expect something like this. And a paradox: Fascism will never be an international movement, as Bolshevism is. Taking a very bizarre form, the Fascism will be national in all countries. Of course, the reality of the danger depends on the will and determination of our 'vague and hesitating public opinion.'

The almost astounding clarity of vision and the impressively unshaken belief in values, such as democracy and cosmopolitanism, are visible again in a review, *N. Coudenhove Kalergi: Pan Europa*, signed by Dr. Kurt Jarek (no. 61, Oct. 1925). The text addresses a theme of cosmopolitan politics, which was relatively known to the intellectual circles in Europe at the time: Nikolaus Coudenhove Kalergi's famous project of a *Pan Europa*, a political study envisioning the project of a Pan-European Union. The text from *Contimporanul* is a comment on Kalergi's book:

Vienna 1923 (...) Europe has lost, in the last quarter of a century, her undisputed political hegemony; facing the four future world empires: the British, the Russian, the American, the Asian, Europe is able to become more visible only through unification. We must end with the small states in Europe. Coudenhove represents the idea of a 'small Europe.' Pan Europa should form itself without England, not against England; the English Empire would be 'overwhelmed' and should undoubtedly act pacifistically, since it has nothing to win, but everything to lose! The Russian problem is troublesome: Russia is the 'Macedonia of Europe': its natural resources

it started out with bodies, then cheerfully it has moved forward to the *numerus clausus* and, finally, it fell at the foothills of Article 7 [of the Constitution]. Thus, however commonplace the sentence 'History repeats itself' is, it still remained true. Every Constitution with its vandalisms, its beatings, its flaws and its anti-Semitic scandals."

and riches should be exploited; this would give Russia the opportunity to overthrow Europe at a certain moment. Especially Germany should be forced to enter an alliance with Russia, if Europe remained disunited. The Russian-German alliance would be only a matter of time. If Germany did not want to become the 'limit of Europe,' Germany should enter an agreement with France – and France would have to stop acting against Europe. Only a united Europe could defend itself against the Russian hegemony and invasion. A European customs' union would be a counterweight to the economic agreement with Russia. The mediator between Pan Europe and Pan America would be England. During the Middle Ages, the idea of the unity of the West was particularly strong; then, nations emerge, as spiritual communities between 'the elites and the people.' Yet, Coudenhove goes against this idea; he seems to envision a mixing of the nations inside the *Pan Europa*. A war against the idea of nation would be a war against culture. (...) *Pan Europa* will be a community created out of need; out of the need for self-defense against foreign economic and political superiority; for the people, which have been and still are the guardians of culture. This is the survey of Coudenhove's comprehensive study (...) What needs to be added (...) is the idea of a vital Pan Europa (...) The merit of Coudenhove is that he found the precise, appropriate expression for ideas which were widely known; the basics of his ideas are well established, well dressed into historical and economic science, a little bit rationalistic, a little bit less literary. Coudenhove is the person who has found the most appropriate formula for expressing these ideas in a popular way, at the same time serving the cause. (...) There are other important issues here, issues to which Coudenhove pays little attention. He is exactly like the scientist proud to be ahead of his time. This book is dedicated to all artists and intellectuals and to all others who create and live not for 'utility, but for prosperity.' Because only in a world which is prosperous will the artists, scientists and intellectuals, those who do care about the world about as much as the world cares about them, be able to dream, think and verify.

A text from 1923 announces the rebirth of the *Human Rights League* in Paris in 1922.⁵² The author of the text praises the optimistic universalistic humanism promised by this European human rights enlightenment after WWI and also laments the moral decay of Romanian society after the war:

The human optimism is undoubtedly of divine descent. We could not otherwise explain the eternal turmoil that gave us, the human race – the apostles, the martyrs or the heroes, the rebels against tyranny, the rebels against faith or against political order, the martyrs of the arenas, of the barricades, or those burnt at the stakes, the famous or the unknown, the glorious or the ignominious, the fighters or the humble ones, the meek and the terrible – yet invariably and eternally representing the consciousness of Man, the divine spark hidden in the thick mud of which man is made – Humaneness. For Humaneness is Justice itself – immanent Justice – supreme Justice in its eternal and pure form – a Justice in which the executor is itself a tool. To this impetuous reaction of active consciousness of this people we owe the rebirth of the *League for Human Rights*, known to us even before the War in the person of Georges Lorand, who counted many friends among us, the Romanians. Yet the significance of this rebirth is another one, and more today than at any time in history we have to pay tribute to the saying: organ follows function. Never before has our country passed through such a disastrous moral crisis as it does nowadays. To the decay produced by the post-war restratification of society, the ruining of the old classes and the enrichment of a new, brutish and barbarian one, unprepared for its stereotypic role in society, one adds a long series of local phenomena. The economic anarchy, fraud and the state's bankruptcy; the high-level corruption, encouraged as a corrective of land reform and the general vote, implemented without the necessary preparations; the discrediting of the State's authority, the Parliament's state of demoralization, the *state of emergency* introduced under the pretext of border defense, military abuses and crimes, the sabotage of cultural life by the diabolical protection of professional instigators – all these patronized by an odious, demagogic regime, known only by its supreme cult of incompetence and by the cynicism of placing the national interest outside the Constitution and the rule of law; a sectarian, biased and impassioned regime – this is the chaos in which we have been living for seven years, this

52 Șt. Vidran, "Liga pentru drepturile omului" (*The Human Rights League*), in *Contemporanul*, no. 42, June 10, 1923.

is the vast desert in which the voice of the *Human Rights League* speaks, as did once the voice of the Prophet, speaking to those who are hungry for power and to the unfortunate alike: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" [John 2:19].

On the other hand, the aesthetic activity of the *Contimporanul* group is well documented.⁵³ The aesthetics of *Contimporanul* is complex and it develops in different phases. The first phase, the aesthetic-revolutionary phase, is influenced by Dadaism, Constructivism and Expressionism, and peaks with the "Activist Manifesto to the Young" (no. 46, May 1924) that is the programmatic manifesto of the first period of *Contimporanul*. The manifest is written in a Futurist vein and reminds us of the aesthetic anarchism of the first phases of European avant-gardes. Here, the traditional concept of "art" is questioned in an activist way and art is put to the test of its social utility. Also, "art" itself is seen as a tool in the progress towards a "great industrial-activist stage."⁵⁴

As an artistic group, *Contimporanul* produced manifestoes, pamphlets, and also encouraged and publicized the artists of the Romanian Avant-garde. With the "First International Exhibition of Modern Art" organized between November and December 1924, at Bucharest's hall of the Artists' Union, where the entire Romanian avant-garde participated, alongside with famous international names, such as Lajos Kassak, Hans Richter, Hans Arp, Paul Klee, Karel Teige, Tereza Zarnower and Mieczysław Szczuka, Kurt Schwitters, and Viking Egging, the movement demonstrated its strength as a fully-fledged European avant-garde, comparable to the other European avant-gardes. Besides encouraging the development of an independent avant-garde in the country, the *Contimporanists* published manifestos and publicized works from all the major Western and Central European avant-gardes (Hungarian, Polish). They published reviews, texts, poetry or letters from major international artists they were in contact with.⁵⁵ One announcement from 1923⁵⁶ to their readers

53 S.A. Mansbach, "The 'Foreignness' of Classical Modern Art," P. Cernat, *Avangarda românească și complexul periferiei. Primul val* (București: Cartea Românească, 2007); Erwin Kessler (ed.), *Colours of the Avantgarde. Romanian Art 1910-1950*, Institutul Cultural Român, 2007.

54 Quoted in S.A. Mansbach, "The 'Foreignness' of Classical Modern Art," 538.

55 For example, Huelsenbeck's report on the city life in Berlin after the War: "The Germans are suffering a terrible defeat. The moral and spiritual blow is even harder than the political one. The weakened Germany nowadays does not have any spiritual zest for life. Art is almost gone. The German Revolution was merely a farce. Our compatriot's heads are filled with stupidity and greed. Germany is a thick fog, a cumulation of evil instincts. Women are selling themselves without any grace. The utter bankruptcy is here. Berlin is a dead city. People: soulless creatures, driven by money and greed. The public of the theatres is comprised of the same butchers and bakers. In the streets, you can feel a harrowing sadness. In the cafés, you are a ghost, watched by hostile eyes. The poets are the most despised nowadays. Speculation is thriving. The dancing halls are choke-full, the cinemas abused. Berlin is the most barbarian city in the world. The city of kitsch, not even a glitter of spirit. The city of ordinary faces." Richard Huelsenbeck, *Scrisori din Germania: Agonie* (Letters from Germany: Agony), in *Contimporanul*, no. 42, June 10, 1923.

56 *Contimporanul*, no. 34, March 10, 1923, "Pentru Contimporani" (To the readers of *Contimporanul*): "Contimporanul goes to great pains in looking for and asking celebrities of the artworld to visit Bucharest. Our assiduous exchange of letters, information, newspapers, our continuously rising visibility abroad caught the attention of our fellow artists from the West. Many of them say in their letters that they are convinced of our intellectual elite's capacity not only to catch up with the real trends in our contemporary world – speed, movement, force – but to become real artists, authentic creators, and spiritual leaders in our backward East European societies. (...) After good signals came from artists such as Marinetti and Prampolini, the Danish Hans Richter responded to our invitation and informs that he will travel here personally to present his Abstract Film, the most developed form of modern art yet seen.

shows their relentless efforts in establishing contacts with international artists and organizing exhibitions through a cosmopolitan network of fellow artists. Their journal already contained dozens of reviews and announcements of avant-garde events throughout Europe, as well as the artists' own accounts on the events (often publicized directly in their native language, German or French). The journal was actually a real melting pot of styles, theories, poetry, prose, images – a seemingly chaotic amalgam of opinions, languages, people and texts. One such aesthetic manifest was Mieczysław Szczuka's account of the avant-garde Polish group BLOK:

[M. Szczuka], 'The Artistic Movement in Poland' [on the same page: an illustration of *Guitar* by Juan Gris, Paris]

1) The most common feature of Polish art is its highly developed sensitiveness and the lack of purely formal problems.

2) In pre-war Poland, art was the only asylum for the national spirit. The artist was reviving the past: decline and grandeur, imitating folk art, creating national art.

3) The great discoveries of Impressionism were resounding in Poland also. Afterwards, they degenerated into naturalism and went into the hands of the sentimental searchers for the 'beautiful Polish landscape.'

1) The last years before the war and the years after independence have brought significant changes.

2) At the same time, in Warsaw and Krakow appeared the modernistic movements called 'Formists.' The Formists of Krakow, more radical, represented Futurism and Expressionism, the ones in Warsaw remained Cubists and Expressionists.

3) Until 1920, the Formists were very active: new editions, conferences, exhibitions. The society reacted differently: hostility, indifference, benevolence. Then, the new postulates ended up by being accommodated to the popular taste.

1) From 1920 on, the movement fades. New tendencies appear: a return to classicism. The Formists were losing ground. Exile begins: many emigrate, not able to cope with the hostile atmosphere. Alas! The eternal fate of the Polish artist is finding success and development away from his native homeland. In Poland there is no place for them. The same thing happens even to those who have already found success and acknowledgment in Europe: K. Malewicz. (The Ministry of Culture refused his return to Poland). Marcoussis, Halicka, Lipchitz, Kissling, etc. The others mingle with the Classicists, Cézanists, moderate Impressionists within the 'Rythm' group. After 1922, the paintings and the sculptures of the 'Formists' would be rare in Warsaw's exhibitions. The Formist movement, although not without flaws, brought many new things. They have explained, publicly and for the first time, the formal problems related to art. Their flaws are: an insufficient construction, lack of order and moderation, lack of a solid program, too much sentimentalism.

(In other words, expressionists):

1) The merit of the [artistic group] BLOK is that they gave a precise and clear definition of avant-garde postulates.

2) BLOK's programme was a new thing to Polish society. A totally different phenomenon compared to what the Polish public thought it knew.

3) From BLOK came the signal: *methodic work, intellectual, collective*.

4) BLOK put forward in its program the indivisibility of art problems from social problems. We have fought for the radical Left in the social movement.

1) Even when they were Formists, the current members of BLOK were in opposition, accusing the others of being moderate. In 1923, initiated by Teresa Żarnower and Mieczysław Szczuka a group was formed, joined by others, W. Strzeński and H. Stażewski. Exhibitions were organized.

2) In 1924, following Żarnower's initiative, we have organized and edited our first publication.

Theo v. Doesburg, the editor of *De Styl*, will give a few lectures during his visit and will exhibit his most famous works in Bucharest. His wife, a famous musician, will travel with him and will perform some of her concerts here. Henry Walden from Berlin will also pay a visit to us and exhibit some of the *Sturm* works (...)."

3) The results are already obvious: everywhere, we hear our postulates being repeated and observe in others the influences of our activity.

Warsaw, 1924⁵⁷

Conclusion

Contimporanul is the venue of a fully mature and non-imitative avant-garde, where novelty and transformation are part of the modern process of producing artworks (literary and visual). In the end, the avantgardistic artwork that emerges at the juncture between aesthetics and politics (at least in the first phase of *Contimporanul*) is the site of a development in cosmopolitan imagination that fosters not only the self-becoming of the avant-garde itself, but also the promise of a future political and moral liberation provoked by the deeds of the artfield.

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57 M. Szczuka, *Mișcarea Artistică în Polonia* (The Artistic Movement in Poland), in *Contimporanul*, no. 48, October 1924. Numbering original.

Aleksandar Kandić
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World as an Artwork: Aesthetic, Artistic and Mathematical Aspects of Plato's Cosmology¹

Abstract

*In this paper, we briefly reconsider the synthetic character of Plato's cosmological thought in the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*. At the core of Plato's cosmological theory stands a unique geometric method – thoroughly elaborated in the *Timaeus* – by which the structure of seemingly diverse artistic, natural, and socio-anthropological phenomena may be explained and understood. Plato repeatedly insists on the principle of musical analogy. In order to elucidate Plato's position, we employ several geometric diagrams and graphic representations.*

Keywords: *cosmology, Plato's geometric method, proportion (analogy), art, nature*

Plato's severe critique of mimetic arts, which begins with poetry in Book III of the *Republic* and then, in Book X, considers all art to be mimetic and banishes it from the ideal state on metaphysical grounds, is not supposed to deprive arts of *mimesis* entirely, but only to redefine the notion of the artist and the source of his inspiration, that which he imitates.

The greatest of all artists, and the only artist in proper sense of the word, according to Plato, is the so-called Demiurge (*demiourgos*), the creator of physical world, resembling the monotheistic God of Abrahamic traditions.² The character of the Demiurge is anticipated within Book VII already,³ as well as within the lucid, extraordinary passage in the concluding book of the *Republic*.⁴ The very beginning of *Timaeus'* speech indicates that the Demiurge is

1 This research was funded by the Ministry of Science, Education and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia within the projects 179064 and 179048.

2 See: Broadie, S., *Nature and Divinity in Plato's Timaeus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, pp. 7-26.

3 Plato, "The Republic," in Hamilton, E., Cairns, H. (ed.), *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1989, 530a.

4 *Ibid.*, 596b-d. Within the context of Book X, the meaning of the passage is primarily ironic, but when considered from the viewpoint of the *Timaeus*, it represents an adequate description of Plato's Demiurge.

absolutely good⁵ and that his creation is absolutely good and beautiful.⁶ This is reiterated within the closing passages of the *Timaeus*: “all that is good is also beautiful.”⁷ Although the mathematical aspects of Plato's cosmology would fulfill their purpose on their own, Plato is very keen to incorporate them into a wider ethical, aesthetic and mythical framework.

The link between the beautiful and artistic was brutally broken in Book X of the *Republic*, but in the *Timaeus*, it is reestablished within the realm of mathematical objects, which serve the purpose of a paradigm of creation. Unlike artists who create worthless representations by imitating unstable, fluctuating sensory objects, the Demiurge imitates the perfection of mathematical objects, the pureness of transcendent Ideas. The source of his inspiration is the supposed mathematical essence of the world. Chaos lacks goodness and beauty, and the Demiurge's task is to set chaos into order (*cosmos*)⁸ on the basis of a specific geometric principle. There is also an important place in the late dialogue *Philebus* which correlates the Idea of beauty, or absolute beauty, to the perfection of geometrical shapes, which – according to Plato – constitute the basis of reality (or at least, the basis of a model of reality). In *Philebus*, it is explicitly stated: “the straight line and the circle and the plane and solid figures formed from these by turning-lathes and rulers and patterns of angles ... the beauty of these is not relative, like that of other things, but they are always absolutely beautiful by nature.”⁹

We should never forget that geometry represents the basis of Plato's philosophy, as was supposedly pointed out at the entrance to Plato's Academy.

Timaeus' speech, therefore, integrates various aspects of reality on the basis of a unique geometric theory. The text contains numerous arithmetical and geometrical terms which can be studied independently from the mythical framework of the dialogue, and one can only assume that in its original form the *Timaeus* included the geometrical drawings as well. The two basic notions out of which entire Plato's cosmology derives are *the Same* and *the Different*, and it is said that they are mixed with *Being*.¹⁰ Being is, supposedly, the substratum out of which the physical world is made. Same and Different, through which we experience the physical, sensory world, are represented by perfect, circular shapes. This is unambiguously stated several times.¹¹ Furthermore, in the opening lines of *Timaeus*' exposition, the entire universe (*kosmos*) is said to be spherical in shape, for “the sphere is the most perfect of all shapes and contains all the other shapes within.”¹² The entire theory echoes the so-called Pythagorean concept of “the music of the spheres.” One of the most striking passages is the one where Plato explains the structure of the “world soul” (the living essence of the universe) by the geometry of the great intervals of the

5 Plato, “The *Timaeus*,” in Hamilton, E., Cairns, H. (ed.), *op. cit.*, 29e.

6 *Ibid.*, 30a.

7 *Ibid.*, 87c.

8 *Ibid.*, 30a.

9 Plato, “*Philebus*,” in Hamilton, E., Cairns, H. (ed.), *op. cit.*, 51c.

10 Plato, “The *Timaeus*,” 35a-b.

11 *Ibid.*, 36b-37a.

12 *Ibid.*, 33b.

Pythagorean musical scale: "He (the Demiurge) began to distribute the whole thereof into so many portions as was met; and each portion was a mixture of the Same, of the Different, and of Being. And He began making the division thus: First He took one portion from the whole (1); then He took a portion double of this (2); then a third portion, half as much again as the second portion, that is, three times as much as the first (3); the fourth portion He took was twice as much as the second (4); the fifth three times as much as the third (9); the sixth eight times as much as the first (8); and the seventh twenty-seven times as much as the first (27). After that He went on to fill up the intervals in the series of the powers of 2 and the intervals in the series of powers of 3 in the following manner: He cut off yet further portions from the original mixture, and set them in between the portions above rehearsed, so as to place two Means in each interval, one a Mean which exceeded its Extremes and was by them exceeded by the same proportional part or fraction of each of the Extremes respectively; the other a Mean which exceeded one Extreme by the same number or integer as it was exceeded by its other Extreme. And whereas the insertion of these links formed fresh intervals in the former intervals, that is to say, intervals of 3:2 and 4:3 and 9:8, He went on to fill up the 4:3 intervals with 9:8 intervals. This still left over in each case a fraction, which is represented by the terms of the numerical ratio 256:243. And thus the mixture, from which He had been cutting these portions off, was now all spent"¹³ (see *Table 1*).

Description	Value	Interval Analogy	Ratio ¹⁴
"one portion from the whole"	$\frac{1}{1} = 1$	Unison	AB
"a portion double of this"	$\frac{1}{1} : 2 = \frac{1}{2}$	Octave	$\frac{AO}{AB}$
"half as much again as the second portion, that is, three times as much as the first"	$\frac{1}{1} : 3 = 1 - \frac{2}{3} = \frac{1}{3}$	Perfect Fifth	$\frac{KB}{AB}$
"the fourth portion ... twice as much as the second"	$\frac{1}{2} : 2 = 1 - \frac{3}{4} = \frac{1}{4}$	Perfect Fourth	$\frac{KB}{AB}$
"the fifth three times as much as the third"	$\frac{1}{3} : 3 = 1 - \frac{8}{9} = \frac{1}{9}$	Whole Tone	$\frac{PB}{AB}$
"the sixth eight times as much as the first"	$\frac{1}{1} : 8 = \frac{1}{2^3} = \frac{1}{8}$	Perfect Eighth	$\frac{AG}{AB}$
"the seventh twenty-seven times as much as the first"	$\frac{1}{1} : 27 = \frac{1}{3^3} = \frac{1}{27}$	Inferior Quarter-tone	$\frac{AN}{AB}$

Table 1. The great intervals of the Pythagorean scale that constitute the structure of the "world soul," according to Plato

¹³ *Ibid.*, 35b-36b.

¹⁴ See: *Fig. 1*.

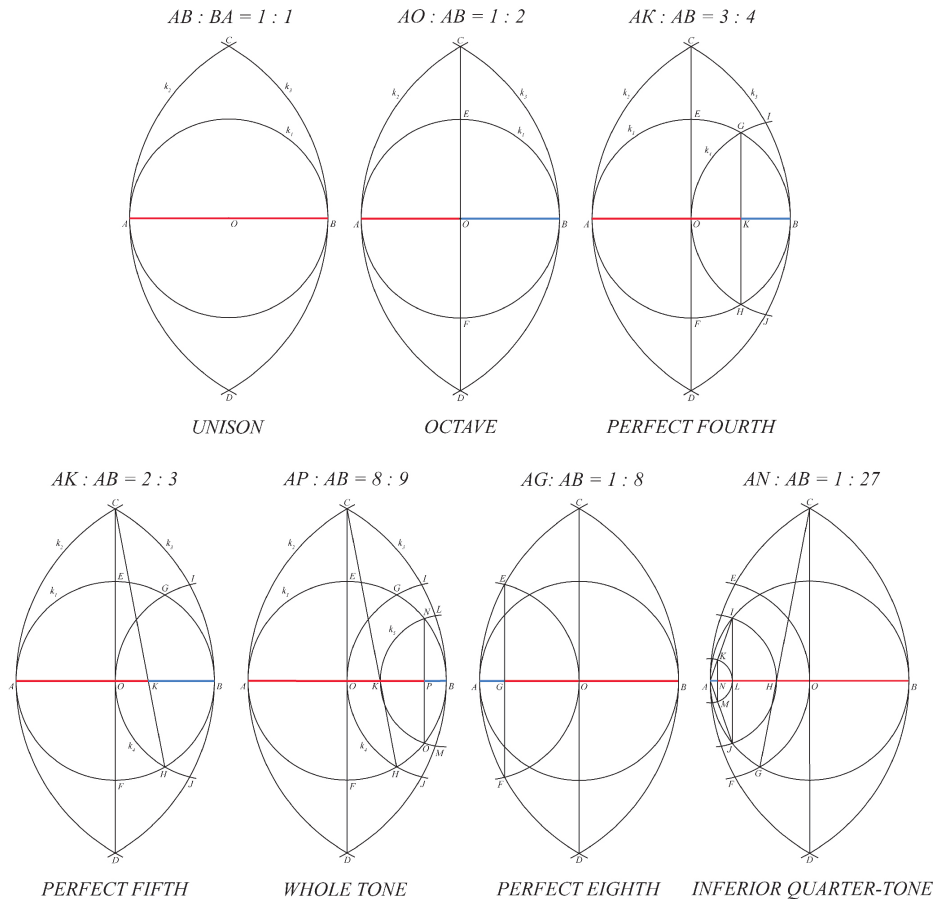


Fig. 1. Geometrical representations of the great intervals of the Pythagorean scale

One can realize from the aforementioned place in the *Timaeus* that Plato based the values of the small intervals of the musical scale on the identical mathematical principles conceived by the Pythagoreans (for example, Philolaus). The value 256 : 243 is called *diesis*, and is calculated in the following manner:

$$\frac{\text{fourth}}{\text{whole tone}^2} = \frac{4}{3} : \left(\frac{9}{8}\right)^2 = \frac{256}{243}.$$

Marić (1997) proposed,¹⁵ and Milosavljević (2007) advanced the idea that Plato's geometrical approach is quite correct and that natural, measurable structures can be represented by this interplay of circles, interplay of radiuses. The idea that the experimentally obtained values concerning the water molecule structure (angles and distances) may be described by the same geometry by

15 See: Marić, I., *Platon i moderna fizika*, Društvo filozofa i sociologa Crne Gore, Nikšić 1997, pp. 11-128 and pp. 257-264.

which the intervals of the Pythagorean scale are brought into relation is very interesting and worth further exploring.¹⁶

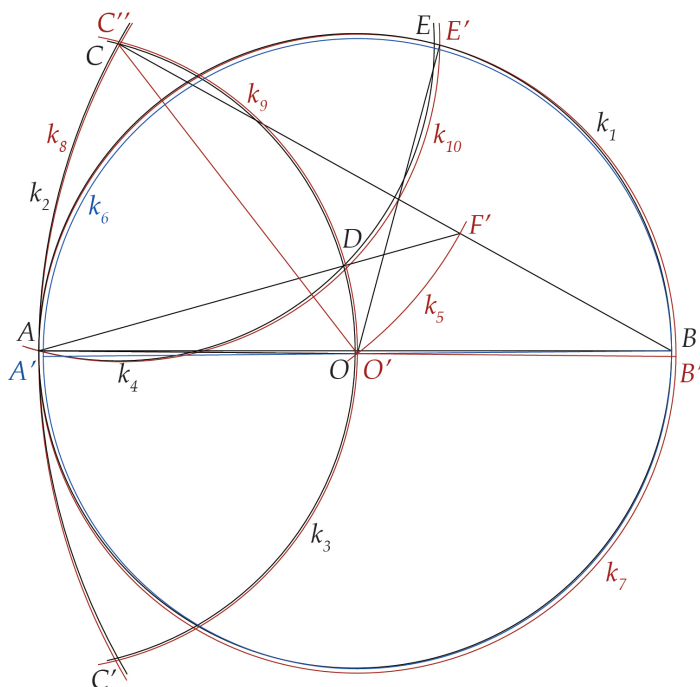


Fig. 2. The method of scalar-angular division by the Golden mean: $\frac{CO}{AB} \approx \frac{\sqrt{6}}{4}$ (circumradius of a tetrahedron), $\frac{CF'}{AB} \approx \frac{CO'}{AB} \approx \frac{\sqrt{5}-1}{2}$ (Golden ratio); and the angular values within the water molecule structure ($\angle AOE \approx 104.47^\circ$ and $\angle A'O'E' \approx 105.50^\circ$)¹⁷

It appears that the geometry of the Pythagorean scale, accompanied with the geometry of the Golden mean¹⁸ and the geometry of Platonic, regular solids,¹⁹ which all play pivotal roles in Plato's cosmology and physics, may enable better understanding of the ancient Greek natural philosophy, as well as contemporary theories about the structure of the universe and the corresponding experimental results.²⁰ The geometric construction of the scale reveals the characteristic angular values out of which the familiar linear aspects of the

16 Milosavljević, P., "Lestvična deoba po zlatnom preseku," in *Phlogiston*, Vol. 15, p. 58, Kandić, A., "The Physics of Social Processes," in *Skepsis Journal*, Vol. 22, Iss. II, p. 214 and Chaplin, M., *Water structure and science*, <http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/water/> (October 26, 2014).

17 See: Hasted, J. B., "Liquid water: Dielectric properties," in Franks, F. (ed.), *Water: A comprehensive treatise*, Vol. 1, Plenum Press, New York 1972, pp. 255-309, Silvestrelli, P. L., Parrinello, M., "Structural, electronic, and bonding properties of liquid water from first principles", in *J. Chem. Phys.*, Vol. 111, pp. 3572-3580.

18 Plato, "The Timaeus," 31c-32a.

19 *Ibid.*, 54d-55c.

20 See: Milosavljević, P., *op. cit.*, pp. 54-63. Compare to the results in Luminet, J.-P., Weeks, J., Riuzuelo, A., Lehoucq, R., Uzan, J.-P., "Dodecahedral space topology as an explanation for weak wide-angle temperature correlations in the cosmic microwave background," in *Nature*, Vol. 425, pp. 593-595.

$\frac{1^1}{1}$	$\frac{1^1}{2}$	$\frac{1^1}{3}$	$\frac{1^2}{1}$	$\frac{1^2}{2}$	$\frac{1^2}{3}$	$\frac{1^3}{1}$	$\frac{1^3}{2}$	$\frac{1^3}{3}$
1	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{3}$	1	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{9}$	1	$\frac{1}{8}$	$\frac{1}{27}$

Table 2. Plato's series, out of which the Platonic lambda is derived

This approach indicates that Plato recognizes the analogy within the context of temporal arts (music) and spatial arts (architecture, sculpture, etc.), as he aims to visualize its simple mathematical principles by reduction to the identical geometric order. For Plato – just like the Pythagoreans – the constructible order of geometric elements and values represented the only real order, analogous to the natural order of spatial and temporal values which are derived one from each other.

The Pythagorean-Platonic description of the universe influenced Classical Greek art to a great extent, no matter whether it be music, sculpture, painting, etc. The application of the system of musical analogy and the Golden mean may be observed within architectural creativity as well, usually associated with the ceremonial activities and urban complexes built in honor of the deities. During the transition between the Classical and Hellenistic eras (5th-3rd century BC), the Amphitheater at Epidaurus was built, and its geometry displays the identical Platonic synthesis of proportional systems in a most immediate manner (see: Fig. 4).

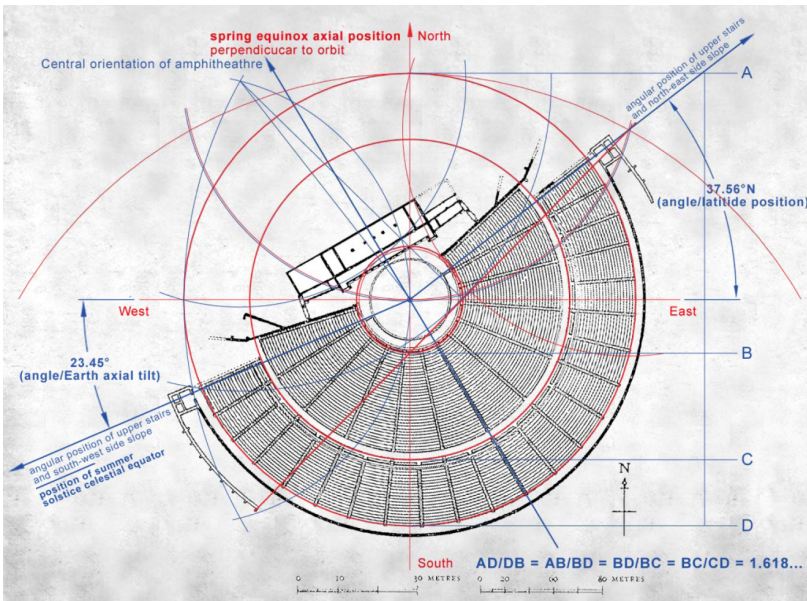


Fig. 4. Geometrical basis of the Amphitheater at Epidaurus (Peloponnese, Greece, 4th-3rd century BC). The proportioning of the base circle diameter according to the principle of the Golden series: $\left(\frac{AD}{AB} = \frac{AB}{BD} = \frac{\sqrt{5}+1}{2}, \frac{BD}{BC} = \frac{BC}{CD} = \frac{\sqrt{5}+1}{2}\right)$

It is important to emphasize that the elements of the circular form and the orientation of the Amphitheater, whose primary form was designed by the Ancient Greek sculptor, architect and athlete Polykleitos sometime between 340 and 300 BC, correspond to the transposition of the geometric-angular values of the north latitude (37.56°) and the tilt of Earth's axis (23.45°). The value of the Golden mean is observed within the proportioning of the base circle diameter (out of which the circular form of the Amphitheater is derived) by the principle of the Golden series ($\frac{AD}{AB} = \frac{AB}{BD} = \frac{\sqrt{5}+1}{2}$; $\frac{BD}{BC} = \frac{BC}{CD} = \frac{\sqrt{5}+1}{2}$). During the Roman period, the diameters of circular cut-outs which define the heights and the propagation of seating rows were aligned according to the Golden series. The aforementioned geometrical properties may have contributed to the acoustics of the Amphitheater, erected within the Asclepius' sanctuary, the urban complex dedicated to the deity of healing and health.

Plato's "great theory," therefore, aims to bridge the gap between diverse cognitive, artistic and experiential phenomena. In the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*, as well as other dialogues, Plato repeatedly insists on the principle of *musical analogy* by which the worldly and the transcendent, mathematical objects may be harmonized and brought into order. By introducing the character of the Demiurge, who creates the world by looking into the ideal, mathematical shapes, the properties of artwork are now loosely applied to nature in general, and *vice versa*. In Plato's view, myth, science, art, psychology, as well as the axiological notions of beauty and goodness, all seem to converge into one point, possessing a common mathematical ground. But such a synthetic, holistic approach is certainly not specific to Plato only. Many Classical Greek and Hellenistic artists were influenced by the Pythagorean-Platonic natural philosophy. Of particular importance is Polykleitos' Kanon which puts forward the principle of symmetry,²³ as well as Plato's "mysterious" geometrical (wedding) number,²⁴ which, as a numerical (arithmetical) expression of a specific angular value (see: *Fig. 2*, $\angle AO'C = 51.729^\circ$), may be observed within many great sculptural and architectural compositions of the Classical epoch.²⁵

Władysław Tatarkiewicz rightly concluded in his *History of Aesthetics* that Plato "not only proclaimed that beauty consists in measure and proportion, but also attempted to determine what these proportions precisely are."²⁶

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23 Diels, H., *Predsokratovci. Fragmenti*, Sv. 1, Naprijed, Zagreb 1983, p. 342.

24 Plato, "The Republic," 546b-d.

25 See: Milosavljević, P., Kandić, A., Stojiljković, D., "Pythagorean Theory of Harmony: Natural Philosophical Aspects of Classical Greek Art and Aesthetics," in *Skepsis Journal*, Vol. 24 (to appear soon). Electronic version of the paper may be found at the following address: <http://aleksandarkandic.com/papers/pythagorean-harmony.pdf> (October 26, 2014).

26 Tatarkiewicz, W., *History of Aesthetics*, Vol. 1, Mouton, The Hague 1970, p. 117.

Magdalena Lange

Artists in White. The Bio-Creation of Art

Abstract

In contemporary art inspired by biology, objects are altered or created by artists who along with scientists explore the boundaries between living plants, animals, humans and inanimate objects. Artists for whom biotechnology has become an artistic inspiration are referred to as practitioners of bio-art. Contemporary aestheticization turned global and chose the direction of beautifying reality. Wolfgang Iser, author of the influential Aesthetic Thinking, argues that "philosophical aesthetics was forced to change and become more flexible in order to be able to see the interdisciplinary concepts." He suggests that aesthetics has become trans-aesthetics and from this position is used to define the contemporary art movement that insists on breaking possible limits. Does the perspective of aesthetics beyond the traditional, narrowed type of aesthetics benefit the analysis of such art? This article concentrates on the analysis of a number of particular bio-artistic works in the context of the aestheticization processes observed and defined by Iser.

Keywords: *aestheticization, bio-art, biotechnology, cell, manipulation*

*The most beautiful thing we can experience
is the mysterious.
It is the source of all true art and all science.
Albert Einstein¹*

*Does my verse make sense
if the universe doesn't make sense?
In geometry does a part exceed the whole?
In biology does the function of the organs
Have more life than the body?
Fernando Pessoa²*

I.

A museum-goer of today – rather than admiring mastery or inhaling the aesthetic of art – is often invited to consider whether Rembrandt's artistic

¹ Forrest Clinger and Mark H. Dixon, *Placing Nature on the Borders of Religion, Philosophy and Ethics* (Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 9.

² Fernando Pessoa, *The Collected Poems of Alberto Caeiro* (Shearsman Books, 2007).

representations of human anatomy or Robert Hook's fascinating microscopic images were encouraged by a cognitive urge similar to the one that has been driving scientists to delve deeper into the origins of life.³ This appears to be the case, for in contemporary art inspired by biology, objects are altered or created by artists who – along with scientists – explore the defining boundaries between living plants, animals, and humans and inanimate objects. Artists like Marta de Menezes, Oron Catts, Ionat Zurr, Eduardo Kac, and many more engineer new forms of life, creating them in cell-culture dishes, bioreactors, and labs. Indeed, colorful pictures of electrophoretic patterns of the DNA are aesthetically enjoyable. However, and perhaps more importantly, these pictures are the fruit of studies that have brought researchers closer to the discovery of the formula of forms of life and have prompted them to ask what would happen if the code observed as DNA bands in a gel were altered. In a well-known artistic project,⁴ the genetic manipulation of butterflies ended in the creation of one-winged insects, which contradicted our understanding of the biological stability of individuals. Artistic activity of this sort requires a reconsideration of the creative potential that humans possess, due to the fact that new means and direction for altering the Divine or natural creation are now being unleashed. The aim of this short sketch is to present a couple of distinct bio-artistic works in the context of aestheticization processes observed and defined by Wolfgang Welsch.

II.

Artists for whom modern biology involving technology (or biotechnology) has become an artistic inspiration are referred to as practitioners of bio-art. However, there is no single or unambiguous definition of what "bio-art" is. Eduardo Kac, one of the first and best-known artists of this trend, uses the term *bio-art* to distinguish work requiring bio-agents,⁵ which are living organisms (for example, bacteria, viruses, or fungi). Another artist, Marta de Menezes, defines it as a form of art created in test-tubes.⁶ In turn, Steven Wilson, a theorist involved in the exploration of the relationship between art and science, describes *bio-art* as bio-engineering, i.e. research on stem cells and any kind of experiments on bio-materials.⁷ An artist and theoretician of bio-art, George Gessert, defines bio-art as an artistic activity that does not necessarily use living matter but generally has recourse to the events and processes of science, extracting the cultural, social, and political meaning of biotechnology; he claims that science is a metaphorical creative substrate for art, the product of which is visible for

3 Robert Huxley, *The Great Naturalists: From Aristotle to Darwin* (Thames & Hudson, 2007).

4 Marta de Menezes, <http://martademenezes.com/> (accessed April 14, 2014).

5 Eduardo Kac, *Sign of Life Bio Art and Beyond* (Cambridge: The MIT Press Leonardo 2009), 18.

6 Marta de Menezes, "The laboratory as an art studio," in *The aesthetics of care?*, ed. Oron Catts (Perth: Symbiotica, 2002), 53.

7 Steven Wilson, *Information Arts. Intersections of Art, Science, and Technology* (Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press Leonardo 2003).

the audience and which opens the window of contemplation to the evolution of the future.⁸

By creating almost anything using any available means, contemporary art defies traditional aesthetic objects – namely painting, sculpture, and musical pieces – in favor of the manipulation of living material, and poses a huge challenge to philosophy and to the defining of art. Following Arthur Danto, it can be observed that “[...] the master narrative of the history of art – in the West but by the end not in the West alone – is that there is an era of imitation, followed by an era of ideology, followed by our post-historical era in which, with qualification, anything goes. [...] In our narrative, at first only mimesis [imitation] was art, then several things were art but each tried to extinguish its competitors, and then, finally, it became apparent that there were no stylistic or philosophical constraints. There is no special way works of art have to be. And that is the present and, I should say, the final moment in the master narrative. It is the end of the story.”⁹ Thus, after the end of art, at a time when traditional art disappears in a multitude of aesthetic objects, the question arises again about places in which art can be found.

Contemporary aestheticization turned global and chose the direction of beautifying reality while at the same time distorting the concept of beauty and its quality. Wolfgang Iser argues that “philosophical aesthetics was forced to change and become more flexible in order to be able to see the interdisciplinary concepts. [...] [A]esthetics, as the reflective authority of the aesthetic, must also seek out the state of the aesthetic today in fields such as the lifeworld and politics, economy and ecology, ethics and science.”¹⁰ The author of *Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics* suggests that aesthetics became trans-aesthetics and from this position is used to define the contemporary art movement that insists on breaking possible formal and material limits.

The phenomenon of bio-art brings art outside of its traditional area (artifacts); it is open to technology and most importantly to the world of living beings, of nature. Does watching bio-art through the eyes of aesthetics beyond the traditional, narrow, art-oriented type of aesthetics, benefit the analysis of this kind of art? With this question in mind I will present and examine a number of works within this trend. The working hypothesis is that in bio-art we are dealing with the aestheticization of nature and biology, in which the contemplation of beauty found in nature emancipates itself from life, in spite of an artist’s attempt to take possession of it and to subdue nature.

III.

Scientific experiments aimed at exploring the possibility of genetic manipulation allow researchers to modify the genes of experimental mice to achieve

8 George Gessert, *Green Light: Toward an Art of Evolution* (Cambridge: The MIT Press Leonardo 2010), 12.

9 Arthur Coleman Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton University Press 1997), 47.

10 Wolfgang Iser, *Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics: Towards a New Form of the Discipline*, trans. Katarzyna Guczalska (Krakow: Universitas 2005), 120.

features characteristic of other individuals. Perhaps mice with imported genes, described as transgenic, prompted Eduardo Kac to construct a piece of transgenic art named by him "Genesis."¹¹ The project was the artist's visualization of engineered genes which were created from a phrase from the biblical book of Genesis translated into Morse code. Eduardo Kac believed that the general rule of life was inherently built into the human genome's DNA as a chain of base pairs, similar to signals read in Morse code characters. In an artistic format, Eduardo Kac's created genes were introduced to the bacterial genome and shown as a video clip in the gallery, with the image made public on the Internet.

The initial phrase taken from the Bible reads "Let man have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."¹² This sentence was chosen by Eduardo Kac according to the vision of the world in which the supremacy of Man over nature is a leading principle. However, the principal message of the gene could be changed by any of the online viewers of Eduardo Kac's transgenic genome by focusing an ultraviolet light on chosen parts of the genome, which were capable of causing real mutations in the bacteria. The changes made by the UV light caused mutations in the Kac's bacteria genome which were again expressed through Morse code and then translated back into English. If the mutation(s) could change the meaning of the Bible, they could change the proposed understanding of the world's rules. If this is possible, then this would mean that even some common principles that people share could be easily reengineered purposefully or in a stochastic way by artists.

The discovery of DNA revolutionized science's understanding of the origins of life by solving a mystery that had been latent in the structure of nucleic acids. Sculptor and painter Marc Quinn – who in his works explores the relationship between art, science, and the human body – took this above-mentioned mystery-message quite literally, by exposing it in one of his works: in "The Garden," rather than the figure of Adam and Eve in the company of wondrous animals (as in, e.g., the image of "The Garden of Earthly Delights" by Hieronymus Bosch) the author inserted a DNA sample. The work is a stainless steel triptych with plates of cloned DNA – 75 plants and two human samples. He comments on his use of bio-materials for this piece thus: "What's interesting to me is that reality should be real stuff and not illustrated."¹³ The author's rejection of representation and mimesis goes hand in hand with a selective approach to the symbols that he chooses to employ in his work: he excludes DNA from those people that are, based on the given context, represented as being in Hell; also Purgatory is excluded in Quinn's picture. One can assume that "Hell" or "Purgatory," as culturally existing ideas, are inaccessible to bio-art, as standing in confrontation with modern scientific data that replace religion in explaining the background of human existence and eschatological theories.

11 Eduardo Kac, <http://www.ekac.org/geninfo.html> (accessed April 14, 2014). Brazilian artist Eduardo Kac is recognized for his bio-art works. A pioneer of telecommunications art in the pre-web 1980s, Eduardo Kac emerged in the early '90s with his radical works combining telerebotics and living organisms.

12 Genesis 1:26, *The Holy Bible* (New York: American Bible Society, 1999).

13 B. Andrew Lustig, Baruch A. Brody and Gerald P. McKenny, *Altering Nature. Volume One: Concepts of 'Nature' and 'The Natural' in Biotechnology Debates* (New York, Philadelphia: Springer, 2008), 292.

Another group of artists is focused on the use of modern biotechnology as a tool opening new avenues in the creation of potential hybrid beings. An example of this approach is a project of Yiannis Melanitis and Marta de Menezes.¹⁴ Both artists are associated with bio-art – De Menezes strongly, with her first project “Nature?”¹⁵ That project created live butterflies whose wing patterns were modified: these changes were achieved by interfering with the normal development of the wing, inducing the development of a new pattern never seen in nature before. The butterfly wings remain exclusively made of normal cells, without artificial pigments or scars. In this project the artistic intervention left the butterfly genes unchanged; the new patterns were not transmitted to the offspring of the modified butterflies, but were visible to other natural organisms.

Along opposite lines runs another project that is based on injecting a human gene encoding the eye into the butterfly genome to make that animal transgenic. The gene will be copied from Melanitis’s genome. The butterfly with the human gene will be identified using the hybrid human/animal name “Leda Melanitis.” The effect of this microinjection will be followed with modern technological tools (the reporter gene), and the expected outcome registered to answer several questions that can be raised. Says Yannis Melanitis about the project:

“[...] By inserting information in the core of the physical world we confront the conceptualization of life. Human presence inside the physical event, by changing the event itself, is a major issue since quantum-mechanics era. Interventions occurring at the biological scale however, present several differences compared to that model, since the entropy to be calculated is more complex. The interference of the artist, the biologist or the experiments in general, has to provide changes to the entropy of the event in general. [...] On the bioscale, genes are the carriers of information, but information evolves also. A human gene from Melanitis Yiannis in a hybrid butterfly that in named “Leda Melanitis” is also a linguist-sociological overlap with ontological consequences that require further analysis. The extraction of a vocabulary out of its environment, transforms the amount of information it carries. Information has a cost in information indeed [...] none natural event happens without a human action, by means that, from the primeval era of human history, interventions on the natural scale were drastic and there is no context we may perceive nature out of it.” [sic]¹⁶

It is worth looking at the message of the last sentence in view of the works of a couple of Australian artists. A new chapter in bio-art was opened by Ionat Zurr and Oron Catts, who explicitly declared that they personally engage in the manipulation of living systems and explore the manipulation of living tissues as

14 Yannis Melanitis, <http://www.goethe.de/ins/tr/lp/prj/art/kue/per/yme/enindex.htm> (accessed April 14, 2014). A Greek artist, his research includes biological dynamics, studying the energy of living systems through an artistic standpoint.

15 Marta de Menezes, <http://martademenezes.com/> (accessed April 14, 2014). A Portuguese artist exploring the intersection between art and biology, working in research laboratories demonstrating that new biological technologies can be used as new art media. “Nature?” was created by the artist using live butterflies whose wing patterns were modified.

16 Yannis Melanitis, “Artwork: Inserting a human gene (of the artist Melanitis Yiannis) in a butterfly (species: Leda Melanitis),” 2012. http://www.academia.edu/3122312/Artwork_Inserting_a_human_gene_artists_Melanitis_Yiannis_in_a_butterfly_species_Leda_Melanitis_ (accessed April 14, 2014).

a medium for artistic expression.¹⁷ In practice, they built a construct in which a nonliving scaffold that was overgrown by living animal cells (harvested from mice). They created sculptures composed of the artificial skeleton and living cells; in their works, the living part overgrows the scaffold. The cells need to be fed, and they must breathe in order to divide; living, growing cells were contributing to the final shape.

“Pig Wings” is one of their projects of the creation of so-called “semi-living creatures.”¹⁸ The artists constructed the wings in the shape of those seen in chimeras: good wings (as seen in birds) and evil ones (like those of bats). Taken out of an incubator that had maintained the environment indispensable for the cells, the living wings were coated with gold.

In view of the project above, its authors’ statement regarding xenotransplantation is puzzling, if not controversial.¹⁹ For the sake of clarity of the presentation of the artists’ voice it is best to quote their own description:

“Xenotransplantation is the transplantation of cells, tissues or organs from non-humans. This procedure crosses a species barrier that has evolved over millions of years. Furthermore, the procedure involves genetic manipulation and insertion of human genes into the animal (mainly pig) genome for better compatibility. The human-animal cross, from a biomedical perspective, presents new procedures and new risks that can only be assessed in a perspective of a time scale of more than one-generation. As all of these technologies will become more available in different forms and different prices, the idea of Organ Farms (for replacement, modification and enhancement) might become a reality. Body parts made out of different animals tissues might become objects of desire. The traditional view of a body as one autonomous unchangeable self will go through a radical change. Body parts are designed, exchanged, replaced and sustained in a semi-living state as part of the environment. Animals are being used as a bioreactor for the growth of other parts. Naturally... non-human animals such as pigs will become the ‘vessels’ for the growth of ears, noses and other body decorations.”²⁰

The Australian duo opened a new avenue of artistic exploration by employing a scaffold guiding the stem cells to grow mostly according to the vision of the artistic creator; but in a view of the above manifesto we are prompted to ask: does science inspire the creation of art or does it equip the artists with modern and current tools?

The power of the traditional forms of art, like painting, is that the artist could master them sufficiently to make a work of art a durable object, nearly

17 Ionat Zurr and Oron Catts, <http://www.tca.uwa.edu.au/> (accessed April 14, 2014). The Tissue Culture & Art Project, initiated in 1996 by Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr, is an ongoing research project into the use of tissue technologies in artistic practice.

18 Ionat Zurr and Oron Catts, “The Aesthetics of Parts: humans and other animals are ‘becoming’ each other,” <http://www.tca.uwa.edu.au/pig/parts.html> (accessed April 14, 2014).

19 World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/transplantation/xeno/en/> (accessed April 14, 2014). Xenotransplantation in the form of animal to human transplantation brings together living cells, tissues, or organs of animal origin and human body fluids, cells, tissues or organs with these living, xenogeneic materials; it has the potential to constitute an alternative to material of human origin and bridge the shortfall in human material for transplantation.

20 Ionat Zurr and Oron Catts, <http://www.tca.uwa.edu.au/pig/parts.html> (accessed April 14, 2014).

completely dependent on the artist's vision. It is hard to apply this process of expression to living systems. Artists can only prompt or influence them. Such systems, however, quite often prove to be resistant, thus the creation of an artist is either diminished or enriched by the way in which particular living matter behaves.

IV.

It is easy to see why the phenomenon of bio-art evokes the following questions in the field of aesthetics: Who or what factors are responsible for the process of creation? Who is the author: the artist, the living matter, or the environmental conditions (laboratory), which can simultaneously induce spontaneous changes (mutations) in the living matter, thus introducing different forms? Significant is also the question about the work of art. Andre Malraux wrote that the work of art "Occasionally appears in the language of artists, as well as critics, apparently not acting as a domain necessary for the description of artistic creation or aesthetic standards embodying its assessment" (translation M.L.)²¹ After post-postmodernism, after the end of art has already been announced, when definitions and concepts were proclaimed weak and unstable, the question of certainties may raise doubt. But it is hard not to ponder whether a work of art may be the concept itself, expanded by the possibilities of (bio-)technology and complemented by a full, even minute technical description of the act of creation. In a way, this is nothing new, as conceptualists accurately described their process of creation before. Practitioners of bio-art also focus on the process, and the process description is all the more significant here – as is the case in eco-art and kinetic art – because the works sometimes create themselves on their own. This means that elements of nature add new elements to the work of the artist. A good example is the work of the aforementioned Marta de Menezes, who prepared a replica of an image of Piet Mondrian. Colored squares drawn from Mondrian's work were made into fertile soil for the bacteria *Pseudomonas putida*. When multiplying, this bacterium decolorized red, yellow and blue squares, giving the work a different form. Of course there are also less planned projects, in which the material from which a work arises of art directs the creation itself. It can be considered that this is another attempt to throw works of art into the vortex of processes. Just as performers throw their projects into the social world and kinetic artists allow the laws of physics to work, so, too, representatives of bio-art allow themselves to participate in the recreation of the laws of nature.

How then, can we determine form in the bio-works? Is it at all possible and reasonable to determine form in a work so gradually "taking place in time"? How to determine the limits of this work; what are the possible forms of interaction between the artist, the bio-work, and the recipient? When we invoke

²¹ Teresa Kostyrko, "Pojęcie dzieła sztuki a sztuka współczesna," *Estetyka i Krytyka* 5, no. 2(2003), <http://estetykaikrytyka.pl/art/5/kostyrko.pdf> (accessed April 14, 2014).

the concept of the open work of Umberto Eco – which, however, is best suited for literature but also includes plastic arts – the number of interactions, and also the number of interpretations, will be very large.²² It is worth noting that in a world of freedom to understand and interpret works of art, the bio-arts' potential to make changes in a work through the recipients' senses – like touch, which can enhance or destroy the work of art, or the inhaling of the air necessary for a given bacteria to grow – is a further extension of the openness of this work in a much more radical sense than in the case of works of art executed in traditional media. This presumes that – given all the aforementioned implications of bio-art – living organisms can still be considered “a medium” of art.

V.

Let us now resume the question springing from the close relation between bio-art and bio-technology: How is bio-art seen from the perspective of aesthetics beyond aesthetics, from the perspective of transdisciplinarity? It remains questionable whether bio-art has managed to separate itself from nature and biology or not. Because most of the works produced in this way are extremely technology-dependent (e.g., bacteria die without a sophisticated environment-maintaining apparatus), it can be proposed that this attempt to dominate nature for art's own needs proves to be another manifestation of the failure of the openness of aesthetics, of aesthetics enlarged. Perhaps bio-art could be considered as the aestheticization of nature and biology, if the contemplation of beauty found in nature liberated the living art, instead of taking possession of it.

Bio-art linking technology and the world of living beings obviously does not match the openness of nature. As mentioned above, a set of cells that were cultured and forced by Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr to live and multiply on an artificial skeleton in a wing-like shape live only for a moment, in a particular environment. Exposed to air, living tissues taken out of the incubator fall off of the artificially constructed scaffolding, twist, rot, and dry out. Likewise, fleeing from a foreign radiation (the UV light of E. Kac), the circular DNA molecule of bacteria mutates, changing its genetic code irretrievably, to disappear while dying. It is not known if nature will accept new colors of butterfly wings, whose beauty is not compromised alone, but whose safety is also thus compromised.

Biology seems to be autonomous and too absolute to submit to aestheticization. It physiologically rejects interference and estrangement from its own form, as inflicted by an outside agent – a position that the artist assumes. An important question that bio-art opens is: Can genetic manipulation – rather than attempting to subdue natural processes – be inspired by natural rules and still remain manipulative? In other words, we have yet to determine whether bio-art can be both creative and biologically stable.

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22 Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

Peter Mahr

**Televisionary Moholy-Nagy.
A Review of the Reprint of *telehor* from 1936**

Our times are not the times of manifestos. At least not in the visual arts. This is proven by pastiches from the dawn of postmodernism.¹ Quite the opposite of this vacuity was the case in the early 20th-century modernist art conceptions: the Futurist Manifesto of 1909, Luigi Russolo's Art of Noises manifesto of 1913, the De Stijl manifesto of 1918, the Dada Manifesto of 1918, and the Surrealist Manifestos from 1924 and 1929. Also, all of the fourteen *Bauhausbücher* from 1924 to 1929 belong here, with each one of that formidable series of books being an educational textbook, program, and outline of a new aesthetic at once. It was László Moholy-Nagy who did *Bauhausbücher* issue 8, entitled *Malerei Fotografie Film*, in 1925 – possibly the first book on media art – and issue 14, entitled *Von Material zu Architektur*, in 1929, which was distributed in English with the more programmatic title *The New Vision: From Material to Architecture* in 1932, as well as a series of shorter texts published in art magazines or unpublished since 1920.²

Due to today's need of recollecting the 20th-century radical modernist aesthetic, vision and politics, 2013 saw the reprint of the journal *telehor. the international review new vision*³ (1936) accompanied by an editorial brochure. The "double issue 1-2. L. moholy-nagy," originally published by architect Frantisek Kalivoda on 28 February 1936, contains 138 pages in French, English, Czech and German, formatted in A4, containing 58 black/white and 9 color illustrations along with photographs (many of them of paintings, drawings, reliefs,

1 See: the band Bauhaus from 1978 to 1983, Roxy Music and its album *Manifesto*, London-E: E.G./Polydor/Atco 1979, and the band Art of Noise, the title of one of Luigi Russolo's manifestos, from 1983 to 1990. As the first modern manifesto handed down by Georg Hegel and probably written by Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich Schelling can be considered "Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus" (1797), see Diana I. Behler's 2005 translation at <http://www.cross-x.com/topic/7381-the-oldest-systematic-program-of-german-idealism/>.

2 Moholy-Nagy made the typographic and layout design of *bauhausbücher* not only for his own books but also, for instance, for Paul Klee's *Pädagogisches Skizzenbuch = Bauhausbücher 2*, München: Albert Langen 1925, in English: *Pedagogical sketchbook*, edit. and transl. by Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, New York: Frederick A. Praeger 1953.

3 The title of the journal, titles of the articles and quotations of the journal will be given in non-capital letters according to the 1936 modernist way of writing.

sculpture and stage designs), photomontages, photograms, and film-clips, all of them interspersing the Czech translation of pages 49-112. Printed at "typia" Press, Brno, and distributed by Kommissionsverlag Dr. Hans Girsberger, Zürich/Switzerland, the journal came with a spiral binding done by Felix Synek, Praha/Brno, which was ultramodern back then, clichés by chemigrafia, Brno, and typography and layout by Kalivoda himself using the serifless 10 point Futura in double column.

Strictly speaking, *telehor* was to be the supplement to the journal of the same title that was to appear six times a year. It only happened once. The reprint comes with an 80-page supplement comprising the German/English commentary "Melancholy for the Future" by Klemens Gruber and Oliver A. I. Botar and additional translations into Spanish, Russian, Mandarin, and Hungarian. Both volumes are produced by Lars Müller Publishers at Zürich and shipped together for € 50,-. It comes (and came back then) very much as an art catalogue accompanying later the Moholy-Nagy exhibition that took place in Brno in June 1935, being at once an enthusiastic as well as critical presentation of the work of László Moholy-Nagy, as Gruber and Botar indicate in the accompanying editorial brochure.⁴ It contains a theoretical "foreword" by Siegfried Giedion (1935, 27-29), Kalivoda's "postscript" (1936, 45f.) and Moholy-Nagy's texts "dear kalivoda" (1934, 30-32), "from pigment to light" (1923-26, 32-34), "photography, the objective form of vision in our time" (1932, 34-36), "problems of the modern film" (1928-30, 37-40), "supplementary remarks on the sound and colour film" (1935, 41f.) and "once a chicken, always a chicken" (1925-30, 43-45), a film script on a motif from Kurt Schwitters's dadaist story *Auguste Bolte*.

Before going into a closer reading of the texts in *telehor*, a few words about László Moholy-Nagy may be in order. He was born in 1895 and raised in the small south Austro-Hungarian village Bácsborsód, next to the border of Serbia, coming like many others, as Siegfried Giedion has it in his "foreword," from an agricultural country with little experience in technology. He survived World War I as a soldier and decided after studying law during the war to focus on painting in 1918. He moved to Berlin in 1920, participated in the 1922 Dadaist Convention, and had his first solo exhibit at Herwarth Walden's Berlin "Sturm" gallery in 1924. In 1921, Moholy-Nagy married his first wife, editor and photographer Lucia Schulz, who taught at the Bauhaus (as did Moholy-Nagy, who was appointed in 1923 as the youngest professor of that art school, leading the metal studio and replacing Johannes Itten, instructor of the central foundation course). Together with director Walter Gropius, he co-edited the *Bauhausbuch* series until 1928, when Moholy-Nagy and Gropius left the Bauhaus. At this time Moholy-Nagy proved his versatility in the visual arts of photography, typography, film, sculpture, printmaking, stage design and industrial design – all of them, as Giedion says in his "foreword," rooted in a basic painterly attitude which is still valid for the problems of light derived from the architectural and industrial needs as based on a new world view back then. He is perhaps most

4 Klemens Gruber/Oliver A. I. Botar, Editorische Notiz. Melancholie für die Zukunft/Editorial Note. Melancholy for the Future, in: *telehor. I. moholy-nagy. Kommentarband/Commentary & Translations*, Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers 2013, 6-29.

famous for the 1930 *Light Prop for an Electric Stage*, later called *Light-Space Modulator*. From 1927 to 1929 he served as film and photography editor for the international magazine *i 10* and, from 1929, *die neue linie*, one of the first lifestyle magazines, and designed exhibitions and advertisements. He married his second wife and assistant Sibyl Moholy-Nagy in 1932. After an unsteady life, and joining a group of émigré artists in the mid 1930s in London where he produced special effects for the 1936 sci-fi movie entitled *Things to Come*, he became director of a Bauhaus-like art school in Chicago in 1937. One year after his death in 1946, his long-prepared book *Vision in Motion* was published.

The First Meaning of *telehor*

In “photography, the objective form of vision in our time,” the English translation of “fotografie, die sehform unserer zeit” (dated 1932), mistakenly subtitled “a new instrument of vision” in English, Moholy-Nagy declares the special photogram technique as a key to photography altogether, which in turn is the key to all future art. This can be considered the technological *credo* of Moholy-Nagy. With light and the photosensitive layer used without a camera, the photogram “is the most completely dematerialised medium [German version: “die am meisten durchgeistigte Waffe <weapon>” (120⁵)] which the new vision commands.” (35) Remaining in black and white, the optical quality can be enhanced by means of an impressionist optical design of light and dark like in film and photography. Additionally, electrical light sources allow for fluent light, grading of shadows, and vitalization of surfaces.

For Moholy-Nagy, photography, “the objective form of vision,” is equally important as a new kind of representation that emerges hand in hand, as he puts it, with the sublimating technology of photography: bird’s-eye perspective, intersection, mirroring, penetration, fixation in a thousandth of a second, “ultra-rapid snapshots and the millionfold magnification of dimensions employed in microscopic photography” (35). All of them prepare a physiological transformation and education of the eyes in the long run. We will experience, he says, an increased power of sight diversifying vision in eight ways: -1- abstract vision with the direct light design of the photogram, -2- a precise vision by means of the fixation of reportage, -3- rapid vision by means of the fixation of short movements with snapshot and slow motion, -4- slow vision by means of the fixation of long movements with light traces and time acceleration, -5- enhanced vision by means of micro-photography and filter photography with varying chemical properties, -6- expanded vision by means of panorama photography and X-ray, -7- simultaneous vision by means of cross-fading, for instance of photomontage, and -8- an altogether different vision by means of artificially produced optical humour. By incorporating a new experience of space and developing non-pictorial series in photography – film – this new vision proceeds to photographic alphabetism: “a knowledge of photography

5 Numbers in brackets refer to page numbers in the reprint.

is just as important as that of the alphabet; the illiterates of the future will be ignorant of the use of camera and pen alike.” (36)⁶ As photography, for Moholy-Nagy, has already been the visual form of the present for 100 years, “the new” emerges only if there are no ambitions like in scientific photography, for instance aesthetic or artistic guidelines applied beforehand. Photography in its autonomy need not produce art or be reviewed by art criticism and can yet become an art of its own, thinks Moholy-Nagy. This vision is still interpreted aesthetically-philosophically by circles influenced by the painting of all previous art-isms and to a lesser extent by photography. So there is still inhibition to be overcome. If all this is devoted to a distant productive seeing in space, another part or dimension of the “telehor” concerns a future time. We may invest and indulge in a pure vision into the distant future. But this amounts to nothing less than a utopia, the utopia of new vision.

In the mid-1930s Moholy-Nagy was a utopian, perhaps with some “melancholy towards the future.”⁷ This darkening may be seen best in “dear kalivoda” (1934), Moholy-Nagy’s letter to his editor friend, which takes a look in retrospect with ten suggestions or demands in the context of old pictures for times of new technological and design potential. First of all and most extensively, photography, again, ought to move on from pigment to light. It should paint and build and make frescoes with light. New apparatuses should help realize light visions for special screens and spaces, for instance with a number of projectors, with spotlights, and moving walls like fog, gas, and clouds (think today of Olafur Eliasson), including new materials like galalith, Trolit, chrome, and nickel. Moholy-Nagy thinks of light compositions on the basis of musical scores, outdoors advertisement, spotlight guns, and light games, produced from airships, for festivals or indoors: movies using projection with simultaneous color effects, reflectory light games, including a television process coming from wave networks, light frescoes. Secondly, Moholy-Nagy demands in particular a black-white-grey light game. Third, after the failure of manifestos he demands that youth must develop further ideas already contained in the manifestos. Fourth, Moholy-Nagy diagnoses the material dependence on capitalism, industry, and workshop, an anxiety against exact knowledge and mastered technology as well as the debilitating difficulties of demonstration and the lack of a knowledgeable public. Moholy, fifth, recognizes the dangers of an art news service, its greed for ranking, sensations partially made up, a fast reporting

6 In the same year of the publication of *telehor* in 1936, Walter Benjamin held (“L’oeuvre d’art à l’époque de sa reproduction mécanisée,” in: *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 5 (1936), 40-66, section VI) that photographic takes escape contemplation and require precise captions. This was already Benjamin’s reply to Moholy-Nagy (“Fotografie ist Lichtgestaltung,” in: *Bauhaus. Zeitschrift für Bau und Gestaltung* 1 (1928), 2-9, 5: “Die Grenzen der Fotografie sind nicht abzusehen. Hier ist alles noch so neu, daß selbst das Suchen schon zu schöpferischen Resultaten führt. Die Technik ist der selbstverständliche Wegbereiter dazu. Nicht der Schrift-, sondern der Fotografieunkundige wird der Analphabet der Zukunft sein. My translation into English, my italics of what Benjamin chooses to quote, PM: The limits of photography are not yet to be seen. Everything here is still so new that even pure search leads to creative results. Technology is the natural pioneer. *Not the illiterate but the ignorant of photography will be the illiterate of the future.*”) in Benjamin’s “Kleine Geschichte der Photographie” (1931), in: *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1963, 65-93, 93.

7 Klemens Gruber/Oliver A. I. Botar, *op. cit.*, 12f.

contrary to the tempo of artistic development, all of this being effectuated in artificially produced interests and pseudo-activities. This is, sixth, accompanied by real obstacles: a dissonance between human beings and technology, old economic forms, record production, and an unnatural mentality in workers as well as entrepreneurs. The causes for this are recognized by Moholy, seventh, in capitalism and the resistance of the reigning class to a planned economy, to a socialist transition from an unmastered technologized world to a balance of human being and the technologized world. Moholy, eighth, sets his hopes in creative powers, in the temperament of daily problems as well as that of the germinating and the still untested. Our lives impose not only a revolutionary, but an evolutionary way as well. Therefore, Moholy-Nagy stresses, ninth, the necessity of the usage of utmost technological means, if easel painting is meant to be transgressed. In short, experiments with light ought best go hand in hand with the painting of pictures.

The Second Meaning of *telehor*

With television we look into the distant, simultaneously grasping two different locations and events and spatially bridging them, let us say, in more commercialized or less conventional manner. Moholy-Nagy highly probably did not have in mind the teletopia of the television system as it began to be commercialized a short while after 1936. Moreover, what he may have had in mind is the production technology behind his five enamel paintings that were ordered in 1922 by telephone at a signpost factory, after he had communicated in writing to one of the factory workers the manner of the telephone order to be expected. The painting "construction in enamel," the illustration of which is given on page 69 in the Czech version of "photography, the objective form of vision in our time," would later be called "telephone paintings."⁸ With the intention of encompassing old as well as recent visual technologies and the awareness of television on the threshold of commercialization in 1936, Moholy-Nagy may probably have thought of the production mode of the re-productive procedure for his telephone paintings as one of the main traits of an art of the future.⁹ While Moholy-Nagy and the two other authors of *telehor*, i.e. Kalivoda and Giedion, do not give any indications or even explanations for the name "telehor,"

8 Lucia Moholy-Nagy tells that Moholy-Nagy exclaimed he could have done so by ordering with a phone call: Krisztina Passuth, *László Moholy-Nagy*, Weingarten: Kunstverlag Weingarten 1986, 38. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy himself tells in his "Abstract of an Artist," in: Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist*, New York: Wittenborn, 1947, 79: "In 1922 I ordered by telephone from a sign factory five paintings in porcelain enamel. I had the factory's color chart before me and I sketched my paintings on graph paper. At the other end of the telephone the factory supervisor had the same kind of paper, divided into squares. He took down the dictated shapes in the correct position." Source: Eduardo Kac, *Aspects of the Aesthetics of Telecommunication*, in: *Siggraph Visual Proceedings*, ed. by John Grimes and Gray Lorig, New York: ACM 1992, 47-57, also at <http://www.ekac.org/telecom.paper.siggrap.html>; chpt. "Telephone Pictures."

9 Detlev Schöttker communicates (Kommentar, in: Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2007, 99-248, 117) that Moholy-Nagy, who became known to Walter Benjamin in the mid 1920s, thought this way already in his text "Produktion – Reproduktion," in: *De Stijl*, 5 (July 1922), no. 7, 98-100.

it seems to be suggestive that the enamel painting's elegant "construction" of a large black vertical beam and two small overlaying slender red/red-yellow and yellow/black crosses anticipates a different kind of visual future, namely that of a particular mixture of black and white and color picture parts which is still not regularly used in the arts of our times: the black/white/grey spectrum as derived from the pure quantities of light is confronted – "chiaroscuro in place of pigment"¹⁰ – with the color spectrum qualities which, as one may presume, for Moholy-Nagy still require translation by the application of color pigments as traditionally used by painting, and not only the challenge by the introduction of Kodachrome film in 1935. In any case, this kind of 'television' as a form of artistic production and not mass consumption provides part of the *second meaning* of, I take it, *telehor*, the word which is the proper Greek rendering of what is covered today with the Greek/Latin *compositum mixtum* 'television.'¹¹

The Third Meaning of *telehor*

The considerations of Moholy-Nagy revolving around photography are rooted in texts like "from pigment to light" (1923-26). For Moholy-Nagy the various designations of '-isms' are confusing. However there is a logical development in new painting analogous to all other forms of artistic creation. Since the time of naturalism, photography unchains the canon of representational pictures and the laws and effects of color. The designer of the optical sphere learns with purely optical means. Any '-ism' is thereby revealed as a purely individual method, a destruction of the old picture for new insights and new elements. Photography and its luminance, the use of its beams without a camera, the movement of the radiance of a film – all these procedures teach us a future cinematography that will melt the emotional world of the individual and the objective connections of an optically expressed material. Since in 1936 there is little knowledge about this yet, Moholy-Nagy lists several requirements for a thorough psycho-physiological exploration of an expressive practice with the following elements: light/shadow, light/dark, values of light, time/measure, modes of measuring, the movement of light, fraction of light, color/pigment, intermedia, color intensity, chemistry of color and of light effects, the conditioning of form by color/site/surface quantity, biofunctions, physiological reactions, the statics/dynamics of composition, apparatuses, and the technology of coloring and projection.

Be it photography or a projected series of transparent photographs better known as film – all of this and other prospective means and forms of art are

10 Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film*, ed. by Hans M. Wingler and Otto Stelzer, transl. by Janet Seligman, London: Lund Humphries 1969, 7.

11 Compare Theodor W. Adorno, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, in: *Gesellschaftstheorie und Kulturkritik*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1975, 46-65, 46: "Who is used to thinking with ears is vexed by the sound of the word *Kulturkritik* because it is pieced together, like *Automobil*, of Latin and Greek." (my translation) That Dénes von Mihály probably invented the word in his technological treatise about television (*Das elektrische Fernsehen und das Telehor*, Berlin: Krayn 1923) does not explain the use of the word 'telehor' for *telehor*, as there seem to have not surfaced yet references in documents to this fact earlier or later than 1936 with or around Moholy-Nagy.

necessary in order to evade the anxieties of technification and exhaustion of older arts by new optical canons and registration procedures as well as an “inventive potency, ... (a) genetic tension” (33) that results from present and future intuitive knowledge. McLuhanesque in tone, Moholy-Nagy says that the loss of earlier color experience as prompted by the printed and literary word can only be compensated by the constructive potential of industrial technification, however measured by a technologically assisted standard language of expression taking account of man’s strong emotional side. Moholy-Nagy, in this manifesto, already dreams of a future of “immaterial, evanescent images (*Bilder*)” (34) using light intensities of an infrared penetration that leaves behind the day’s electromechanical devices like the mechanical piano or classic painting made mobile.

There are more thoughts on film in “problems of the modern film” (1928-30) and “supplementary remarks on the sound and color film” (1935). Here it remains to be assessed if Moholy-Nagy really transgresses his already sufficiently radical paradigm of photography, if this was intended at all.

True, the work program for film design and film expression as “mobile spatial projection” (“problems of the modern film,” 37) is recognized insofar as it is thought to be extended to radio, TV, telefilms and teleprojection (1936!). Moholy-Nagy is tireless in examining this projection in detail, in the technical components of the optical, kinetic, and acoustic spheres. Malevich, Vertov and abstract film are referred or alluded to, with the key to all of this being the black and white, and later color, photogram and layering of film stripes, as well as the montage, however restricted to the tasks of reportage ‘talkies’ and the prospective technological advances combining sound with motion pictures and movement, all of them transgressing the standard cinema ‘easel painting’ dispositif.¹²

True, there is a vast array of technological and artistic innovations recounted by Moholy-Nagy: synthetically drawn talkies, sound tricks, comical effects, infrared photography, new objectives for panorama cameras, the Gasparcolor system, Technicolor, Lumière’s plastic film, sliding cameras and cameras on cranes, the movement of scenes with a revolving stage or a running band, relative movements as with swings or airplanes, differentiated optical systems approaching optical methods of the human eye, and new cultures of color film.

But all of these observations and recommendations rest on a basic discovery, namely that photography and with it the artistic use of light are at the center of all of the now-liberated visual arts. This preponderance of light in Moholy-Nagy’s theory is emphasized by Kalivoda: The special problem of light emerges from the 19th century and perseveres with thematic and abstract film and the cameraless photograms, all of them enhancing the pivotal importance of abstract art as the referential point for Moholy-Nagy’s light art, according to Moholy-Nagy’s statements. And Kalivoda reminds the reader that Moholy-Nagy’s desired project of an urban light game with “light-displays in the open air” (Kalivoda, 46)

12 I hereby allude to Jean-Louis Baudry who was, to my knowledge, the first who applied the notion of the dispositif to one of the arts, in his case cinema (*Le dispositif: Approches métapsychologiques de l'impression de réalité*, in: *Communications*, no. 23, 1975, 56-72).

has as a vanishing point the abstract absolute film, with all of Moholy's needs for light sensations, light frescos, reflectory light games, spotlight projection, and cloud projection.

That the color cover illustration is taken from oil painting "construction «z 7»" does not change the factual centrality of light in Moholy-Nagy's reflections. This is only due to the exigencies which Moholy-Nagy increasingly experienced during the 1930s, when not only the political conditions for free art became difficult on the European continent, but artistic developments were unable to arrive at convincing conclusions for a pervasive new form of art. Even in this respect, a *meaning* of *telehor*, the *third* one, deserves to be interpreted: as a testimonial of "work on a new aesthetic"¹³ of Moholy-Nagy and his compatriots that reaches well into a future that unfolds into the 1960s and is still doing so in our recent times.

Aesthetician Moholy-Nagy?

While a philosophical assessment of art manifestos like Moholy-Nagy's remains to be awaited, it seems to be obvious, following Kalivoda's "postscript" in *telehor*, that Moholy-Nagy addresses explicitly the problems of modern art forms, in particular the relationship between art genres like painting, photography, and film, as well as the unity of the arts in (visual) art. Moholy-Nagy may not have been an aesthetician, nor a philosopher. But his thoughts stand on the threshold of entering a philosophical context – be it that of his time, or be it the more systematical one of our philosophically more advanced times.

First of all, *telehor* is bound to photography and centered in the photogram only in order to give a comprehensive perspective on what could be termed, with a correspondence to onomatopoeia, *photopoeia*. Accordingly, the photogram technique is the key not just to photography in a painterly attitude as with Giedion, or a post-painterly attitude after Clement Greenberg and the *Six years of dematerialization*,¹⁴ but any future visual art including electric light and mobile spatial projection of "televfilms" achieving an artistic totalization of light. A philosophy of the arts would have to triplicate this tendency. It would have to conceive in the same way that which was ocularcentrally set aside in Moholy-Nagy's nostalgia for the silent movie and skepticism concerning montage: sound in general, and with it the tonal arts. Likewise, it would have to fan the fire of words in general for taking account of the linguistic arts. Such an aesthetics would rely on the integrative powers of arts radicalized by the visual, auditory and linguistic material in its technologically advanced form. The relationship between arts like painting, photography, and film stressed by Moholy-Nagy would have to be extended beyond a unified visual art to all the arts.

Secondly, *telehor* stands for an anticipation of what is today the arts and aesthetic of telecommunication or the new media. What is given with the

13 Klemens Gruber/Oliver A. I. Botar, *op. cit.*, 15.

14 Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, New York-NY: Praeger 1973.

model of the 'telephone painting' – which embodies a mode of distant production and reproduction of an artwork – is what is today known as the art of telecommunication or of electronic media. Accordingly, television or *telehor* is not just *television technology* in the ordinary sense: an extension of art using light for visually bridging distances. It is the prototype for a communicative art from the very beginning of production. This may run into what has come into existence in the limited commercialized form called the *prosumer*, but it could be equipped with full aesthetic and creative powers on the side of both the artist and the spectator/listener/reader.

Third, the aim for a *new aesthetic* was certainly maintained by Moholy-Nagy after his educational and programmatic efforts in the *bauhausbücher* of the 1920s. Once commercially available, this aesthetic conception extended to the mixture of black and white and color pictures. But the artist-theoretician Moholy-Nagy does not have in mind an aesthetic just for design purposes. The "objective form of vision" does not apply only to photography. What leads from photography's techniques of representation and sublimation to a physiological education of the eyes that amounts to a photographic alphabetism may, in the long run, develop an entirely new form of vision. This may finally be signified by the *telehor* which is the vision apparatus for what is the subject of a historically new kind of *aisthesis* altogether, not just vision. In other words, it is the theoretical *organon* of a utopia for something that is not yet here, but which lends a metaphorical vision of a distant future.

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Jean-Luc Marion
Courbet ou la peinture à l'oeil
Paris: Flammarion, 2013

Traces of Real Presence.
Jean-Luc Marion on the Origins
of Courbet's Painting

The last chapter of Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Andrei Rublov* entitled "The Bell" perfectly encapsulates the problem of the origins of artistic creation and its relation to reality. It is the story of a young boy, Boriska, son of a bellmaker and the only plague survivor of a village. After persuading others that he is the only one to whom his father had confided the secret of casting a bell, he becomes the head of a group of craftsmen and workers who cast a bell for a cruel and merciless Prince. The decisions that he makes throughout the whole process of production are peculiar and provoke a subtle conflict between him and the older, more experienced staff. Viewed by the others as arrogant and irresponsible, he manages to finish his job and, after breaking the mold, the bell is finally ready to be tolled. The Prince arrives and everyone prepares for the worst, since no one is sure if the bell will ring. When the deep, all-encompassing sound can finally be heard, all the people fall to their knees in reverence and cathartic relief – except for the boy who, curled in the mud, spasmodically cries. When asked why he is crying instead of being proud and happy, he answers: "My father never told me – he took his secret to the grave."

This story shows all the aspects of the process of artistic creation in which certainty mixes with doubt, modesty, and even the shame that is felt towards the work itself, constantly outbalanced by an arrogance regarding the accepted rules, and in which what is intended is no more important than blind chance. It could also be an illustration of the life and work of French realist painter Gustave Courbet. But what does it mean to be a "realist" in painting? This is the question Jean-Luc Marion tries to answer in his latest book, entitled *Courbet ou la peinture à l'oeil*. As the title suggests, the answer to the question is simple: to be the realist painter is to "paint by the eye." But what does that mean? Is it possible for the painter to paint by anything else? And above all, doesn't the painter paint "through" the eye, rather than "with" it?

Jean-Luc Marion, together with Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Henry, Jean-Louis Chrétien and Jean-François Courtine, is one of the most important representatives of the so-called "theological turn" in French phenomenology. Without going

into more detailed analysis of this branch of the phenomenological movement,¹ what should be mentioned here is the specific way in which proponents of this turn understand the main phenomenological, Husserlian imperative “zu den Sachen selbst” – “to the things themselves.”² The phenomenological project aims to ground any kind of possible knowledge in the “things themselves,” that is: on the immediate experience. This experience is not interpreted in an empirical way (although Husserl used to call phenomenology a kind of “radical empiricism”), but in a transcendental way. This means that to study the structure of our experience without making any assumptions concerning an object of that experience is to focus on the way it appears to consciousness. Objects appear to the consciousness; they are phenomena, and the consciousness is always directed towards certain objects (content, meaning), which means that it is intentional. Hence, Husserlian phenomenology, as the radically descriptive science, seeks to investigate different modes in which different phenomena present themselves to the consciousness, in order to grasp essences through a categorial intuition and to gain apodictic and absolutely certain knowledge. Such a project of the transcendental theory of cognition had been criticized, but also radicalized, by Martin Heidegger who defined the structure of experience not mainly in terms of knowing but in terms of being, and who developed an existential analysis of the different modes of *Dasein*. The “theological turn” belongs also to this line of constant radicalization of the original return to the truly originary in experience. If the things are to present themselves “as they are,” without any assumptions about their structure – for example as the objects of cognition, as Husserl assumed, or as tools entangled in worldly relations guided by ontological difference, as Heidegger claimed – then perhaps a new kind of experience should be investigated. So firstly, the turn towards religious phenomena seems to be dictated by the inherent phenomenological striving to find the experience that would be purely originary, that would present – and not only re-present – what appears, without making any preestablished project, without any further claims concerning the nature or meaning of such appearance. Secondly, this turn reflects a broader tendency of a critique of metaphysics and ontotheology of Heideggerian provenance that would neglect any kind reflection upon the Absolute, upon God in “ontic” terms – that is, as a substance or a highest being (*Seiende*). This second feature will also deeply influence the language and conceptual framework of philosophers who follow this path of analysis and would sometimes provoke certain analogies with the tradition of negative theology.

In his philosophical books, Jean-Luc Marion has developed his own project of the phenomenology of givenness (*donation*), which is based on the central category of gift and in which the two mentioned tendencies meet. “To be given,” or “being given,” is Marion’s translation of *Gegebenheit* – the “technical” phenomenological term used by Husserl that is attached to Marion’s interpretation

1 On this topic see D. Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2000. Also R. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion. A Theological Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

2 E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, ed. D. Moran (London: Routledge 2001), 168.

of the "Principle of All Principles," in which Husserl stresses "that every originary presentive [*gebende Anschauung*] intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originally (so to speak, in its 'personal' actuality) offered to us in 'intuition' is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there."³ In Marion's terms, phenomena are "being given;" that is, they present themselves as they are and according to their inherent structure, without any additional activity on the side of consciousness. But is it possible to point out such phenomena? This is where the second "postmetaphysical" theological tendency appears, in the phenomenon of the Revelation, of an unconditional faith, since what is an icon – as opposed to an idol – corresponds with the basic characteristics of what is given, with what comes unexpectedly, exceeding any kind of rational scheme projected by the consciousness. The specificity of Marion's analysis consists in developing the phenomenology of aesthetic phenomena in what appears at first sight to be a subsidiary argumentation. In the books *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*,⁴ *God Without Being*,⁵ *The Crossing of the Visible*,⁶ *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*,⁷ and *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*,⁸ aesthetic phenomena, especially painting and the phenomenon of visibility, seem to introduce autonomous aesthetic reflection. Even though a painting as a work of art belongs to the order of "idols" that aim at presentation and proximity of what is given as opposed to an "icon" that accentuates distance and radical transcendence, it may however serve as the model of explanation of the very fact that things are being given to consciousness, that they appear. This means that painting becomes a medium of appearance – it is a manifestation of the shift from what is unseen (*l'invisu*) to visibility. The world can be viewed, so to speak, in its infinite and indefinite aspects and forms that can take shape in paintings but can never be objectified into one cardinal image. To explain these characteristics, one doesn't necessarily have to refer to the phenomenological vocabulary. For example, Nelson Goodman writes in this case about "syntactic and semantic density" and "syntactic repleteness."⁹ Paintings present to us how the world becomes visible by showing us that there is always something yet to be seen, which is invisible now (indefinable, unexpected, hidden) but potentially visible, able to manifest itself as an "artistic idol." It needs to be mentioned here that Marion uses the term "idol" in a non-normative way. One can speak of idols non-pejoratively,

3 *Idem*, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, vol. I, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), 44.

4 J.-L. Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. T.A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

5 *Idem*, *God Without Being*, trans. T.A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

6 *Idem*, *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. J.K.A. Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

7 *Idem*, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. J.L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

8 *Idem*, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. R. Horner, V. Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

9 N. Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 1976), 252-255.

just to stress the “autonomous glory” of the painting.¹⁰ Painting saturates or fills the vision so that the visible is made entirely present, whereas in the case of an icon the gaze is confronted not with what is presented but with the invisible – the other gaze or the gaze of the Other, God. Painting is a “saturated phenomenon” because it is filled with “originary presentive intuition,” so to speak. It gives more than can be conceptually grasped or objectified. What is important is that for Marion the painting shows how the transfer from the unseen (*l'invu*) to visible is made and how it lays the groundwork for artistic creation: “The painting *adds* presence to presence, where nature preserves space and thus absence.”¹¹

The book about Courbet’s painting is the first to be devoted exclusively to the analysis of one particular painter, although in his previous works Marion carefully interpreted such artists as Raphael, Caravaggio, Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock. Written more as an artistic essay than as a philosophical argument, it can be read as an introduction to Marion’s aesthetics, or even as an autonomous analysis of the work of the great French painter. Marion’s analysis can also be paralleled with the inquiry presented by Michael Fried in his *Courbet’s Realism*¹² (to which Marion often refers) and Linda Nochlin’s *Courbet*.¹³ Those two important studies, written by art historian and theorists, go beyond mere historiography in order to grasp the specificity of Courbet’s work, which – as Linda Nochlin writes – “despite its surface immediacy, and its apparent ease of availability, has often seemed, paradoxically, to hide a secret, or produced an effect of the occulted and suggested an alluring mystery of withheld meaning rather than the clear legibility one might expect from a realist artist.”¹⁴ For Marion this “alluring mystery” in Courbet’s painting is deeply attached to what has been previously described as the “unseen”: “The painter grants visibility to the unseen,” wrote Marion in his earlier book, “delivering unseen from its anterior invisibility, its shapelessness.”¹⁵

According to the hypothesis presented in this book, Courbet, as one of the most prominent fathers of modern painting, was the first modern painter who wanted to create not the mere representations of reality but to render reality fully present. The painter doesn’t look at the world, at things, people, events, or landscapes, to create an adequate pictorial representation equipped with aesthetic qualities. To paint, according to Courbet and to Marion, is to let things present themselves as they are. In his *The Stonebreakers* (1849-50) or *La Rocher de Hautpierre* (1869), Courbet is the first painter to show a stone as a stone, and nothing else. At first, such statement may sound exaggerated, but Marion is trying to show that what Courbet had been doing in painting, Husserl planned in philosophy: to accept everything that is “offered to us in

10 J.-L. Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, *op. cit.*, 25.

11 *Idem*, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, *op. cit.*, 66.

12 M. Fried, *Courbet’s Realism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

13 L. Nochlin, *Courbet* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007).

14 *Ibid.*, 6.

15 J.-L. Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*, *op. cit.*, 26. On this topic see also Shane Mackinlay’s *Interpreting Excess. Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena and Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

‘intuition’” (...) simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there.) We may say that in Marion’s interpretation Courbet performs “painterly reduction” analogous to the phenomenological reduction that enables one to focus not on “what” is given to us in experience but on “how” it is given – a specific mode of visual presentation in the case of painting. This line of argumentation has been prepared in the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty about Cézanne,¹⁶ and, indeed, in the one of last chapters Marion writes about “Courbet’s certainty” and tries to link those two artistic projects as both belonging to the “figural philosophy of seeing,” to use Merleau-Ponty’s phrase. For anyone acquainted with Courbet’s biography, his political involvement, and his letters, what is the most striking in this parallel is that there is very little that would enable to connect these two artists on personal grounds. According to Marion they both show how the art of painting operates to “reduce entirely the phenomenal to the visible.”¹⁷ In Courbet’s case this may be entirely related to his radical resistance to the claim that one should “make art according to the idea” [*faire de l’art à l’idée*], to which he opposes sight and the careful observation of the things emerging out of the unseen into the visible.¹⁸ As Marion stresses: “The painting gesture does not redouble the already existing appearance of the thing by consigning it by art to the object it should become, but it lets the visible emerge and accomplishes itself together with it in a unique energy, letting also the spectator see what he hasn’t foreseen.”¹⁹

Thus for Marion the art of Courbet aims to transcend the order of representation, based always on a certain “idea” – a basic scheme, a symbolic form (e.g., perspective), a convention or subjective plan (*disegno*) – and by surpassing it he turns towards the real presence. This presence, mute but visible, is not the presence of things-for-themselves, of Kantian *noumena*, but of Husserlian *noemata* – and this means that things in their real presence are always given to us.²⁰ Noema are intentional objects, that is, objects of the intentional act of consciousness, noesis. And just as each act of consciousness has its intentional correlate, so, too, seeing is correlated with what is seen. The peculiarity of the painter’s work lies in the fact that he doesn’t copy what he has seen in order to mirror or reproduce the sight but is able to performatively catch the act of seeing “in the act,” *in statu nascendi*. This is possible if one – like Courbet – doesn’t prepare and foresee what is to be seen but “sees (by) painting;” only then, writes Marion, “[t]he thing seen is contemporary, so to speak, with its pictorial visibility.”²¹ And this leads Marion to the conclusion that: “The painter not only sees according to the act of painting (and not after taking some time and observation), but also what he shows is united itself with what is given. He makes us able to see what

16 M. Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, transl. C. Dallery in: *Primacy of Perception*, ed. J. Wild (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 159-190. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Cézanne’s Doubt* in: *Sense and Non-sense*, transl. H. Dreyfus, P. Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

17 J.-L. Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, *op. cit.*, 68.

18 *Idem*, *Courbet ou la peinture à l’oeil* (Paris: Flammarion, 2013), 97-126.

19 *Ibid.*, 29.

20 *Ibid.*, 154-158.

21 *Ibid.*, 113.

he has seen *with the eye*.²² One acts without any preestablished rules, but it doesn't mean that one acts blindly. The rules of pictorial presentation are given within the "material" – within what is being made visible in the act of painting. This reminds one of Husserl's famous example from *Ideas I*, where he describes the act of looking at a blossoming tree. The tree as the natural, physical object "can burn up, be resolved into its chemical elements," but the tree as perceived cannot burn or be cut to pieces since as a noeme it is "the sense of this perception, something belonging necessarily to its essence."²³ According to Marion, Courbet's famous painting *The Oak of Flagey* (1864) is able to "fix" the noeme (the oak tree as something perceived), so he doesn't merely make a reproductive image of a certain view but evokes the "thing itself," the tree as an intentional object. For Marion, one can speak of the "grace of painting," of the "eucharistic trace of a real presence"²⁴ that – as a trace – points at the presence of *res*, things making them this way present by calling them forth.

For someone who is familiar with French phenomenology and phenomenological aesthetics, such an interpretation and conceptual framework is nothing new and the stress being put on the exceptional character of painting is echoed by analyses proposed by Merleau-Ponty or Michel Henry in his book on Wassily Kandinsky.²⁵ What is new, and what pushes Marion's aesthetics further to a new field of investigation, is what we might call the problem of existential conditions of art. Following Courbet in asking "what does it mean to be a realist painter?," he interprets this question not in formal or stylistic terms but as an existential question. Quoting the *Letter to the Romans*, "We are well aware that the whole creation, until this time, has been groaning in labor pains" [*Romans*, 8, 22], he traces the "groan" (*la peine*) not only in Courbet's realist paintings of peasants, workers, mourners, and servants (*The Stonebreakers*, *The Grain Sifters*, *A Burial at Ornans*), but also in still-life and landscape painting. Often defined in terms of detachment and distancing, the aesthetic attitude has been attacked as either an artificial, subjective aestheticization or as a purely formalist maneuver to protect against difficulties of contextual interpretation. Stressing the exclusive character of the aesthetic experience resulting from its ability to "frame" reality and thus reduce it to its "givenness," Marion emphasizes also the importance of grounding such experience amongst "human affairs." On the basic and universal level it is a question of suffering that unites all the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*). If a painting doesn't produce images of the world but presents what is real – the world, nature, man as being seen – as becoming visible, so it must also include *pathos* – finitude and the ability to suffer. In the final chapter, Marion opens once again the question concerning the relations between aesthetics and ethics but also between aesthetics and theology.

While Marion's essay wasn't intended as a strictly academic philosophical work, it demonstrates the most important features of his phenomenology, so

22 *Ibid.*, 115.

23 E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*, *op. cit.*, 216.

24 J.-L. Marion, *Courbet ou la peinture à l'oeil*, 126-127.

25 M. Henry, *Seeing the Invisible*, transl. S. Davidson (New York: Continuum, 2009).

it may serve as an introduction for those interested in contemporary French debates. As a book on art, it shows that what phenomenological tradition has to offer is the craftsmanship of meticulous description that should not be mistaken for detached formalism. As a philosophical proposal it shows – and this is a statement with which (not only) phenomenologists would agree – that no one has told us any secrets and that we must discover it by acting.

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Hanna Malewska

“Opowieść o siedmiu mędrkach” [“The Tale of Seven Wise Men”]

Cracow: Znak 2012

The “Re-Mythologizing” of Wisdom
on the Margins of the New Edition of Hanna Malewska’s
“The Tale of Seven Wise Men”

The number “seven” is symbolically rich, and even richer when connected with the theme of “wisdom.” In the “Arthurian Encyclopedia” (ed. N. J. Lacy, 1986) we can read Joseph Palermo’s contribution saying that “The Seven Sages [of Rome] legend is a frame-story, into which are interpolated a series of tales and counter-tales told, on the one hand, by the wicked empress, condemned to death for having attempted the seduction of her princely stepson, to avert her execution, and, on the other, by each of the seven sages, preceptors of the innocent prince, to seal and hasten her doom.” Versions such as the Old French “Les Sept Sages de Rome” or Italian “Sette Savi di Roma” refer, among other cultural traits, to Arthurian elements, such as the character of Merlin.

But the story, sometimes retold as “The Seven Wise Masters,” is of more distant, e.g. Sanskrit, Persian, or Hebrew origin (“the widely diffused Indo-European legend of the Seven Sages, a combination, essentially, of the story of Potiphar’s Wife with the storytelling device of Scheherazade in the ‘Thousand and One Nights’” – Palermo, 1986, *ibid.*). Another narrative combining “seven” and “wisdom” is that of The Seven Sages of Greece, or Seven Wise Men, which was ancient Greek tradition referring to the 6th century BC historical sages (actually more than seven, of which the seven were differently chosen by the different storytellers). The Greek version is rarely seen as a tale or narrative cycle.

* * *

In the Warsaw coffee-bookstore Wrzenie Świata [“Upheaval in the World”] overseen by reporter-reportagists in the backyard of the Nowy Świat Street, non-fiction literature is mostly on offer. However, in an exposed location at the bartender-cashiers’ counter one can find a copy of “Greek Mythology.” Here, too, could – and rather should – also stand the recently published “Opowieść o siedmiu mędrkach” [“The Tale of Seven Wise Men”]. This is because “The Tale” can be read as a collection of insights, discussions, and explorations between the spheres of values and spheres of fact, between spheres of myth and spheres of non-mythical – philosophical – thinking. It is thus a collection of tales that can be regarded as representing both Greek categories: “Mythos” and “Logos,” respectively. Thus Polish writer Hanna Malewska combined the Indo-European

storytelling approach to the "Seven" with ancient Greek tradition of the "Seven" philosophers. This led her to "apocryphal" narrative of some well known (and some fictive) Greek philosophers.

This is not a new book, as it was first published over a half-century ago, in 1959. At the same time it is new, insofar as it has not been republished (and thus discussed) for around forty years. Its author, Hanna Malewska (1911-1983), was a writer and editor, and for many years editor-in-chief of Polish intellectuals' influential Catholic monthly "Znak" and collaborator with the famous "Tygodnik Powszechny." But in 2012, neither "Znak" nor "Tygodnik Powszechny" noticed the reissuing of "The Tale of Seven Wise Men." Paradoxically, a small article published in the "Metro" popular daily seems to be the only one that took note of this long-awaited republication (Toczyski Piotr, "Gdyby filmowcy znali Malewską..." ["Would the Filmmakers Know Malewska?"], "Metro Daily," 5 July 2012). The main argument of that newspaper article intended for a wide spectrum of readers is that Malewska's books thematically preceded bestsellers such as Ken Follett's "Pillars of the Earth" or multi-season television shows such as "The Tudors" by Michael Hirst. The process of building medieval cathedrals or Sir Thomas More's imprisonment followed by his consequent rejection of Henry VIII's offer were the subjects of Malewska's novels and short stories many years before these Western books and films were released. Thus, too Malewska's (or a Malewska-like) presentation of Greek antiquity and philosophy could be on filmmakers' lists one day, given that her books will not always be forgotten, as they currently seem to be.

* * *

One who would like to initiate a debate around "The Tale of Seven Wise Men" ought to begin at its starting point, which is the year of the first edition in 1959. At that time two critical reviews of "The Tale" were printed. One, entitled "U korzeni drzewa genealogicznego naszej kultury" ["At the roots of our culture's genealogical tree"], was written by then 33-year-old Jan Józef Lipski (and can be found in his posthumously collected works "Słowa i myśli" ["Words and Thoughts," Biblioteka Więzi 2009]). The second text, "Mądra opowieść o siedmiu" ["Wise Tale of the Seven"], was written by then 35-year-old Marcin Czerwiński and published only in "Przegląd Kulturalny" ["Cultural Review"]. Thus attention to Malewska's book, newly published at that time, was paid mainly by two authors who had similar generational experiences of war and European disunity; fifteen years earlier they both had fought in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising against German occupants. As their later biographies revealed, they were both authors who had similar academic aspirations. They both defended their doctoral theses almost simultaneously: in 1965, Jan Józef Lipski, whose thesis advisor was Kazimierz Wyka, a famous Polish literary critic and historian, and one year later Marcin Czerwiński, whose thesis advisor was Nina Assorodobraj, one of the leading sociologists of the pre- and post-WWII period in Poland. Both were then connected with institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN). Jan Józef Lipski achieved *habilitation* (an advanced post-doctoral degree) at

PAN's Institute of Literary Research, although he had to wait six years to have it finally accepted due to his involvement in anti-regime political opposition; he was one of the co-founders of the Komitet Obrony Robotników [Workers' Defense Committee]. During the martial law period he was fired from PAN's institute. Marcin Czerwiński was professor at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences since 1983, and earlier at PAN's Institute of Philosophy and Sociology. The names of the institutes are mentioned here on purpose: the content of "The Tale of Seven Wise Men" can prove interesting for both researchers of literature and art as well as for readers interested in philosophy and properly construed sociology.

Moral power seen for the first time, and the heartrending massacre of the Pythagoreans

Jan Józef Lipski saw Malewska's book as an attempt to search out the "birth of separate elements of the value system which for millennia to come would influence the culture of Europe." He compared Malewska's novel with other literary searches for universal values in Polish historical prose that were written by Polish authors of that time such as Iwaszkiewicz, Parnicki and Gołubiew. However Lipski considered Tadeusz Zieliński, a classical philologist, to be the great conceptual patron of the novel, as he had "looked for the birth of Christian ethics rather in Hellas than in Judea." The moral system of "The Tale of Seven Wise Men" Lipski sees as being "almost an outline of the Gospel" – "although not yet baptized."

Lipski reads "The Tale" especially through the moments when something happens "for the first time": when grace turns out to be better than punishment (e.g., Pittacus frees Alcaeus), when moral power is able to counteract ruling power (the tyrant Periander wants to step down), when impractical knowledge proves to have value (Ismenios searches for answers from Thales of Miletus), and when the social contract is accepted – also for the first time (in Solon's Athens). These half-mythical tales point at a greater reality of civilization: in the Hellenic world appears a "powerful cultural factor, which until the present day lives in the circle of our civilization."¹ Jan Józef Lipski interpreted these proto-beginnings of Europeanness in categories of social consciousness. He wrote of moral reflexivity, which generates a norm, which in turn becomes a "property of social consciousness." He also wrote of moral power that can be "in social consciousness" a power capable of winning power in a new dimension. Thus the literary researchers read Malewska's book in the year of its first publication mostly from the sociological perspective.

There is not so much difference between literary research and the sociological approach as is usually assumed. Marcin Czerwiński, later professor of sociology, saw "The Tale" in a manner complementary to Lipski's approach. He wrote: "Malewska's protagonists *modo homerico* are transferred from herding

1 Translations from Polish throughout the article by Author [ed. note].

pigs to sword, lyre, or book" and "against the old beliefs of naïve peasants an interrogative curiosity counteracts." Czerwiński noticed different unifying elements in ancient Greek wisdom: engineering curiosity, the philosophy of fate and humanity, and the inventiveness of reformers. "In this the charm of this book certainly lies – the charm of that world and this kind of multi-aspect sensitivity, this kind of – often – omni-skill, which later, in effect, led to dilettantism, at that time bore the highest social responsibility and bathed in glamour" (M. Czerwiński, *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 1959).

But Czerwiński – already as one of the first readers of "The Tale" – paid particular attention to the massacre of the Pythagoreans: "Of all the tales my attention was seized especially by the tragic fate of the Pythagoreans from Croton. This Order of the Wise – partially savants, partially moralists, somewhat contemplators – falls victim to a massacre that was aimed at vicariously fulfilling the grievances of different interest groups acting in the town. The Pythagoreans become the symbolic guilty party, found among the defenseless. I noted with sorrow that this episode seemed to me far closer to modernity than any other" (Czerwiński, 1959, *ibid.*).

From mythical and non-mythical Antiquity to Europeanness

Taking place at the seashores and isles of Greece, Libya, and Asia Minor, "The Tale of Seven Wise Men" – as is well illustrated by the modest map included in new edition – is thus a special form of literary and ethical expression mediated by Antiquity, or perhaps by quasi-Antiquity.

This is because with the development of knowledge and appreciation of wisdom, Rudolf Bultmann's "Entmythologisierung" does not happen. This ambiguous German-language "demythologizing" is usually translated and understood literally as "demythologization," or sometimes – by Marcin Czerwiński himself in his works on the anthropology of modernity ["Przyczynki do antropologii współczesności," PIW 1988] – as "desymbolization" or "discoursivization." This "soft" observation of the interlacing the mythical and the non-mythical rises especially from Malewska's insightful book. Illustratively, colorfully, and with the true conventions of mythical content, Malewska writes of moral and social development, precisely about the rise of what we would name "Logos," but also about its further interlacing with "Mythos."

After more than a half century from the first appearance of the book, we can begin reading with our own current dilemmas, fascinations, and disturbances. Unfortunately, this new edition from the series of five Malewska books that has been chosen for republication omits, for unknown reasons, the original critical reception. The introduction by Władysław Stróżewski included in the book is also interesting and important, but Lipski's and Czerwiński's texts from a half-century ago should have found a place in the new edition, at least as afterword. Although since the first publication of "The Tale of Seven Wise Men" the center of Europeanness, rooted in Hellas, is readily seen as closer to North than South, both the current geopolitical situation and the one from fifty years

ago constantly provoke us to the same reflection on Europeanness to which Malewska's book inspired at least two aforementioned readers already in its year of first publication.

The cultural source of Europeanness is in Antiquity, and in our new situation an urgent task is not only the constant redefining of Europeanness but especially approaching these values which constitute Europeanness. This is difficult, mainly because of the fact that self-questioning is one of the qualities of Europeanness. Thus the republished "The Tale of Seven Wise Men" opens a space for broader reflection about the contemporariness of the tradition of the European Antiquity. Any Antiquity other than the one of mass cinema is often only found deep in research centers into which mostly classical philologists are admitted. If we suppose that we are losing something, then let us look first into Malewska's book.

Hopefully, a belated English translation of the initial critical reception received by Malewska's book will be followed by the translation and distribution of the book itself among the contemporary European community of readers. The case of Hanna Malewska's worthwhile writings clearly shows that any convergence of a pan-European culture is a slow process, especially when it comes to shifting the direction of literary exchange so that the thought of authors like Malewska can move from unknown, semi-peripheral, non-Anglophone and non-Franco-phone territories towards the continental and global mainstream.

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Piotr Orawski
Lekcje Muzyki (Musical Lessons)
Warszawa: Kle 2010-2014

Radio *Music Lessons* with Piotr Orawski

Seven years ago, ambitious editors of the second channel of the Polish Radio network started broadcasting a long series of programs about the history of artistic music. Its main purpose was educational, as suggested by the production's title, *Music Lessons*. Piotr Orawski, an expert in the field of music, was given the lead role. He proved a perfect fit for the task, and this fruitful cooperation led to a series of nearly a thousand lectures (he wrote 985 lectures), abruptly brought to an end by Piotr Orawski's untimely death at the age of 51. Fortunately, Kle publishing house preserved the great majority of texts of his radio broadcasts, which makes it possible to pass on his legacy. His work was already highly praised during his life, as evidenced by five prizes (including three first places) such as the Prix Musical de Radio Brno and the Złoty Mikrofon award.

There are many books in multiple languages on the history of classical music, however presenting this material on the radio was an altogether different challenge. The radio audience, unlike a reader, cannot simply return to a more complex passage or pause at a particular scholarly term; remembering the details is also often more challenging than it is in the case of books. Piotr Orawski was surely aware of these challenges, and so he included definitions of academic terms, provided examples of relevant musical pieces, and, in general, spoke in a manner easily accessible to a wider audience. His goal was to make the subject matter understandable not only to those already familiar with the topic, but to all radio listeners. Piotr Orawski's lectures had numerous fans who actively engaged in music-related discussion on internet forums. Those charmed by these lessons now have a chance to rediscover Orawski with the publication by Kle. It is a truly unique and priceless opportunity.

The conductor of these *Music Lessons* discussed only a part of the history of music – but a very important part that included four stylistic periods: medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, and Classical. His premature departure ended the series on a discussion of Mahler, but the publisher has yet to release the texts on Romanticism.

Although Orawski's history of music is similar to many other surveys of the subject in that it lists and discusses the works of various composers and examines their biographies, it is also characterized by some unique features. The author is very critical regarding his chosen source material, often scrutinizing it and challenging the accuracy of widely-cited information. In one such discussion he takes on the question of the authorship of the Gregorian chant and writes that "Pope St. Gregory the Great did not actually invent it, despite being credited

with its creation for many years and the form having been named after him.” He goes on to point out that the tale of the chant’s inventor was popularized through a legend about Pope St. Gregory the Great described by Johannes Diaconus in the 9th Century, while music studies revealed that “During the times of St. Gregory the Great the Old Roman chant sounded completely different from the later Gregorian chant” (The lesson on “Origins of the Gregorian chant”). Another example of Orawski’s investigative nature is his disputing the popular belief that Arcangelo Corelli was the creator of the concerto grosso. Orawski claims that the form had been used earlier by Alessandro Stradella (The lesson on “Baroque concerto”). In his insistence on historical accuracy, Orawski would always clearly articulate when he considered a particular piece of information not sufficiently documented, even if he did not directly challenge its accuracy. And so he pauses for a moment to discuss the meaning and origin of the name of the composer Jacob Clemens non Papa. He ponders the alias “non Papa,” which means not-pope, never used by the musician himself. Orawski writes, “It remains unknown whether the alias referred to Pope Clement VII, who was Pope during the composer’s lifetime, or someone else altogether... [possibly] a well-known poet of the time, Jacob Papa” (The lesson on “The 4th generation of Franco-Flemish composers”). This goes to illustrate what great attention Orawski paid to even the tiniest details surrounding composers’ lives.

The currently available works describing the history of music are often criticized for focusing solely on a discussion of the most famous composers – those widely considered musical geniuses – while neglecting the contributions of other less prominent, yet often very significant, musicians. Piotr Orawski naturally devotes a lot of time to the greatest composers, dedicating 16 lessons to the analysis of Beethoven’s works, however he also reacquaints the audience with some of the “forgotten composers.” Who today remembers the contributions of one like Guillaume Bouzignac? Orawski dedicates a whole lesson to him, writing, “It was he [Bouzignac] that invented a new type of overture known since as the French overture, proposed new formal resolutions in his stage pieces, adjusted the Italian recitative to the French language prosody creating its new value [...] he created the national French music style, which then, very quickly for its time, spread all around Europe soon achieving the status of the universal style” (The lesson on “Guillaume Bouzignac”).

Even such prominent figures as Jean-Francois Le Seur are not mentioned in some encyclopedias of music, and thus remain obscure to most. Orawski, on the other hand, devotes a separate lesson to him (The lesson on “Oratorios by Jean-Francois Le Seur”), pointing to the fame he enjoyed during his lifetime and discussing the great number of works that he left behind, including monumental oratorios, masses, cantatas, and, most of all, operas. He adds that Le Seur wrote the opera *Ossian* specifically for the occasion of Napoleon Bonaparte’s coronation, at the emperor’s request.

Orawski offers many more intriguing details from the history of music. Some are quite startling, like the fact that Heinrich Biber wrote *Missa Salisburgensis*, a mass for a stunning number of 53 singers, at the request of the Salzburg cathedral (The lesson on “Mass in the Baroque period”). He also informs the audience

that some of the scholarly terms used in history of music have evolved through the years and thus could have had a very different meaning at some point in the past. In one such example, he explains that “Missa parodia,” popular in the second half of the 15th Century, at the time had nothing in common with the current use of the term – which implies a ridicule – but instead constituted a form of mass, “the themes of which were based on religious or secular polyphonic composition” (The lesson on “Nicolas Gombert”). Likewise, the author discusses the term “countertenor,” which is nowadays associated with a male alto or even soprano, while during the Middle Ages it described the lowest male voice. He also addresses the fact that the term “cantata,” presently of a single meaning, throughout the ages was connected to various forms such as concerto, serenate, dialogo, motetto, ode, psalm, artus funebris, artus tragicus, anthem, or even symphonia sacra (The lesson on “Cantata – formal structure and themes”).

Some of Orawski’s “dementi” are simple curiosities such as the mention of the fact that during the Middle Ages the interval of sexta was treated as false harmony and was not recognized as a consonance until the Renaissance (The lesson “At the onset of Modernity”). The author addresses the terrible peril of a composer’s life, in which the musician “can fall victim to his own masterpiece” – that is, have all of his other works forgotten due to the fact that he created one particular outstanding piece of music. Here Orawski cites the example of the famous Canon in D major by Johann Pachelbel as well as Vivaldi’s familiar *Four Seasons*. Their current popularity is undisputed; however, when asked about other works of Vivaldi, most people have nothing to say (The lesson on the “*Four Seasons* by Antonio Vivaldi”).

We are introduced to another astounding fact in the lesson “French orchestra suite” devoted to music of the 17th and 18th Centuries. Piotr Orawski claims to have discovered the first ever use of a musical cluster in Jean-Féry Rebel’s suite *Les Éléments* (*The Elements*), justifying his claim in the following manner: “[the overture] begins with a rough unresolved dissonance of the whole orchestra, which is hard to define using the functional criteria of the dur-moll system. It is probably the first cluster, an overtone composed of sounds adjacent to each other on the musical scale, in the history of orchestral music. Clusters are structures typical to the 20th century music. Rebel employed this sound effect, very unusual for its time, so that he could more clearly [...] illustrate the chaotic nature of elements right after the creation of the universe.”

Piotr Orawski’s radio broadcasts can be described as lectures of a music expert characterized by great academic knowledge, attention to detail, scrutiny of various historical sources, and dedication to making the subject matter easily accessible.

The introduction to the *Music Lessons* series includes a quote from the author, which nicely illustrates the uniqueness of his approach: “I wrote this book, because my audience and students taught me how to write it.” The reader will enjoy pondering exactly what he meant.

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