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# GASTON BACHELARD

By Aurosa Alison

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Gaston Bachelard was born on June 27, 1884, at Bar-sur-Aube, a small town in the Champagne Ardennes. In 1903, as a youth, Bachelard began working as a temporary clerk at a post office. Simultaneously, he began his studies as an autodidact and in 1924 earned a diploma in mathematical sciences, as well as a qualification as a second-degree professor of philosophy, becoming also professor of chemistry at the public college of Bar-sur-Aube. In 1927, Bachelard was designated as a doctor of letters at the Sorbonne in Paris. In 1930, Bachelard joined the Faculty of Letters' academic community in Dijon, where he taught as a professor of philosophy for ten years. In 1940, he became a professor at the Sorbonne in history and philosophy of science, succeeding Abel Rey as the director of the Institute of the History of Science and Technology. In 1947, Bachelard founded the scientific journal *Dialectica* alongside Ferdinand Gonseth and Paul Bernays. On October 16, 1962, a year after winning the Grand Prix Nationale des Lettres, Bachelard died in Paris. He was buried at Bar-sur-Aube's cemetery.

Bachelard's aesthetic thought is characterized, on the one hand, by the relationship between the world of natural elements – the reality around us – and the world of images. On the other hand, his thought is composed of poetics images. Historically, Bachelard's theories developed through various aesthetic and theoretical currents in French phenomenology and an early period of surrealism.

The logical-systemic organization of images (Wunenburger 2006) confirms their fundamental role in Bachelardian aesthetics: (1)

they accord with natural elements, giving rise to the concept of *material imagination*, and (2) they underlie the world of poetics. Bachelard's introduction of the *material imagination* concept in *L'eau et les rêves: Essai sur l'imagination de la matière* (1942) emblemized these aspects of his aesthetics. Indeed, Bachelard held that the imagination's materiality corresponds to the production of images sparked by natural elements. The images of matter are always combined from a dialectical perspective: cold vs. hot, alive vs. dead, off vs. on, or wet vs. dry.

Through his poetics, Bachelard highlighted the power of the phenomenology of images. In *La poétique de l'espace* (1957) he introduced images of dwelling, and in *La poétique de la rêverie* (1960) he introduced the value of imagination as a phenomenological need.

#### MAIN WORKS

In his earlier works, Bachelard focused on the new scientific theories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His first research project was based on the relationship between matter and space and discoveries in microphysics. Highlighting the importance of progressive and constructive knowledge, in *Le nouvel esprit scientifique* (1934), Bachelard examined in an even more specific way the break between everyday experience and scientific knowledge. In this regard, he held that scientific knowledge is based on recurring concepts of rupture and rectification. Following the path of scientific progress in *La philosophie du non: Essai d'une philosophie du nouvel esprit scientifique* (1940), through *no* Bachelard theorized and systematized a way of knowing reality. *No*, he explained, produces knowledge insofar as it denies a given and not rationally elaborated-upon fact, thus making a "permanent rectification" possible.

Bachelard's approach in his epistemological works marked a fundamental step in purging the world of images. Indeed in *La formation de l'esprit scientifique: Contribution à une psychanalyse de la connaissance objective* (1938a), Bachelard expressed his fierce aversion to the world of images, which would later prove to be the focus of his later philosophical works. Images, he said, can be ex-

traordinarily ambiguous and complicated obstacles. But suddenly Bachelard's philosophical interests changed; he expressed a keen interest in the world of images. Indeed, in the same year, he published the first of five books dedicated to the natural elements. In *La psychanalyse du feu* (1938b) Bachelard introduced Jungian complexes as psychoanalytic apparatus to describe images' sensitivity and material involvement. In *L'eau et les rêves: Essai sur l'imagination de la matière* (1942), he described the fundamental difference between material imagination and formal imagination: material imagination comprises images that relate to matter, while formal imagination relates to images' superfluous approach. In this regard, the realm of imagination functions through the law of the four natural elements. Through literary and poetic constructs, Bachelard showed the dialectical aspect of various water images, illustrating clear waters vs. dark waters, deadly waters vs. vital waters, and feminine waters vs. masculine waters.

With the air element, Bachelard introduced the concept of the mobility of images, which he developed in *L'air et les songes: Essai sur l'imagination du mouvement* (1943). This concept describes how the imagination can produce images of movement. Bachelard dedicated two texts to the earth element. In *La terre et les rêveries de la volonté: Essai sur l'imagination des forces* (1948) Bachelard underlined the role of resistance. The faculty of resistance enables the description of an essential theme: the sensitive relationship between the hand and matter in the condition of "petrissage," in which ductility and resistance occupy opposite poles. In *La terre et les rêveries du repos: Essai sur les images de l'intimité* (1949), through the images of intimacy, Bachelard identified the importance of domestic space, childhood homes, and roots. Using figures of the cave, the house, and the root, he extrapolated the Jonah complex to interpret the earth's material bond. The maternal womb's ancestral relationship, he explained, denoted the protective envelopment of the whale's belly in the Jonah parable; in this welcoming cavity of the belly, all things will find refuge.

Bachelard's inclination toward the world of aesthetics remained fundamentally important in his later works. *La poétique de l'espace*

(1957), his first text devoted to poetics, analyses the phenomenology of imagination and poetic images. Its central argument focuses on inhabited space – the space of experience – and the aesthetic assonance of our condition, inhabited through images of the house. Introducing the *topoanalysis* concept as the study of happy, welcoming, and native spaces, Bachelard described the various places of the house in detail, as well as their representations of our experience – the attic, the cellar, closets, and chests are all objects and places that accompany our imagination. Describing the dialectic of the inside-out and the dimension of intimate immensity, he suggested that opposite images can suggest different ways to feel a space-experience. Poetic images became crucial in *La poétique de la rêverie* (1960), where Bachelard illustrated the division between rationality and metaphysics. Thus, the phenomenology of images urges us toward creative participation.

The last text of Bachelard related to the fire spaces that create intimacy is *La flamme d'une chandelle* (1961) that defines the candlelight's contribution as a basic image of intimacy. Flame's great evocative power, said Bachelard, "forces us to imagine".

#### DIALOG WITH CONTEMPORARIES

In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jean-Paul Sartre (1936; 1940) theorized about images and imagination, consecrating two works to the imagination and the imaginary. Simultaneously, and then especially in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bachelard hired the role of philosopher of images, inspiring many contemporary intellectuals, such as Roger Caillois, Paul Ricoeur, Gilbert Durand, Henry Corbin, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Serres.

Bachelard organized his philosophical system through dimensions of his thought such as: (1) the poetic activity, in which imagination presents itself as a primitive intention of consciousness; (2) material images, in which an image is a psychic and physical continuum; and (3) the reunion of being with the world through imagination (Wunenbuger 2006: 69-71). Using an experienced approach, Bachelard explored experience's material sphere. Like Caillois and



Corbin, Bachelard analyzed reality's material structures (Chiore 2004), contextualizing his thinking through a "transcendental and fantastic" investigation. According to Foucault, Bachelard was a greatly valuable resource especially because, by bringing first-class authors and secondary or forgotten authors into dialog with each other, he showed how long-established cultural hierarchies can be circumvented and challenged.

### CRITICAL DEBATE

An early phase of the critical debate surrounding Bachelard stems from his interest in two opposing domains: epistemology and aesthetics. In a lecture for the Société Française de Philosophie in 1950, Bachelard played with words by describing the figure of the 24-hour man, "l'homme de 24 heures," defining the coexistence of the two aspects: the nocturnal and the diurnal, i.e. the imaginary and the rational.

His work represents two opposite sides:

- 1) a first epistemology, based on his epistemological approaches, from 1927 to 1940;
- 2) a first aesthetics, based on material imagination and the elements, from 1938 to 1949;
- 3) a second epistemology, based on contemporary physics and the rationalism, from 1949 to 1953;
- 4) a second aesthetics, based on poetics, from 1957 to 1961.

Beginning with Bachelard's earliest legacy in French philosophy, the dialectical aspect of his works immediately faced emphatic criticism. In 1974, Dominique Lecourt analyzed two phases of discordance, separating these two paths in *Bachelard ou le jour et la nuit* (1974). Conversely, François Dagognet sparked a new course of criticism, highlighting the dual aspect of Bachelardian philosophy (Dagognet 1984) and introducing the possibility of a constitutive dichotomy in which rationality and irrationality combine. A decisive phase in Bachelard criticism is related to the constitution

of a Bachelardian ethics (Wunenburger 2013), where a dialectical vision of knowledge becomes necessary to openly and comprehensively read Bachelard's works.

A poly-philosophical reading of Bachelard's works developed a new sort of criticism. In Italy, interest in Bachelard began as early as the 1950s, investigating his aesthetics of images (Dorfles 1952; Boccali 2017) and dialectics (Sertoli 1972; Vinti 1997; Alison 2019). Even for the Geneva School (Georges Poulet, Jean Starobinski, Jean-Pierre Richard), the phenomenological aspect of Bachelard's thought has been a point of reference in the aesthetic-literary tradition. The Anglophone reception of Bachelard's works has been characterized by some fundamental topics, such as the dynamism based on a bivalent system (Smith 2016) and the relation between Bachelardian thought and the evolution of phenomenology in the Western tradition (Rizo-Patron 2017).

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# CARL DAHLHAUS

by Michela Garda

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One of the most influential German musicologists of the post-war era, Carl Dahlhaus (1928-1989) earned a graduate degree in 1952 in Freiburg with a major in musicology and specific studies in philosophy, German literature, history, and art history. Although the coupling of musicology and philosophy was typical of the German academic tradition, the scope of his interests as a student anticipated one of the characteristics of this future scholar: grounding musicology in the debate about the current methodological foundation of the humanities. Unlike most musicologists of his time, Dahlhaus was an insider of the operatic system (from 1950 until 1958 as a Dramaturg at the "Deutschen Theater" in Göttingen) and musical journalism (from 1960 until 1962 as music editor at the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*). In 1967 he became a professor of musicology at the Technische University in Berlin. Until his death in 1989, his teaching continuously attracted students nationally and from abroad. In addition to his academic activity, Dahlhaus supervised several editorial projects, which impacted musicology significantly.

## AESTHETICS AND MUSICOLOGY

One of the central commitments of Dahlhaus' musicological research was the re-establishment of aesthetics as a major musicological discipline. In Guido Adler's articulation of systematic musicology from 1885, musical aesthetics was one of its four pivotal branches, assisted by general aesthetics as an auxiliary discipline. According to Adler, the task of musical aesthetics was to evaluate

and compare “the highest law in the individual branches of tonal art”, referring them both to perceiving the subject and the criteria of musical beauty. About a century later, together with Helga De La Motte-Haber, Carl Dahlhaus edited a new handbook of systematic musicology. This publication allowed him to redefine the role of music aesthetics when the discipline was under attack by the critics of ideology and undermined by the dawn of the universality claim of aesthetical systems. Therefore, his peculiar theoretical move was to accept the radical historicization of musical aesthetics linking it to music historiography. Aesthetic theory would perform the task of clarifying the intentional dimension of art through a hermeneutic-phenomenological interpretation. This, in turn, would prevent historiography’s dissolution into a loose collection of interpretation works or art sociology or psychology. To avoid both the competition among the philosophical systems and the anarchic coexistence of aesthetical projects or manifestos, Dahlhaus suggested the project of aesthetical dogmatics, according to the model of legal dogmatics, i.e., a systematic account of the legislation in place; or the theological dogmatics understood as a synthesis of the Christian religion. Despite the idea of a comprehensive and normative systematic, which this term suggests, Dahlhaus’s intention was more restrained: it referred to the investigation of a limited number of historically emergent aesthetic concepts. Dahlhaus never did realize this project as a systematic undertaking. Nevertheless, this plan highlights the inner logic of his countless investigations into several key concepts of musical aesthetics, among them the concepts of musical work of art, absolute music, musical logic, and the temporal structure of music. On the other hand, the theoretical clarification of the concepts, which is the silver thread of Dahlhaus musicology, implies the mediation of musicology in the scrutiny of aesthetic ideas. His theoretical horizon is deeply rooted in the constant dialogue with philosophy and literary theory, notably with Gadamer’s hermeneutic, the group “Poetics and Hermeneutics (*Poetik und Hermeneutik*)”, and also Adorno’s aesthetic theory.

The intertwining of historical and systematical perspectives also impacts the method of music aesthetics, understood as a specif-

ic field of musicology. Instead of providing an overarching narrative of music aesthetics (such as that developed by Enrico Fubini in Italy in various versions since 1968), Carl Dahlhaus tackles aesthetic questions or problematic concepts through their historical developments: "The system of esthetics is its history: a history in which ideas and experiences of heterogeneous origin interpenetrate" (Dahlhaus 1982: 3). His *Esthetics of Music* explores key phases and topics in the history of music aesthetics, such as its origin, the emancipation of instrumental music, the changing stages of the aesthetics of emotion, the discussion about formalism, program music, tradition, and reform of opera. The scrutiny of these historical chapters plays a key role in discovering the forgotten premises of the present debate. Dahlhaus acknowledges that music aesthetics represents the spirit of cultivated bourgeois music lovers, which in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was on the verge of collapsing. He claims, however, that until the repertory of concerts and operas of the past three centuries would be performed, "there is no reason to regard as obsolete and extinct the thinking of an epoch whose works belong to the living present" (Dahlhaus 1982: vii). This observation is only one side of the coin that pertains to the cultivation of the past heritage through education. Every investigation in past debates and concepts, at the very end, represents a powerful tool to discuss and clarify a specific thorny issue of the present. Theoretical crux and paradoxes, which are the driving force behind Dahlhaus's thought, are addressed by investigating musical practices' developments and the unfolding of reflexive concepts.

#### THE CONCEPT OF EXPRESSION

An emblematic example of Dahlhaus's method is the concept of expression. Instead of giving an historical account of different conceptualizations of this term, he comments on some definitions rooted in very different historical contexts: from Christoph Nichelmann to Aristotle, from Jean-Baptiste to Hrabanus Maurus, with a bold leap reaching the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The result is confusing because definitions are different, but "often they flow into each other imperceptibly". To find a thread, Dahlhaus

switches to the systematic order, borrowing from the linguist Karl Bühler the threefold function of sentences: triggering, representation, and testimony. According to this scheme, actions are triggered, states of affairs are represented, conditions of the heart are attested. The history of the term "expression" unfolds the possibilities inscribed in the systematic order: music can trigger an effect or move an affect, as attested to in music theory from Johannes Tinctoris, Nicola Vicentino, and Gioseffo Zarlino, as well as in more recent musical aesthetics by Eduard Hanslick and Kurt Huber. Music is a representation of passions, according to the mimetic theory of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Charles Batteux, Friedrich Wilhelm Marburg, and, to some extent, Jean-Jacques Rousseau). In music writers like Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Daniel Schubart, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Wilhelm Heinse, expression means "nothing else than testimony", in the sense of "letting one's passion gush".

The more recent history of musical concepts has corrected the duality implied in this classification, highlighting a more nuanced use of the term's representation and expression in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries by music theorists like Zarlino, Vicentino and Galilei as well as in the discussion about the "prima e seconda pratica". Nevertheless, Dahlhaus's clarification represents a historical landmark of this concept, although still embedded in the traditional history of ideas and without references to actual musical practices. Dahlhaus's intention was to rescue this concept "for serious use" after it has become "so ambiguous, vague and all-encompassing" (Dahlhaus 1982: 18). However, in order to achieve this goal, history alone does not suffice. In a very Hegelian way, the deeper sense of expression could be inferred only from the dialectical logic of the historical development: "Expression, then, is paradoxically yoked to convention, the particular to the general. If expression, being subjective, is unrepeatable, yet at the same time, in order to make itself clear, it yields to a compulsion of becoming established. In the moment when it is realized in any tangible existence, it sacrifices its essence. But, precisely in its dialectic, the principle of expression has become definitive for an historical consciousness and activity in which progressive and conservative traits mutually con-



dition each other. The paradox of the art of expression forces both the production of novelties in steadily accelerating change and the preservation of works from past phases of the development. [...]. Progress and historical memory belong together, as two sides of the main thing" (Dahlhaus 1982: 23-4).

#### MUSIC AS A WORK OF ART

Among the concepts encompassed in Dahlhaus's *Aesthetics of Music*, that of musical work of art was already problematic at the time when the book appeared. The short chapter "Music as Text and Work of art" does not mention the questions opened up by avant-garde music, but tackles the history of the concept from the vantage point of the 18<sup>th</sup> century theory of the arts, and precisely the distinction between the arts of space and the *energetic* arts which work in time as music does. The distinction stems from Herder (and remotely from Aristotle) and is akin to the modern definition of performative arts. Dahlhaus, however, captures in this distinction a duality which not only distinguishes music from visual arts, but dwells at the core of music itself and its historical developments. "When Herder calls music an 'energetic art' (*energetische Kunst*), he means that it is essentially activity (*energeia*), not a product, a piece of work. [...] Hence the idea that music is exemplified in works, no matter how firmly rooted it has become in the past century and a half, is far from self-evident" (Dahlhaus 1982: 10). Dahlhaus traces back the emergence of the concept of work of art to Listenius's definition of *opus perfectum et absolutum* in his *Musica* from 1537. It represents the first testimony of a trend which counters the idea of music as the transitory, fleeting product of an activity. Music as *opus non stabile* was a longstanding *topos*, attested to in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, notably by Bonaventura, Adam da Fulda, and Leonardo, which survived until 19<sup>th</sup> century Hegelian aesthetics. Despite its recent origin, the concept of the musical work of art has proved to be historically more resistant. Dahlhaus cursorily reminds us that even Benjamin in *The Origin of the German Baroque Drama*, defines "the supreme reality of art" in terms of "isolated, self-contained work". Dahlhaus

pinpoints two important turning points in the history of the concept: firstly, the classical theory of art, exemplified by Karl Philipp Moritz, which acknowledges the existence of an object that exists and endures "for the sake of its inner perfection"; secondly, romanticism, which ascribed metaphysical value to such a work. According to Dahlhaus, the concept of the musical work of art developed along with major and intertwined transformations in the practice: the separation of music handicraft since the 18<sup>th</sup> century; the emancipation of music from external goals which marked the transition to its aesthetical autonomy; the increasing importance of individual works as compared to the genres; the developing of techniques for writing music.

The last two points are of paramount importance in Dahlhaus's agenda in proposing a viable definition of the concept. The reversal of the rankings of individual works and genres testifies to an irreversible historical process. According to Dahlhaus, in older functional music, "a work was primarily an example of the genre, as an individual person fits into a succession of generations that extends far beyond him and survives him [...]. But since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century all genres have rapidly lost substance [...]. The concept of genre is no longer established in advance for individual works. Rather, every genre fades to an abstract generalization, derived from individual structures after they have accumulated; and finally, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, individual structures submit only under duress to being allocated to any genre" (Dahlhaus 1980: 15). The impact of written music on the sedimentation of the concept requires, conversely, a theoretical stipulation, equating the written score with a literary text. "It would be an exaggeration – Dahlhaus claims – to deprive written music of the status of a text, and to see in notation nothing but a set of instructions for musical practice. The meaning of music can be specified – in a crude oversimplification that neglects emotional characteristics – as inner coherence of the relations among the tones constituting a work. Tone-relations and tone-functions, however, are a third aspect, extending over and beyond notations and its realization in sound [...]. Musical meaning is 'intentional': it exists only insofar as a listener grasps it" (Dahlhaus 1980: 12).

The intertwining of the functional musical theory and Ingarden's ontology of the work of art (the German version was published in 1962), offers a theoretical legitimation of a historical process and a solid argument to defend this concept against his detractors a few years later. In one of the following articles about this topic (Dahlhaus 1969) he takes the opportunity to test the coherence and validity of aesthetic theory facing the challenges posed by the anti-art of 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde, in a way akin to that of Adorno in his writings of the late 1950s early 1960s. The goal, however, is different. Dahlhaus's *Plädoyer* focuses primarily on the historical and theoretical legitimacy of the concept of the musical work of art as a tool for musicological research instead of questioning the aesthetical legitimation of post-serial music. Whereas the criterion of coherence (*Stimmigkeit*) is reaffirmed for the sake of retaining an objective reference for the value judgment. Compared to the former normative theory of art grounded on rules, coherence means for Dahlhaus that each aesthetical moment should be related to a technical and compositional setup. This method's goal, which Dahlhaus calls "immanent criticism" (developed by Dahlhaus in 1983), would allow for distinguishing between right and wrong, without returning to abstract and ahistorical rules, while preserving the link between aesthetical intention and compositional output.

#### ABSOLUTE MUSIC

*The Idea of Absolute Music* is the only book by Dahlhaus that is entirely devoted to a single aesthetic concept. Although the method is not different from that developed in his *Aesthetics of Music*, some features like the multiplicity of the sources scrutinizes, the clear and thorough articulation of the concept's history, the centrality of this idea in aesthetic debates of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, qualify this volume as the central output among Dahlhaus's aesthetic investigations. Absolute music represents for Dahlhaus an "aesthetic paradigm", in an analogous sense to Thomas Kuhn's use of this concept. From a historical and sociological perspective, it constitutes the foundation of the concert culture from the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to

today. Retracing the process of its cultural establishment over the last two centuries is essential for Dahlhaus on three counts. First of all, the affirmation of the paradigm of the absolute is, at the very least, surprising. It, therefore, requires a historical explanation because – as Dahlhaus reminds the reader – “symphony and chamber music in the 19<sup>th</sup> century represented mere enclaves in a ‘serious’ musical culture characterized by opera, romance, virtuoso display, and salon pieces” (Dahlhaus 1989: 3). The second motivation is that current musical habits unconsciously rooted in this paradigm require critical scrutiny. However, there is more than an attempt to unveil the unreflected aesthetic opinions of conventional wisdom in Dahlhaus’s investigation. For him, and this is the third and most important motivation, theoretical reflections about music are not derivative, in the sense of mirroring compositional aims, interpretation and receptions of the musical work. They belong, rather, to the music itself. In Dahlhaus’s words, “for insofar as music does not exhaust itself in the acoustical substrate that underlies it, but only takes shape through categorical ordering of what has been perceived, a change in the system of categories of reception immediately affects the substance of the thing itself” (Dahlhaus 1989: 63).

The emergence and final establishment of this aesthetic paradigm is the result of complex dynamics in which the history of the concept (from Wagner, Hanslick, Nietzsche up to August Halm, Hermann Kretzschmar, Ferruccio Busoni and Ernst Kurth) plays only a secondary role. More important are the transitions and transformations of previous aesthetic paradigms, their coalescence around the emergent theory of instrumental music. Dahlhaus tracks down some of these conversions, from the aesthetics of sensibility to one of indefinite and elated sentiments; from the literary *topos* of ineffability to the romantic idea of music as a language of ineffability; from Schleiermacher’s definition, “religion of the art” to the living experience of ecstatic music contemplation in the writings of Wackenroder and Tieck. However, this paradigm would have been empty, Dahlhaus argues, in the absence of high value works and, moreover, without the powerful concept of musical logic, capable of accounting for the production of musical meaning in instrumental music. The final chapter of the book captures the moment in

which the paradigm of absolute music converges with the theory of *poésie absolue* by Paul Valéry, as a tendency to retreat to the pure forms paired with a religion of the art. This last step turns the linear development of the paradigm full circle: "The paradox, that withdrawal means elevation, is the dialectic at the root of both *poésie absolue* and absolute music" (Dahlhaus 1989: 155).

#### CRITICAL DEBATE

Immediately after his death, two distinguished American musicologists, Philip Gossett (1989) and James Hepokoski (1991), harshly criticized Dahlhaus's historical and theoretical output. The former's attack was focused on the alleged misuse of Weber's concept of ideal type in Dahlhaus's account of 19<sup>th</sup> century music. Hepokoski's critique aimed to undermine the whole "Dahlhaus' project", grounding Dahlhaus's position within the epistemological crisis and sociopolitical ramifications in West German universities in the 1960s and 1970s. From this perspective, he interpreted the restoration of aesthetic categories like autonomous art, musical work of art, absolute music as part of Dahlhaus's plan "to shelter German Romantic canon for ideology critique" and defend the canon of Austro-German autonomous music (Hepokoski 1991: 225). Hepokoski's conclusion that Dahlhaus's writings are the late-postwar product of a divided Germany has been further elaborated by Schreffler (2003). She located the Dahlhaus debate in the concurring cultural and political strategies of the divided Berlin of the 1960s and 1970s, narrowing the focus to the ideological debate on Carl Dahlhaus and his alter ego beyond the wall, Kurth Knepler. In turn, Zagorski (2015) calls into question the outcome of the Dahlhaus's debate originated by his US reception. Drawing on Dahlhaus's critique of historiography's claim to be the account of all music worth considering in a period or a place, Zagorski reevaluates Dahlhaus's interpretation of the Austro-German musical canon. His focus on German culture might be seen "as an effort to rehabilitate that which had been abused and damaged by the National Socialist regimes, whose crimes and brutality he had witnessed firsthand" (Zagorski 2015: 263).

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# MIKEL DUFRENNE

By *Fabrizia Bandi*

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Mikel Dufrenne (1910-1995) can be surely considered one of the main scholars in the tradition of phenomenological aesthetics. His research spans the second half of the last century. By the end of the war, he published his first book, *Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l'existence* (1947), together with the philosopher Paul Ricoeur. He defended his doctoral theses *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique* and *La Personnalité de base* at Sorbonne University in 1953. In the 1950s, Dufrenne began his academic career after years spent teaching in high schools. The 1960s definitively established his name in the world of academia and research. He was co-editor of the *Revue d'Esthétique* (1960-1994) and president of the *Société française d'esthétique* (1971-1994). He became professor at the new Nanterre University in 1964, where he founded the philosophy department. He took part in the protests of 1968, which greatly influenced his thinking. He retired from university in 1974, but continued his philosophical work until his later years.

Mikel Dufrenne's aesthetics is undoubtedly rooted in phenomenology. On the one hand, he ideally carries on the studies conducted by scholars belonging to the first wave of phenomenological aesthetics, such as Waldemar Conrad and Roman Ingarden; on the other hand, he explicitly follows Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre's phenomenology. It is no coincidence that his career opens and closes with two works in this tradition: *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique* (1953) and *L'œil et l'oreille* (1987). Phenomenology is the underlying structure of Dufrenne's thought. Even in a work far from the theory of experience such as *Le Poé-*

*tique* (1963), the genesis of poetic language is investigated in light of the relationship between the subject, in this case the poet, and the world with its hidden meaning. The effective experience of human beings in the world is perhaps the theme that can best capture the spirit of Dufrenne's aesthetics.

Dufrenne's thought is also strongly influenced by contemporary French aesthetics. Especially his conception of the imagination, which runs throughout his philosophical production, is the result of a dialogue with his mentor Alain, with Gaston Bachelard and, of course, with Sartre. However, his aesthetics is certainly first and foremost a phenomenology of perception, directly inspired by Merleau-Ponty's theory. From this perspective, artworks are conceived by Dufrenne as aesthetic objects, which arise from the encounter with the perceiving subject. Thus, seeking a new way to describe the artistic object with respect to classical canons, Dufrenne conceives of artworks primarily as "objects for me" related to the sensible dimension.

Finally, there is a strand within Dufrenne's aesthetics that is devoted to the social and the political. In the work *Art et politique* (1974) he investigates the meaning of art in terms of social and popular commitment. Many of his aesthetic writings are also collected in the three volumes *Esthétique et Philosophie* (1967-1981).

Before embarking on a brief analysis of Dufrenne's major aesthetic works, it is necessary to offer some clarifications. Many scholars pointed out that Dufrenne's philosophy has all too often been reduced to his aesthetics. While this is probably true, it must be nevertheless emphasized that sensible experience is the foundational dimension in which all other questions are rooted. Beside this, it must be also said that Dufrenne's aesthetics is not a self-enclosed sphere. It is clear from the very first texts that his investigation starts from aesthetics and seeks to transcend its own domain towards an original substrate of experience. Over the course of his career Dufrenne gradually clarifies this ontological thought through the expressions *a priori* and Nature. In this respect, the most relevant works are *La notion d'a priori* (1956), *Le Poétique* (1963), and *L'inventaire des a priori* (1981).

Aesthetics undoubtedly remains the constant question in Dufrenne's philosophical career. One of his most important works is still *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique* (1953). In this voluminous book, the philosopher aims to describe the aesthetic experience of artworks through the relationship between object and subject. The philosopher develops a view that reverses the perspective on artworks and focuses on experiencers. Artworks are analysed as aesthetic objects, by describing the structure of the spectator's perception while also giving artworks meaning and value precisely on the basis of this perception. Therefore, beholders acquire an essential role, since works find their fulfilment only in the subjects' experience: they are both *performers* and *witnesses* to the epiphany of aesthetic objects.

Moreover, the French philosopher defines the artwork as a *quasi-subject*. This makes Dufrenne's approach to the artistic question unprecedented. Aesthetic experience is thus a mediated relationship between two human styles: on the one hand, the aesthetic object, through its presence, bears witness to the artist's experience (*quasi-subject*); on the other hand, the beholder phenomenologically constitutes it, grasping the glimmer of meaning and humanity enclosed in it.

However, the core of this text is the analysis of the subject's perception. To perceive, Dufrenne states, is "to know – that is, to discover – a meaning within or beyond appearances which they offer only to the one who knows how to decipher them" (Dufrenne 1973: 335). In the second volume of this work, three phases of the aesthetic experience are defined: presence, representation, and reflection and feeling.

Presence is considered a nascent state, namely the condition of possibility of all experience. It is an unutterable relationship between subject and object, occurring at the bodily level. Though the body is always the founding dimension of every experience – according to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology –, Dufrenne introduces an operating consciousness.

The second phase, representation, is defined by the role of imagination. This is conceived as a condition of possibility for all knowl-

edge, which converts what is acquired by sensible experience into the visible, generating a representation – close to Kantian aesthetics. By breaking the plane of presence, consciousness itself emerges. Thus, the function of representation is to mediate between the presence and the reflective plane. Hence, imagination is conceived as a bridge, an organic passage from the immanence of the presence to the transcendence of consciousness. It makes it possible to go beyond mere sensibility and to develop a kind of reflection that delves into the structure of our experience. Dufrenne's imagination can also be defined as "existential", in Jaspers' sense, since it is that function which, in its transcendental and empirical nature, concretely places humans in the world. It gives them their own mode of existence, which is that of representation.

The third phase of the experience discloses the expressive dimension of the aesthetic object through feeling, conceived as a kind of capacity for receptivity, a sensibility to a certain world. According to Dufrenne, feeling needs to be encompassed by reflection. Reflection operates in a continuous attempt to understand artworks as feeling has grasped them; at the same time, feeling is reinforced by reflection. Hence, the final stage of the aesthetic experience is characterized by the union between feeling and reflecting, in a never-ending dialectical process.

The aesthetic process is coherent whole within the phenomenological frame. The object is grasped by a stratification of gazes, which gradually clarify its meaning without ever being able to fully reach it.

In the last pages of the *Phénoménologie*, the author refers to poetry. The spectator must transform himself into a poet in order to access a pre-conceptual dimension, i.e. to gasp the poetic side of the perceived. Similarly, in *La notion d'a priori* he claims that, in order not to be forced into silence, philosophy must transform itself into poetry. This is the only language capable of giving adequate form to the common ground of subject and object, which the author calls Nature. However, it is only in *Le Poétique* that his reflection on poetry finds fulfilment. Dufrenne describes the essence of poetry by setting out from the experience of the reader, who

is drawn into a “poetic state” both physically and intellectually. In this almost ecstatic moment, the reader comes into contact with a specific world, directly sharing the poet’s experience. At the core of poetic writings, there is the sensible experience of poets, who are able to deeply connect with the inner sense of the world. This sense is, by definition, overflowing and cannot be enclosed in any form but verse composition. In the poetic act, the author describes another side of reality, a sense that is not immediately visible, but immediately ready to be grasped: *Natura naturans* as the original ontological dimension.

After May 1968, Dufrenne became more and more certain that art is charged with promoting cultural revolution, which, in his view, always precedes political revolution (as Marcelle Brisson stated in Lascault 1975). In *Art et politique* (1974) the author explored these two dimensions and their intertwining, in dialogue with thinkers such as Pierre Gaudibert, Jean Baudrillard, and Gilles Deleuze. The philosopher criticises art as a market phenomenon, whereby objects merely acquire an exchange value and become symbols of belonging to a certain social class. When art becomes institutionalised and ideologically charged, it loses its wild dimension: it is “derealised”. Art and politics are linked in *utopian practice*. They both find their original vocation, which starts with *desire*, defined as the awareness of a lack, but also as the productive force and the very process of utopian action. In light of this, art must belong to common people and therefore become a socio-cultural practice: not mass art, but an art belonging to the masses.

The *Trattato di estetica* (1981) sprung from the friendship and collaboration between Dufrenne and Dino Formaggio, one of the exponents of the Milan School. This text, divided into two volumes, “History” and “Theory”, collects a series of contributions from various contemporary scholars, including Gianni Vattimo and Emilio Garroni. Dufrenne offers a rich picture of contemporary French philosophy, presenting himself as the heir to Merleau-Ponty’s aesthetics. He contributes the essays *Arte e società*, *Arte e natura*, and *L’arte e le arti*. These books are particularly valuable today, as they

not only offer us a vivid testimony concerning the major aesthetic themes of the time, but also illustrate how certain issues and authors were perceived within academic circles.

In 1977, Dufrenne took part in a conference in New York dedicated to Merleau-Ponty with a paper entitled *L'œil et l'esprit (Esthétique et philosophie)* (1981). Here he rhetorically wonders why the philosopher chose to focus on the eye, instead of other organs, such as the ear or the hand. By further exploring this perspective, in his last work *L'œil et l'oreille* (1987) Dufrenne discusses the theme of the synaesthesia. After years spent focusing on ontological themes, and political and anthropological issues (*Pour l'homme* [1963], *Art et politique* [1974], *Subversion, perversion* [1977]), Dufrenne returns to the issue of sensible experience. He describes the original unity of the senses: the original dimension is the sensible field. The *synesthetic experience* is conceived as the most radical conceptualization of sensible experience: it designates precisely the original unity of the sensible prior to the specialization of the senses. Dufrenne stresses that this dimension always arises within the perceptual horizon – in the flesh of the world, as he puts it. Within this framework, this original sense is named the *virtual*. This term defines a dimension at hand just behind that which is immediately perceived. Thus, it is not something transcendent, but something immanent in perception. It thus indicates the qualities of objects that are not immediately or consciously perceived, but which fill the real and give it depth. For example, in their joining the visual, the tactile and the sonorous are conceived as a virtual part of the real, since they are not directly felt or visualized.

The notion of the virtual, then, is linked to that of the imaginary: a final, crucial turning point in Dufrenne's conceptualisation of the imagination and its extension. The latter is a theme running throughout his philosophical output. In his early works, imagination plays a marginal role, but gradually the author begins a cautious reappraisal of its functions, assigning it an increasingly essential role. A renewed conception of the imaginary gains ground in Dufrenne's writings from the 1960s onwards. His short essays

*L'imaginaire* and *Vers l'originaire...*, both published in *Esthétique et Philosophie* (1976), explore this issue, opening up a rich reflection on the topic within the author's production. Dufrenne defines the imaginary as that which is possible in reality, but also starting *from* reality. This conception is definitively reaffirmed in his last work, *L'œil et l'oreille*. Here, imagination, beyond its creative function, becomes an actual faculty capable of detecting a sense of the real: the virtual dimension of the given. Through the notion of the virtual as the imaginary immanent to the perceived, the author thus seeks to describe another possible way of relating to the world. Imagination becomes the capacity to open oneself to that which is not immediately perceptible.

As has already emerged, Dufrenne is an extremely wide-ranging author, who enters into dialogue with scholars of contemporary French philosophy. At the beginning of his career, he directly engages with the previous generation of scholars, such as Étienne Souriau and Raymond Bayer, whose theories about artworks are mentioned in the *Phénoménologie*. Most notably, in the article "*La sensibilité génératrice*" published in *Esthétique et philosophie* (1967), Dufrenne discusses Bayer's concept of sensibility as strongly linked to imagination.

Certainly, the dialogue with contemporary phenomenology remains the fundamental point. Dufrenne owes the greatest debt to Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception, but he also maintains a direct intellectual exchange with Sartre throughout his career. According to Sartre, the aesthetic object enters the realm of the imagination, namely of the unreal. On the contrary, for Dufrenne the work of the imagination as an empirical function arises exclusively from the presence of a world, and is indeed constitutive of the perceptive process. Hence, images set out from the visible and never cease to refer to perception itself in order to receive decisive confirmation. Dufrenne also criticizes Sartre's position on the aesthetic experience, which is considered merely an induced dream. Rather than describing a consciousness locked in the imaginary that suddenly re-engages with the real, Dufrenne depicts consciousness in relation to an experience that is rooted in reali-

ty, without necessarily excluding the “dreamlike” aspect. Finally, the spectator loses himself in the perceived and not in the imaginary, as claimed by Sartre. The reflection on imagination is also influenced by Gaston Bachelard’s idea of a realizing imagination. He distinguishes dreams from *reverie*, namely a form of conscious and controlled imagination far from the dangers of fantasy. In *L’œil et l’oreille*, the meaning of imagination comes closer to this notion. Ultimately, the concept of the imaginary regains its positiveness and richness, in opposition to Sartre’s theory.

In the short essay *Pour une philosophie non théologique*, published as a supplement to the second edition of *Le Poétique* in 1973, Dufrenne condemns the “philosophies of absence”. In opposition to the perspectives of Jacques Derrida and Maurice Blanchot, the philosopher reaffirms an ontology of presence, at the centre of which there are always human beings in their perceiving and aesthetic existence. Dufrenne discusses the idea of *désir* as a relationship with the impossible, a notion borrowed from Blanchot, yet without the negative aura the latter assigns to it. Directly relevant to this conceptualization of desire are the themes that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari discuss in *L’Anti-Œdipe. Capitalisme et schizophrénie* (1972). Here the idea of desire retains its positive value, since it is not immediately related to a lack, but rather to the productive strength of reality. Hence, philosophy is not the waiting for a *parousia*, but a search conducted within the *sensible presence* by human beings, who feel a desire for a total presence, which is to say for an encounter with Nature.

Mikel Dufrenne has been absent from academic debate for many years, both in France and abroad. However, in recent years many scholars have published several studies on this philosopher, highlighting different aspects of his thought.

Maryvonne Saison, Professor Emeritus at Nanterre University, has established herself as the leading Dufrenne scholar in France, starting with the contribution *Imaginaire et anarchie* in *Mélanges Mikel Dufrenne: Vers une esthétique sans entraves* (1975). She was the editor of the book *Mikel Dufrenne et les arts* (1998). In 2018, Saison published *La Nature Artiste. Mikel Du-*



*frenne de l'esthétique au politique*. Here she draws an articulated picture of Dufrenne's thought. She defines the philosopher's aesthetics as "atypical", since it goes beyond works of art themselves, while still dealing with them. Hence, according to Saison, the *Phénoménologie* remains a unique work with no continuation. One of the most interesting parts of her book is that in which she takes the reader back to some of the lesser-known short texts pertaining to Dufrenne's aesthetics. For example, the article on Robert Lapoujade's exhibition (1961), which was published in *Revue d'esthétique*, as follow-up to Sartre's text for the exhibition catalogue.

In her work *La percezione armata. Esperienza estetica e immaginazione in Mikel Dufrenne* (2018), Fabrizia Bandi emphasizes the author's aesthetics as a theory of experience and critically analyses the stages of aesthetic experience developed in the *Phénoménologie*. She also offers a cross-sectional look at the author's works, analysing the evolution of the role of imagination.

A close look at various themes and concepts in Dufrenne's aesthetics is provided by the collected volume *Mikel Dufrenne et l'esthétique. Entre phénoménologie et philosophie de la nature* (2016) edited by Adnen Jdey and Jean-Baptiste Dussert. In some contributions, the author is also read in relation to Heidegger's thought.

Roberto Revello has edited the Italian translation of *Pour une philosophie non théologique* (2015), giving the text a life of its own, independent from *Le Poétique*. In the introductory essay, Elio Franzini wisely reconstructs the fundamental elements in the author's thought, framing the text within Dufrenne's ontological horizon. An essay by Revello himself concludes the volume with a detailed study about Dufrenne and Derrida's thought.

Frédéric Jacquet devotes the first part of *Naître au monde. Essai sur la philosophie de Mikel Dufrenne* (2014) to the author's aesthetic thought, while the rest of the text analyses Dufrenne's cosmological and anthropological themes. These pages highlight the role of Dufrenne's aesthetic reduction in the aesthetic experience of the *Phénoménologie*. Emphasising the notion of existential *a priori*,

Jacquet argues that Dufrenne transcended both Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's perspective, by combining the transcendental and personal nature of subjectivity with corporeality.

In *Poetiche del sensibile. Parole e fenomeni tra esperienza estetica e figurazione* (2013) Rita Messori focused on the relevance of the poetic language in relation to the ontological dimension in the author's perspective. Also, in *Un'etica della parola: tra Ricoeur e Dufrenne* (2011) she analysed the original bond of *aisthesis*, *poesis* and *ethos* in Dufrenne's philosophy.

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# ECOLOGICAL AESTHETICS AND HAPTIC EXPERIENCE

By Nicola Perullo

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It. *Aptico*; Fr. *Haptique*; Germ. *Haptik*. By virtue of the Greek etymology of the word “haptikos” (ἅπτικός, “able to come in contact with”, from ἅπτω (*háptō*, “to touch”), haptic experience bespeaks a kind of tactile perception. Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term “haptic” indicates a peculiar touch, assuming a specific meaning which is not a mere equivalent nor a generic synonym of the latter. The “haptic” goes beyond the grasping of the hand, encompassing the whole kinesthetic processes and all the senses. At first, this notion has been used, with different meanings and in different contexts, especially by psychologists, theorists of perception and phenomenologists. Today, however, the term “haptic” is known especially for its adoption by technological, medical, and prosthetic fields, as well as by applied psychology, cognitive sciences, and engineering. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, philosophers – particularly in aesthetics – have occasionally opted for it to suggest a trans-sensorial and cross-modal perception. Here, haptic is an indicator of a relational modality of making experience; a modality that overcomes the conventional dualism between subject and object.

## THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

In the sense here addressed, “ecological aesthetics” has not to be understood as a specific domain dealing with the natural environment, but as a comprehensive paradigm that has to do with a modality of perception. One of main peculiarities of “Ecological Aesthetics” (Gambaro 2020) consists in the fundamental importance

attached to the notion of experience as an immersive field. More precisely, ecological aesthetics claims for the experiential nature of aesthetics in itself. Such a belief has brought to highlight its immersive and relational character, which also corresponds to the development of a paradigm that is alternative to the prevailing modern, Kantian aesthetics. This model originates from issues originally proposed by John Dewey's notion of "aesthetic experience", from the phenomenological approach of late Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and from the "ecological approach" to perception elaborated by James J. Gibson. Since the 1970's Arnold Berleant has proposed to connote the "aesthetic field" in terms of a "participatory model" and as a practice of "constant engagement" (Berleant 2013). In the first place, a "participatory" and "engaged" aesthetics challenges the assumptions according to which aesthetic judgement calls for a distance between the subject and the object of aesthetic appreciation; secondly, it questions another characteristic often associated with that of distance, namely disinterestedness (Berleant 1994). In the Kantian aesthetics, disinterestedness is one of the keystones, as it is usually considered necessary for aesthetic judgement and appreciation. Ecological aesthetics, instead, calls for a collusive and an intimate model of aesthetic experience, shifting from "critical distance" to "critical intimacy" (Miles 2018). This model can also be defined as relational, and ecological aesthetics is, precisely, a relational aesthetics, positing a *with-y*, that is, participative, implicative and interdependent perceptual modality (Perullo 2020). This conception is based on the assumption that the aesthetic experience happens and grows *before* objectivation, being itself a relationship (Matteucci 2019). It is within such framework that haptic comes into play.

## THE HAPTIC

Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term "haptic" indicates a peculiar tactility, assuming a specific meaning which is not a mere equivalent of touch. The "haptic" goes beyond the grasping of the hand, encompassing all the senses and the whole kinesthetic processes.

The first theory about haptic as active touch has to be attributed to Ernst Weber, master of Fechner and author of *De Tactu* (1834) and *Die Lehre vom Tastsinn und Gemeingefühl* (1851). Later, further investigations have been carried out by David Katz, for example in his *Der Aufbau der Taswelt* (1925) (Prytherch 2002). In 1950, the Hungarian psychologist Géza Révész, in *Psychology and the Art of the Blind* (Révész 1950), examined the relationship between the haptic and art. Here, the connections between blindness and artistic creation are analyzed using the example of sculpture. A few years later, James J. Gibson proposed the notion of “haptic” drawing a distinction between passive and active touch (Gibson 1962, 1966). According to him, the difference between passive and active touch lies in the intentionality of our exploratory behaviors of the latter. (Ballesteros, Heller 2008). Over the last decades, all these pioneering studies have delved into deeper, and been proved by studies in applied psychology, cognitive sciences, and engineering (Gopnik 2016) The field of haptic is increasingly wide, but heterogeneous and somehow ambiguous; all the more so if we consider that the most common contemporary applications of the haptic do not so much concern philosophy but digital technology, information technology and robotics (from medical prostheses to games), as well as media theories.

In philosophy, the haptic does not so much have a specific place, but it can rather be traced here and there, from Democritus to Jean-Luc Nancy (Crispin 2014). Aesthetics and art began to deal with the haptic with respect to sight and visual art. In 1896, Bernard Berenson wrote of “tactile values” with regard to Florentine Renaissance painting (Berenson 1959). Alois Riegl, in turn, in 1902 – resuming the distinction between optical vision and haptic vision proposed by Hildebrand in *The Problem of Form in painting and sculpture* (1893) – used it to highlight on the one hand that there exists a tactile and close seeing, on the other hand that touch is not limited to the hand (Riegl 2000).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the question also affects sculpture, whose need to be considered as a tactile art had already been amply argued by

Herder in his *Plastic* (1778). “*Prière de toucher*”, Marcel Duchamp and André Breton exhort on the cover of the Surrealism Catalog for the 1947 Paris International Exposition (Pinotti 2009). A few years earlier, moreover, the Futurist Manifesto on *Tactilism* (1921), albeit without mentioning haptic, proposed a liberation of touch through a new sensitivity aimed at conceiving it not as one of the senses but the transversal super-sense. But what is at stake in the question of touch, and why suggest, in its place, the alternative of the haptic? The question has been addressed especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century French philosophy.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, haptic is a better word than touch, because it highlights the potentiality – not merely retinocentric – of the eye. The haptic space can be visual, auditory, no less than tactile (Deleuze, Guattari 1987). Following such a perspective, the notion of “haptic space” has been brought in the media theory (Bruno 2014). In a dialogue with Jean-Luc Nancy, who proposed the haptic as the fading of *res extensa* an extension occupied by objects, Derrida claimed that a “pure” haptic cannot exist, deconstructing it as just another attempt at the metaphysics of presence (Derrida 2005).

Such interpretation of the haptic has entered also the field of social sciences and black studies. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, for example, define hapticality “the capacity to feel through others, to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you.” (Harney, Moten 2013).

#### THE HAPTIC AS EXPERIENCE-WITH

The common ground for ecological aesthetics and haptic experience lies in the assumption that relationship is prior to the distinction between subject and object. As “ecological” indicates the immersive and sensible nature of perception, “haptic” indicates, in turn, the relational process, in which perception operates on all the senses at the same time, and experience is a continuum: “all its dimensions are always all there, in different actual-virtual configurations, expressing different



distributions of potentials.” (Massoumi 2008). Haptic experience suggests that a radical relationship can be described in terms of experience-*with* instead of an experience-*of* something. In such a model, aesthetic perception, as it is processual, situated, and engaged, it is also, by definition *ecological*; haptic space, moreover, fades *res extensa* as an extension occupied by objects.

We can illustrate this with the difference between haptic and optic perception. If the latter has to do with the gesture that solidifies the operational into the thematic, the former tries to correspond with the making process itself and with the flux.

The conventional paradigm of aesthetic experience, based upon the subject-object model, expresses the modality of experience-*of* something, that is, an optical (retinoic) approach, in which one perceives and appreciates the *content* of the objects – their quality – as the vector of aesthetic appreciation. Conversely, the aesthetic experience according to the relational model expresses the modality of experience-*with*. When Merleau-Ponty writes about the painter’s sight, he refers to this experience; to see the sky means to see *with* the sky, to merge with its light and presence in a relationship of reciprocal affection (Ingold 2015). The haptic approach is a collusive and engaged perception, according to which the objects emerge *through* the relationship and their ecological, situated perspective. Here, appreciation and judgment do not refer to aesthetic qualities as *content* of something, but, rather, as encounters, as *with-y* phenomena, as “aisthema” (Matteucci 2019).

The haptic experience entails further relevant consequences. Notably, it suggests to overcome the sheer barrier between the inner and the outer, as well as between the mind and the world. The perceiver is never in isolation. In other words, haptic perception corresponds to extended mind and, conversely, that extended mind is always aesthetic. Aesthetic/extended mind is narrative and not explicative; it is not a centered and enclosed perception, rather but open and diffused (Perullo 2020).

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# ETHICAL CRITICISM OF ART

By Alessandro Giovannelli

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It. *Critica etica dell'arte*; Fr. *Critique éthique de l'art*; Germ. *Ethische Kunstkritik*; Span. *Crítica ética del arte*. The ethical criticism of art – often referred to as simply “ethical criticism” – is the art-critical practice of admitting ethical considerations about artworks within artistic evaluation. More precisely, “ethical criticism” considers an artwork’s ethical merits or demerits as relevant to its assessment as art.

The interest of philosophers for the possible relationships between art and morality dates back to Plato’s condemnation, in Book X of the *Republic*, of the representational arts as morally suspicious. In contrast, in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, successful tragedies – and by extension, today, a wide range of artistic genres – appear to be seen as offering opportunities for moral growth. And, in *The Art of Poetry*, Horace (*Ars p.*, v. 332) introduced the maxim for which poetry – yet, again, by extension the arts more generally – ought to *delight* and *instruct*.

Especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, philosophers and art critics have also been wary of positing any relationship between the artistic and the ethical. Pierre Jules Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) made famous the “art for art’s sake” (fr. *l’art pour l’art*) motto, which became a slogan for such nineteenth-century literary figures as Charles Baudelaire, in France, and Oscar Wilde in England, and for Walter Pater (1839-1894) and the so-called aesthetic movement, or *aestheticism*. By insisting on the necessity for art to be judged according to strictly artistic criteria, and by con-

demning the attribution of any other duties to art or artists – most notably toward morality – aestheticism is, then, one way to reject ethical criticism.

#### THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

The contemporary debate within analytic aesthetics reflects, if with greater sophistication and a wider range of positions, the divide between those who see the ethical as at least sometimes relevant to the artistic, and those who conceive of the two realms as fully independent of each other. Likewise, contemporary debate has also tackled the topic of the transformative – educational or corruptive – powers of art. The renewed interest in ethical criticism is mainly due to Noël Carroll (e.g., 1996, and in Levinson, ed. 1998) and Berys Gaut (in Levinson, ed. 1998, and 2007), who have differently defended the thesis that artworks' aesthetic value is affected, positively or negatively, by their praise or blameworthy character – for Carroll, sometimes, for Gaut virtually always – and to Jerrold Levinson's influential edited collection (Levinson, ed. 1998). Such a renewed interest followed the attempt, by Wayne Booth (1988), of rescuing ethical criticism from a theoretical neglect that, he argued, never matched actual literary criticism practice. It must also be seen in connection to the advocacy of views about the place of literature in one's ethical growing, whether in an Aristotelian fashion (as in Nussbaum 1990; see also Carroll 2002) or within a Kant-influenced framework (as in Eldridge 1989). Relatedly, but by applying notions derived from cognitive science – significantly the mechanism known as mental simulation – Gregory Currie (e.g., in Levinson, ed., 1998) has attributed to our imaginative engagement with fictions a significant role for the improvement of our understanding of others, of ourselves, and of ethically relevant situations. Skeptics on the relationship between ethical and artistic value include T. J. D. Diffey (1997), Jerome Stolnitz (1992), and, in more complex and less a dismissive way, Peter Lamarque (1996).

For the most part, contemporary debate has unfortunately occurred within an unclear conceptual framework. One source of confusion is failure to clarify whether the claims are being advanced in regard to artworks' *aesthetic* or, instead, *artistic* value.

Of course, there are theoretical positions that reduce the value of art to aesthetic value (e.g., Zangwill 2001), and positions that conceive of aesthetic value in ultimately artistic terms (e.g., Gaut 2007). However, the debate on ethical criticism, as one on the legitimacy of an art critical practice, ought to regard the value of art as art – henceforth *artistic* value – whatever the conception of such a value.

Most significantly, lack of conceptual clarity has affected the distinctions between allegedly opposed positions. To their credit, Anderson and Dean (1998) state their “moderate autonomism” clearly, as the view that *never*, in a context of art criticism, ethical reasons count as artistic reasons. Such a view advocates what truly is a form of autonomism, in the sense of considering artistic value as fully independent from ethical value (cf. Giovannelli 2007). The temptation of seeing it as a “moderate” approach comes from the way in which such terminology was introduced and used by Carroll and others, given the theoretical possibility of denying that artworks can be judged ethically. In fact, the view for which artworks are so to speak shielded from ethical evaluation could be best named “aesthetic isolationism” (cf. Giovannelli 2013a). Whatever the terminology one adopts, a discussion on the possible relationships between artistic and ethical value arises only if artworks can be judged from the ethical point of view – a principle Giovannelli has dubbed *ethical amenability* (2007).

For those who accept that ethical value can be among the determinants of artistic value, one of the fundamental questions should be whether the relationship between the two values occurs systematically – with merits/demerits of one sort counting as merits/demerits of the other sort – or not. In that regard, a possible position, including (but not coextensive with) what Gaut (2007) calls “contextualism,” and which might be helpfully named “particularism” (cf. Giovannelli 2013b), is that of accepting that, on occasion, a work’s ethical status can affect its artistic worth – e.g., a work is worse, artistically, because of an ethical flaw –, yet with no generalization possible. For the particularist, situations ought to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Such is the

view Daniel Jacobson has defended as “the antitheoretical view” – namely, that “a moral defect or merit in an artwork can figure *either* as an aesthetic defect or merit, or can be aesthetically irrelevant” (2006, 344; see also 1997). It is quite significant to note how theories that are meant to be in opposition to an approach like Jacobson’s, are formulated in ways that might make them, in fact, forms of particularism. Carroll’s formulation of his own thesis (which he dubs “moderate moralism”), for which “sometimes” ethical evaluation bears on artistic evaluation, underdetermines the theory, as such a statement is compatible with Carroll’s moralist aspirations but also with particularism. Matthew Kieran has defended what he calls “ethicism,” the view that ethically praiseworthy works – he glosses – “deepen our understanding and appreciation” (2003, 58; cf. Kieran 1996), and are better works of art for that reason. Yet, he has also claimed that, in some works, their *immoral* character may promote “the intelligibility and reward of the imaginative experience” they proffer (2003, 56-57). If so, Kieran’s position, too, might fall under particularism (as indeed Jacobson 2006 notes).

The tendency towards particularism might partly be the result of theorists’ concentrating on specific artistic examples (as done, e.g., by Mary Deveraux in Levinson, ed. 1998, yet indeed by many others). Yet, particularist temptations creep up even within views that make the most comprehensive claims. Gaut, for instance, defends what he calls “ethicism” as the thesis for which artworks’ ethical merits and ethical flaws, when artistically relevant, are merits and flaws of the artworks when valued as art. Such a statement, then, advocates the existence of a systematic relationship between ethical and artistic value across the realm of art. Yet, when explaining his added clause, for which the relationship obtains only when “aesthetically relevant,” he adds that artistic relevance may have to be decided, within an art-critical context, on a case-by-case basis (Gaut 2007, 87-89).

Despite the widespread tendency towards particularism, the logical space of possible positions includes the possibility of confining the moralist claim to only certain kinds of works, that



is, to certain genres or otherwise art-critically relevant categories. The practice of ethical criticism, then, could be endorsed only with respect to such categories, or, in any event, within such categories the relationship between the two values be considered systematic. Carroll himself suggests this type of approach when he refers to “kinds of artworks – genres if you will – that naturally elicit moral responses [...], genres [for which] moral considerations are pertinent, even though there ere may be other genres” for which such considerations are not pertinent (1996, 227). Similarly, but in reverse manner, Anne Eaton (2012) argues that some narratives that endorse morally blameworthy characters have a moral defect that, however, counts as an artistic achievement. Again, the claim could be relativized to the art-critically relevant category of works that include such characters and successfully portray them as at once morally despicable and attractive.

Whatever the scope of a theory, it ought to be specified which ethical respect it addresses, as artworks can be ethically assessed from different points of view. Most notably, a work can be judged for the perspective it embodies, or its effects on the beholder, or the modes of its production (cf. Giovannelli 2007). Most theorists have been clearly looking at the first kind of ethical assessment; they endorse, that is, what Nannicelli (2020) calls “perspectivism.” As seen above, several theorists have also been making claims about the possible cognitive gains (or the detriments) that engaging with certain artworks can bring about. Though in itself the corresponding ethical merits or flaws – of works that can be deemed ethically enlightening or corruptive – is distinct from judging a work’s perspective, several theorists have linked, and sometimes confused, those two different kinds of considerations. On the other hand, ethical criticism based on a work’s modes of production has so far received limited attention (with Cyril Barrett 1982, Alessandro Giovannelli 2010, and Ted Nannicelli 2020 as exceptions).

The vast majority of arguments in support of a relationship between ethical and artistic assessment refer to some notion of response or other, including the quality of the imaginative expe-

rience had when engaging with a work. Carroll claims that moral works will tend to receive “uptake” – that is, audiences will respond in the ways intended – while immoral works will tend to fail at receiving uptake. The issue is related to the phenomenon known as “imaginative resistance,” which Carroll explicitly mentions – that is, resistance to imagining what we find (or would find in real life) to be ethically repugnant (cf. Gendler 2000). Gaut construes an argument on the notion of meritedness of responses, with morally praiseworthy works meriting the responses they aim at, and morally blameworthy works failing to merit them. Kieran looks at how the experience proffered by a work might be enlightening (because of qualities that make a work ethically praise- or instead blame-worthy). In these and other accounts, however, it is often not quite clear, *what* makes certain forms of engagement, say, problematic; indeed, it is often just assumed that it be so (for skepticism on such an assumption, see Cooke 2014). The issue is interesting in itself, for it invites reflection on the scope of ethical evaluation (is endorsing evil, albeit just in imagination, ethically problematic and, if so, why?); it also has implications outside the realm of art, e.g., in regard to some pornographic representations. Nonetheless, it might turn up that the issue is after all not that relevant to the question of the legitimacy of ethical criticism. First, when ethical criticism targets the modes of production, the available arguments will unlikely appeal to the ethical status of imaginative states. Second, even when pursuing arguments within a perspectivist approach, there might be no reason to link either the construal of a work’s perspective or its ethical evaluation to the mental states a work aims at producing or their alleged ethical status. Giovannelli (2013a), for example, has argued that the very attribution of ethical judgment to a work, when legitimate, reveals an artistically relevant commitment of the work to endorsing an ethical perspective as correct. If so, then artworks’ succeeding or failing in such an ethical respect – that is, according to the perspective’s status – may turn out counting as, respectively, an artistic merit or demerit, quite independently of any reference to responses or imaginative states of those who interact with the work.

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## LUXURY

By Lambert Wiesing

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It. *Lusso*; Fr. *Luxe*; Germ. *Luxus*; Span. *Lujo*. A Luxury is a thing or way of life whose production, possession or practice involves a waste of time, resources or labour, or excessive technical complexity. Werner Sombart offered an apt and much cited definition in 1913: "Luxury is an expenditure that exceeds necessity" (Sombart 1996: 5).

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A characteristic feature of the concept of luxury is that it is employed both descriptively and normatively, in everyday as in academic usage. That is: both in order to identify things as involving unnecessary effort as well as to evaluate them in light of this excessive effort. In its normative sense, the concept of Luxury can be used either positively, extolling something as noteworthy by calling it a luxury, or negatively, criticising such things for their wastefulness, thus rejecting them. Examples for each of the three usages luxury would be: if listening to records is called a luxury, it is, as a rule, merely a descriptive statement of the fact that an unnecessarily complicated way is being used to listen to music; if an advertisement describes a hotel as being a luxury resort, then it is to extol the immense efforts to which it is willing to go; if, on the other hand, a political report on poverty refers to the life of luxury of the rich, then their sumptuous way of life is being criticised as wasteful and reckless.

Although, historically, luxury has been praised (cf. eg. Hume 1993) as often as it has been condemned (cf. eg. Rousseau 1979), the fundamental question of what luxury actually is has not been one of the classic topics of philosophy. This is as much the case within aesthetics as for philosophy as a whole: its history offers no systematic discussion of luxury, preventing us from distinguishing any traditions or positions within an aesthetics of luxury. All there is are scattered and unheeded calls for such a systematic debate (Görland 1926). We are thus faced with the following situation: insofar as luxury has been the object of research in the humanities, it has either been from the standpoint of the social sciences (Bourdieu 1984; Roberts, Armitage 2019) or, in a hermeneutical context, in literary and cultural studies (Roberts, Armitage 2016; Armitage 2020; Weder, Bergengruen 2011; Signer, Weder, Wittemann 2021). The latter attempt to understand historical conceptions of luxury and their respective social and cultural meanings, primarily by means of textual analysis.

#### THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

This traditional situation, which is thoroughly dissatisfactory from a philosophical or aesthetic perspective, has recently undergone a significant transformation. Luxury has become an explicit object of philosophical aesthetics. This shift, which is becoming increasingly apparent, is the result of two independent developments.

The first precondition for the discovery of luxury as an independent aesthetic phenomenon is linguistic in nature. More precisely: it starts with the growing acknowledgment of a pervasive linguistic confusion and attempts at its resolution. Both in everyday and academic usage the expression "luxury" was, and still is, also used to ascribe to a thing a high degree of comfort or a significant prestige value. Luxury is thus sometimes interpreted as a purely sensual phenomenon – as the experience of comfort and convenience – and sometimes as a purely symbolic phenomenon – as a form of social "self-presentation/self-aggrandisement" by means of conspicuous consumption. To refer to both phenomena of com-

fort and convenience and of prestige as luxury leads, however, to inaccuracies and confusion, as was already noted and criticised both by linguists (Mühlmann 1975) and by philosophers (Adorno 1981). In order to proceed with an examination of luxury, it must be distinguished factually and linguistically in two directions: luxury must neither be identified with comfort nor with prestige – even if this is often done, particularly within sociology (Bourdieu 1984; Veblen 1994). It is uncontroversial that the terms “Protz [pomp]” and “conspicuous consumption” can be used synonymously – and can thus be distinguished from luxury in the same way as prestige: if the extreme effort of a thing or practice serves the attainment of comfort and convenience or social self-presentation, then the extreme effort is a necessary one and not, as is the case with phenomena of luxury, superfluous and unnecessary effort.

The second precondition for the discovery of luxury as an aesthetic phenomenon *sui generis* is a break with the received opinion that only sensual acts such as seeing, hearing, smelling or, further, imagining can be performed for their own sake – that is: enforcement-oriented – and thus allow an aesthetic experience. This view is ubiquitous to the aesthetics of reception from Kant to the present (Seel 1997). Within academic aesthetics, the act of possessing something – which is quite distinct from the concept of ownership and property – has not hitherto been considered as a possible mode of intentional reference to the world that is carried out for its own sake and can thus afford the possessor an aesthetic experience through possession for possession’s sake. This view has been called into question in recent years; the discovery of luxury as an aesthetic phenomenon *sui generis* is part of a larger movement within contemporary aesthetics that one might put under the heading “aesthetics of possession” (Ulrich and Wiesing 2018). From a historical perspective, the possibility of ascribing the formation of an aesthetic experience to the act of possession was first proposed by Walter Benjamin (1969). In this regard, the numerous works of Wolfgang Ulrich (2008; 2016) are of particular pertinence. He analyses the phenomenon of “Sieg-erkunst [victor’s art]” as one in which possession is substituted for the traditional act of reception.

Within the aesthetics of possession an emphatically phenomenological account of luxury as a form of aesthetic experience has recently been proposed (Wiesing 2018; 2019). The central thesis of this account is that whether something is a luxury cannot be determined by means of a scientific examination of the object; as is the case for art, there are no measurable properties of an object that can be made responsible for something being a luxury, viz. a work of art. Luxury is a phenomenon because luxury is always *luxury for somebody* – namely for the person for whom the possession of an object is accompanied by an aesthetic experience. The aesthetics of luxury thus stands in the tradition of the “feeling of life [Lebensgefühl]” Kant propounds in the *Critique of Judgement*, a description of a lived experience “in which the subject feels itself” (2000: §1). In moments of aesthetic experience a human becomes conscious of the specific abilities that make them human and distinguish them from animals. Such an aesthetic experience as an anthropological feeling of life constitutes itself – quite in accordance with Kant (2000: §9) – after judging something to be purposeful. Something can only be luxury for somebody if they previously deemed it to be irrational, inappropriate, excessive and, therefore, unreasonable in the effort it involves. Things to which somebody considers themselves to be entitled or whose effort is deemed to be appropriate cannot be experienced as luxury by that person. The question of what these things actually are depends heavily on the social and historical situation: something that is excessively elaborate for one is a trivial commonplace for the other. *Qua* their humanity, however, all humans have the ability to react to the result of their judgement of the appropriateness of a particular thing. Nobody is forced to do what they deem to be appropriate and reasonable. The experience of luxury is the product of a statement on what is considered to be reasonable; it is the result of a gesture of defiance against the dictates of rationality and the conventions of possession. Since the conscious rejection of and transgression against the usual, the recognised, the fitting and, in particular, the bourgeois notions of what is appropriate, for the sake of aesthetic experience, is programmatic for Dadaism, one could describe luxury as “the Dadaism of possession” (Wiesing 2019: 51). Particularly in



societies that are governed by strong notions of efficiency and effectiveness, possession of the unreasonably excessive is – according to Adorno – positively a chance for emancipation, an “escape [from] the slavery of utility” (Adorno 1981: 80). As an aesthetic experience of autonomy, luxury can, like all other experiences, be experienced in private and is thereby distinct from the necessarily public aesthetic self-presentation of pomp.

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# VOICE

By Michela Garda

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It. *voce*; Fr. *voix*; Germ. *Stimme*; Span. *voz*. In the twentieth century, the voice, as an abstract concept, has paradoxically become a central topic in philosophical debates after Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence, based on what he calls phonocentrism. In two seminal books (Derrida 1974 and 2011), he deconstructed both Rousseau's and Husserl's claims to install the voice in a metaphysical place, where it resonates with plenitude (Rousseau) and truth (Husserl). Beyond the broad philosophical implications of this critique, the comment on Rousseau's *Essais Sur l'origin des Langues*, at the core of Derrida's *Grammatology*, constitutes an implicit caveat to any regressive opposition between oral and written, voice and language, hidden in the resurgent interest in orality and, in the years to come, in the claim to uncover the "original voice". Drawing on Rousseau's narrative about the loss of the originary energy in sung speech through articulation, Derrida observes that "[t]his fissure is not among others. It is *the* fissure: the necessity of interval, the harsh law of spacing. It could not endanger song except by being inscribed in it from its birth and in its essence. Spacing is not the accident of a song. Or rather, as accident and accessory, fall and supplement, it is also that without which, strictly speaking, the song would not have come into being. In the *Dictionary*, the interval is a part of the definition of song. It is, therefore, so to speak, an originary accessory and an essential accident. Like writing. Rousseau says it without wishing to say it" (Derrida 1974: 200).

## THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

The philosophical question about the voice and its relationship to language has been the object of Giorgio Agamben's long-term investigation culminating in his *Experimentum vocis* (Agamben 2018: 1-29). Drawing on the twofold articulation of language (according to the different terminologies, name and discourse, *langue* and *parole*, semiotic and semantic, sense and denotation), which traces back to Plato and Aristotle and has been further elaborated by linguistics and the philosophy of language, Agamben's scrutiny focuses on the fact that an insurmountable opposition splits these two levels: no passage can be discerned from one to another. From Agamben's perspective, however, this fissure locates the voice as the place of this articulation and defines the investigation of its elusive nature as the most urgent philosophical task. The Aristotelian distinction between the voice of the animal and that of man dwells, likewise, in this same place. Commenting upon several Aristotelian passages about *phone*, he captures the process of anthropogenesis in the "splitting of the animal voice and the positioning of logos in the very place of phone". (Agamben 2018: 15). Language arises, therefore, from an "operation on the animal voice", an inscription of single elements, letters (*grammata*), in its undifferentiated continuum. According to Agamben's perspective, the origin of this event cannot be historically pinpointed. The process of anthropogenesis is still ongoing and it happens according to the figure of *exceptio*: "Just as the natural life of man is included in politics through its very exclusion in the form of bare life, so human language (which, after all, according to Aristotle, founds the political community [...] takes place through an exclusion- inclusion of the 'bare voice' [...] in the logos" (Agamben 2018: 19). The voice, far from claiming the primacy of absolute presence, discloses a paradoxical relation with absence. Its relationship with language is a negative one: "it gives rise to it, by disappearing" (Agamben 2018: 28). The subject is, therefore, the result and the witness of this contact without articulation. Agamben's reading of Aristotle is an explicit critique of Derrida's tenet about the intrinsic phonocentrism of Western metaphysics. Mladen Dolar (1996) advances precisely the same critique, however, from a different perspective. In his ac-

count, phonocentrism is a marginal theme, a detail in the history of metaphysics. There is a different multi-millennial metaphysical history of the voice, where the voice is considered to be dangerous, threatening meanwhile, the seductive and feminine opposite of the logos. A third sense of the voice complicates the polarity between voice and logos, that is, the voice of the Father, "the voice that inherently sticks to logos itself, the voice that commands and binds, the voice of God" (Dolar 1996: 25). If one compares these traditional interpretations of the voice, it becomes clear that it is impossible to grasp the voice as an object.

As the object of an impossible investigation, the voice was also the result of the challenge of phonology. Segmenting speech into phonemes, the smallest linguistic entities, resulted in a total reduction of the voice into language. The diagnosis of the linguistic undertaking as a point of no return in the speculation about the voice is, in turn, the catalyst for a new reflection, for Dolar, as for Derrida and Agamben. Unlike the last two, Dolar refers to the psychoanalytic reflection of the voice, particularly that of Lacan. This move turns out to be very fruitful in managing the voice's theoretical intractability after the linguistic turn. The remainder left by the phonological operation coincides with the Lacanian *objet petit (a)*, the object of (unattainable) desire, the leftover of symbolic castration. Dolar's investigation of the pre-linguistic and post-linguistic sounds pinpoints the two outer limits of the voice. The former points towards "the zero-point of signification, the incidence of meaning, itself not meaning anything, the point around which other – meaningful – voices can be ordered" (Dolar 2006). The post-linguistic voice, singing, which is in turn highly structured, claims to have a sort of "surplus meaning" which cannot be expressed in words. Therefore, aesthetics is always in danger of transforming the voice into a fetish object. In conclusion, like an arrow, the voice shows the direction toward signification and, at the same time, discloses the wound inflicted by the assumption of the symbolic order, to which it owes its power of fascination. For Dolar, the object voice, which is not an immaterial entity and cannot be reduced to the materiality which sustains it, can be investigated in different practices, considering its inherent hybridity. However,

aesthetics cannot properly address it – as stated above – because of the danger of its fetishization. His Lacanian conception of the body makes him an uncompromising critic of those trends which reintroduce the body in the theoretical reflection, once neglected and repressed by the philosophical tradition.

The possible danger of “extolling the voice as an extension of the body” (*Afterword* to Feldman and Zeitlin 2019: 347) can only partially be individuated in the complex and ambiguous definition of the “grain of the voice” as proposed by Roland Barthes. This critique resonates with Barthes’s passionate description of the bodily grounding of the voice “something which is directly the singer’s body, brought by one and the same movement to your ear from the depths of the body’s cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilage, and from the depth of the Slavonic language, as if a single skin lined the performer’s inner flesh and the music he sings” (Barthes 1991: 270). This and similar Barthian passages mark the entrance of the sonorous voice, produced by “a throat of flesh” in the theoretical discussion of the voice. Nevertheless, this bodily account of the voice is intertwined with two psychoanalytic reference points: the distinction between *pheno*- and *geno*-song (borrowed and adapted from Julia Kristeva) and the Lacanian object *a*. The *geno*-song is the “space in which the significations germinate ‘from within the language and its very materiality’; this a signifying function alien to communicate, to representation (of feelings), to expression; it is that culmination (or depth) of production where melody actually works on language – not what it says but the voluptuous pleasure of its signifier-sounds, of its letters: explores how language works and identifies itself with that labor. *Geno*-song, is in a very simple word which must be taken very seriously: the *diction* of language” (Barthes 1991: 271). For Barthes, as for Dolar, it is impossible to tackle the voice in a specific scientific field because of it being a leftover, a supplement, a lapsus, the object (*a*). He vindicates, however, an erotic relationship (verging on fetishism?) with the voice as an object *a*, claiming that there is no neutral voice, and if that neutrality could occur, it would be terrifying “as if we were to discover a frozen world, one in which desire was dead” (Barthes 1991: 280).

Adriana Cavarero, in turn, developed a philosophy of the voice grounded in the singularity and unrepeatability of voices. In comparison with Derrida's speculation on the *phone*, Caravero develops an opposite point. She identifies, at the core of Western thought, a process of devocalization of logos, grounded in the Aristotelian definition of logos as *phone semantike*: "Despite the grammar", as Cavare-ro explains, "the fundamental role falls to the semantic [...] founded on the priority of the order of signifieds with respect to the signifiers. To the voice, therefore, goes the service role – it makes signified audible, it provides an acoustic robe for the mental work of the concept" (Cavarero 2005: 35). Drawing on feminist thinkers, notably Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, Cavarero develops a polarity between the vocalic, i.e. the sonorous dimension of the voice, grounded in the libidinal body and related to the material sphere, and the semantic, i.e. the signifying power of language. The exclusion of women from the realm of thought and reason is inscribed, therefore, in the complex dynamics of these two poles: "The binary economy of the patriarchal symbolic order would be, in this sense, rather simple: on the one hand, the body and the voice, and on the other, the mind and speech. However, the framework is anything but simple, for speech, *phone semantike*, cannot help but reduplicate within itself the dichotomy that splits it into vocalic and semantic. Through the corporeality of the voice, the feminine is thus reinsinuated again in the register of masculine speech. In other words, speech— whether understood as signifying voice or as vocalized signified—is sexually ambiguous, from the perspective of the patriarchal ideology. Although the semantic guarantees to speech a rationality that is privileged by man, the vocal keep speech rooted in the body, which is assigned to woman. The devocalization of logos aims to eliminate this very ambiguity by leaving the feminine figures to embody what remains—namely, the voice" (Cavarero 2005: 207). Cavarero's investigation addresses the role of voice in opera and poetry and several cultural topoi in the Bible and the myths of ancient Greece. Her main goal, however, is to envision "a politics of voices" rooted in the singularity of who is speaking, in her/his "vocalic uniqueness", instead of on the universal disembodied individual that relies on the communicative rationality of language (Cavarero 2005: 210).

Alongside the multifaceted discussion outlined above, the voice has been at the core of countless investigations in many intersecting fields: anthropology, ethnomusicology and musicology, poetry, theatre, opera, cinema, performance, and recently the newly established discipline of voice studies. Calling upon a new vocal turn seems to be appropriated (Feldman, Zeitlin 2019: 3). This challenging and sometimes confusing debate coalesces troubling contemporary issues, such as gender, race, and the impact of technology on one of the most human forms of expression and communication. The vicissitudes of vocal experimentation in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries attest to the deep intertwining of the philosophy of the voice with the theory of its practice.

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