

I.J.A.P.H.C.

**THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF AESTHETICS AND PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE**

(Online)



2016

Issue 1, No. 1


editura universității din bucurești[®]
2016

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ISSN 2501-9929
ISSN-L 2501-9929

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THE EDITOR'S FORWARD

The first issue of *The International Journal of Aesthetics and Philosophy of Culture* comes with a variety of topics and domains of research. We grouped the contributions in four sections taking into account our already established general purposes: 1. Contemporary aesthetics and philosophy of art; 2. Cultural history – scientific meetings; 3. Studies on ethnic cultures; 4. Interviews with artistic personalities.

In the first section, the journal has two guests, professors Ewa Bobrovska and Malgorzata Szyszkowska from the Academy of Fine Arts and the University of Warsaw, Poland. Ewa Bobrovska's text refers to the works of a renowned American contemporary artist, Bruce Nauman. In an elaborated article, the author develops on some specific topics of contemporary art (the body, the intimacy, or the blindness) using many philosophical sources of the 20th century, not only European but also American ones. The contribution of the other guest, Malgorzata Szyszkowska from the University of Warsaw has as central point of research, another sensorial organ of the human body, the eye, mainly the "listening eye". The author uses as philosophical approach J.Fr. Lyotard's phenomenology and its interpretation by American commentators.

The interest in the philosophical contribution of the 20th century to a better understanding of contemporary art is also central in Alexandra Irimia's contribution based on an analysis of Paul de Man's thought on the matter of tropes, especially on the structure of allegory which functions in a double literary condition, as a persuasive instrument and also as a meaningful one.

Rodica Ivan-Haintz brings in her article useful clarifications concerning some traditional aesthetic notions as Representation (*mimesis*). Re-enacting the traditional debate on art as illusion and art as

uncovering the artistic truth, the author pleads in favor of the latter basing her arguments on Nicolai Hartmann's *Erscheinung*.

Moreover, the relationship between the de-definition or de-aestheticization process of contemporary art and the consumerist capitalism is the topic that Oana Șerban debates in her article. She develops possible connections between Lipovetsky's "artistic capitalism" and Rosenberg's "de-definition of art".

Another article centered on revealing how philosophical thought could contribute to a better understanding of contemporary art is Mihaela Pop's text. The author evaluates how process philosophy, precisely Whitehead's specific concepts could be involved in such an approach.

In the second part, the journal hosts a short presentation of *The International conference of the International Society for Cultural History – Time and Culture* – which took place in Bucharest at the Faculty of Philosophy in September 2015. It was organized by the *International Society for Cultural History* in collaboration with the University of Bucharest, the Faculties of History and Philosophy. Prof. Daniela Zaharia (Faculty of History) had an interesting interview (initially published by the cultural magazine *LaPunkt*), with Professor Alessandro Arcangeli, president of the ISCH, about the role of cultural history in contemporary cultural researches. The debate unveils how large could be the contribution of this domain to the understanding of cultural phenomena.

The third section, *Studies on Ethnic Cultures*, hosts Gabriela Bădescu's article, "Sarajevo Haggadah". The author's main debate centers on the so-called aniconic theory of the Jewish culture. She proves the superficiality of this theory using as a convincing example, *the Sarajevo Haggadah*.

The last section of our journal is dedicated to interviews with artistic personalities. Ilinca Bernea, a young Romanian writer and stage director, had a very dynamic dialogue, devoted to many contemporary aesthetic issues, with an English musician, Graham Lynch. The debate centers on contemporary art, old and new aesthetic concepts and their meanings for various arts. In a colloquial and charming manner, the dialog raises many dilemmatic aspects of the artistic creativity as well as some challenging issues of the contemporary aesthetics.

Therefore, from its inaugural number, *IJAPHC* assumes the dual mission of creating an interdisciplinary platform of research for debating

the intimate connections between these two autonomous fields of research – aesthetics, respectively the philosophy of culture (and arts) – and supporting the dialogue between different European scholars that reconsider, nowadays, the main contemporary challenges of these domains.

The Editors

POSTMODERN AESTHETICS AND ART

“LIKE THE HOLE IN A BONE SOCKET THAT LETS YOU SEE WITHOUT SHOWING YOU ANYTHING AT ALL”: BLINDNESS (IN ART) FOR BRUCE NAUMAN AND CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE

EWA BOBROWSKA¹

Abstract

In this paper a reflection upon the topic of blindness in contemporary philosophy offers a revealing perspective to analyze the artworks of a renowned American artist: Bruce Nauman. His artist's statement Notes and Projects published in "Arforum 9", no. 4 (December 1970) provides the additional context for interpretation. The mode of experiencing Nauman's art involves the use of paradox and experiment with the possibilities of seeing, touching, moving, feeling, and understanding. The paper traces the state of confusion triggered by Nauman's pieces in the light of Heidegger's concern with the coveredness and hiddenness of being, Nancy's notion of an identity of being as trembling, Freud's psychoanalysis and defense mechanisms, and Derrida's concept of a ruin. The subsection Art of the Intimate explores the problem of self-concern and body concern in Nauman's art with reference to the child's stages of development according to Freud and Sloterdijk's return of the intimate. Nauman's early art from 1965 to 1972 is presented as reflecting contemporary narcissism and a strong sense of isolation and imprisonment within the claustrophobic bounds of one's own psychic. Furthermore, the analogy between Nauman's performances and Joseph Beuys's interest in the organic and the temporary is drawn. In the conclusion, the argument concerns the role of the hand and drawing as the attributes of blindness.

Keywords: contemporary art, blindness, narcissism, anxiety, psychoanalysis.

It might seem paradoxical to talk about blindness in the context of the visual arts. Nonetheless, paradoxical though it may be, I will claim

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that talking about the paradox of blindness in the context of the visual arts may prove enlightening. Enlightening, that is, in the Platonic sense of the supremacy of the value of ideas over mimetic representation, the cleverness of concepts over the craft of painting, the dream over reality, and the sublime over aesthetic beauty. Viewed in this light, it becomes clear that rethinking the theme of blindness might offer a revealing perspective from which to look at contemporary art, especially the art of ideas and concepts rather than pleasing beauty – that is, conceptual art.

Bruce Nauman, the top contemporary artist whose artworks are sold for millions of dollars, will serve as my example of a “blind artist” or an artist of blindness. The concept of blindness in Derrida is central in his *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, and is also present in *The Truth in Painting*. Notably, the theme of blindness as a defect or as a misfortune, by the logic of contrast appears always as a prelude to its very opposite – a revelation, a miracle due to some divine intervention, hope, or enthusiasm. Blindness connotes “transfiguration, transgression, dynamism.” In a very deconstructive and miraculous, at the same time, manner, the lack of proper vision calls upon or demands just its opposite. Derrida analyzes various scenes of Christ healing the blind, like the blind man of Jericho, the stories of Tobias or Samson, or Saint Paul.

Decentering the initial opposition, both the restoration and the lack of proper vision trigger action and dynamism; this transgresses the usual sense of events, the natural order, and the design of the visible reality. It is the touch of the hand, the word, the saliva, and the mud that heal blindness. All of these elements play a crucial role in Neumann’s art.



Bruce Nauman, *From Hand to Mouth*, 1967

As Arthur Danto notes:

"In 1967, Nauman made a cast in waxed cloth of a region of his body that included his hand, arm, part of his neck and chin, and mouth, which has the inevitable title: *From Hand to Mouth*." (Danto, 1995).

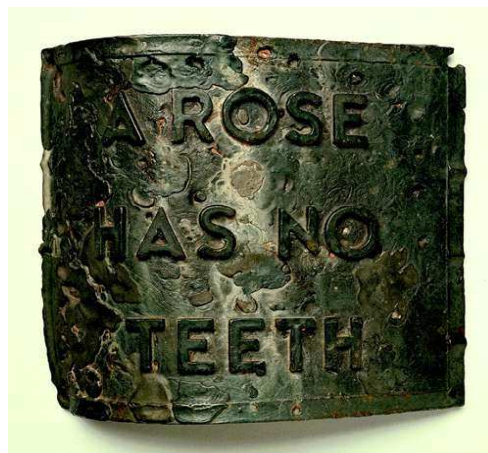
Calling the work an image of "a condition of marginal existence" Danto notes further, "at the very least Nauman's transgressions seem to show a certain blindness to meaning, or a will to subvert it". In my paper, I rethink this statement and the claim of blindness in the conceptual art of Bruce Nauman. Interestingly, the visual perception may demand certain excess, the state of satisfaction, completeness, happiness, the outside - as contrary to the inner life, whereas Nauman seems to be fascinated by the opposite. His protagonists - fragmented, disfigured human and animal bodies - are caught while waiting for their Godot, who never comes. In the meantime, they are trapped in senseless routines imposed by their own bodies. One may wonder why the human or animal heads depicted by Nauman either often have their eyes closed or are devoid of eyes altogether, when at the same time, their mouths are often highlighted. Nauman is certainly one of those few contemporary artists who are aware of the creative and transformative

potential of language, also in the domain of the visual arts, to such a degree that it makes him almost a follower of the so-called language art. However, his use of language is distinct, playful, ironic, and almost cynical.

On the one hand, language, signs, letters, as well as voice (extremely noisy and distracting elements of his works) may replace image and thus become a sign of blindness, as in *A Rose Has No Teeth* – a sculpture composed of the letters that form this phrase. Notably, each letter is convex and tactile as if to be read by a blind person.



Bruce Nauman, *Hanging Heads #2*
(*Blue Andrew with Plug/White Julie*), 1989



Bruce Nauman, *A Rose Has No Teeth* 1966

On the other hand, language itself becomes an object of ironic reversal and play in Nauman’s art. The gesture of inversion of verbal inscriptions like in the *War - Raw* lithograph may point to the other, unofficial side of reality, as do his objects, which in Nauman’s work, are deconstructed so that they reveal their opposite, unfamiliar sides. Nauman often resorts to showing the search for the inner meaning and inner perception of everyday objects and words², the outsides of which we already know so well that we have developed a certain blindness to them. It is a state of surprise, a new fresh look at things and states that Nauman seems to promote. As he commented in an interview for *Arts Magazine*:

“It’s an attitude I adopt sometimes to find things out – like turning things out to see what they look like. It had to do with doing things that you don’t particularly want to do, with putting yourself in unfamiliar situations, following resistances to find out why you’re resisting, like therapy.” (Sharp 1970, 27)

Yet, it is most of all the linearity of the reading process that Nauman undermines. Language is one of the main targets of Nauman’s deconstructive practices. In this way, Derrida’s thesis about the privileged role of language in current culture has gained additional verification and support. As Derrida puts it: “Never as much as at present, the problem of language has invaded the global horizon of the most diverse researches and heterogeneous discourses, diverse and heterogeneous in their intention, method, and ideology.” (Derrida 1997, 6). Therefore, it seems, one may claim that the role of language have become, in the twentieth century, a focal issue for many different fields as diverse as computer sciences, genetics, philosophy, and art to mention only a few. Apparently, playing language games is Nauman’s favourite pastime. Moreover, Nauman’s use of language seems to be in many respects parallel and analogous to Derrida’s approach. Not only does Nauman activate the performative potential of language, as in “pay

² About this aspect of Nauman’s art see: P. Polit (2010). *Nie/No, Catalog of Bruce Nauman exhibition in Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle*.

attention”, but he also deconstructs our reading habits, drawing our attention to what he calls “the other side” of language, making language speak in reverse, with silent irony to suspend and delay the production of meaning, to put into play the dialectics of difference (the question of the relationship between the signifier and the signified). The intended confusion caused by reversals, inversions, and alliterations in his verbal inscriptions, in his works of paper and neon are to “encourage the viewer to acknowledge the other, unknown side of reality,” (Polit 2010, 7) the negative, the lining of the mental and the material, created by wordplay.

As Michael Kimmelman puts it:

“Mr. Nauman’s art is about heightened awareness, an awareness of spaces we usually don’t notice (the space under a chair depicted in one of his sculptures) and sounds we don’t listen for (as the one in a coffin), awareness of emotion we suppress or dread.” (Kimmelman 1994)

It is experimentation, sometimes powerful, often futile, sometimes banal, but always accompanied by a probing spirit with the possibilities of seeing, touching, moving, feeling, and understanding. In other words, Nauman’s writing is writing that takes place when one writes without seeing.

One cannot help wondering if by the logic of supplement (the reverse side of reality), Nauman’s writing is not, according to Derrida’s phrasing,

“A sort of re-drawing, a withdrawing, or retreat, at once the interposition of a mirror, an impossible re-appropriation or mourning, the intervention of a paradoxical Narcissus (...) in short a specular folding or falling back – on a supplementary trait.” (Derrida 1990, 3)

Could drawing be considered, then, an instance of unveiling and coveredness of being, where being is in its state of hiddenness and unhiddenness (uncoveredness). Blindness, then, might be a state which allows the withdrawing from the state of being-in-the-world.

Heidegger’s emphasis is on the link between Dasein subiectum and being. It is the realization and understanding of the fact of being that constitutes the basic moment and element of being. Dasein

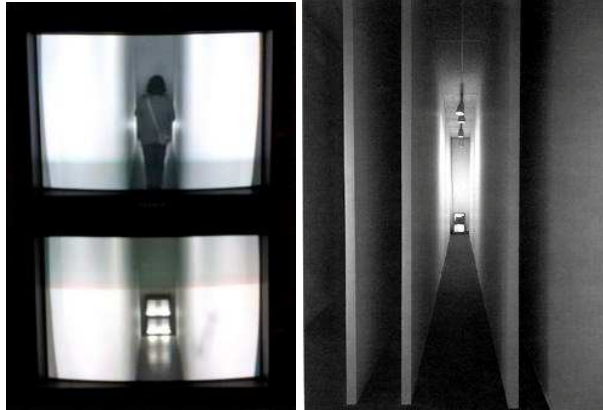
experiences and undertakes being, although it is always withdrawn to his own being.

Blindness expressed in drawing could constitute an instance of the dualism inherent in being itself – as it is a retreat into the private, a very discreet, private, personal movement of the hand, which signals the transcendental, transgressing itself (as in the act of healing blindness) grounded in care. However, it is being that is dark (Chapter 1, 2) obscure, unilluminated, secret. Hypothetically, one could say that blindness is the state of the true experience of being as “the sense of being is always covered in darkness” (Heidegger 1962, 3) and anxiety. Moreover, Heidegger’s notion of anxiety (somehow in the mood of Kierkegaard’s repertoire of experiences) might be understood as another metaphor of blindness. Heidegger states:

“The face of which one is anxious is completely indefinite (...) that is why anxiety does not see any definite here or yonder from which it comes. (...) Anxiety ‘does not know’ what that in the face of which it is anxious. (...) Therefore that which threatens cannot bring itself close from a definite direction within what is close by; it is already ‘there’, and yet nowhere; it is so close that it is oppressive and stifles one’s breath, and yet it is nowhere.” (Heidegger 1962, 231)

A similar sense of fear relates to the sense of danger and disorientation which constitutes many of Nauman’s pieces, such as his corridor installation in which

“The viewer sees his own figure on the screen of a monitor placed at the far end of one of six narrow corridors, the image is transmitted from a camera placed behind his back. As the viewer approaches the monitor, his figure becomes smaller and smaller.” (Polit 2010, 9)



Bruce Nauman, *Live-Taped Video Corridor*, 1970



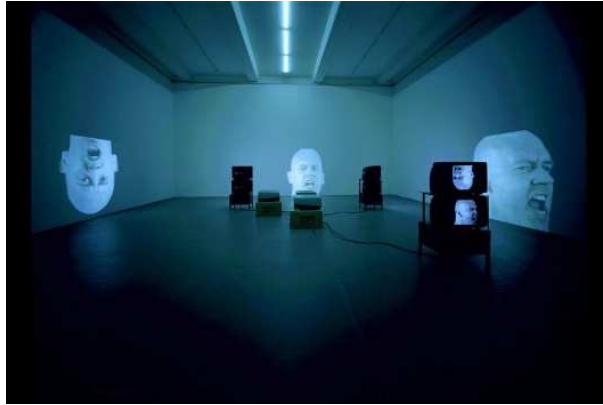
Bruce Nauman, *Three Dead End Adjacent Tunnels, Not Connected*, 1981

In this piece, the viewer is subjected to the effect of disorientation, fear, and identity loss. The image transmitted by the camera does not confirm his presence or being. On the contrary, he may feel threatened by a sudden unnatural and inexplicable loss of his beingness, accompanying the diminishing mirror reflection of his figure. A similar mixed experience of confusion, disorientation, and, consequently, fear may be triggered by pieces such as Nauman's *Three Dead End Adjacent*

Tunnels, Not Connected. In some other pieces, Nauman explores the potential of an overwhelmingly loud cry and voice. In 2004, Nauman filled the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern with a noisy exhibition of unidirectional sound installations. In many of his video installations, the sense of tension is connected to the accompanying sound. Michael Kimmelman describes his retrospective at the Walker Art Centre (1994) as the "loudest show in years," commenting also that the works exhibited were "aggressive, paranoid, ridiculous," (Kimmelman 1994) however powerful and loud. It is as if Nauman wanted to substitute the perceptual pleasure of seeing with an extremely strong auditory experience. Again, the theme of blindness reoccurs here, notably in the context of Beckettian revulsion and fear caused by auditory stress. As both Kimmelman and Danto assert, the urge to flee Nauman's exhibition is strong.

In some video installations, Nauman makes use of chants or rhymes cried out loud as in *Antro/Socio* exhibited in MoMA in 1991, where a bald head of a man was chanting: "Feed me/ Eat me/ Anthropology. Help me/ Hurt me/ Sociology." It is the trembling voice of a biblical beggar or a blind man, described by Derrida, crying out for help or a miracle. Danto treats this voice as a representation or allegory of the voice of humanity. For Hegel, the voice comes before the subject, as Nancy writes in *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*.

"Voice begins with a sound. Sound is a state of trembling, an act of oscillation between the consistency of a body and the negation of its cohesion. It is like a dialectical movement that, unable to complete itself, remains a mere palpitation...The soul is already present in the resonant trembling of an inanimate body, this mechanical reciprocity of the soul... But voice is first and foremost, the act of trembling freely in itself... In this trembling, there lies the soul, this actuality of ideality that constitutes a determined existence. The identity of the being – the concrete presence of the Idea itself – always begins with a trembling." (Nancy 2006, 44)



Bruce Nauman, *Anthro/Socio*, 1992



Bruce Nauman, *Carousel*, 1988

Trembling and fear are the emotions that pervade also such voiceless artworks of Nauman as *Carousel*, composed of dead animals body cast strung up by their neck or feet, where the cry of suffering and pain still seems to resonate in the silence. In the case of the blind man, meaning goes farther than the hand, and goes farther than the eye, as Derrida notes.

In *The Pleasure in Drawing*, J.-L. Nancy considers various kinds of pleasure related to art. Apart from the obvious, stimulating, enjoyable experience, he also mentions the Freudian pleasure of death, which can only be terrible for consciousness, but is pleasure nonetheless. Nancy

would conceive of this kind of pleasure in terms of the release of tension of the self towards itself: “the subject experiencing itself in death, feeling itself dead, and rejoicing in its absence of self” (Nancy 2013, 81). This ambiguous and strong experience recalls Burke’s or Kant’s concept of the sublime as a mixture of pleasure and pain. Various critics agree that Nauman’s art inspires reverence or loathing (but interestingly enough, never indifference), for example, the famous video installation *Clown Torture* – presenting a constipated clown in a public toilet, or pieces such as *Learned Helplessness in Rats*, and an artwork which deals with the issue of death directly – *One Hundred Live and Die*. These artworks propose a very deep existential statement about the human condition based on a tension of fear and pleasure of approaching the ultimate truth, a departure from self, the sublime and threatening infinity of negation, since as Nancy notes:

“The essence of pleasure cannot be reduced to a simple positivity.”
(Nancy 2013, 82)

It is always ambiguous and makes us tremble, like the photographs of death masks from the collection of the Schiller National Museum, which inspired Heidegger in 1926, according to the hypothesis proposed by Nancy in *The Ground of the Image*. Being-towards-Death, of which the death mask might be symbolic, is based on self-hiding, disclosing the unshowable as one more form of withdrawal, one more form of blindness as it presents “the gaze without gaze or the withdrawal of the gaze.” (Nancy 2005, 99) It withdraws to the ground of the image, as Nancy states, where imagination may remain hidden under the mask: dead, free and creative. Not surprisingly, Nauman has a reoccurring theme of tied up, upside-down, drenched heads, always depicted in some state of distress, as impersonal objects of play with their eyes closed or with an empty gaze as in *Ten Heads Circled Up and Down* or in *Venice Fountains’s* casts that are almost like death masks.



Bruce Nauman, *Venice Fountains*, 2007

The discussion of death comes close to another of Derrida's metaphors – the notion of the ruin.

“Ruin is the self-portrait, this face looked at in the face as the mourning of itself. The figure, the face than sees its visibility being eaten away. It loses its integrity without disintegration. (...) For one can just as well read the picture of ruins as the figures of a portrait, indeed, of a self-portrait. Whence the cave of ruins.” (Derrida 1993, 68).

The ruins of bodies - animal and human – are caught in a dance macabre of mourning and melancholy as in Nauman's *The Animal Carousel*. It is composed of chaotically fragmented animal bodies which, according to the curator of the exhibition, are “a powerful metaphor for a distressed, degraded and almost hopeless human condition.” (Milliard, 2013) The strong perceptive experience of the absurd that accompanies the reception of this work should be implemented in the context of Derrida's concept of a ruin, which is “memory open like an

eye, or like the hole in a bone socket that lets you see without showing you anything at all." (Derrida 1993, 69)

And finally, let us consider the perhaps too obvious aspect of blindness implied in the lack of colour constitutive of drawing. Derrida, Nancy and Nauman seem to have deliberately discarded colour from their consideration. Notably, colour in Nauman's artworks appears as a part of linear compositions of neons, where its role seems only supplementary – since it is the line of neon writing that conveys the message. Moreover, Nauman often exhibits his hand-drawn sketches of his installations as evidence of the thinking process. Notably, to draw is to outline an idea, and the drawing is the clarification of thoughts, as Matisse says. With a linear neon drawing hanging in space – the idea of the lightness and fragility of a drawing mark - the sublimity of perception acquires new meanings, as well as Kant's assertion of the supremacy of drawing (as more conceptual, closer to the idea, and thought) over the charming effects of colour.

The graphic linearity visible in Nauman's neons may provoke various interpretations. One of them is that the linear patterns, such as fluorescent lines of neon lights or intentionally exposed electrical lines conceptualize the mental process of perception, association, or reading. Interestingly enough, each line has two ends and allows for two dimensional movement, hence the problem of the negative side of a line. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud draws attention to the fact that we may be blind to certain meanings, messages, or subconscious associations, which are disclosed only when the text is read in the opposite, negative direction. In other words, Nauman makes his text a dynamic constellation of meanings that can grow in any possible direction or manner.

Art of the Intimate

Reading, like making art, is a predominantly private activity. A withdrawal from the world and the self is necessary to experience "experienceable phenomena" as Nauman claims:

“Withdrawal as an Art Form

activities

phenomena

Sensory Manipulation

amplification

deprivation Sensory Overload (Fatigue)

Denial or confusion of a Gestalt invocation of psychological defense mechanism (voluntary or involuntary). Examination of physical and psychological response to simple or even oversimplified situations which can yield clearly experienceable phenomena (...)

Manipulation or observation of self in extreme or controlled situations.” (Nauman 1970, 44)

Nauman’s art is definitely art of the private, hence its meaning and collocations often remain unclear. The wax casts of various parts of the body, happenings that take place in his own studio, such as: *Bouncing Two Balls Between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms*, *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk Around the Studio*, or other *Video Pieces* showing Nauman walking, acting, or playing clearly belong to the domain of the private introspection. It is art for art’s sake (*ars gratia artis*), but it’s also art made by and “out of” Nauman himself. It happens when Nauman is observing, experiencing, and manipulating himself, his own body. The pieces mentioned above are representative of art in its state of narcissism (a partial blindness to anything but itself), or else the artist being narcissistic. Nauman’s profound statement: „If I was an artist and I was in the studio, then whatever I was doing in the studio must be art” is clearly a very bold expression of artistic self-sufficiency (perhaps narcissism) as it is made evident in a piece *My Name As Though It Were Written on the Surface of the Moon* (1968). In this way, Nauman follows the Romantic vision of a self-creating and self-centered artist. He himself becomes the favorite object and possibly the only ideal recipient of his own art. Furthermore, Nauman often simply looks at himself through the lenses of a camera. Art happens between those gazes into a camera in the predominantly private sphere of his studio. In one sense, Nauman’s art is an attempt to return to the very origins of art – as a very personal act of creation. As opposed to Duchamp’s depersonalized

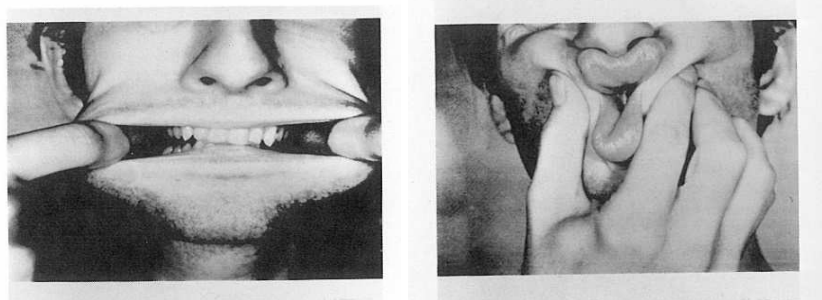
objects often derived from the public domain, Nauman's absurd acts, drawings and objects usually explore the domain of the private. The strong, visually intrusive role of the frame, a parergonal border between the public and the private, in most of his video pieces gives additional evidence to this claim. The space of Nauman's art is an individual and unique space that should be separated from the finality of the outside world, especially in the case of his early pieces such as: *Composite Photo of Two Messes on the Studio Floor* (1967).

Nauman's technique of creation may deserve the name of a visual, sometimes verbal stream of consciousness, or, even better, subconsciousness, where ideas and associations evolve around the central theme of the artistic "I" as in *My Last Name Exaggerated 14 Times Vertically*. The technique of free associations in this stream involves also paradoxical play on alliterations, tautograms, repetition, anagrams and accidental meanings:

"leen lech Dante'l delight light leen snatches light leen lech Dante'l
delight leen snatches leen leche'l delight Dantes light leen snatch
light leen snatch'l delight Dantes leen leech light leen leech'l
delight Dantes leen snatch leen leen leeche'l delight light Dante"
(Nauman 1970, 44)

At the same time, Nauman's pieces are utterly sensual, concerned with his own body. Arthur Danto points to the possibility of Freudian interpretations of Nauman's art in relation to his use of letters and words, as if distorted and transformed by the medium of dreams. However, Freud's psychoanalysis may reveal even more aspects of the art of this American artist, which will be disclosed in the following passages. As Kristine Stiles claims: "Nauman often employed his own body or the spectator's body as a physical object and catalyst for behavior. His art also included participatory installations in which he manipulated and altered viewers' psychological and perceptual experiences of time, duration, and place." (Stiles 1996, 579-580). Notably, Nauman's early pieces predominantly are very often recordings of his body actions, drawings, or sculptures of some parts of his body, most often hands, thighs, heads, mouth, sexual organs. Sometimes they

evolve towards some abstract symbolic compositions as in a drawing *Wax Templates of My Body Arranged to Make an Abstract Sculpture*, or a work *Sculpture*. Other times, bodily fantasies seem to be an absurd play with possibilities of one's own body as in *Six Inches of My Knee Extended to Six Feet* (1967). Interestingly, it may be right to conclude that Nauman's fascination with his own body may be conceptualized in terms of a regression to early childhood memories, as it reflects child's perception of the outside world. It is the child's own body that becomes the first target of explorations and emotional attachment, the source of all emotions, needs and satisfaction. The measurement and knowledge of one's own body becomes then a referential scale of measurement of the outside reality. As Freud's psychoanalysis demonstrates the development of child's perception begins with the discovery and the awareness of its own body parts – the significance of the body focus is evident in subsequent stages of child's development from the oral stage, through the anal stage, finally to the sexual stage. Interestingly enough, it is primarily the first oral stage that reverberates in Nauman's art. In his early holograms, the artist's mouth in particular becomes an object of idle and nonsensical play as in *First Hologram Series (Making Faces)*, continued in later *Studies for Holograms*.



Bruce Nauman, *Studies for Holograms* 1970

By his unusual self-mocking actions, Nauman introduces a new topic into the serious domain of conceptual art. Is playing with one's mouth meant to replace speech or is it a preliminary exercise of mute speech/art organs? Not surprisingly, in the context of on blindness – this

study's main focus, mouths rather than eyes attract the artist's attention. Moreover, Nauman's playful activities should be located somewhere between the self-mockery and irony directed toward the spectator and a symbolical desire to explore the very foundations of creativity. To what extent an act of creation requires an artist to reformulate and explore his own sensual constitution to gain a fresh, child-like perception of being? Do Nauman's performances express a need for a new language in art that has to be reinvented and created anew from its basis? No matter what the answer is, Nauman's holograms present an image of a blind man learning to speak anew through a very intimate exercise.

Notably, most of Nauman's early pieces involve a high degree of intimacy, while the conception of space seems to play a specific role in his actions. With the exception of neons placed in public spaces, it is usually an isolated, private sphere limited to the perception of the artist – a psychological sphere of a solitary monad. Nauman's art is utterly one-personal. (Even in the case of public neons, such as *The Seven Deadly Sins*, the message that they convey is a private one.) Narrow tunnels, solitary performances of the artist in his studio, images of separated body parts convey a strong sense of isolation, confinement, imprisonment within the claustrophobic bounds of one's own psychic. In some sense Nauman's intimate acts mark a return back to the claustrophobic closeness of the "I" as a model of our experience of space and a distrust for the contemporary perspective of posthuman media and hyperspace based extensions of human body, described by Fredric Jameson in his famous monograph *Postmodernism, or, the Logic of Late Capitalism*. The questions of the role of intimacy in contemporary culture and the relations between the body and its technological extensions, have been also raised by some modern thinkers such as Peter Sloterdijk. One of the possible subtitles of *Spheres I*, his famous trilogy devoted to the analysis of contemporary space, was to be: "archeology of the intimate," as Hans Jurgen Heirichs mentions during his interview with Sloterdijk. It seems to be an unusual path of thought to take in an era dominated by high-tech and cyberspace interpersonal communication possibilities. Yet, it should not be improper, to define Nauman's art as traditional in a sense of its stubborn preoccupation with the most basic existential dilemmas. The main (usually singular) protagonist of

Nauman's video pieces treat a camera as a mirror, in front of which he plays his solitary games: makes faces, neurotically repeats certain phrases, rhymes and jokes during an intense one-personal show. In other words, Nauman's time and space are, above all, radically poor, personal and intimate. In the previously mentioned interview, Heinriche draws the following conclusion:

"Closeness and tenderness, the fragility of human encounters, and the daring of deep erotic connections – these things are more remote than ever, despite the all-powerful telepresence of the intimate, and the entertainment programs that brim with the so-called taboo subjects. As such, "the tyranny of intimacy" that Richard Sennett diagnosed some years ago, and the concomitant understanding of public space, comprise only superficial effects that evoke false appearances of proximity. The societal infiltration of intimacy, which Sennett criticized, did not really increase familiarity with the more dissimulated strata of the Self. Instead, the impression is that individual self-experience as well as the potentiality for fantasy and community are more blocked than ever. The cult of intimacy has entered into bizarre relations and alliances with alienation, anonymity and technology." (Sloterdijk, Heinrichs 2011, 137-8)

However the mode of intimacy present in Nauman's work seems more involute and bodily and less technological. It is closer to the half-awake, half-dream reality of one's tensions and desires, half-forgotten symbols, overheard phrases that can reveal some deep incongruities and playfulness of the unserious, intimate collocations such as *Self Portrait as a Fountain*. The intimate, the subconscious, the bodily are all forms of the repressed narcissistic and obsessive self-entanglement, which is a recurrent theme especially in Nauman's early art.



Bruce Nauman, *Self Portrait as a Fountain*, 1966-67

His artworks from the 60s reveal a constant desire of the artist to confront his own identity, the very fact of one's own existence. According to Freud, the child evolves the sense of his or her own separateness from the rest of the world between the age of 2,5 and 5. It is related to the overwhelming experience of being isolated, estranged from the mother and everything that he or she suddenly recognizes as different. Nauman repeatedly examines his own status of being: the mode of closeness to oneself, yet remaining immersed in the world. The dismemberment of one's own body reflects the fear of losing the control of one's ego – in the Freudian sense a mediator between the world and the id. The artworks such as *Neon Templates of the Left Half of My Body*, *Taken at Ten Inch Intervals*, *Study for a Body Measurement Piece*, *Shoulder*, *Square Knot*, *Six Inches of My Knee Extended to Six Feet*, *Wax Templates of My Body Arranged to Make an Abstract Sculpture* are all connected to the self-identity fixation problem. Yet it is neither the question of a desire for life nor the desire for the warmth and energy of human flesh. The body in Nauman's art undergoes a transformation into lifeless, sometimes geometrical forms of inanimate objects as described by Nauman in *Body as a Cylinder*:

“Lie along the wall/floor junction of the room, face into the corner and hands at sides. Concentrate on straightening and lengthening the body along a line which passes through the center of the body parallel to the corner of the room in which you lie. At the same time attempt to draw the body in around the line. Then attempt to push that line into the corner of the room.” (Nauman 1970, 44)

Nauman’s famous saying: “if I was an artist and I was in the studio, then whatever I was doing in the studio must be art” generates another context. The artist himself literally becomes a piece of art, as if sacrificing his own body to the process of fragmentation. Notably, the transformation involves some changes, identifications, and repetition practices of dismembered, material, yet lifeless forms, sounds, words and movements. Clearly, the recurrent theme in the early Nauman’s art is the question of identification, self-identification, establishing and losing one’s own boundaries.

According to Freud, the infantile development takes place in the process of identifications: first with the mother, then with the father. Laplanche and Pontalis, in Theweleit’s words, describe the process of identification as: “a psychological process in which the subject assimilates some aspect, property, or attribute of another and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides.” (Theweleit 1987, 205). Therefore, a possible hypothesis is that in his early works, the other, with whom Nauman (as an artist) identifies, is art itself. In his early pieces the identification with art may take the place of the first identification act during human psychological development – the identification with the mother. Consequently art replaces the mother figure. Hence the fantasy of transforming his body into fragmented, geometrical sculptural pieces, as it is apparent in Nauman’s description: *Body as a Sphere*, which may also express a desire to regress to the prenatal stages of development alluded to in the following instructions given by Nauman:

“Body as a Sphere

Curl your body into the corner of a room. Imagine a point at the centre of your curled body and concentrate on pulling your body

in around that point. Then attempt to press that point down into the corner of the room. It should be clear that these are not intended as static positions which are to be held for an hour a day, but mental and physical activities or processes to be carried out. At the start, the performer may need to repeat the exercise several times in order to fill the hour, but at the end of ten days or so, he should be able to extend the execution to a full hour. The number of days required for an uninterrupted hour performance of course depends on the receptivity and training of the performer." (Nauman 1970, 44)

Nauman's obsessive theme of mouth, as in *Studies for Holograms* (1970), *Mouth* (1967) reflects the first stage of child's development – the symbiosis with the nurturing mother. According to recent studies in psychoanalysis quoted in Theweleit's analysis:

"The phenomena that appear here in place of Oedipal ones – the fear of/desire for fusion, ideas of dismemberment, the dissolution of ego boundaries, the blurring of object relations – do not originate in the Oedipal triangle, but in a dual relationship. It is the relationship between the child and the first person who takes constant charge of it, usually the mother. Experimental research with children has shown that the perceptual neurological functions that allow children to think of themselves and describe themselves as separate Selves don't evolve until sometime between the ages of two or three. (Piaget, Spitz, and others)" (Theweleit 1987, 207)

The second identification in the Oedipal process is the identification with the father – which in some aspects may stand for the identification with the outside observer, the viewer of art. Consequently, the viewers' eyes are often represented by the objective lenses of the camera, in front of which Nauman performs his self-centered actions.

Therefore, to sum up, if a general description of Nauman's early art was to be formulated, it could involve a description of the concept of his artistic ego through (perhaps intended by the artist himself) the employment

of Freudian hypothesis of a psychic identity apparatus formation through the process of subsequent identifications/repetitions. Nauman (like a developing child) experiments with his body/art testing its boundaries, exhibiting and perceiving himself as an object/art object exposed to a public view, often resorting to the technique of repetition of movements, phrases, compositions, etc. According to Lacan, One of the stages of child's "I" formation takes place during the encounter with the mirror.



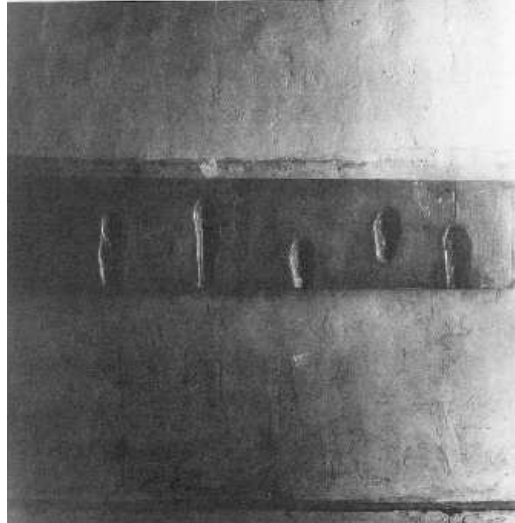
Bruce Nauman, *Finger Touch with Mirrors* (1966-67)

In Nauman's early pieces this stage is represented by: *Finger Touch with Mirrors* or *Fingers Touch Number 1*. Notably, his famous piece *Self-Portrait as a Fountain*, which is usually interpreted as an allusion to Duchamp's *Fountain*, is at the same time a reversed image of the child's act of suckling. Thus, in this way an inverted act of feeding becomes an act of creation.

Nauman explores the processes that take place before the ego formation, before the mechanisms of control and repression and defense mechanisms take place, which suggests a desire to approach the very origins of art and creation even before the stage of its confrontation with the superego – the public, the art world. It is the desire for the intimacy with art, the desire to reach its deepest subconscious levels, its very

essence, to see art before it is able to see (distinguish) itself, still in its stage of self-blindness.

Although expressed in a more anthropological and mythical terms, a similar aim could be also identified in the artworks and artistic attitudes of a chronologically earlier artist, such as: Joseph Beuys, who in many ways remains a source of inspiration for Nauman. Beuys was active in Dusseldorf in the early 60s, when the city became the center for contemporary art and the cradle of modern performance. As in the case of Nauman, Beuys and the Fluxus artists intentionally blurred the boundaries between the visual arts, happenings, performances, video art, and perhaps philosophy. With the exposed primary role of the artist as a spiritual and ideological leader and the most important element of artistic actions, Beuys's unconventional, experimental approach to art constitutes some of the parallels between his and Nauman's work. In one of the Robert Lehman lectures on contemporary art, Pamela Kort draws an interesting analogy between Leonardo da Vinci, Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Beuys – pointing to the noticeable quality of secrecy and aloofness characteristic of their work, their reliance on word puns and word play, or to their shared interest in the intellectual and philosophical dimensions of art. All of those characteristics distinguish also the work of Nauman, their most reknown follower. One of Beuys's well-known performances consisted of an action in which Beuys – a performer, a philosopher, and a blind artist (with his head entirely coated in honey and gold leaf) explained art to a dead hare. It was titled accordingly: *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*. Most of Nauman's early performances refer to such symbolic actions based on Beuys's concept of himself as an acting artist. Nauman's famous video piece: *Clown Torture* based on endless repeating of the word: no is a clear allusion to Beuys's work titled *Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes, No, No, No, No* (1969) – a monologue consisting of words : „ja, ja, ja, nee, nee, nee...” The choice of organic materials such as: wax, felt, the body (of the artist), animals' sculptures and bodies used for their installations and actions reveals also some shared quality of their work. Nauman's *Felt Formed over Sketch for a Metal Floor Piece*, *Wax Impressions of the Knees of Five Famous Artists* could be an ironic commentary on Beuys's *Chair with Fat (Wax Chair)*.

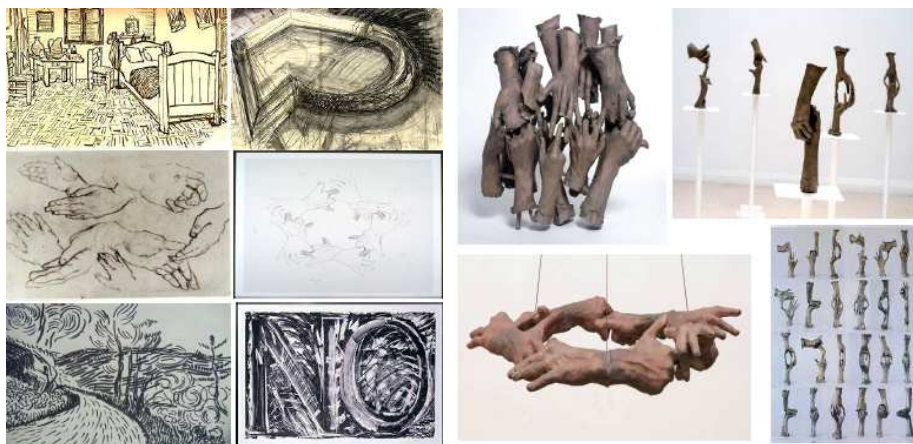


Bruce Nauman, *Wax Impressions of the Knees of Five Famous Artists* (1966)

It seems worth noting that, as Kort claims, if Beuys's objective was to challenge the artistic authority of Marcel Duchamp, whose work was rediscovered in the late 1950s in German-speaking Europe, Nauman's objective could be parallel – to usurp the artistic domination of Beuys and his concept of art as a social sculpture. In some sense, Nauman's clown figure in *Clown Torture* could be seen as a parody of a shamanistic, symbolic, yet unclear and absurdly illogical role of the artist-leader in Beuys's art. Beuys openly admits to being inspired by shamanistic practices and the figure of the shaman in his performances concerned with the myth of freedom. On the other hand, Beuys's idea of adopting the ritualistic practice of rites of passage and transforming it into a form of "trial zones" for the viewer was further radicalized by Bruce Nauman in his concept of corridors and double cages based on manipulation with the viewer's perceptual experiences. Last but not least, both Beuys and Nauman used traditional pencil drawings and sketches as a form of constant inventory practice, a trace of the thinking process, as if imitating (perhaps consciously identifying themselves with) da Vinci. Beuys openly admits to this inspiration in his *Mona Lisa Fluxus*, 1957, or *Drawings after the Codices Madrid of Leonardo da Vinci*, 1974, as Korts notes.

Conclusions

In conclusion, let us make another comparison based on some similarity between the manner of drawing peculiar to Nauman and characteristic trait of Van Gogh's way of drawings. Both of these artists use a very strong, masculine, material line, devoid of decorative effects. According to Fredric Jameson, Van Gogh's drawings (or paintings) should be interpreted in the light of Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art*. As Jameson highlights, Van Gogh's scenography is composed of, to use his exact phrase, “the raw materials, reconstructing the initial situation to which the mask is somehow a response.” (Jameson 1991, 59) Notably, the phrase ‘raw materials’ was also the title of Nauman's exhibition at Tate Modern in 2005. Moreover, those raw materials in the case of both artists indicate some very primitive, yet essential, rudimentary things or words, as brutal as the bodily existence of human kind; the Beckettian truth of the human condition as absurd, painful, meaningless, material, enigmatic, beyond the conceptualization in language, seduced by the death instinct. Being towards death reemerges again in this analysis. A work of art emerges into the unconcealment of being, the gap between Earth and World as Jameson phrases Heidegger's approach. The work of both artists seems to have its origin there.



Vincent van Gogh's drawings / Bruce Nauman's drawings

One more trait of both artists is a strong, undeniable mark of the artist's hand, a firm gesture. In Van Gogh, it will be the manner of painting or drawing, as characteristic as hand writing. In Nauman, it is the manner in which his heads are shaped, it is the figure of the hand itself reoccurring, like a refrain, throughout his art. Notably, it is the hand and the tactile experience that constitute the world of the blind. It should not be surprising at this point to note that although the figure of hands appears very often in Nauman's art, eyes are almost never depicted, but probably intentionally excluded. The most characteristic piece of Nauman is *For Beginners. All the Combinations of Thumb and Fingers* comprising a video installation of gigantic hands – counting on fingers to ten (a possible allusion to the Ten Commandments or the state of blindness).

“The theme of the drawings of the blind is, before all else, the hand,” says Derrida (Derrida 1993, 4). „Everything takes place between speech and the hands,” he comments further. (Derrida 1993, 98). Interestingly, the theme of hands combined with voice, as a powerful way of expressing traumatic experiences in art, reoccurs also in Krzysztof Wodiczko's art, especially in his public projections, such as Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1989) and Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C. (1988).



Bruce Nauman, *For Beginners (all the combinations of the thumb and fingers)*, 2010



Krzysztof Wodiczko, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989
Public projection



Krzysztof Wodiczko, Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C., 1988
Public projection

The hand gives evidence, retells the story, conceals, blames, and begs for help. It gives the most powerful testimony about the human condition, which is described by Plato as a state of partial blindness – in a dark cave filled with shadows. As Derrida notes, „We left the cave behind because the lucidity of Platonic speleology (...) carries within it another blind man, not the cave dweller, the blind man deep down, but the one who closes his eyes to *this* blindness – *right here*” (Derrida 1993, 55), no matter if it is a contemporary artist like Nauman, a philosopher, a narcissist, any one of us, or the human kind that Derrida addresses.

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THE LISTENING EYE: JEAN-FRANCOIS LYOTARD AND THE REHABILITATION OF LISTENING¹

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Abstract

The author points out to the rehabilitation of listening which occurs in Lyotard's philosophy in the field of his aesthetic analysis. The philosophical grasping of time and especially the instant is being explained in Lyotard through the listening mode and in invoking the aural experiences and the experiences of sound. The author suggests that the category of listening is often used in place of the category of aesthetic and as metaphor of the aesthetic perception. In contrast to seeing, listening can be undertaken together with other sensual experiences and thus it allows for a more polyphonic experience. The author maintains that listening is a very special type of experience: on one hand, it is open and welcoming, on the other, it is discrete and prone to solitude, qualitatively changing its course.

Keywords: Lyotard, listening, music, Tonkunst, aural experience, aesthetics.

I. The Ways of the Ear

"I (the viewer) am no more than an ear open to the sound, which comes to it from out of the silence; the painting is the sound, an accord. Arising [*se dresser*] which is a constant theme in Newman must be understood in a sense of pricking up one's ears [*dresser son oreille*], of listening." (Lyotard 1991, 83-84)

¹ Research paper financed by the Ministry of Science and High Education's "National Program for Development of Humanistic Studies 2014-2019". Grant No 0114/NPRH3/H12/82/2014.

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“Every voice, *vox*, in as much as, since the Bible, this has been the name borne by the pure actuality of the event, comes to us recorded, phenomenalized, formed and informed, if only in the tissue of spatio-temporal agencies, in the « forms of sensibility », here and over there, not yet and already no longer, etc.”
(Lyotard 1991, 147-148)

It would not make much sense to claim that Lyotard has anywhere in his writings abandoned the visual or the literary planes in favor of the experience of the ear. He has not. Lyotard has never intended to forget the visual or to exchange his love for imaginary, visual and literary experiences for the aural ones. Yet there is in Lyotard the need for pointing out to listening as a distinct type of experience – aesthetic to the core. There are vast possibilities arising out of the aural sensibility that might be more clear, more pure and more powerful than anything else brought in by the senses. It is perhaps this primary force that has appealed to Lyotard the most. Of course, there were also the new possibilities brought by the technological evolution that forced Lyotard to acknowledge the power of sounds and even more than this, the necessity to listen again.

Well, was he?

I would like to show what I believe to be clearly present within the writings of Jean-François Lyotard and that is the re-evaluation of the ear and the rehabilitation of listening. This is not just summoning to listen. This is a request to hear what is to be heard and to see what is to be seen - the necessity to sharpen our perceptive skills. It comes from the social and political experience of being shut down within the walls of one all-powerful system, whatever its nature may be. The great narrative, philosophical, political or otherwise, can reduce the space for movement, change and creation. So much so that the plurality of input may seem revolutionary, while in fact it is just the way things are in the world. For Lyotard, this truth was always present, both politically and aesthetically. The plurality of sources, of input channels, was something Lyotard thought of as important. Like change and difference, they constitute the very essence of meaning.

The new visual sensuality of the postmodern era seemed to be the perfect time to reclaim the powers of human senses and sensibilities. The necessity to listen and, at the same time, the stress on the ability to acknowledge the presented (and not just to listen to oneself), these claims are both present within Lyotard's philosophy. Lyotard stressed the concealed dimensions, the other side of the thing, but also the not-yet-here, the almost-but-not quite state of the thing. If listening can reveal this to the listener, it is the more important to be listening. My aim throughout this paper, therefore, would be to show the presence of it, as well as the request for listening understood as the ultimate aesthetic state of attentiveness within Lyotard's philosophy.

II. The Ambivalence of the Visual

Obviously, the aesthetic sensibility has been the constant thread throughout Lyotard's writings. His focus was on the visual; with it commonly pleasing powers. Yet the visual and the sense of seeing were never conceived by Lyotard in a simple, one dimensional manner. Even though in *Discourse Figure* he describes the sign system as flat and two dimensional, the visual – properly understood – is more than just this which is possible to see. The visual imposes new meanings through shapes and figures. In the figural visual is presenting meaning. Sight in Lyotard's philosophy is already presented as capable of displacing and disrupting the knowledge. "The eye must be understood as a source of disruptive energy", says Lyotard (Lyotard 1991, 565). And yet this is a positive claim attesting to the abilities of the eye as an active force. He still understood the eye and the power of sight as strongly reductive and disruptive. It was portrayed as highly ambivalent. Lyotard acknowledged its dangerous, devious and ambiguous aspects without questioning its primacy. Acknowledging hidden qualities of the eye, Lyotard stressed its brutality, the savageness of the eye, the chiasmic proximity of the visible and invisible – in short, the crude and savage visual force (Lyotard 1991, 566). Acknowledging its power and accepting its primacy, Lyotard also requested mobilizing of the eye. He had never let go of the visual neither as the stimulant, nor the artistic field. It was

primary in Lyotard's philosophy just as it was primary in the postmodern art. What changed was its function. The visual had to be understood through the figural, the shapes and the meanings that escape the rational, structural coding, which are yet still meaningful in themselves. Thus visual may be understood as challenge to as much as the ground of perceptual experience. The visual and figural are both constitutively present in signifying. The shapes and various changes of the letters in rebus are elements of its meaning and any solution must take that into account. The line and the figure are always "telling". Their presence is already suggestive of possible meanings. The mobilizing power of the eye coupled with intellectual force of the mind is used productively to deduce and establish meaning. The discourse has to be seen through its figural elements as much as through the system, on which it depends. It is the visual aspects of the signs that lead the eye and the mind to recover the meaning behind. The two are mutually dependent. Letters, spaces and dots are not just presenting the linguistic content – the meaning – they constitute it both by drawing attention to themselves and by pronouncing the differences thus making meaning visible/readable and last but not least by engaging the mind to recover the meaning. Lyotard traces the disruptive power of the figural, which is present in discourse and which show that, in the language, is not just the system but the presentation as well, which allows for communication. This mutual interdependence of the discursive and the figurative elements is the most important. However the visual and figural are not reducible to the meaning, they help produce. They are meant to be seen first and foremost. And so the reaction to what one see is the most important.

The problem Lyotard faced in *Discourse figure* was also the problem of the aesthetic as a critical tool. The figural aspect of meaning and the figural as part of communication were connected to figural as an element of aesthetics. In Lyotard's philosophy, what is worth mentioning, the aesthetic is always critical, judging, checking, measuring, and questioning. There is no art or aesthetic experience that does not lead to or hide within it a question, that does not pose a doubtful remark. According to David Carroll "undoing" of signification, undoing of the system is what art does in Lyotard (Carroll 1987, 27).

And, even in looking at the world, what one aims to see is not the image or the view – as in simple and straight forward reproduction or repetition based on physical measurements and scientific assumptions – but something entirely different. The experience of participation, the feeling of being there or being a part of something happening. It is as if instead of seeing what was expected, someone was being able to hear or smell the view. For in art, what is important is not to reproduce the looks of things, nor the visual horizon surrounding them, but suggesting that something is happening (*événement*) or that something has happened (Lyotard, 2015:14).

III. Art as *événement*

Lyotard was interested in art all his life. He went to see the exhibitions, but more than that he spend time talking to artists and getting to know them. He was interested in paintings that were adventurous, complex and difficult to understand and yet that were saying something. He was looking for the figural aspect, the lines or shapes that spoke, pointed in unexpected direction rather than in images that portrayed the world. He was tracing (it seems now) the events in art, the avant-gard intellectual presence in among artists. The term event (*événement*), according to Anthony Gritten's entry in *The Lyotard Dictionary*, refers to an occurrence beyond the powers of representation, something a subject is experiencing, but is unable to comprehend or think through adequately (Sim, 2011, 71-72). This, according to Lyotard, is what happens in art. At the same time, artists Lyotard was so interested in, thought more than they saw – claims he is bringing to closure painting as art of seeing (of representing a vision) and turning to the thought about seeing (Lyotard, 2015, 17). In *Que peindre? Adami, Arakawa, Buren* Lyotard discusses three painters, whose work is on the verges of painting. They draw, but their work consists almost entirely of questions. Questions in a form of a line, shape or an unfinished figure, some white canvas or other inconsistency within the assumed whole. Demanding as much as asking (Lyotard, 2015, 67). A line – Lyotard is so interested in – conveys emotions but at the same time these emotions are

calmed, subdued by form. The chaos or chaotic verve of those lines is transformed into ascetic, quiet and simple shape. But it is the line that invites reading, finding the life, the presence behind it.

“It is just the presence, its sound, that artist wants to recreate through his painting. He wants to make it be heard. (...) painting is for someone ...I do not know ...it is the happening (*événement*), this blue, this morning.” (Lyotard, 2015, 14).

In the course of the book, Lyotard presents a view that a line is a sentence. A work is a sentence. It comes (results) from simple and lasting laws of forming and joining. It reads as a syntactic whole (Lyotard, 2015, 177). Painting and literature are variations of the same simple structure, says Lyotard – its writing – creating meanings and passing those forwards. However, as it is acknowledged, Buren’s work is readable, but at the same time relative to its context, the time and space that is situated in. It isn’t so easily approachable or readable, and, of course, it is what Lyotard values in those works. They are commentaries or in fact they question the very status of art as a commentary on life, philosophy or itself. Buren’s work according to Lyotard’s analysis the question, or alarms the viewer; it summons and stimulates that asking schismatic and mirroring power of sight (Lyotard, 2015, 177-180). It is not only asking “what is painting?”, but “what is thinking about painting?” and so, says Lyotard, the question becomes philosophical (Lyotard, 2015, 182). All this discourse about painting and about art (done in a form of a dialogue with different speakers) – rather repetitive one must say – comes to an understanding that art (and thus seeing) is not equal to text (reading). It is its opposite. It is operating in similar manner yet still requires a different kind of presence.

“To read does not mean to see ...” (Lyotard, 2015, 205)

It seems that these different discourses (reading, writing and seeing) affect and stimulate one another. But they do not take a place of one another. They do not function instead of one another. Buren, says Lyotard, writes in order to think over the questions he intends to ask in

his works. And in a more general comment, Lyotard tells us that contemporary artists work to extend the sensibility instead of giving straight answers in their art. They work to make something into something to be seen or to be heard. In other words they change the given types and forms of sensibility (Lyotard, 2015, 205-206).

IV. The Sublime

One of the forms of contemporary sensibilities, favored throughout the 20-century, was the sublime. On the opposite side from the beautiful it demanded more and different engagement with art. The category of the sublime, following Kant's reading of the aesthetics of taste (Burke), is for Lyotard an interesting tool in pointing towards feeling and yet discovering "disaster suffered by the imagination" (Lyotard, 1991, 136). The sublime sensibility helps to understand the paradox of contemporary art, which plays with the unrepresentable and the paradox of *aesthetics without sensible and imaginative forms* (Lyotard, 1991, 136). The art of nuances and differences that demand the greater, softer sensibility and which itself protests against the rules of forms.

"For the last century, the arts have not had the beautiful as their main concern, but something which has to do with the sublime."

With this statement, Lyotard begins the chapter on the sublime and the avant-garde in *The Inhuman* (Lyotard, 1991, 135). The sublime he discovers in the avant-garde works, however, is not the sublime of Burke, Boileau or Longinus, at least not quite the sublime, they have been analyzing. It is not found in style, or the grandiose theme and lofty ideas. Lyotard may be said to follow Kant in that he finds sublime to be unbound by rules and free from the constraints of concepts. But one could easily see that the weight of the sublime lies on the artist and thus the work, rather than on the mind of the viewer. Surely Lyotard does not find much of the Kant's theory of the sublime being the sign of the highest ability of the human mind in finding the ideas were both the concept and the imagination fails. One might say that contemporary art

is said to be sublime simply because it is not beautiful. For there is no feeling of harmony or pleasure to be found in the experience of the avant-garde art. And there is surely no satisfaction to be felt and, as Lyotard argues, no fulfillment either. In the works of Burnett Newman, Lyotard discovered the sublime conditioned not by space (the distance) or proportions (the magnitude) but by time; the sublime of the instant, the now, the becoming. Moreover, what Newman's painting required more than viewing was belief. And Lyotard was the reader, who wanted to spend time figuring them out, believing in what they could offer.

"Newman works belong to the aesthetics of the sublime..."
(Lyotard, 1991, 84)

and a bit earlier:

"The picture presents, being offers itself up in the here and now. No one, and especially not Newman, makes me see it in the sense of recounting or interpreting what I see. I (the viewer) no more than an ear open to the sound which comes to it from out of the silence; the painting is that sound, an accord. Arising [se dresser], which is a constant theme in Newman, must be understood in the sense of pricking up one's ears [*dressers son oreille*], of listening."
(Lyotard, 1991, 83-84)

To believe is like listening – it signifies effort on part of the recipient. Here is where we can see how the visual becomes aural, not because of the sound, or sounds involved, but because of the attitude. Listening is simply a way of understanding or perceiving attentively, fully, with engagement that is both physical (bodily) and intellectual. The consciousness that invites and receives seeks and in turn recognizes. Both welcoming and learning, receiving is listening in its core. Listening – and in Lyotard's writings the right kind of perception – is opening one's ears to receive the possible meanings. It is attentiveness to nuance, to timbre, to change, that allows for perception of the art. He lists *arte povera*, minimal art and other artistic movements that might and should be reconsidered from an angle of the immaterial matter, the continuum

of timbre, of color (Lyotard, 1991, 140). The continuum of sound, where the smallest difference is what is challenging, and what the art is after – the changes of the sensibility. If not to listen, one needs at least to open up the senses to acknowledge the smallest possible change, in order to see (feel, hear) what which is presented as yet unseen, is what the arts demand.

In the *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (Lyotard, 1994), Lyotard analysis Kant's work in great detail. Concluding with remarks about the sublime being neither possible to communicate, nor in demand of universality as absolute, or enormous, are not in connection to a concept, nor are they presentable. This is why the sublime in art requires a special kind of sensitivity. Moreover the driving force of the sublime feeling is the violence of the *differend* (Lyotard, 1994, 239). Lyotard seems certain that the negative pleasure of the sublime may be found in the contemporary art, in their resistance to harmony and in their violently seek freedom from content based on the outer world. Their demand is for the special kind of experience, accommodating both the negative pleasure from the negative presentation and the recognition of the freedom of the mind of the perceiver.

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“Even before he absorbed the full measure of Levinas' critique of the eye, Lyotard already harbored some of the reservations about the alleged nobility of sight so pervasive in the twentieth-century French thought” (Jay 1994, 562).

As pointed out by Jay, the reservations towards the eye may have been present in Lyotard's writing from the beginning of his career. If the visual mode was to be questioned at all, it was also because of its primacy over other senses. If there is doubt in Lyotard about whether language can express the phenomenological qualities of everyday experience, there is also a need to point towards hidden and the marginal, which is omnipresent in Lyotard's writing. The fringes of life and the fringes of language are being sought. He turned to art and especially to the sublime, as Martin Jay reminds us, as the realm of that, which is immune to presentation, also trying to find that which is

resisting the rational and systemic and which can nevertheless communicate important aspects of life.

“For Lyotard the sublime was the essence of the aesthetic sensitivity of Modernity, which became even more pronounced in Postmodern due to the rejection by <high> Modernity of the dated nostalgia for the beautiful” (Jay 1996, 102).

The sublime in Lyotard’s analysis of Burnett Newman’s painting for example resides in its intellectual (one might say conceptual) claims as much as in its pure, simple, monochromatic surfaces. Newman’s paintings are representations of time – proclaims Lyotard – but they also become instantiations of the sublime experiences because of the author’s engagement with the theory of the sublime. In Lyotard’s reading of the sublime in art, in his analyses, seeing is listening, arriving because of the author’s engagement with the theory of the sublime is attending. To explain what Newman’s paintings attempt to do, Lyotard had to go back to the listening mode: *listen to me* (Lyotard 1991, 81). To talk about time, to point at the change, to acknowledge the state of the world and to experience it or to criticize the lack of experience thereof, one must resume to the listening mode, it seems. It is not enough to see, neither to see the painting, nor to see the world. One needs to find out what brought this painting to life, what it means to experience the world. And this quest requires a change of mode, a shifting of the attitude. It is no longer possible to remain disengaged, as in the case of seeing, it is crucial to switch to listening in order to break through the barrier of the neutrality. In order to engage one needs to be listening, to be silent and to be attentive. Within the world of painting one needs to try to find out what the painter says, and what initiated the process of painting.

But, if turning to the sublime meant for Lyotard to acknowledge the inexpressive or simply put invisible, the aesthetic as such was his way of questioning and criticizing the *status quo*. The figural stresses the necessity to acknowledge this, which escapes from the confines of the semiotic system. And just like the figural is possible to know by looking at it, the visual must be understood as something much more than a sign or system of referents. The visual provides the differences acquired

through knowing by looking rather than knowing by differentiating through the system. It presents itself to the eye. Still, the most important thing is to look behind the most obvious and pronounced, trying to see precisely this, which seems not to be the part of the system of communication. Thus looking becomes an attempt at transgressing the system; just like in the case of listening, which must be more than hearing, more than receiving.

In this context, the listening and the sense of hearing come as help in realizing what is hidden, and lead the way to better and more careful perception. Obviously, the ear has qualities which are precious and unique. The ear has the ability to withdraw itself from the power of the sight while the eye must "listen" at the same time. A careful ear may warn us about the dangers ahead against the serene and calming view. The power of the ear comes perhaps from its ability to act independently from other senses, while at the same time it derives from an ability to be in harmony with other senses.

In aesthetics and in the experience of the art, he who listens is open to new challenges and perceptual wanders, often before or independently from what the sight offers. The death of *the big narrative* pronounced by Lyotard, brought with it the recognition of the fragmented, the miniscule, the marginal. Listening, despite the long history of being a primary tool for the narrative and traditional recitation, has also the ability to reclaim the scattered, fragmented bits and pieces. With listening comes the ability (both physically as much as intellectually) to make sense of what is otherwise unrelated or distanced from each other. The postmodern sensibility that stressed previously ignored and marginalized senses and aspects of life, turned to subversive modalities to construct the wholes made out of fragments and scattered pieces of information, images and sounds. Advent of many different sources, the plethora of stories and voices, which could perhaps balance out the former privileged views, demanded likewise opening up to differences. These demands meant as well that the eye had to learn to listen as it does in philosophy from Levinas to Merleau-Ponty.

V. The Listening Eye

“The face is the presence of the word. Between it and me who listens to it lies not the thickness of the sensory, but absolute openness, absolute imbalance, true irreversibility where are to be found not objects and my gaze (as Claudel believed), but the infinite and the finite.” (Lyotard 211, 5)

In *Discourse figure* Lyotard acknowledged the disparity between the rigid power of the sign system, such as language and the possibility of discovering meaning through figurative signs. The visible and the figurative are on the verge of language stretching its boundaries and questioning its validity. To accommodate this, the eye becomes the listening eye. Listening is precisely that, which makes it mobile. The receptive eye is active just like the listening ear: always searching, distinguishing, welcoming.

“In pursuing this double exteriority one may be able to take up the challenge that language poses to the visible, and the ear to the eye, namely, to show that the gesticulatory expanse that makes depth or representation possible, far from being signifiable through words, spreads out on their margins as what enables them to designate; and to show, too, that this expanse is the source of the words’ power of expression, and thus accompanies them, shadows them, in one sense terminates them and in another, marks their beginning.” (Lyotard 2011, 8)

To make that possible seeing itself must change, become alert and attentive, while following the path within. I am quoting Lyotard again here:

“To look at a painting is to draw paths across it, or at least to collaboratively draw paths, since in executing it the painter laid down, imperiously (albeit tangentially), paths to follow, and his or her work is this trembling, trapped within four wooden slats, that an eye will re-mobilize, bring back to life.” (Lyotard 2011, 9).

Listening is most of all opening up towards new possibilities. Regardless of whether it concerns sounds or other modalities, the ability to perceive comes from an acute attentiveness and readiness. While commenting upon the XVII-century religious texts and their insistence on lending one's ear to the sacred voice, Lyotard raised not only the topic of religious experience, but also the topic of attentive listening as such. In *The Inhuman*, Lyotard says after quoting Swedenborg:

„There is an inexhaustible network linking listening to belonging, to the sense of obligation, a passivity, I should like to translate as *passibility*“ . (Lyotard 1991, 178)

This *passibility* again, Lyotard explains, is that which makes happening possible. Not the passivity, but openness to what happens or what may happen. In one sense this opening is passive, but in another it is not. Just as welcoming or receiving it requires taking a stand. It is only through such opening that an event might happen. Listening makes such things possible.

With listening comes the topic of music, which is presented in Lyotard as a frame for experience or better yet, a frame for gaining new experiences. The technology, an opening of the material, gives it an extra push. Music is listening just as listening is following and following happens in time. The *passibility* of music comes not from its inability to move or act, but, on the contrary, from its ability to follow, to engage and be faithful; *passibility* is readiness for whatever will happen, openness and attentiveness to the outer world. Not just anything out there, but everything right here. The qualities of sounds and the sound timbres are nuances that are the most important to catch, if we are to be lead on the right path. These nuances are to be traced, revealed from the hiding. And, in order to do that, the ear must be listening, stretched far and wide, waiting for something to happen. Any small detail, any deviation, color, smell or touch will alert the listener and lead her on the path of aesthetic experience.

VI. Rehabilitation of Hearing

Despite the crucial role of visual experience and the stimulation provided by the literary sources, there is a constant turn toward the auditory experience in Lyotard's philosophy. The necessity of feeling the power of sound or its vast open horizon is undeniably present. For Lyotard both listening and hearing provide ways of aesthetic perception *per se*. In contrast to seeing, listening, although powerful and overwhelming in itself, is also congruent with other sensual types of perception and thus facilitates the polyphonic character of postmodern experience. Furthermore, listening opens up the possibility of cooperation between different senses allowing for active participation on many planes at the same time. But listening is also a very discrete state and therefore the experience it affords is enhanced when it is undertaken in solitude; it appropriates the listening consciousness, deepening and qualitatively changing the experience.

According to Lyotard, the new art and the post-modern sensibility of the new technology and new understanding of the matter and time requires listening and being attentive to the nuance. All the details and differences, the timbres are there, like the ones that aren't, and the perceptive viewer/listener has to pay attention to them. It is only then that the aesthetic judgment and aesthetic experience may take place. Even the very mutability of color or sound, the wide range of the spectrum, which permit the smallest change in their shade, all that helps in the realization and the conceptual grasp of the phenomenological experience of the world. But that is not what Lyotard is after. He demands opening up to detail, to nuance in political (and moral) quest for transgressing ignorance. No longer will the world, the art, the artist, the story be ignored. In listening, one breaks the silence of the ignored, one comes back to the elements that have been silenced or simply forgotten.

The rehabilitation of hearing that occurs in Lyotard is also stimulated by the need to make "an attempt to think- and to see – just where one does not or cannot know" (Rajchman 1998, 3). The visual and that, to which we attend in listening, are therefore the more special and interesting the more they allow for venturing outside the "normal", "visible", and "known". There is the need to transgress the everyday,

the accessible or already seen. The knowledge that Lyotard seeks is the knowledge of that which is hidden, forgotten or inaccessible. But more than that, it is a way of seeing the world as being in need of deciphering. The knowledge itself is that which we gain by looking not directly at something, but through learning within the attentive gaze and thinking through instead. Retreating and facing it again and again.

The listening then is much more than leading an ear, it is attending to the sound and the audible, but it is also conquering the visible by simply listening to it – giving it a chance to be heard. The sensual attention is at the core of listening and as such, listening is neither more nor less than touching, smelling nor seeing. There are no favorite senses, there are favorite ways of attending or in other words what is privileged is the mindfulness in the sensual experience. As in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, where the sensual experience and the intellectual work of the mind are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them, in Lyotard's writing thinking (mind's working, puzzle solving *et cetera*) has been the first in every endeavor. But it also means that the gaze is always informed just as it is structured by linguistic or semiotic forms. Nevertheless, it is listening that frees the mind and lets it follow the path. Let us take a look at this aspect of listening within Lyotard's philosophy.

VII. Obedience

"The voice and the ear" stressed within the Jewish tradition and Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy in particular became an important element of Lyotard's cultural critique. In Levinas, the importance of ear lending or bringing oneself to the command of the ear had to do with moral obligations towards the Other and towards the Ultimate Good. In Lyotard, the aesthetic is critical, as well as under critique all the time, but the moral quest underlining philosophical writings is much more subtle. There is however moral as much as political concern present in many of his writing, which Lyotard borrowed from Adorno, 'let us make sure that Auschwitz never happens again' and hence the requirement to listen to victims becomes a moral imperative. In his philosophy, criticism is always political and because of this, the ethical

ideas are reached or at least reached for. There is a necessity to see and hear beyond what is given, to free oneself from “the common sense of the habitual circuits of classification, appraisal, and sale” (Rajchman 1998, 18). In listening, this ideal (the ideal of the *homo politicus*, of active participation) becomes at least partly realized. Listening is obedience to what is not present, to what is hidden and dispersed. And thus the marginalized or deprived of the right to speak are finally listened to.

In the new music, Lyotard seems to be saying, “the organization of the sets of sounds (...), i.e. their composition into musical forms” does not obey the laws of repetition (Lyotard, 1991: 154). They – these works – offer change, the nuance so new, so unexpected, that the mind is unable to follow it. And yet it is the following, and not just being in their presence that the music requires. To listen is to seek and to follow. Ultimately, one must say, in listening one follows (is obedient). But the following involves the hidden path, the right path or the path within. Immediately the quest becomes to follow the author (the artist, writer *et cetera*). Following the hidden truths and the margins in order to reclaim the most of the visible, the most of the tangible, the most of the reality. Quite surprisingly in listening, following and being obedient, one discovers one’s own path of obedience – in other words how much can one give up to follow the voice, to follow the world. And thus it is hearing (through listening) that enables us to reclaim the experience of the ultimate reality in its many forms and shapes. And it is listening again that allows for reclaiming one’s own feelings in venturing beyond the proclaimed margins.

VIII. Tonkunst

“Deconstructing hearing in no way means returning to some natural state of listening that musical culture has allegedly caused us to lose. But constructing a knowledgeable culture of hearing can have a ‘musical’ value (in the sense of Tonkunst) only if the sound-machines and the exact structurations they demand eventually destine the work to the marvel of the sound-event alone.” (Lyotard, 1991: 177)

Lyotard saw that the revolution has already taken place in music as *the art of sound* (*Tonkunst*). The musical work has been transformed beyond the work of art as *opus* becoming the time-event instead. Listening has always been the mode of music reception, yet after this change has taken place, there is truly no form or musical material to hang to. Music happens and also slips away very quickly. It is only through attentive listening that it may be seized or experienced fully. In other words in the listening that the music may be found.

“What is presented in the contemporary music is temporality of sound-event, accepting anachrony or parachrony rather than diachrony.” (Lyotard 1991, 173)

And then:

“The new technologies can (capacity, eventuality) favor this work of anamnesis bearing on the strata of music, which separates sound from the ear. The music as *Tonkunst* tries to rid itself of the music as *Musik*.” (Lyotard 1991, 173)

In his analysis of contemporary art gathered in *The Inhuman*, Lyotard reviews for example the music of John Cage and David Tudor (or Pierre Boulez or Varèse) to find out the role the changes they implement play for the art and for its aesthetics. He claims that the different treatment of the rhythm within those works affects the way one listens. “The procedure of this sort, modifies a great deal the sensitivity of the ear (I mean the mind) to rhythm” (Lyotard, 1991, 169). And I would like to put stress on this explanation – *I mean the mind*. The ear is the mind. The mind listening and listening is most conscious of the exercises of the mind. The music is recalled and mentioned mostly to prove the irreversible changes possible through technology. The technologically advance art – and music seem to be within that category – demands as well the proclamation of the revolution of the senses. The time has come to find one’s way back to the modes of listening – which means opening up one’s mind or mindful experience. Philosophy is at once transgressed and put aside and comes back in a form of a request to listen.

IX. The Listening as [anti]Aesthetics

There is one more thing that I would like to point out at the end. David Carroll stresses that Lyotard situates art in a position in which it is capable of doing a critical job, a badly needed one. It is a job of undoing the political, the aesthetic and even the critical itself. Because of its "outside" and often contradictory status, art maintains its critical distance from which it can easily unmask all appearances and expose the repressed (Carroll 1987, 27). This critical status of art in the tradition of Adorno's philosophy is something art has achieved without even trying. Art is critical as such, because of its very place within the social strata, let us call it, its anti-social position. Most importantly, art has contradictory status and performs critical or self-critical function. In Lyotard's writing, however, the demand the art puts over its recipients is also very important. More than acknowledging the situation that is somehow made visible in the arts themselves in Adorno's views of the arts (the epistemological truth of new music), it requires the mind's activation. The critical function of the art requires the viewer to participate, to think through the overall situation of the arts - to mobilize the mind and not only the eye or the ear. To see this potential of art, this negative and critical aspect of the figural, one needs to be specially attuned, to be listening. And this Lyotard has been doing all of the time.

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**RHETORIC'S RESISTANCE TO FORMALIZATION
IN PAUL DE MAN'S THOUGHT:
THE CASE OF ALLEGORY**

ALEXANDRA IRIMIA¹

Abstract

Departing from two influential essays by Paul de Man (Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater* and *The Resistance to Theory*), the present paper attempts to discuss the matter of tropes as inhabiting the limit between rhetoric and grammar by referring to a special case within the formalized framework of figures of speech – the complex figurative structure of allegory. As an extended metaphor, allegory functions as double fold literary device conveying persuasion as well as meaning and for this reason it can be a well-suited starting point for investigating how, according to Paul de Man's self resistant theories, the rhetoric of thought and the rhetoric of figures are at odds with each other in every text.

Keywords: rhetoric, aesthetics, allegory, tropes, Paul de Man.

"We assume all too readily that, when we refer to something called language, we know what it is we are talking about." (Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*)

Given the extensive amount of his commitment to the subject of (allegories of) reading², Paul de Man, a Belgian-born literary critic and

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² Paul de Man (1979). *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

theorist, former student of Jacques Derrida, is a particularly interesting figure in the theoretical landscape of poststructuralist thought. His original contributions follow a pattern aiming to chase the tensions that arise within the confines of language – between its literal and figural dimensions, in other words, between grammar and rhetoric. In two of his most influential essays (*Aesthetic Formalization* and *Resistance to Theory*) that we shall briefly summarize later, Paul de Man dwells on the matter of tropes and on the mechanisms through which they disrupt the semantic unity of speech. By simultaneously referring and not referring to itself, following a logic of allegory, figurative speech assumes its own expressive form, while constantly pointing elsewhere. Thus, the meaning of tropes would reside precisely in this constant oscillation between two figurative regimes, always half-way through their material and their abstract reference. According to de Man, all speech (moreover, all language) is inescapably figurative, being generated by an expanded system of metaphors and functioning by the mechanisms of an allegory. For this reason, allegory is defined as the figure of all figures, the trope originally and inescapably inscribed in all other tropes, being imprinted in the very core of language itself.

The following pages aim to describe and analyze how, in Paul de Man's view, theory in its largest sense is also conceived as an allegory - the folded movement of self-reflection taking place within the boundaries of a thinking consciousness. Therefore, theory (an intricate network of formalization processes) would unveil its hidden, innermost contradiction: being similar to a trope – a rhetoric device that, through its nature, resists formalization – theory resists itself.

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In *Resistance to Theory*³, an introductory article providing a systematic approach to the key problems of literary theory, de Man questions the ambiguous status of tropes as either conveyors of grammatical – and logical, since “grammar is the isotope of logic” (de

³ To be consulted Paul de Man (1982). “Resistance to Theory”. *Yale French Studies*, vol. 63, no. 3/1982, pp. 3-20.

Man 1982, 14) – meaning, or agents of a specific function of rhetoric, namely persuasion. Developing his observations on this particular tension occurring between the two linguistic regimes, de Man describes the process of reading as a negative one, allowing for “the grammatical conventions to be undone by their rhetorical displacement” (17). Since reading becomes, as shown, resistant to reading, this negative form of self-reflection enters the realm of theory.

The problematic nature of a theoretical approach to literary texts is examined along other sources of resistance, apart from the relationship between reading and the rhetoric/grammar balance. The discussion begins with the paradox of the main theoretical interest of literary studies in the impossibility of its definition. De Man continues by invoking the poor aesthetic qualities and the inevitable attachment to established systems of knowledge of a theoretical approach – these two ‘sins’ add up to the above-mentioned resistance. Resistance to theory is also a resistance to canons and ideologies, but also to a primarily logic use of language, against its more performative, rhetorical functions.

In another essay, *Aesthetic Formalization*⁴, published posthumously in 1984, Paul de Man proposes an interpretation of Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1793) along the lines of what he calls an ‘aesthetic ideology’. To sum up, contrary to Kant’s ideas of ‘disinterested pleasure’, de Man thinks of the aesthetic as a political instrument, and of the ‘aesthetic state’ as an utopian approximation of an ideal social construct. Next, de Man identifies in Heinrich von Kleist’s hybrid text *Über das Marionettentheater* (a succession of three narratives presented in a dialogical frame, inviting to be read as a philosophical essay) an ironical approach to Schiller’s utopian aesthetic ideology. In fact, Schiller used the metaphor of dance to describe how aesthetics does not so much imply freedom, but a high degree of formalization: the illusion of a beautiful free play is given, actually, by an exquisite mastering of a technique, achieved through the ‘unfreedom’ of repetition. Moreover, a dancer will never enjoy the graceful vision of his motion – the aesthetic

⁴ To be consulted Paul de Man (1984). “Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist’s *Über das Marionettentheater*”. *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 263-313.

pleasure is reserved only to those in a privileged position of power, controlling the dancers and restricting their movements. From this perspective, Schiller's aesthetic state can only be realized in the form of a totalitarian structure. In this way, the strong links established between aesthetic formalization and political power become more than obvious.

According to de Man, the process of formalization can, just like mathematical numbers, simultaneously be conceived as tropes for infinitude or as tautology. In the three short stories proposed by Kleist, formalization represents, in order: 1. a mimetic device for establishing conformity to the real (in the first short story), 2. a diegetical over-determination of mimesis (second story), for the author deploys it only to consolidate its authority, and 3. a performative enactment of the text as a fight ('agon') taking place between the author and the reader. Therefore, the text is able to exist only because neither the author, nor the reader win this fight – and this is possible only by means of an invented 'system of deviations', namely, the figurative language (the tropes). In conclusion, the aesthetic power of the dance (as a metaphor for any artistic endeavor, *y compris* literature) does not reside in the puppet (the reader), nor in the puppeteer (the author), but in the linear movements of the puppeteer's fingers – ellipsis, parable, hyperbole, and other 'figures' that can easily be recognized as rhetorical devices.

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Following Edmund Husserl's line of thought in phenomenology, one becomes convinced that no bridge can be built to cross the abyssal ontological gap separating subject from object. The object is thought to be "given" to us only in consciousness, and this is the reason why every grounding, every showing of *truth*, *knowledge* and *being* (to name only a few concepts that have been dominating Western logocentric thought until the threshold moment of Deconstruction) can occur exclusively within the limits of consciousness, thus being damned to ineluctable subjectivity. This dissociation between subject and object is both *symptomatic of* and *latent in* the functional mechanisms of language – in Paul de Man's own words, "the poet knows better than the philosopher that the writer cannot live within the plenitude of a natural unity of

being; he also knows that his language is powerless to capture this unity, since it is itself the main cause of the separation." (de Man 1960, 92)

Walter Benjamin, similarly, questions and attempts at concealing the distinction between the subject of idealism and the material object of knowledge – in de Man's words, "binary polarity of classical banality." (de Man 1979, 107) As Paul de Man sees it, the goal of modern aesthetics is "articulation", the joining together of the heterogeneous into unities. However, according to de Man, *true aesthetics* is the aesthetics of disarticulation and it is precisely in this point that one can identify the origin of his effort to reorient the discourse of the artwork around the materiality of art, perceived as something that radically differs in its nature from anything human. With the force of a Nietzschean rejection of any anthropocentric or humanist pretention, de Man vehemently notes that:

"The idea of individuation, of the human subject possessing a privileged viewpoint, is a mere metaphor by means of which man protects himself from his insignificance by forcing his own interpretation of a set of meanings that is reassuring to his vanity", enabling him to forget that he is "a mere transitory accident in the cosmic order." (111)

In direct Benjaminian descent, de Man continues the critique of the organic symbol (as incapable of capturing the phenomenality of experience), emphasizing a positive notion of allegory as a device of folding over of consciousness in self-reflection, transcending the realm of immanence and inhabiting the sphere of the nonhuman or more-than-human things (puppet-like or God-like, as described in his analysis of Heinrich von Kleist's *On the Marionette Theater*⁵). Artworks that enable this sort of reflection, a higher, second-order reflection, are exclusively allegories.

⁵ As explicitly stated in *Aesthetic Formalization*: "grace will reappear after knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) has gone through infinity [...] in the body which is devoid of consciousness or which possesses it in an infinite degree; that is in the marionette or in the god." (cited edition, p. 267) Neither the technological (deprived of

De Man describes *figuration* as “the madness of words” that, by a false metaphysical assumption of meaning, erases the senselessness of language’s positing power (a power that acts randomly and autonomously prior to any human signification). Humans are the products rather than the agents of this strange madness, of this erasure of the non-phenomenal positing power of language.

Continuing with the madness metaphor⁶, one can safely state that figures have a maddening doubleness, both referring and not referring to things. Allegory, the figure of all figures – both referring and not referring to itself – is the condition under which we use language, is the rule of the game. As Walter Benjamin paradoxically defined it, allegory is “a void that signifies precisely the non-being of what it represents” (de Man 1971, 35), thus being a process of signification whose chief-engine is not the affirmation, but the negation of its semantic unity.

Quoting de Man’s affirmation in *Aesthetic Formalization*, “the disarticulation produced by tropes is primarily a disarticulation of meaning; it attacks semantic units such as words and sentences.” (de Man 1984, 289) Moreover, the fact that a certain disruption is inherent at the level of meaning has been revealed ever since Heidegger’s reflections on the conflict between disclosure and uncovering in the nature of speech. Consequently, no text has a determinate meaning; there is in every self-consistent text an irreconcilable difference between the expressive and speech-act dimensions of its play, as well as an uneasy mixture of affirmation and denial, of gracefulness and violence, of mystification and lucidity, of hoax and high seriousness.

Subverting Schiller’s ideal of the aesthetic state, Kleist’s allegory of the puppets reveals how mistaken we are when we constantly project meaning on works of art. The puppets mean nothing to us, and yet they manage to provoke experience in us just by the force of what they do

consciousness) form nor the divine (overconscious) form need language to express themselves.

⁶ Nevertheless, according to Derrida, “Reason is madder than madness – for reason is non-meaning and oblivion – and in which madness is more rational than reason, for it is closer to the wellspring of sense, however silent or murmuring – this crisis has always begun and is interminable.” (Derrida 1978, 76)

within the artifice they operate in: "by itself, the motion is devoid of any aesthetic interest or effect". When this interest comes into play – as it happens in the story about the ephebe – grace is lost. And what holds true for the puppets holds true for all the figures that get embedded into any work of art. Words shake off their old semantic significance, and the nonsemantic aspects of the words become dominant. However, the signifier-signified disruption inherent in all tropes varies in the type of expressiveness it engenders – and here lies another aspect in which allegory differs from symbols:

"The expressiveness of allegory is distinct from that of the symbol. Allegory does not point beyond itself toward some point of transcendental realization. The task, then, of understanding the text does not involve synthesizing it into a whole but mortifying it, shattering it into pieces. Allegory is the means to assault and level to the earth the Romantic and Modernist temple dedicated to the organic unity of artworks." (Waters 1999, 145)

The Romantic ideal of the organic unity of the work of art is subject to yet another factor of disruption: the multitude of contrary forces regulating the domains of what is written and what is spoken, as well as the perpetual play between the performative and constative functions of language (in J.L. Austin's terms) guarantee the independence of language from human will and thus its escape from any attempt at complete formalization, let alone complete understanding. De Man's essays insist on our inescapable situation as readers of what is finally unreadable, and unveils a *writerly* equivalent to this *readerly*⁷ difficulty by stating that:

"Writing can just as well be considered the linguistic correlative of the inability to read. We write in order to forget our foreknowledge of the total opacity of words and things or, perhaps

⁷ We borrow here Roland Barthes' widely known distinction between *lisible/scriptible*.

worse, because we do not know whether things have or do not have to be understood." (de Man 1979, 203)

Consequently, the concept of *authorship* does not remain unshattered by this radical remark and later on de Man will explicitly replace the author with his famous "mobile army of tropes and metaphors." As Peggy Kamuf clearly observes, authorship is reduced to being "only the defensive name of a relation to language, a name which covers up its essential inseparability from the supposedly secondary activity of reading" (Kamuf 2002, 327) From Lindsay Waters perspective things are not very different, since she sees the author as "the affable, familiar ghost to whom most humans have deep sentimental attachments." (Waters 1999, 146)

In his essay *Shelley Disfigured*, de Man asks an inescapable question: *how does a speech act become a trope?* He provides the readers with an equally inescapable answer: "by imposing on the senseless power of positional language the authority of sense and meaning." (de Man 1979, 64) This authority resides in figuration and, according to de Man, all figuration is mad, a mindless stream of language whose enigmatic positing power, devoid of consciousness, posits only its own thoughtless action. Underlining that rhetoric also has a performative dimension apart from the constative one, de Man explains this specific kind of performativity, marked by self-deconstructive moments:

"Considered as persuasion, rhetoric is performative but when considered a system of tropes, it deconstructs its own performance. Rhetoric is a text in that it allows for two incompatible, mutually self-exclusive points of view, and therefore puts an insurmountable obstacle in the way of any reading or understanding. The aporia between performative and constative language is merely a version of the aporia between trope and persuasion that both generates and paralyzes rhetoric and thus gives it the appearance of a history." (131)

Paul de Man's repeatedly declared aim is "disarticulating the project of articulation which is the aesthetic" and this project can be

retraced back to Walter Benjamin, who, according to Lindsay Waters, suggested to de Man "the power there might be in the use of the figures of rhetoric to mortify the text by disfiguring it to see how it works, not as something guided by an animating spirit but as a mechanism." (Waters 1999, 145) By the same token, de Man's thesis is that language broken up into figures provides precisely what the philosophers of consciousness had been trying to describe: the isolation of a *consciousness without a subject*.

Even if for the majority of rhetorists it goes without saying that the study of eloquence and persuasion preceded the taxonomy of figures and tropes, for Paul de Man rhetoric is reduced to "the study of tropes and figures", to "the irreducible property of language to be always figurative, never proper" (O'Leary 1993, 167), since he sees all language as an expanded system of metaphors.

Thus conceived, rhetoric is able to destroy the balance of the stable cognitive field that is traditionally thought to extend from grammar to logic to a general science of man and of the phenomenal world. The fact is well-acknowledged by de Man himself, since we find him in *The Resistance to Theory* describing the disordering orders of the *trivium* as it follows:

"Rhetoric, by its actively negative relationship to grammar and to logic, certainly undoes the claims of the trivium (and, by extension, of language) to be an epistemologically stable construct. The resistance to theory is a resistance to the rhetorical or tropological dimension of language, a dimension which is perhaps more explicitly in the foreground in literature (broadly conceived) than in other verbal manifestations (which can be revealed in any verbal event when it is read textually. Since grammar as well as figuration is an integral part of reading, it follows that reading will be a negative process in which the grammatical cognition is undone, at all times, by its rhetorical displacement. The model of the trivium contains within itself the pseudo-dialectic of its own undoing and its history tells the story of this dialectic."

Therefore, rhetoric understood as persuasion is forcefully exiled from the performative realm and forced to inhabit the affective area of perlocution. De Man signals that speech act theories of reading in fact do

nothing but repeat the grammatization of the *trivium* at the expense of the rhetoric, for characterizing the performative as sheer convention reduces it in effect to a grammatical codes among others. The relationship between trope and performance becomes actually closer but more disruptive.

In *Aesthetic Formalization*, De Man identifies the three embedded stories in Kleist's bizarre text as allegories of the wavering status of narrative when compared to the epistemologically sound persuasion of proof. In all of them the loss of hermeneutic control (the reader is confronted with the challenge of three apparently absurd ahistorical fables) is staged as hermeneutic persuasion, since they are integrated in the dialogical framework as examples supporting certain arguments. However, the narratives succeed in both obeying and subverting the mimetic imperative of the dialogical, reasonable argument under which it functions. Kleist ironizes one by one all the supports of ordinary intelligibility (narratorial authority, verisimilitude, temporal and spatial anchors and so on), leaving the reader in a state of randomly overdetermined confusion, forced to cope with the uncomfortable certitude that "narrative authority can get away with any degree of absurdity".

The disjunctive plurality of meanings of the three allegories emerging when confronted to the text as a whole (the fable of the bear can even be read as a *mise-en-abyme* of the text itself, staging a scene of reading that kills off any possibility of *play*) is, to say the least, disquieting. It envisages the text as a system of turns and deviations, a system of tropes that, similar to the thrusts and feints in the mock(?)-combat with the bear (model of a perfect reader reducing the author to near-nothingness), always refers, but never to the right referent.

This fictional model confirms Walter Benjamin's views upon allegory, detailed in his work *The Origin of German Drama*: allegory is not the *conventional* representation of some expression, but an *expression* of a representational convention itself. Allegorical expression includes as its object this very conventionality of the historical, this appearance of insignificance and indifference. That is, convention itself comes to be signified or expressed. (Benjamin 1998)

Speaking about conventions in the epistemic landscape of the *trivium*, it seems that grammatical and logical ones have, as Greimas notices, a kind of affinity one for another, being co-extensive in the sense

that grammar can be thought of as an isotope of logic. In de Man's view, literariness, however, foregrounds the use of rhetoric over grammar and logic, disrupting an anyway fragile scholastic equilibrium. This has radical consequences for the field of theory – as long as it was anchored in the relatively stable paradigms of grammar and logic, it preserved its connections with phenomenalism of the “outer-world”. Paul de Man signals, nevertheless, that it is no longer possible to ignore the rhetorical dimension of theory, thus leaving it with the problematic status of tropes and their double *appartenance* and reaching a paradoxical conclusion:

“Tropes used to be part of the study of grammar but were also considered to be the semantic agent of the specific function (or effect) that rhetoric performs as persuasion as well as meaning. Tropes, unlike grammar, pertain primordially to language. They are text-producing functions that are not necessarily patterned on a non-verbal identity, whereas grammar is by definition capable of extra-linguistic generalization. The latent tension between rhetoric and grammar precipitates out in the problem of reading, the process that necessarily partakes of both. It turns out that the resistance to theory is in fact a resistance to reading.” (de Man 1982, 15)

Left with the unsolved (and unsolvable?) problem of a barely lisible theory of reading, maybe it would be useful to remind the reader that in its primary ancient Greek acception, *theoria* referred to a group of individuals authorized by the polis to certify that something had taken place, thus providing it the *discursive status of reality*. Like fantasy (as conceived in Jacques Lacan's works), theory makes present a world, a reality in which the subject is not there except as the point of observation that consolidates the absent subject as part of the *mise-en-scène* itself.

Thus conceived, theory becomes an intricate *allegory of absence observing presence*, an allegory that, as any rhetorical device, resists the ambitions of total formalization dominating the realms of grammar and logic. We consider that we have met here Paul de Man's conclusion asserting that rhetoric has a genuinely critical dimension, an aspect corresponding to what he calls the “epistemology of tropes.” Since, as shown above, the language of literary theory is a language of self-

resistance, one can draw the conclusion that the more ambitious its aims and methods, the less possible pure theory becomes. From this perspective, "it would be impossible to tell whether the flourishing of literary theory is its triumph or its fall." (20)

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THE REPRESENTATIONAL THEORY OF ART AT THE EDGE OF MODERN ART: FROM THE SIMULATION OF REALITY TO THE AESTHETIC OBJECT

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Abstract

For a long time art has been perceived as an imitation of the real world. Simulation of reality through the aesthetic object became a common pursuit, which lasted until the end of the 19th century, when photography and moving pictures were invented. The artists then went from one extreme to the other. Modern art wanted to deny any kind of representation in arts. The hurricane of modern art left behind many questions regarding what we should do with our traditional thinking and how we should approach art in a better way. In this article, following Hartmann's steps, I will argue that art never intended to be an illusion, but an appearance [*Erscheinung*].

Keywords: modern art, simulation, reality, aesthetic object, representation.

Since the earliest times, human beings developed a powerful interest in transforming their surroundings into something more beautiful, more appealing, more interesting and less tedious. These transformations prevailed in all areas of human activity. Decoration of homes, weapons, tools, and even one's own body was a common feature of ancient civilizations. There are also traces of work songs of the agrarian societies. These ancient interests were firstly approached theoretically by Plato's writings on *techne* and *mimesis*. Plato's ideas, followed by Aristotle, developed in what we now call "the mimetic

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theory of art", or "imitation theory". The representational theory of art is a contemporary reinterpretation of the mimetic theory.

By *techne* the Greeks meant crafts like medicine, gymnastics, justice, music and even arithmetic. For Plato and his contemporaries, art as *techne* was linked with the idea of skill. *Techne* was something that required skill. Even though in the time of the ancient Greeks there was no such thing as a system of arts in the way we understand it today, some of the crafts leaned on the concept of *mimesis*. Examples of mimetic crafts are painting, poetry and drama. According to the Platonic-Aristotelian view, these crafts imitated the objects or the actions that they represented. These objects or actions were, in turn, themselves imitations of the Ideas. Art, as we understand it today, was for the Greeks a copy of a copy of the Ideas. Art was a simulation of the reality, which, in turn, was also an imitation. Art was illusion, and illusion is often linked with deception. Plato famously wanted to chase away the poets from his ideal society, because he believed art is twice removed from truth, as it is just an imitation of an imitation. Aristotle shared Plato's viewpoint about crafts as drama, music and poetry as being imitations, but did not agree with Plato's belief that these crafts were socially dangerous. On the contrary, Aristotle truly believed that these crafts evoked emotions for the purpose of *catharsis*.

This way of thinking about art as *mimesis* was so popular among the Greeks that the story about the great painter Zeuxis was well preserved and handed down to posterity. It is said that Zeuxis once painted a bunch of grapes with such an extraordinary resemblance to reality, that birds tried to eat the grapes depicted in the painting. Even the Romans, as much as they paradoxically hated it, were big fans of the Greek culture. The Greeks produced mostly bronze statuary, which unfortunately, over the time, was lost or melted down for economical purposes, as bronze has always been a valuable material. Driven by their admiration of Greek culture and their historical and cultural responsibility, the romans copied in marble many of the bronze statues created by Greek artists some five hundred years earlier. Ironically, in the platonic sense, the new marble sculptures were a copy after a copy after a copy.

The Greeks created some kind of a snowball effect. It started from an initial state of small significance and, as it rolled down the hill, built upon itself, becoming larger. Arthur Danto writes about an almost obsessive behavior around the idea of creating the perfect simulation of reality in arts. It was a matter of progress, technological advancement and science.

“The decreasing distance, writes Danto, between actual and pictorial optical stimulation then marks the progress in painting, and one could measure the rate of progress by the degree to which the unaided eye marks a difference. Art history demonstrated the advance, inasmuch as the unaided eye could more easily mark the differences between what Cimabue presented than what Ingres did, so art was demonstrably Progressive in the way Science hoped to be.” (Danto 1986, 86)

This half of a millennium that separates Cimabue from Ingres is the historical proof that artists (painters in this case) literally tried to reach perfection in rendering through arts what the eye saw and perceived. Positioned on the historic timeline right between Cimabue and Ingres, the paintings of Albrecht Dürer were so faithful to what the eye normally perceived that we, as viewers, can almost feel the blood pumping passionately through the veins of the *Praying Hands* and we can almost hear the fast beating heart of the *Young Hare*.

This concern towards simulating the reality was not only about some edible grapes or about sweet little bunnies. It was also about movement and perspective. And this was the beginning of the end.

“In any case, writes Danto, the moving picture united with the literary arts, ultimately by means of sound. In adding sound to motion, moving pictures had two features that painting could not emulate, and thus the progress of visual art as the history of painting and sculpture came to a halt, leaving artists who hoped to take the progress of painting further with no place to go. It was the end of art as it was understood before 1895.” (Danto 2013, 4)

Maybe it sounds a little harsh to say that it was the end of art, but it surely was the end of two thousand years of technological pursuit. Regarding the idea that painters were practically left jobless after the invention of photography, Noël Carroll writes that:

“By the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, visual art clearly begins to deviate from the aim of imitating nature. Visual art departs from the aim of copying how things look; photography could do that. German expressionist painters left off trying to capture exactly the look of things and, instead, distorted them for expressive effects. Cubists, action painters, and minimalists diverged from nature even further until finally making paintings whose referents, if any, were completely unrecognizable became a dominant tradition.” (Carroll 1999, 24)

The icy landscape in which the Greeks’ snowball rolled ended with the advent of the deep ocean of photography and moving pictures. Rolling down at a fiery speed, the Greeks’ snowball cluelessly sunk in the ocean. Technology has won and the task has been completed.

Well, not really.

Firstly, people’s concern with the perfect simulation of reality did not stop. It just took a different turn from the path followed by fine art. Sometimes these two paths intersect, other times they go parallel and there are also times when they go into opposite directions. Secondly, immediately after Danto announced the end of art as it was known until the 19th century, he added that “in fact painting entered a glorious phase when it was revolutionized a decade after the Lumières’ moving picture show” (Danto 2013, 4). “A decade after the Lumières’ moving picture show” literally means the beginning of the 20th century. That is the “zero point” of modern art. Of course, revolutionary and controversial art had been seen before the 20th century, but what happened in the 20th century was something beyond any expectation. It was, as Danto says, “glorious”.

The common way of understanding representation in art came to a dead end once and for all with the avant-garde movement. It was

decreed: art had nothing to do with representation. Criticizing the representational theory of art, Noël Carroll writes that:

“Today, after almost a century of abstract painting, this theory seems obviously false. Certain well-known paintings by Mark Rothko and Yves Klein do not imitate anything – they are pure fields of color – and yet they are considered major works of twentieth-century art. Thus, the theory that art is imitation appears to us to fail as a general theory of art, since it fails to be fully comprehensive. Too much of what we know to be art does not meet the alleged necessary requirement that anything that is art be imitative.” (Carroll 1999, 21)

Noël Carroll is not the only philosopher that shows how the traditional representational theory of art fails to understand modern art. In a different way, Clive Bell, a supporter of formalism, writes that:

“Let no one imagine that representation is bad in itself; a realistic form may be as significant, in its place as part of the design, as an abstract. But if a representative form has value, it is as form, not as representation. The representative element in a work of art may or may not be harmful; always it is irrelevant. For, to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation.” (Bell 1914, 27)

The critics of the representational theory of art base their arguments on the assumption that abstract art could not represent anything. They argue that the representational theory is just too exclusive because, on one hand, abstract art will never be understood as art from this theory's point of view, and, on the other hand, we already know that it is art. Thus, the theory is flawed. But what if the representational theory of art was never about copying the perceptual reality? What if the pursuit of the artists towards creating the perfect simulation of reality was just a path that went alongside with that of the

aesthetic object, but they never overlapped? The artists' pursuit towards creating the perfect simulation of reality was more of a scientific interest than an aesthetic one. Hegel wrote that:

“Apart from anything else, a main feature of artistic production is external workmanship, since the work of art has a purely technical side which extends into handicraft, especially in architecture and sculpture, less so in painting and music, least of all in poetry. Skill in technique is not helped by any inspiration, but only by reflection, industry, and practice. But such skill the artist is compelled to have in order to master his external material and not be thwarted by its intractability.” (Hegel 1975, 27)

With these words, Hegel expresses the fact that the artists should possess the skills, technology and means to render what they truly want, but the means of rendering should not be overlapped with the aesthetic goals.

So, if the representational theory of art is not what we think it is and it is not what we think the Greeks thought it was, then what is it really? The key relies on the fact that representation in art must not be understood as a mean to create an illusion. The reason for this is that, as Hartmann states,

„Illusion belongs the falsification of reality. But what is essential to art is precisely the opposition to being real, which we also sense as present in the object.” (Hartmann 2014, 39)

Art does not deceive. Art does not lie. The artist does not want to fool his public. He is not a cheater and he is not a magician. Art is not an illusion. Mimetic imitation, writes Gadamer, „does not intend to be « believed », but to be understood as imitation. Such imitation is not feigned, is not false show, but on the contrary is clearly a « true » showing, « true » as a show” (Gadamer 1986, 128). Gadamer strongly underlines the fact that whenever we look at a work of art, we do this being aware of the fact that what we see is not something real; we are aware that it is not happening in the real world, that we cannot relate to it as we would do with the real thing. If we immerse ourselves in the

world the artwork opens to us, then it is our conscious choice; not even a second do we have the impression that we actually stepped into another world. Being under the impression that what happens before our eyes is real, when what we actually have in front of us is a work of art, means that we do not look at it aesthetically.

When we, as a public, have the impression that it is real, we “forget” that what lies in front of us is a work of art. Sometimes, people actually want to abandon the aesthetic attitude and to enjoy an illusion, but this activity has nothing to do with a work of art. For instance, a lot of people love horror movies. Before pressing the play button, these people will create a certain atmosphere in order to watch the movie: they will turn off all the lights and they will be sure there are not many people in the room. They will even be happier if the night they are watching the movie is a special night, like the Halloween night, which adds some spiritual and magical load to the actual movie. Only after all this preparation is done (in a manner very similar to a ritual) the play button is pressed and the movie starts. The scarier you get after watching the movie, the better the movie was. We all know about the telephone ring cliché: a movie will depict some people watching a horror movie, a telephone rings in the horror movie and soon after, a telephone will ring in the room where the people watch the horror movie. They will, of course, be very scared because of the so-called coincidence. The fact is that as long as we think that what happens in front of us is real, as long as we expect that the work of art will actually interfere with our lives (as in getting a real phone call from a real zombie that was earlier depicted in a horror movie) we are not actually “seeing” any work of art. This type of attitude has nothing to do with art, it’s just plain entertainment.

Maybe simulation of reality is indeed a bad word choice. And maybe so is imitation. These concepts leave the impression that art has a lot in common with illusion and deception.

“The ideal, writes Danto, of the self-diaphanizing artwork is very ancient. It is, for example, a fantasy of the mimetic theory of art that the work of art should present to eye or ear only what would have been presented them by the object imitated. As such,

presentation underdetermines the distinction between reality and art, to which it is invariant, and illusion becomes not only a possibility but a goal." (Danto 1986, 24)

Illusion becomes a goal in arts not because the Platonic-Aristotelian view is flawed, but because this theory was understood in an extreme way.

Hartmann writes that:

"All theories of illusion and deception that take this direction fail to understand an important characteristic of the nature of the artistic letting-appear [Erscheinenlassen]. It is this: art does not simulate reality, but rather understands appearance just as appearance, it is not integrated as an element in the real course of life, but rather it is lifted out of life and stands before us, as it were, shielded from the weight of reality." (Hartmann 2014, 38)

So, in order to avoid this kind of collapse into illusion, Hartmann reveals the fact that what we see in the work of art is not an illusion, but something "shielded from the weight of reality". How should this something be called is a delicate philosophical matter. Hegel believed that "the beautiful has its being in pure appearance [*Schein*]². However, "to appear" [*Scheinen*], writes Hartmann, "always suggests deception and illusion, and just that may lead us astray here. For, as noted earlier, nothing is simulated here, neither perfection nor a primordial model, nor even the reality of what is unreal (in poetry, the reality of the characters and conflicts) [...] Thus neither <<idea>> nor <<shining-forth>> is entirely accurate. Both must be replaced by concepts that are more accurate and fitting." (Hartmann 2014, 84) According to Hartmann's view, neither the Greeks' "idea", nor the "shining-forth" of the German idealism is suitable as a name for that something "shielded from the weight of reality" that we see in the work of art. Moreover, Hartmann states that

² Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol. 1., 4.

“Behind the Hegelian thought of « shining-forth » [Scheinen] there is hidden the remains of the old intellectualism: appearance [Schein] implies an element opposed to truth. Truth exists only in the realm of knowledge, thus appearance [Schein] exists only where there is a question of knowledge (as a limit, or as a failure of knowledge); or the opposite: only where it is claimed « that something of such-and-such quality exists » can there be appearance [Schein], deception, or a leading astray.” (Hartmann 2014, 86)

So, once again, art might slip into the realm of illusion.

Hartmann’s goal is to absolutely purify the work of art from any negative connotation, from anything that might lead to the impression that art has something to do with illusion, deception and falsity. In order to do so, he emphasizes the fact that what we see in the work of art, that something “shielded from the weight of reality”, is an appearance [*Erscheinen*], not an idea, nor a « shining-forth » [*Scheinen*]. Hartmann writes that

“It is not really a question of a « shining-forth » [Scheinen] but rather of an appearance [Erscheinen]. This shift in meaning lies in a resistance to the use of « shining-forth » because this term suggests an element of deception.” (86)

But where does this appearance [*Erscheinen*] occur? What is this thing that transgresses our perceptual organs, slants through our mind and goes right into our souls? Well, Hartmann argues that there are two strata in the aesthetic object and these two strata are of fundamentally different kind of existence: one is real and the other is unreal. At this point, Hartmann emphasizes the difference between the foreground [*Vordergrund*] and the background [*Hintergrund*]. The foreground belongs to the real world, whereas the background belongs to the unreal. According to Hartmann, the aesthetic object presents itself as “reality in the foreground, which is given to the senses, appearance [*Erscheinung*] in the background; being in itself in the former, mere being for us in the latter. That is not disputed or even put in question, if one avoids attributing deception and illusion to the appearing background. Rather illusion would do injury to the character of pure appearance [*den*

reinen Erscheinungscharakter], because it would simulate reality. Its exclusion is thus precisely the condition under which the back-and-forth activation of the two modes of being can produce a stable and unified picture." (39)

In order to avoid the deception in the work of art we need to understand, as Gadamer pointed out, that art is the sort of imitation similar with the one when we pretend to play. But this is not something we could do with any other object. Art is not just another game. The aesthetic object has certain features that no other object possesses. The aesthetic object is construed in this way, with two modes of being, and those two modes of being belong to the foreground and the background, that it the real and the ideal. The whole act of appearance [*Erscheinung*] marks the union between the real and ideal.

Furthermore, Hartmann writes that:

"He who sees only the figures, the scene, or the emotion, does not see artistically; such a person is attuned only to the content and to the human natures represented by the picture. He is looking just as one may look at human figures passing by: his perception is basically of the everyday kind. Likewise, the person who sees only the colors and notes nothing of their vivid reciprocity upon the canvas, sees as one sees only the superficial qualities of things. The one and the other see nothing of the work of art; the peculiar suspended quality of the art object does not exist for them, and they do not experience the phenomenon of appearance [*Erscheinen*] as such." (64)

It results from here that the public mistakes if it directs its attention towards the foreground. The foreground is the real, the material thing that stands in front of the public. For instance, to return to the Durer's *Young Hare* example, the foreground is the real watercolor depiction of a hare, the actual painting that can now be found at the Albertina Museum in Vienna. The one who directs its attention only to the foreground, "his perception is basically of the everyday kind", as Hartmann argued. Take for instance the case the Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box*. He who only sees the Brillo box as such, will not get out of his *lebenswelt*; he will continue to look at it in his everyday ordinary fashion

and he will completely miss the point and, of course, the work of art. The foreground and the background must unite themselves in the phenomenon of appearance [*Erscheinung*]. The background is the ideal mode of being of the aesthetic object. In the Dürer's *Young Hare* example, the background is the fast beating sound that the hare's little heart makes, his fragility and his wilderness. But this background does not come without the foreground. They come together, in unity. The same reasoning is valid for the *Brillo Box* as well. In the background of the *Brillo Box* lies the philosophical statement that the line between artefacts and ordinary objects is invisible to our unaided eye.

The actualization of the representational theory of art is important because none of the two background examples (*Young Hare* and *Brillo Box*) would be possible without the real existence of the foreground. The artist wants to be talented and to possess skill not because he wants to create a perfect simulation of reality, but because he needs it in order to better express his ideas. The appearance [*Erscheinung*] can be experienced only if there is harmony and unity between the foreground and the background.

The representational theory of art started with the mimetic representation of objects, which, in Plato's view, was a copy after a copy. Then it was developed by Aristotle and representation was not only of objects, but also of actions, like in a drama. After almost two thousand years, the representational theory of art was "adjusted" so it could also represent emotions, and that was the expression (of emotions) theory of art. After this, at the end of 19th century, the theory was followed by a non-representational theory of art, when partisans of abstract art discovered that sometimes it seems that there is really nothing represented in the aesthetic object. Soon after this, the psychoanalysts analyzed those abstract, non-representational creations and found a lot of subconscious material. So, in a sense, even abstract art represented the deep down buried subconscious of the artist.

The Dadaists wanted so much to break free from rules and all these types of putting labels and pointing fingers, that they tried to create something completely random. But the fact is that in order to make art, the artist actually has to do *something*. The artist has to alter some material, or to perform something, or to make certain noises or

music, and so on. This *something* is the real thing that we firstly perceive when in touch with an aesthetic object. This *something* is the foreground. And however abstract or random it might be, the public will always try to recognize something in it. Another way to put it is this: in order to experience the phenomenon of appearance [*Erscheinung*] as such in a painting (or even to just try to see it as a work of art) the public firstly must *see* it. The public must use its perceptive organs – and in this case, the eyes. Firstly, we, as a public have to deal with the foreground and “we invariably seek to recognize or to interpret something as something.” (Gadamer 1977, 30) It is not unusual to hear at an art exposition or at the museum or at a concert hall comments similar with these: “It makes me think about....” or “This work of art gives me the feeling of...” or “This resembles with a...”. Even the “infamous” Duchamp’s *Fountain* firstly comes to us as a urinal. Moreover, if it hadn’t even been a real urinal, but something that resembled a urinal, then the first thing in our mind would have been: “Hey, this looks like a urinal”. This instant perception is like a lever with which we make our way towards experiencing the phenomenon of appearance [*Erscheinung*].

In conclusion, art is not something that has to be believed, but something that we must understand as representation in the sense discussed above. The representational theory of art has lived alongside with the aesthetic object all time and even when it was denied and pushed away by its companion in the 20th century, it still continued to follow every step that art made. Even though at this point in history the interest in representational progress is diminished, because, as we have already seen, pursuit towards the simulation of reality was satisfied, today, representation in arts stands not as a goal, but as some kind of link between the public and the work of art. As Hartmann wrote,

“At first sight, it appears as if the activity of the artist was a realization, perhaps a realization of an idea, or of an ideal that hovers before his mind. But if one looks more closely, we find quite the opposite. His creativity is precisely not realization, and therefore also not a making-possible. What hovers before his mind is not translated into reality, but only represented. And that means: it is brought to appearance [*Erscheinung*].” (Hartmann 2014, 40)

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WHY IS THE DE-AESTHETICIZATION OF ART A PHENOMENON SPECIFIC TO THE ARTISTIC CAPITALISM?

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Abstract

The main aim of this article is to examine and define the *de-aestheticization* of art, from Harold Rosenberg's perspective, as a phenomenon specific to the artistic capitalism, following three major work hypothesis. The first one is that de-aestheticization, criticized as de-definition of art, is an aesthetic revolution of the artistic modernism, specific to artistic capitalism, treated in the acceptance of Gilles Lipovetsky. This level of de-aestheticization allows to comprehend the connection between ethics and aesthetics nowadays, the first one delimitating three ages of the artistic capitalism, each of them corresponding to one of the next values: excellence, merit and authenticity, and reshaping the status of the artist as individual. Based on this paradigm, I will argue, in the light of Rosenberg's and Ferry's arguments that the *de-definition* is a direct consequence of the Subject's moral self-representations in the individualist-democratic societies of consumption, preparing the field for the second hypothesis, which considers de-aestheticization responsible for reinforcing the concept of materiality of the work of art, because it reconfigures the theories about mass art production, consumption and exposure. This approach will inspire the second conclusion of the current research, according to which the materiality of the work of arts provokes, in the terms of *de-aestheticization*, the aesthetic *de-territorialisation*, remarked not only at the level of the artistic production, but also on that of artistic exposure and consumption. Lastly, the third hypothesis will justify the process of de-aestheticization as expression of social and economic capitalist inequalities between individuals reflected in artistic discourses and representations, as well as its consequences on the process of the institutionalization of art and culture.

Keywords: de-aestheticization, culture, art, de-definition, artistic capitalism, aesthetic de-territorialisation, authenticity.

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I. Introduction. The De-Aestheticization of the Art *vs.* the Aestheticization of the World

The modernisation of aesthetics raised the artistic capitalism in the terms of consumption and art production. A radical philosophical critique of the artistic capitalism started to be claimed as an imperative necessity, since the analysis of the symptoms that converted capitalism, from its native and traditional ideology, assumed by the Marxist theories of production and class differences, as well as from the Heideggerian expression of a technical revolution, to an artistic ideology and, more important, to a life style of the (post)modern individual, confronted us with a new social process of claiming the authenticity: “the aestheticization of the world.”²

As specific moment of the history of modern subjectivity, this process reiterated Wilde’s ideal, the constitution of the self as a work of art inspiring the postmodern project of the aestheticization of the world, originated, as Lipovetsky argues, exclusively in the artistic capitalism³. But this phenomena appears at the same time with the cultural

² To be consulted Gilles Lipovetsky, Jean Serroy (2013). *L’esthétisation du monde. Vivre à l’âge du capitalisme Artiste*. Paris: Gallimard.

³ In order to satisfy a methodological constraint of the current research, I will briefly define the sense in which I operate the “artistic capitalism”, enough to clarify to what extent the *de-aestheticization* is a specific phenomenon for this cultural ideology. I agree, on this level, with Lipovetsky and Serroy’s argument that “this is what we mainly call artistic or creative-transaesthetic capitalism”, an ideology “characterised by the increasing importance of different stages of sensibility and process design, through a systematic work of styling goods and commercial spaces, of generalised integration of art, look and affects of the consumerist universe.” (2013, 12) Because it is not the place for an analysis of artistic capitalism as ideology, I will only mention in here that based on Lipovetsky’s perspective, I tried to demonstrate it as the artistic ideology that made possible the aestheticization of the world by unifying the representations of space, time and individual, in a critical theory, which has an artistic component and a social one. This thesis, as well as its main arguments, are developed in a different work, from which the current research is inspired, being an attempt to revisit and finalise the work-hypothesis that constituted, there, the debate on the de-aestheticized art, configured in the first chapter. To be consulted Oana Șerban (2016). *Capitalismul artistic (Artistic capitalism)*. Pitești: Paralela 45.

paradigm of *the de-definition of art*, also named “de-aestheticization”, that Rosenberg understands being the age of “the anxious” aesthetic object: the artistic quality or legitimacy of an object depends on the recognition given by an artist who has the autonomy to proclaim himself as such, as well as to qualify or withdraw his work of art from the function of an aesthetic product. The best example for this argument is represented by Morris’s deposition executed before a notary, through which the artist “withdraws from said construction all aesthetic quality and content” of his Litanies and “declares that from the date hereof said construction has no such quality and content.” (Rosenberg 1972, 28) At a theoretical, meta-level of interpretation, Rosenberg’s project of the de-definition of art, produced in this manner, represents the movement through which the conflict between the traditional art and the art of the avant-gardes became a substitute for a coherent concept of art in our era. At a micro-level, surprising not the acceptances of what art represents generally nowadays, but what its concepts became, one can observe that:

“The principle common to all classes of de-aestheticized art is that the final product, if any, is of less significance than the procedures that brought the work into being and of which it is the trace.” (29)

The de-definite art is, behind all this flexible assumptions, a correspondent phenomenon for the individual’s need to reinforce the constitution-of-the-self through the aestheticization of the environment, in order to create a minimalist and personalised space for living, or to attach to the consumption the allure of an aesthetic production. If the de-definition of art is specific to capitalism and consumption societies, than it must be understood also as an ideology that encourages the production and the consumption of art. Under these circumstances, Rosenberg revisited his operational definitions for *de-aestheticization*, assuming that:

“Ultimately, the repudiation of the aesthetic suggests the total elimination of the art object and its replacement by an idea for a work or by the rumour or by the idea that one has been consummated – as in conceptual art.” (29)

Therefore, the cohabitation of this two apparently incompatible paradigms, the aestheticization of the world and the de-definition of the art, in the artistic capitalism, requires a reevaluation, by applying both a social and an artistic critique.

II. Arguments for Raising the De-aestheticization of Art as a Capitalist Artistic Phenomena

According to Boltanski, the events of May '68 must be interpreted in the terms of "a social critique of a fairly classical Marxists stamp, combined with demands of a very different kind, appealing to creativity, pleasure, the power of imagination, to a liberation affecting every dimension of existence, to the destruction of the consumer society" (Boltanski 2005, XXXV). This argument might be integrated in a larger discourse, dedicated to the critique of the avant-gardes, as artistic expressions of the will-of-rupture of the individuals, from canonical paradigms of social representation. Therefore, the individual's revolts, in the name of self-determination and unconstrained self-constitution, contrasts with his imposture of being part of a large and uniform mass, developing a proper appetite for the art of mass, produced for consumption ambitions. Hence, interrogating if there is any aesthetic revolution in the society of consumption represents a legitimate research, once that artistic capitalism promotes both the society of consumption and the individuality of the Subject.

The first hypothesis is inspired by the fact that the de-definition of art represents the result of a sum of ruptures that appeared in the history of 'the individualist-democratic society.'⁴

(H1) The de-definition of art is an aesthetic revolution of the artistic modernism, specific to artistic capitalism.

⁴ To be consulted Daniel Bell (1979). *Les Contradictions culturelles du capitalisme*. Paris: PUF.

If H1 is a plausible and a sufficient hypothesis, than one should be able to determine what is the protocol or the program of this revolution. In order to give a suitable answer, I consider that in this regard, Luc Ferry's critique of modernism is eloquent: the philosopher argues that the modernism, in a cultural logic, continues, later with a century, the expression of the modern society in democratic order. The artistic modernism liberates the art and the literature from the cult of tradition, by exonerating them of the exigencies of the imitation code, in the same manner in which the democratic revolution requires the liberation from the forces of the visible. But, when Ferry sustains "the subjectivisation of the truth as main conception on the art as expression of a distinct and original individuality"⁵, than a necessary condition should be included in order to accept his assumption: art should adapt also to the individual's will to redefine the ethics in the terms of aesthetics, an aspect that Ferry recognized being a nuclear task of postmodernity. This remark is important because the affinities between ethics and aesthetics exercised in the constitution of the individual's lifestyle, and moreover, in the process of the aestheticization of the world procures us innovative explanations for the origins and the symptoms of Rosenberg's de-definition of art. There are three significant moments of this relation of causality:

- (1) The determination of the work of art as an extension of the artist;
- (2) The determination of the science by a dominant objectivity pertained by a Subject;
- (3) The historical constitution of the Subject through the recognition of autonomy as value and principle of our existence.

Through these three moments, ethics delimitates three ages of the artistic capitalism, each of them corresponding to one of the next values: excellence, merit and authenticity. My thesis is that the social reception of these values influence, in fact, the production and the consumption of art, the status of the artist and, moreover, his professionalization and the quality of his works. On the one hand, this values emphasize the role of the artist to apply the notorious imperative of the authenticity, "be yourself" as "will of will" (Ferry 1977, 301), to the self-fulfilment and

⁵ To be consulted Luc Ferry (1977). *Homo Aestheticus*. București: Meridiane, pp. 251-271.

artistic representation of the self-governance practices. On the other hand, the artist renounces at a dandiest image to express himself both as an individual and as a professional, who devotes the aesthetic object into a perspectival and representational revolution. In my opinion, the fundamental interrogation on this concern regards not the manners in which the artist succeeded in preserve his originality and individuality, but the effects of his existence on redefining the artistic object and provoking, at limit, its *de-aestheticization*. In the moral hypermodern register, ethicists remark the fact that for the individual, the anxiety substitutes the culpability, while the authenticity is proposed moreover as expression of the personality or as style. Taking into account these statements, inspired by Luc Ferry, I argue that precisely this revolt of the individual determines the necessity of the aesthetic object to adapt to a series of moral substitutions announcing the artistic capitalism as era of the categorially destitution of the criterions that used to define the quality of a work of art, as well as its recognition. Following Rosenberg's critique, I consider that his aesthetic diagnostics are correct:

“Where an art object is still present, as in painting, it is what I have called an anxious object: it does not know whether it is a masterpiece or junk. It may, as in the case of a collage by Schwitters, be literally both”. (Rosenberg 1972, 12)

As a conclusion for my arguments, derived from the acceptance of H1, I stress that

(C1) *The de-definition of art, as aesthetic revolution of the artistic modernism, is a direct consequence of the Subject's moral self-representations in the individualist-democratic societies of consumption.*

The autonomy of art, as well as the liberty and legitimacy of the artist to define or withdraw the aesthetic quality of an object are a natural consequence of treating the artist as an individual and of strengthening his professionalization by accepting his work in terms of independency, excellence, merit, art market and consumption. Not accidentally, authenticity became a privileged term despite the concept

of authenticity in curatorial discourses, as well as in qualifying different elements belonging to the conceptual art.

This conclusion also inspires a contra-argument to one of Rosenberg's statements, regarding the changes brought by the individualism to the reception of the artist in the field of aesthetics. Rosenberg pleads for accepting the fact that

"The de-definition of art necessarily results in the dissolution of the figure of the artist (...). In the end everyone becomes an artist." (13)

I consider that this aspect must be understood exactly contrary, because it should be interpreted in the light of the postmodern dictum "be yourself!" The capacity of self-determination and the individualist revolution for the autonomy led to the reception of the artist's figure as individual. This is the main reason for which consumers rather prefer to buy a signature instead of a work of art, an attitude specific to the artistic capitalism, as Lipovetsky argued. As a matter of fact, I consider that the origins of Rosenberg's artistic de-definition should be placed not only in the radical critique of the quality of the aesthetic object, but also in the new paradigm of the artist as a professionalised individual. This is a hermeneutic approach that is missing, as far as I researched the multiple interpretations that Rosenberg's theory received both in the philosophical field and in art criticism. Nevertheless, the absence of such an interpretation is barely caused by the theoretical critique that Rosenberg himself predetermined, stressing that the de-definition of art as de-aestheticization is an aesthetic process that mainly concerns the object of art. *The Litanies* aesthetically retracted by Robert Morris through his notarial statement from the 15th November 1963, a manifesto for the autonomy to deny to any object created through artistic procedures the aesthetic condition, convinces Rosenberg that the artist's capacity of artistic determination is turning aesthetics back to a literalist or conceptual art. Therefore, in the light of this retraction, the distinction

between aesthetic and artistic becomes clearer⁶, Rosenberg considering that the effect of Morris's gesture is to suppress the aesthetic condition of the object, which remains valid only from an artistic perspective. The working hypothesis is that the gesture of aesthetic retracting is the act of born of an anxious aesthetic object, anticipating the exigencies of the minimalist Donald Judd, who proposed the emancipation of an art that possesses "the specificity and power of actual materials, actual colours and actual space." (29) Therefore, Rosenberg analyses two manifestations of *de-aestheticization*, represented by the aesthetic withdrawal signed by Morris and by the appeal to the materiality conceived by Judd: both argue for the artificialization of the artistic creation. The most important effect of these two moments is the assimilation of the aesthetic withdrawal as *an art of the process*: the recourse to materiality involves the possibility of the destruction of the object, as well as its perishability. The chance of the object to represent a work of art consists of exploring the repudiation of the canonical artistic practices and aesthetic protocols, in order to privilege the function of the idea of a work of art and the rumour of consuming one, which is a perspective with specific affinities for the conceptual art.

H2. The de-aestheticization of art is reinforcing the concept of materiality of the work of art because it reshapes the theories about mass art production, consumption and exposure.

This hypothesis opens a very sensitive criterion of aesthetic judgment. On the one hand, the materiality of the work of art confronts the nomothetic power of creating an artistic object or performing an artistic act. Morris's withdrawal is not only a precedent in the history of the oral destitution of the artistic quality of an object, it is also a legitimization of different criterions of aesthetic proclamation. Rosenberg reminds Morris' gesture as "a verbal exorcism" (29) preparing the field of conceptual art. In fact, it expresses the very possibility of the "anxious

⁶ This distinction is not valid for Lipovetsky; for the French philosopher, the artistic and the aesthetic condition of an art object are the same.

object" to exist independently of its materiality and moreover, to affect the so-called consumption of a work of art in the terms of non-materiality. Therefore, one might ask how is possible for the "de-aestheticized" art to organise the mass production of artistic objects and to influence their exposure? A brief answer is given by the requalification of the artistic experience in itself: either the consumption of the work of art is a *hic et nunc* experience, conditioned by the lack of perennial materiality of the artistic object, or it becomes a multiplied experience whose main characteristic is that of being distributed. Consequently, a second veritable interrogation arises: what senses should claim the authenticity of art in a culture of serial artistic production? It is a sensitive concern for the artistic capitalism the interdependence between the materiality and the authenticity of the work of art: when it comes about a proper materiality, which develops a serial production under the exigencies of capitalism, the authenticity of art moves its accents from the experience of production to the experience of consumption. According to Benjamin, modern technological reproduction adapted, at the beginning, to the bourgeois ideologies of art consumption, *de-aestheticization* appearing as denial of canonical aesthetic authority of cultural institutions and artistic practices of production, as well as emancipation of artistic production in the name of autonomy, by destroying the quality of the unicity and singularity, originated in religious traditions that gave cults to the art, and reinforcing it, in very different terms. From production to re-production, art lost its ritualist performance: it no longer possess an aura, nor it remains symptomatic for a cultic society.

"The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced."
(Benjamin 1968, 221)

Hence, Rosenberg's anxious object inherits only the anguish as expression of an emotional human tangency; in rest, it lacks human intervention for the most part of its creation. Production is no longer natural, it has no "aura" of ritually investment with human dignity:

statues, for example, are integrated in society not as cultic artefacts, but as material symbols of ideological control, reflection and personality. In the late capitalism, Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* disputes its pop authority based on the capacity to express the ideology of consumption as base for society manners and life-styles through semi-mechanized screen printing processes and industrial practices. As Bourdon asked⁷, if Caravaggio could paint baskets of fruits and Cezanne's impressionism often brought apples into his canvas, why would Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* not be objects with an aesthetic potential, according to the artistic canons of his time? Dominated by minimalism and a revaluation of fine art criteria, his work creates a notorious manifestation of pop art in the terms of *de-aestheticization* understood in two primary directions: the accommodation of an improper materiality of an artistic object to the canons of aesthetic criteria of judgment, respectively the rise of conceptual art in the age of capitalist realism, by inverting the supremacy of the aesthetic experience of production, from the Pre-World artistic age, with the experience of consumption. On the other hand, mechanical practices of production develop an impersonal art. Rosenberg would argue that this conjuncture favors the apparition of artistic training in the age of artistic capitalism: technology rather prefers practitioners, not artists. In the end, the artist has what I understand as an 'environmental function': he creates the décor, the ideology of context, the subject of the work of art, leaving the mechanical means of production to selectively affect the work itself. In these capitalist terms, the equation *production-distribution-consumption*, applied to the work of art, must be completely adjusted. Hence, the classical spaces of art exposure are reformed, reinforcing the concept of "materiality", but from the perspective of other alternative effects. From Marinetti's dictate, "Burn the museums!", art begin to seduce the public space of our quotidian life: mall galleries or street art exposures create the barrier between art and event, leaving the possibility for anyone to be either a performer or a spectator. Art begin to resemble with a public demonstration. Its character of *mass spectacle* created a new artistic

⁷ To be consulted David Burdon (1995). *Warhol*. Harry N. Abrams.

paradigm, that of the *anti-art* phenomena. In this concern, Rosenberg quotes Ragon, who considers that the Revolution of May '68 intimately reevaluated the sense of art. Public lamentations from that time were directed not against the market of consumption, the criticist opportunism, the professionalization of artists, the commercialization of works of art as a cultural abuse, but against art itself. According to Rosenberg, this mercantile tradition raised by the artistic capitalism tends to treat the works of art as objects, alienated from their subjective experiences of production. From a pre-capitalist age in which both creators and consumers of art lament over the fact that "the artist is an anachronism, his methods are pre-industrial and his equipment is out-of-date" (Rosenberg 1972, 205), we get in a fulfilled industrialized artistic era, assumed as posterity of capitalist realism, in which the death of art, confronted with the phenomena of anti-art, "sets free the power of creation from individuals and passes it on to all." (208) In a word, art is deinstitutionalized and this specific cultural revolution is ought to the artist, by breaking the tradition with conformity, in the name of the aesthetic demystification. In fact, this is the century of the remains left by the "portable museum" of Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*, a mass-production at a very modest scale.

"The Boite exemplifies the transition between two worlds: the old Europe of the museum and the connoisseur, and the young America of the commercial gallery and artistic commodity." (Hopkins 2000, 37)

A conclusion derived from the acceptance of H2, is:

(C2) The materiality of the work of arts provokes, in the terms of *de-aestheticization*, the aesthetic *de-territorialisation*, remarked not only at the level of the artistic production, but also on that of artistic exposure and consumption.

The simple existence of various and autonomous market arts, with very specific trade practices and auction traditions, exhibitions on the lobby halls of corporate centres or informal museums and private galleries, attest the phenomena of aesthetic *de-territorialisation* not only as

symptomatic for de-aestheticized art and implicitly, for artistic capitalism, but also as a unifying process of different artistic traditions and practices, independently of their elitist spaces of exposure, in the terms of the so-called *mass-art*. Strictly connected to this topic, a third and last hypothesis of the main argument of the current paper is concretized as it follows:

H3. In the terms of de-aestheticized art, mass culture is the expression of capitalist inequalities, reflected in the aesthetic decadence and indifference.

In order to sustain this hypothesis, I will reinforce the last two of the fourth operational definitions of capitalism from Luc Boltanski's and Eve Chiapello's theory on the new spirit of capitalism and its criticism. According to them,

"There are essentially of four sorts:

- (a) Capitalism as a source of disenchantment and inauthenticity of objects, persons, emotions and, more generally, the kind of existence associated with it;
- (b) Capitalism as a source of oppression, inasmuch as it is opposed to the freedom, autonomy and creativity of the human beings who are subject, under its sway, on the one hand to the domination of the market as an impersonal force fixing prices and designating desirable human beings and products/services, while rejecting others, and on the other hand on the forms of subordination involved in the condition of wage-labour (enterprise discipline, close monitoring by bosses, and supervision by means of regulations and procedures);
- (c) Capitalism as a source of poverty among workers and of inequalities on an unprecedented scale;
- (d) Capitalism as a source of opportunities and egoism which, by exclusively encouraging private interests, proves destructive social bonds and collective solidarity, especially in minimal solidarity between rich and poor." (Boltanski, Chiapello 2005, 37)

I have already applied the first two presented acceptances of capitalism on artistic capitalism from the perspective of the relationship between materiality and authenticity, as well as in the register of investigating the consequences of the autonomous and capitalist process of production of the work of art on its consumption. I consider that the latter significances of capitalism can be suitably addressed to the *Arte Povera* as a specific aesthetic paradigm of artistic capitalism, mainly to the capitalist realism. It becomes obvious the task fulfilled by the artistic discourse to carry on, in representing a social critique, the expression of inequalities both in artistic hierarchies and consumers classes. At limit, *Arte Povera* is a poor art for poor people, as Gorky ideologically explained it. Remarkd through an assemblage of poor and artisanal materials, mainly unprocessed, *Arte Povera* belongs to the Italian pre-industrial culture, rejecting minimalism and Pop Art, by a profound lack of synchronisation with their exigencies of technical modernisation of the artistic representation. The humanism propagated by Celant's theorized *Arte Povera* lies on the opposition to the commercialisation of art, enhancing Cage's appeal to perform art as *an experimental condition in which one experiments living*, even though many of its principles align with capitalist views, such as the rejection of elitist or canonical exhibitions spaces, transformed in quotidian dimensions of the immediate landscapes, or the description of primary materials for the work of art in industrial terms, in order to demonstrate "the noblest quality of each one, the most refined technology... polished marble, cleaned bronze, molten glass, silk worked with dressmaker's finesse and colours to match this context." (Luciano Fabro⁸) The anxiety of the artistic object seems to be reiterated in the feeling of alienation from nature in the age of a mechanized and industrialized society; for instance, Piero Gilardi confesses, in 1966, that

"My attitude at the time was one of anxiety toward the loss of nature, however, at the same time, however, I trusted technology,

⁸ To be consulted Richard Flood, Frances Morris (2001). "Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972", TATE Modern, p.3, online source, accessed at the 1st of February 2016: <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/6630>

which I represented in my use of an artificial material: polyurethane.” (Flood & Morris 2001, 8)

As a matter of fact, *Arte Povera* is not an aesthetic paradigm inspired by penury and economic insufficiencies confronted by Italy in the Post-War period, but a reaction to the American current of democratizing art by commercializing it: the main alienation required by *Arte Povera* is that of the art market, which nowadays represents one of the most surprising utopias in the age of artistic capitalism. The only penury reported by this artistic paradigm is that of the details of art production, returned to the artist in a “natural” way, composed by unprocessed elements, at the beginning, and based on the primacy of the human intervention. It is not a restricted interference to artistic practices of production; on the contrary, it has to inspire a social critique of consumerist life-style and cultural institutionalisation of art.

“If life, society and its actual institutions are not open to the freedom of art, then we need to change them.” (Piero Gilardi⁹)

One might argue that the Italian economic recession caused the primary impulse of artists to reinforce natural elements and materials to their work. Their art was the expression of the economic adaptability in creation to material constraints. Therefore, it is not a form of artistic liberty, but the result of a rational cost of investment in art, lately inspiring the rejections of capitalism, considered the main source of this inevitable collapse. And yet, this movement, with no specific manifesto or program, succeeded in endeavouring the return to natural life, testing its possibilities in terms of commodity and comfort, as Mario Merz’s work (*Giap’s Igloo – If the Enemy Masses his Forces he Loses Ground, If he Scatters he Loses Strength*, 1968¹⁰) attempts, or in the terms of the

⁹ To be consulted Flood & Morris 2001, 6.

¹⁰ “The title of this work, which is spelt out in neon letters around the surface of the igloo, is a quotation from the North Vietnamese general Giap, who defeated the French in 1954. Using earth, Merz refers to nomadic peoples and their shelters, and connects the natural world with our daily lives. The igloo shape was used by

inseparability between the artist and its work¹¹. Therefore, the last conclusion of my argument, derived from the evaluation of the third proposed work-hypothesis, is:

(C3) De-Aestheticized art is also the expression of social and economic capitalist inequalities between individuals reflected both in artistic discourses or representations, and on its consequences on the process of the institutionalization of art and culture.

III. Instead of Conclusions, Revisiting the Main Argument

In the current research, I tried to summarize and criticize three significant work-hypothesis the highlight the co-dependency between the *de-definite* or *de-aestheticized art* and the artistic capitalism, each of them procuring particular conclusions regarding this theoretical interaction and the reception of different artistic movements, as well as their main representative principles, ideologies and manifestations. However, my attempt was to open the arguments presented in here to a potential field of research, that of the individualist-democratic societies of consumption, based on the artistic and social approach of their constitution, provided by clarifying the effects of de-aestheticization, mass culture and reinforcement of both ethical and aesthetic values, such as autonomy, authenticity, merit, excellency, individuality in capitalist terms. This critical inquiry had the role to make the correspondences between Lipovetsky's artistic capitalism and

Merz repeatedly, usually in conjunction with the Fibonacci series of numbers, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55 etc.) named after the Italian scientist's findings of this numerical configuration in the natural world." (Flood & Morris 2001, 9) The main challenge is to think how "would be possible to use this work as a home?" (9) or, in other words, to think to what extent the traditional rationality of life and the rationality of number still can cohabitate in a capitalist age in order to let the individual to access a very natural life-style.

¹¹ Merisa Merz's statement from the vernissage of her exhibition, including the work "Nylon threads" is revealing in this aspect: "There has never been any division between my life and my work." (Flood, Morris 2001, 5)

Rosenberg's de-aestheticized art clear and justified, taking into account that even though Lipovetsky develops a critique of this aesthetic phenomena in his research, he does not refer properly to Rosenberg and his main perspectives on the subject. Hence, the fundamental interrogation of my paper, "Why is the de-aestheticization of art a phenomenon specific to artistic capitalism?" satisfied by the constructed answers previously discusses, paved the way to a new incursion, only announced in here: "What is the future of de-aestheticized art in the era of artistic (post)capitalism?" testing, in the same time, the limits and succession of this ideology.

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COULD PROCESS PHILOSOPHY BE USEFUL TO UNDERSTAND PERFORMANCE ART?

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Abstract

Both process philosophy and performance art are significant contributions to the 20th-century philosophical thought. They are based on a new perspective on perceiving reality and art. Both are centered on the notion of process as actual, ongoing action. Both are also based on immediate experience. In our contribution, we will focus on certain notions of process ontology as developed by A.N. Whitehead in his *Process and Reality*. We will try to explore their relevance in contemporary art, especially in performance and installation art. Among Whitehead's well-established notions, we will revisit as follows: actual entity (actual occasion), nexus, concrescence, feeling, extensive continuum, potentiality as continuity, actuality as atomist determination; the role of the human body within the vague perception of a nexus, *the body whithness*.

The corpuscular characteristics are present in the human society (collectivity) as Whitehead mentioned, playing a role in the communication between the artist and the spectator encountered in performance art. One of the subjects of debate in our work refers also to the role of the *symbolic reference* in performance art. Our thesis supports the idea that the process ontology provides a better method to analyze contemporary art, especially performance art and, generally speaking, arts based on action (process). We will also point out a certain connection between Whitehead's philosophy and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, especially the role of the body as part of the relationship between man and nature.

Keywords: process philosophy, performance art, actual entity, concrescence, action, symbolic reference.

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The process philosophy initiated by A.N. Whitehead in his book *Process and Reality*, (published in 1929 after his Gifford lectures delivered in the University of Edinburgh during the session 1927-1928), could be considered a revolutionary philosophical theory. Whitehead had the ingenuity of making an intelligent change in the use of some philosophical fundamental concepts. He replaced the traditional concept of substance with its opposite, namely with the concept of *process*. By this basic replacement, the current philosophy spreading the idea of a static intelligible world, brought into the picture a completely different universe, based on processuality, evolution, changes. Whitehead himself admitted he borrowed this idea from the history of philosophy, starting with Heraclitus and Melissos, Plato and Aristotle. He built his approach by replacing a notion with another one and then changing his theory according to this new perspective. He did not chose the Parmenidian immutable and rigid way of thinking which had been developed along the history of European philosophy. He chose the Heraclitean vision according to which the entire existence was based on motion (*kinesis*). *Kinesis* made possible the evolution or becoming, the birth and decay, the coming into being of any potentiality. It also made possible the existence of the new or the ultimate (the most recent) in a temporal sequence. Something similar happens in the performance art, which eliminates the finished artistic product as a material product of creativity. The artist does not make any longer a painting or a sculpture. The work of art is an action (a process) which is performed in front of the spectator, sometimes together with the spectator. The work of art is in fact the action, a process performed by the artist himself (using his body as artistic instrument and material). No material product results from the action. *The present* of the action itself is the only thing that counts. Is it art? How can we identify art in this action?

We will try to apply some of Whitehead's concepts to this contemporary art in order to get a better understanding of the artistic thought. In the beginning we will synthesize several basic concepts of Whitehead's theory.

Whitehead pointed out in his texts that the 20th-century philosophy should be connected to the contemporary scientific discoveries in order to get a better understanding of the world and

existence. It was no longer useful to think in a traditional way, in terms of substance and static universals. The physicists have proved that the functioning of the universe and the matter was more complicated. Einstein's theory of relativity, the discovery of electromagnetic forces and the theory of corpuscular and wavelike motion of matter are the discoveries proving the role of processuality, evolution and the numerous ways in which the matter is in a continuous process of becoming. Thus, the process is no longer a unique seriality of linear type. It is a "creative advance" (Whitehead 1985, 21). However it is not a continuous evolution as each actual entity is a stable entity once completely determined.

In the process philosophy or "philosophy of organism" (60), as Whitehead calls it, the Aristotelian substance is replaced by the *actual entity* or *actual occasion* which is the ultimate, the most recent product of the new. The actual entity is no longer the immutable subject. It is seen as the subject of *this* proper experience and thus the subject becomes a *superject* as it is also the final term of *concrecence*.

Whitehead distinguishes between *concrecence* and *transition*. The first is the process of becoming of the "actual entity" (18). It is the concrecence of many potentialities in an actual unity as an actual occasion of summing up. The becoming is thus "a transformation of an incoherence of many possibilities in a coherent unity" (45). Once the actual entity becomes completely coherent and unified, it remains stable, well determined, and atomistic until its proper decay.

The second process is called *transition* and it is "a transfer from a particular existence to another one" (212). If the concrecence implies internal constitution and it is based on the final cause, the transition is based on the efficient causation represented by time. The process of concrecence supposes two phases: a) the perception of the world seen as a vector, a tendency full of potentialities and b) the supplementation – a moment when the origin is denied being subordinated to the individual experience. There is a "power", similar to the Bergsonian *élan vital* which implies action and change making possible the fulfillment of

this process.² During the second phase namely the ‘supplementation’ stage, the process of *subjectivization* develops and evolves. All that was perceived as coming from outside is recreated from a personal point of view and becomes subjective. The constitution of an actual entity is a process of transition from non-determination to final, definite, determination. The theory of the organism describes the world as a process of generation of actual entities. They perish individually but get an objective immortality by the process of objectification. This process implies their ingression in the evolution of other actual entities, this ingression being a process of transition.

Each actual entity exists in an *extensive continuum* which is the actual world. Whitehead makes a distinction between continuity as potentiality and actuality as atomistic determination. This extensive continuity is a nexus which form a “corpuscular society” (Whitehead 1985, 32). Each extensive relation within the nexus implies a temporal connection between the past (called “historical route”) and the actual entity. Here is Whitehead’s example:

“I see a chair with my eyes and touch it with my hands. The chair is an objectified entity for my experience. On the other side, my eyes and hands, parts of my body, belong already to an already anterior and determined world, thus they belong to a history. The sensations and perceptions are constituent elements generated by my eyes and hands, by my body.” (101)

But we are not aware of their direct existence as antecedent entities. Their presence is somehow vague, hidden by the time and space which dominate these perceptions. We are not completely aware of our hands and eyes when perceiving a chair. In fact,

“Our chair-image is the objectification of a nexus of actual entities. This nexus contains the parts of my body and the whole past of

² To be consulted Henri Bergson (1998). *Creative Evolution*, tr., Arthur Mitchell, New York: Dover.

my experience concerning a chair, its material, etc. Thus the chair-image implies a unity in the direct experience and conceptual knowledge about that entity. The nexus supposes a vague perception of some component elements which belong to the past." (102)

Whitehead says that the actual world in its extensive continuity is the objective content for a new creation. Thus an extensive continuum is a complex of entities reunited by various relations. Any actual entity in relation with another is somewhere within this continuum. The constitution (*concrecence*) of an actual entity supposes the objectification of the entities around it and thus it includes the continuum.

We have to mention here the contribution of the French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who, in his *Phenomenology of perception*³ underscores the role of the body in the process of perception. Merleau-Ponty, as well as Whitehead, said that we perceive the real world through our body and this specifically determines our perceptions as we have a vertical position, a specific disposition of our body parts, etc. Merleau-Ponty mentioned also a certain consciousness of our body which he called *mute, silent consciousness*, known in Whitehead's texts as *vague, vague consciousness*. Both philosophers unveil the existence of this awareness and its contribution to the perceptive process. Being a consciousness, it has a memory, called *historical route* in Whitehead's work. According to Whitehead, this makes possible the *body whithness* (1985, 98), a sensitive and bodily consciousness which is present in each act of our existence. There is also an extension of this characteristic: it is not only the body that participates in the experience but also the *extensive continuum* or all that is outside us, the actual world. Each actual entity has *to house* its actual world as this entity becomes, originates in that universe representing its causality. Thus, there is a strong relationship between the entity and the *extensive continuum*. The entity is the product of that universe, on the one hand, and it contains – *houses* (247) – that universe, on the other hand. Thus, the theory of corpuscular motion is adequate to explain the societies of living beings.

³ M. Merleau-Ponty (1999). *Phenomenology of perception* (Romanian transl.). Oradea: Aion.

These societies (actual worlds, nexus) are corpuscular and their processes are similar to the process of emission / absorption, the photoelectric effect being a suggestive example for the functioning of such societies.

Another notion with very significant meanings is the *subjectification*, (*prehension* or *feeling*). It is a process of subjective appropriation of an element of the nexus (256). In this way the past, the historical route is assimilated in the new actuality. The components of the process of subjectification are as follows: a) the *power*, considered as a creative tendency (almost similar to the Bergsonian *elan vital*); b) the *prehension*, the process of assimilation of an element of the nexus which supposes the assimilation of a historical route (or path) and its subjectification. Whitehead called *satisfaction* the result of this process as it is based on the *joy* (257) of the creative tendency (the power) when the creative demands are fulfilled. The prehension itself is also called *feeling* as it is a process of subjective appropriation. The physical experience is considered by Whitehead to be emotional, supposing thus a feeling.⁴ We can speak thus about an ontological aesthetics in Whitehead's vision. The process of prehension has the following participants: a) the subject which appropriates or feels; b) the datum which is appropriated or felt and c) the subjective form showing how the subject apprehends or feels that datum.

Another concept which seems to be very important is the *symbolic reference*.⁵ The direct experience does not provide past or future data. It reveals a part of the present duration. It is in fact a cross section, a moment of the actual world. In fact, any perception (prehension) is not only immediate it is also mediate as it includes data of the past and future at the same time. Whitehead considers human perception is based on the symbolic reference which is ensured by the past experiences (the historical route) and the intellectual products (intellective schemes, universal concepts, etc.). Thus, perception is interpretative as it contains direct (immediate) data but also indirect (mediate) information.

The symbolic reference is founded on the *locus* (the object and its environment). It is both directly and indirectly perceived in the

⁴ To be consulted Whitehead 1985, 193; 236- 244.

⁵ Especially Part II, Chapter VIII, pp. 195-198.

immediate perception. In this last case, the perception is so vague that the geometrical relations are not clear, precise; certain regions of the perceived image are almost not distinct. Such an indirect perception generates vague, uncontrollable and multiple deviations of significance. This gives birth to confusions, uncertainties, a certain feeling of other vague presences of the past partially recognized but which cannot be very well determined. This indirect type of perceptions represents *the general sense of our existence* (196). It remains the uncontrolled basis of our character. Our body inherits this fundamental experience which implies also other bodies. Thus, this experience is common and archetypal. Due to this experience the sensitive data obtained from more ancient data are projected upon the actual locus without a clear determination of certain regions of the locus. The past is brought into present but without all the distinctions of the past. Thus, they do not become clear distinctions of the present. This mediated mode of perception is the source of symbolic reference. It is specific to the human being. The example mentioned by Whitehead refers to the distinction between immediate and mediate perception which includes also the intellectual activity. In the group of words *grey stone*, the immediate perception is expressed by the word *grey* and the mediate perception is expressed by the word *stone*.

Whitehead makes also a distinction between *symbol* and *significance*. The synthesis between these two aspects depends on the experiential process of the subject. In general, symbols are much handier than their significance, in our experience.

It is easier to smell incense than to generate religious emotions. The *incense* becomes the symbol of religious emotions when they are interconnected. This is due to the fact that the aesthetic experiences are easier to produce and become better symbols than written words. However, there are unhandy or very ambiguous significances. The religious feelings are very diverse, shadowy, obscure and the most difficult to quantify. Thus, the symbolic reference is always imprecise or misty and impossible to determine clearly.

Merleau-Ponty also referenced this indirect, mediate interpretative character of the human perception. He called it *culture* as any human perception has indeed an interpretative side based on the cultural background of the subject, this background being multilayered.

Let us take into consideration now which would be the contribution of the process philosophy to a better understanding of performance art.

The first and fundamental characteristic of this art is the fact that it does not produce a specific, material work of art. In fact, performance art designates, in accordance with its name, a performance, an action, a process. It is thus a *concrecence* of the work of art which, in its final stage, does not become a material actual entity but a spiritual, imaginative one. The process philosophy asserts that an actual entity can be any object, particle, action, etc. thus, an artistic performance is included by this theory in the category of actual entities. In the traditional way of thinking there are voices claiming that this activity should not be seen as an art as it does not produce a finished object. Performance art has emphasized the process of creativity stressing the idea that this process is the most important component of the artistic phenomenon, and not the product.

Another specific aspect consists of the fact that the artist is usually the one who performs the artistic action. His body represents both the artistic instrument and material. The artist's body is thus an object and also a subject. In the traditional art, our eyes were contemplating the work of art, the artistic product, not the process of creation developed by the artist. In performance art, the spectator participates thus in a more immediate experience. This direct experience is intensified by certain artists who, while performing, stimulate the spectators to participate directly. However, through the spontaneous dialogue between artist and spectator, the process of creativity suffers changes in a hazardous, accidental manner. This aspect raises a lot of questions from an aesthetic perspective: is the artist the only author of that action or there are more authors: does the artistic creation belong to a single person or it is created by a multitude of authors? Which is the identity of such artistic creation?

If we take into account the extensive continuum of the process philosophy, in the case of performance, its ingression is even larger, considering the contribution of certain spectators. In this situation, the symbolic reference both intensifies and multiplies. I would like to give an example of such extension of the continuum or nexus of the actual world, as well as of the symbolic reference: John Cage's work "*4 minutes and 33 seconds*". Cage considered that any sound could be a musical

element. In his work, the silence and the various sound within the concert hall such as coughing, noises, etc. replaced the musical elaborated sounds. Thus the continuum of the immediate perception was allowed to become part of the work. And the silence, the absence of a clear systematic music which would generate a quite determinate symbolic reference, made possible the manifestation of a much wider symbolic reference as each spectator could imagine his own music in accordance with his level of musical culture. I will also mention another example: Marina Abramović is a performance artist from Serbia. She collaborated for several years with a German artist, Uwe Laysiepen, called Ulay. They set up various performances exploring the relation between two human bodies who got to know each other so well that they obtained what Marina called "one two-headedbody" (Green 2001, 167), a kind of sensitive, perceptive unity of their bodies. They seemed to practice a de-constructivist corporal art as they succeeded in escaping from the limits of the individual subjectivity. The artist extracted his self from the social and sexual codes reaching finally a sort of sensitive intuition of the other's body and feelings. In 1977, during the performance *Relation in time*, they stood still hours and hours back to back, bound to each other with their hair. They developed a deep experience of self-psychic and physical concentration and created for themselves an inner world where the spectator could not look in. The artists admitted that during the performance they escaped mentally into exotic worlds. Thus they tried to extend the limits of the self.



Note for the images ⁶

In this performance, *the kiss* is a continuous change of air inside each body till its complete consumption. Thus the kiss becomes a co-existence using the same quantity of air as for respiration.



Relation in time is a performance in which the two artists remained in this static position feeling each other's body by their back and meditating silently to these feelings.

⁶ All the images are from: Google / images / Marina Abramowicz / accessed on December 2nd, 2015.

After many years of such tight collaboration, the two artists decided to separate and continue their artistic life individually. Their separation was thought as a performance. In my opinion, this performance is a good example of the fact that the process philosophy can provide a better understanding of this artistic project.

The two artists decided that their separation should be a lasting process, this period allowing them to think about their common past work and to decide their future. Thus they chose to walk along the Great Chinese Wall. Not together. They started their journey from the two opposite ends of the Great Chinese Wall (2,500 km long). Thus, they had enough time to recollect all their life together, to bring to their memory the entire “historical route” or their common past. As they were walking one toward the other their indirect perception, as well as their direct, immediate perceptions, grew in intensity. When they finally met halfway, simply “to say goodbye”, we can imagine that all that represented their common past was already revisited, reminded. After seeing each other once again, on that way, they definitively separated and the distance between them grew larger and larger.



They met again however after 22 years in 2010 at an homage exhibition dedicated to Marina by MOMA in New York. On this occasion, Marina had a performance entitled *The Artist is Present*. She set down on a chair in front of a table and any visitor of the exhibition could come and sit down in front of her for a while. One day during this

exhibition, Ulay appeared and set down in front of Marina, looking at each other intensively...



It is obvious that they emphasized here the process: either a complex motion such as walking days after days along the Great Chinese Wall or an apparently static process (sitting in front of a table and spending hours looking at the person in front of you). The two processes are equally intensive as the real process is focused on what happens inside each artist, the way they live their emotions, feelings, perceptions. At the same time the symbolic reference does not diminish as somebody could think only because there are not many actions or characters or objects around them, etc. On the contrary, the symbolic reference extends enormously, having no limit.

The main object in *The artist is present* is the table which reunites and separates at the same time, establishing a certain distance between the two bodies. If we think that a table is used especially to feed a human person (to support the food) we can say that each of the two artists have become a sort of "food" for the other, a sensitive food as being present but also a "food brought by the memory" or actualized recollection. In the other performance, the object is the road (on the top of the Great Chinese Wall) meaning an infinite space which evolves, moves, flows, becomes at each moment something different while walking on it. It is a continuous evolution. But at the same time it is a space that stimulates the actualization of a personal past, of a historical personal route. Thus the infinitely widened space, almost impersonal, is

combined with a very individual, personal past. The result is of course a subjective, individual decision in an extensive continuum. The decision evolves, becomes clearer while reaching step by step the point of the meeting. The other performance opposes to this dynamism an apparent statism which hides another processuality, perhaps more intensive, related to recollection and spiritual actualization.

Conclusions

In our opinion, the process philosophy is very useful in helping us to get a better understanding of many artistic contemporary phenomena which seem to hide their meaning when applying only the traditional interpretation based on a rigid, immutable system of theories and components universally accepted. This system is far too stable to capture the fluid meaning of a spiritual world of continuous transformation.

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REVIEWS OF INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC EVENTS

CULTURAL HISTORY NOWADAYS. THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CULTURAL HISTORY – *TIME AND CULTURE*

ALESSANDRO ARCANGELI, DANIELA ZAHARIA

Time is all-around us, as an invisible but always present frame of our existence: we live in time, we change and learn to adapt to its fluidity, and we organize our life and our relations with others –from daily agendas to life projects –depending on Time. Even if Time is a physical reality, our impossibility to perceive it by senses generated a multitude of cultural solution, that in fact transformed Time in probably the most culturally mediated physical dimension of the reality. Across cultures, measuring, structuring, explaining and valuing time takes various forms, from language to technology, from mythology to arts, politics, philosophy, ideology or rituals. History itself, as an intellectual demarche, is ultimately areflection about time and its variables. Equally perceived with personal and social instruments and concepts, awareness of time is a universal cultural fact, but time and its representations, use and value may vary from one culture to another, and from that perspective we are ourselves products of time.

These topics gathered last autumn, at Bucharest, over 130 researchers in humanities, more specifically in areas such as cultural history, philosophy, arts, aesthetics, literature, anthropology, politics, and sociology, during *the 2015th ISCH Annual Conference on Cultural History*. The Annual Cultural History Conference of the International Society for Cultural History (ISCH) is the main academic event for cultural historians to share their knowledge, and exchange the latest

scientific stand related to the sub–themes of Cultural History. Held at the University of Bucharest, Romania, on September 7-10, 2015, the conference proposed a discussion about time and its multitude of cultural aspects, as culture is our main instrument in interpreting Time:

- Time, history and memory;
- Time and Heritage: past, present and future;
- Time and power. Time and dimensions of time in ideology, legitimation and propaganda;
- Perception of time: dimensions, representation, interpretation;
- Social time – Personal time;
- Gendered perceptions of time;
- Technology and material culture of time;
- Time, arts and esthetics;
- Time, myth and cultural imaginary;
- Methodological aspects of the study of time;
- Time regimes and regimes of historicity.

On the behalf of ISCH, Alesandro Arcangeli, Associate Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Verona (Italy), as Chair of the International Society for Cultural History, gave an interview to Daniela Zaharia, Professor at the Faculty of History of the University of Bucharest (Romania), Director of the Department of Ancient History, Archaeology and History of Art, and organizer of the last edition of the conference. The interview, previously published in Romania by *LaPunkt* – a cultural magazine that served as partner in organizing the ISCH Conference – briefly reconsiders the most significant topics of this academic event, as well as the role of cultural studies nowadays, highlighting, once more, both the disciplinary and the methodological needs to distinguish the cultural history from the history of culture.

Interview

With Alessandro Arcangeli, Associate Professor of Early Modern History at the University of Verona (Italy), Chair of the International Society for Cultural History (ISCH):

THE CULTURAL TURN OF HISTORICAL STUDIES

Q: What is exactly meant by 'cultural history'? Is it equivalent to the history of culture?

A: Not quite. Or rather, it depends by what one means by 'culture'. There has always been a history of high culture (philosophy, literature and the arts), parallel but subordinate to what the majority of historians regarded as most important, that is politics and war. Historians have now embraced a much wider, anthropological notion of culture, which includes customs and beliefs, all what is characteristic of a particular group of people at a given time. Consequently, doing cultural history is no longer defined by a specific object, but rather by a type of approach, by the way we question the past: the same set of phenomena and events can offer themselves to a variety of different reconstructions and interpretations, in political or economical terms, and so in cultural too. What is characteristic of the cultural reading of the past is an emphasis not much on a series of facts but rather on the ways people experienced and conceived themselves and their world.

Q: Is this a recent development in historical studies?

A: The attention for the 'history from below', that is for the life of the majority of humans, rather than the happy few, was already strong in a previous generation of historians, the one active during the 1970s and 1980s, which introduced the need for a *social* history, with class or hierarchy as a central category. The following generation, over the past 25 years, has shifted to emphasize the *cultural* dimension, that is, paid increasing attention for lifestyles and habits, perceptions and emotions, attitudes and mental structures. Social hierarchy has not been forgotten,

but gender, age, ethnicity and other components of individual and group identities have been added to the mixer.

Q: Do you regard your way of doing history as a specialized field more or less reserved to professional researchers or has it something new to say also to the general public?

A: Although some intellectual roots of this development can be identified in rather sophisticated academic reflections (what has been named as the 'cultural turn' in the humanities and social sciences, a shift that has marked a significant part of the twentieth century in a variety of disciplines), one of the most striking aspects of cultural history today is that it has been embraced by all sort of writers and readers, and in any bookshop one today can find a cultural history of the widest possible range of objects – from places, to practices, to things (including body parts). As with any fashionable development, there is an evident risk of superficiality of approach, and not all this writing is of the same quality. On the whole, though, a new sensitivity for questioning the historical roots and cultural implications of all aspects of everyday life has grown, and I can only welcome the fact that this is happening.

Q: Can you offer any suggestion for further reading?

A: Ecaterina Lung, Professor of Medieval History at the University of Bucharest and the organizer of this week's conference, has published in 2009 with the Press of her University the volume *Istoria culturală. Origini, evoluții, tendințe*. Many other introductions are available in other languages.

Thank you very much for your time, Professor Arcangeli.

Thank you for offering me the opportunity to expose to your readers our idea of the historical enterprise and experience.

STUDIES ON ETHNIC CULTURES

JEWISH ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS – SARAJEVO HAGGADAH

GABRIELA BĂDESCU¹

Abstract

Bibles and texts of *Haggadot* made among the Jewish communities in the European Middle Ages developed a special art in which the images along the written letters are represented in a different craft spread also in Islam and Christian tradition, which draw them the artistic inspiration. One of the famous Jewish illuminated manuscripts is the *Sarajevo Haggadah* – a Spanish manuscript dating from the 14th century, created around 1350 in a famous Jewish family in Barcelona or Saragossa.

Keywords: Illuminated manuscripts, Judaism, *Haggadah*.

I. Introduction

The discussion about the images in Judaism still remains suspended and controversial. After returning from exile, figurative art is prohibited, stricken by the curse because the second commandment should not be violated. It also develops directions less severe in the first century A.D., and after that the statues (3D) were the only anathematized. Between the 3rd and 5th centuries the figurative art - such as mosaics and paintings – Dura Europos (246), Galilee (Sec. III) – is more permissive, and the 4th century reveals historic and monumental decoration tapestries with representations of birds and animals. However, the sculptures rondes-bosses are banned and will remain so

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until and 5th and the 6th centuries – a period of iconoclastic attitude. The Jewish art of decoration is now inspired by Islamic art, the old decorations are deleted, except the floral ones (Capernaum), followed by a period of relaxation. It is the illuminated manuscripts era: Bibles and *Haggadot*, medicine and astrology treatises, where decorations reach unprecedented artistic levels.

So, not all images are strictly prohibited. The rabbinic literature hardly deliberated upon the theme of images. For example, the Talmud and rabbinic *Responses* forbade the representation of the *Merkavah*, four creatures in the Ezekiel's vision. In the 12th century, the synagogue from Köln has painted stained glasses, but other rabbinical authorities did not agree the animals to be represented in Bonn synagogues and Meissen. The problem of the images was never definitively solved in Jewish tradition. They are always suspected of forgery, but they are never completely proscribed, provided they do not exceed a certain limit – the idol.

We built our study on the Jewish art evaluation made by Anthony Julius in his *Idolizing Pictures (Idolatry, Iconoclasm and Jewish Art)*². Instead of considering the second commandment of the “graven images” prohibition such a tormenting censorship, he says, we can change the perspective and see in it a way that acknowledges art and even stimulates it. The assimilation of the second commandment with a specific ban involved in a process of “idol-breaking” makes Julius to find the *raison d'être* of the Jewish art. He proposed a classification: aniconic, iconic and iconoclastic Jewish art (Julius 2001, 41). Each of these types challenges the idol: “The Aniconic ignores it, the Iconic diminishes it, and the Iconoclastic one undermines or destroys it.” (42) The iconic art benefits from a glut, says Julius (58)³, unlike the “poverty” of the aniconic art seeking to enroll the image to the un-representable realm (48). The Hebrew illuminated manuscripts undoubtedly belong to the iconic art.

² To be consulted Anthony Julius (2001). *Idolizing Pictures. Idolatry, Iconoclasm and Jewish Art*, Thames & Hudson.

³ Julius illustrates the abundance of Iconic reiterating not only the decorations, the Jewish ritualic objects and illustrations, but also the memorial art of the Holocaust (pp. 44, 51).

The most common form of painting in the Middle Ages was not executed in pictures or on walls, but on pages of manuscripts. Hand-written and decorated books, both religious and secular, were produced over that period. Hebrew manuscripts commissioned by Jews for sharing within their community or for personal use were often illuminated and great fortunes were offered for such special artifacts.

The main characteristic of the medieval Jewish manuscripts is the inspiration from oriental (Persian or Islamic) miniatures schools. There were also artistic influences from the European schools situated in the regions where Jewish communities lived. Although there are many Jewish elements, exegetes stress that we cannot speak of a “Jewish style”, but rather an artistic reflection of the region where these manuscripts appeared.

Commentators say that it is possible for that full-page⁴ miniatures in Jewish manuscripts, preceding Spanish *Haggadot*⁵, to be inspired by the illuminated way used for making Latin Psalters in England or in France, derived in their turn from the early Middle Age illuminated “aristocratic” manuscripts (i.e. Byzantine Psalters).⁶

Illuminated manuscripts called *Haggadot* are religious books dedicated to *Pessah* (*Passover*) festival containing specific Jewish prayers and guidance for believers preparing for this religious event. Designed for use in family – to read the *Haggadah* during *Pessah* is a religious custom for every faithful Jew – these manuscripts started to be produced during the mid-13th century.

Manuscripts less bulky perpetuate a “scenario” of text and pictures in different styles. Every manuscript is unique. The selection of illustrated episodes varies from one manuscript to another which is unique, without equivalent in the Christian Psalters, or the *Latin Book of Hours*. These manuscripts are the only books with religious themes taken from Jewish environment including anthropomorphic illustrations (scenes from *Genesis*, *Exodus*, and *Psalms*).

⁴ *Carpet pages* (eng.); *pages tapis* (fr.).

⁵ *Haggadah*, ebr. (*haggadot*, pl.), means “narration”, “story”.

⁶ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 8, “Haggadah, Passover”, p. 212.

There are theories claiming that Jewish manuscripts art, which has reached its peak between the 13th to the 15th centuries, is the continuation of an art developed since Antiquity. This idea is difficult to sustain in the absence of any manuscript dating from that era. It is based on “circumstantial evidence”: the cycle painted on the walls of Dura Europos would suggest that the artists of the above synagogue, dating from the 3rd century, were inspired by previous models of sacred illustrated texts (the Jewish legends represented were before the 3rd century AD); the abundant scenes of the Old Testament (sacrifice of Isaac, Jonah), used in the decoration of early Christian churches beside those of the New Testament prove that the Church Fathers were familiar with *midrash* legends and used them in their writings⁷.

The oldest Christian manuscript with biblical scenes – *Vienna Genesis* – is considered to be based on a Jewish prototype. Of course, the influences are mutual: the illustrations in the Christian manuscripts often include rabbinic legends which in their turn represent a source of re-inspiration for the medieval Jewish manuscripts.

The hypothesis that in Spain during the 15th century, there were iconographic models derived from ancient biblical images, most probably of Jewish origin, is evoked to explain the peculiarities of Latin manuscripts made in the Iberian Peninsula: the *Pentateuch of Ashburnham*⁸ dates from the 7th century AD., the Bible from Real Colegiata Basílica de San Isidoro de León dates from 962 or the *Pampeluna Bible* dates from the 11th century (Sed-Rajna 2000, 226).

A strong argument in favor of Jewish origin of these models is given by the narrative method of these paintings, unprecedented in the Middle Age, which is very close to the analytical narrative method of *midrash*.

The oldest Jewish manuscript known so far was written in Tiberias, in 895 AD, and contains a part of the Bible (it can be found in the synagogue of Kara in Cairo). Although there are fragments undated which may be older than this model, their existence does not change the

⁷ Joseph Gutmann, *apud Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 9, “Illuminated Manuscripts, Hebrew”, p. 726.

⁸ This manuscript is known as the *Tours Pentateuch* or the *Ashburnham Pentateuch* and it is in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, MS nouv. acq. lat. 2334.

essential, due to the gap of centuries separating the Dead Sea Scrolls and the discovery of the oldest Jewish medieval manuscripts.

II. Manufacturing

The procedures used for the illuminated Jewish manuscripts are not different from those used for Christian works. Most Western European manuscripts were written on animal skins, although the paper used in the Islamic East before the 15th century was already known. Calfskin is used both for Torah scrolls and illuminated manuscripts.

Once the parchment was prepared and cut into pieces, they were folded in half (*bifolio*) and arranged in form of a book, in groups of four to five sheets. Once sheets were arranged, the scribe responsible for the page format and layout copied the text, leaving areas to be decorated unfilled. The booklets were then ready to be decorated by the artist, usually a different person than the scribe. Firstly, the drawings were executed, but before their painting was executed, the parts to be covered with gold were prepared.

A mixture of clay and chalk (*bole*⁹ or *terra rosa*) was applied to the *folio* to form a thickened area on which delicate gold leaflets could be attached. The pigments obtained from various minerals and ordinary substances, such as egg and urine were then mixed and applied one color at a time¹⁰.

⁹ *Bole* is a shade of reddish brown. The color term derives from Latin *bōlus* (or “dirt”) and refers to a kind of soft fine clay whose reddish-brown varieties are used as pigments.

¹⁰ Some medieval recipe books have been preserved containing ingredients and explaining the procedures used to create different pigments. One of these was written by a Jew, Abraham ben Iuda ibn Hayyim. The text is in Portuguese, written with Hebrew letters, and can be found in a manuscript kept at the Palatine Library in Parma (Ms. De Rossi 945). The colophon tells us that the treaty was written in 1262, and its copy seems to have been made during 15th century. The document consists of 45 parts, and each section describes how to obtain a particular color. The Treaty begins with a description of how different types of gold are produced and it continues with the manufacturing process of blue, red, green,

Unfinished manuscripts, such as *Prato Haggadah*¹¹, the most revealing example, enable us to reconstruct the various stages of a manuscript. This work, written in Spain in the 1300s, is an illuminated manuscript in the strict sense of the word: it is a book that has been painted in bright and light-reflecting gold colors. The manuscript remained unfinished, with only some pages with sketches, while others were completely painted.

We might assume that the order of the operations was the following: writing the text, execution of drawings, application of the *terra rosa* layer, application of gold flakes and finally adding the colors. Pages have been kept as a book and the artist worked from the outside to the inside, from the first outer *folio* to the center. The colors were applied one by one, starting with blue. In the unfinished section, the outer side of the *bifolio* was fully illuminated, while the inner side was covered only by blue. Moving towards the center, the *folios* are covered with gold and have no pigment, the next ones have only *bole* and, finally, in the middle of the stack, only the drawings have been executed.

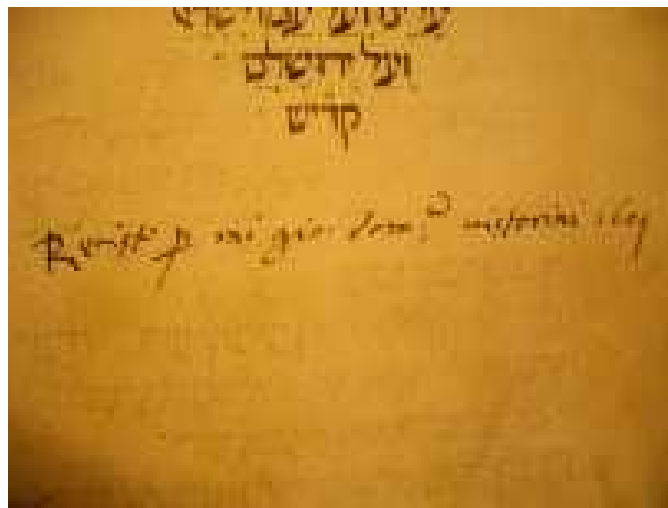
III. Sarajevo Haggadah

One of the famous Jewish illuminated manuscripts is the *Sarajevo Haggadah*. A Spanish manuscript dating from the 14th century, it was made around 1350 in a famous Jewish family in Barcelona or Saragossa. It is one of the oldest and best-known Jewish manuscripts, and its fame is the extent of the story that accompanies it. The manuscript leaves Spain with the Jewish community expelled after 1492. The notes on the page edges say that it was in northern Italy in August 1510 and under consideration of an Italian censor in 1609, as the note "*Revisto per mi gio*" appears on a page edge (ill.1). It reaches in the possession of the Museum of Sarajevo in 1894, when a Jew child from the Sephardic

yellow and black. Different recipes and instructions to obtain different shades of color are also mentioned in the manuscript. (Cf. http://www.fathom.com/special/jewish_studies/index.html#courses).

¹¹ From *Jewish Theological Seminary on New York* (Mic. no 9478).

community in the area brings it to school trying to sell it because his father had died, leaving his family (who had the manuscript in their possession) without any survival resources. It is hidden in a village near Sarajevo in 1941 until after the Second World War, for fear of being confiscated by the Nazis. The manuscript survived the bombardment on the National Museum building during the conflict in former Yugoslavia (1992-1995) due to the efforts of two Bosnian Muslims employees. Only in December 2002 it was publicly exposed for the first time, after its restoration, and it was declared a symbol of peace and democracy for the newly born Bosnian nation¹². The fame of this *Haggadah* derives from its age, beauty and the large amount of text decorations and illuminated miniatures.



1. The Christian censor's signature on the Sarajevo *Haggadah*¹³

It is made of calf leather, and decorated on one side. This method is an exception in the case of Jewish manuscripts which were most often made using both sides of the leather piece, taken mostly from the animal

¹² It was reproduced twice during the last 70 years, with exegetical comments, and its first edition was that of Muller and J. von Schlosser, and its last edition was that of Cecile Roth.

¹³ *Photo*: Das Judentum in Deutschland (http://www.talmud.de/sarajevo/detailansicht_bild.htm).

womb. In the *Sarajevo Haggadah*, as for the *Golden Haggadah*¹⁴, the decorations are made on the inner side of the piece of leather, leaving the outer side undecorated.

The manuscript consists of 34 sheets covered by full-page miniatures and the illuminated text. There are 68 paintings in total on 109 pages. The sources of inspiration of the paintings are biblical scenes, as well as *midrash* legends. The *Sarajevo Haggada* includes the widest exposure of the biblical text of all Jewish manuscripts, starting with Genesis and ending with Moses blessing his son, Joshua, and the Jewish people before dying. Seventeen panels are dedicated to the story of Joseph. The biblical illustration cycle presents the history of Exodus, being preceded by the story of Patriarchs and occasionally interrupted to insert episodes from Genesis, or legendary episodes of *midrash* such as Joseph's throwing in the Nile.

IV. Structure of the Manuscript

A correspondence between the text and images does not exist in the illuminated manuscripts. The text itself is the artistic character of the manuscript. The scenario of images belongs to the artist and makes each manuscript unique. Jewish manuscripts are unique copies, meaning that two identical copies do not exist.

Like any Spanish *Haggadah*, the *Sarajevo Haggadah* consists of three traditional parts: the text, the *carpet pages* and a collection of prayers (*piyyutim*) recited in the synagogue during the *Pessah* week or on the Sabbath day before *Pessah*.

The text is rarely illustrated and the prayer section has some pretty modest paintings. Instead, the *carpet pages* are the most beautiful artistic execution of the Jewish manuscripts and the *Sarajevo Haggadah* is one of the well-known examples in the field, along with the *Golden Haggadah* or *Kaufmann Haggada*. In this section, the text is not only a decoration support, but even the main element.

¹⁴ This manuscript is in the British Library, Add Ms.27210.



2. Text section¹⁵



3. Text section¹⁶

¹⁵ Photo: Pitt Special Collection (<http://pittspecialcollections.tumblr.com/post/118114197279/the-sarajevo-haggadah-the-past-as-present>).

¹⁶ Photo: Indiana University (http://www.indiana.edu/~jsp/events/2013_14/conference_jsgsa.shtml).

4. Text section¹⁷

The decoration is placed over text joints: it signals the beginning or the end of the sections, and rounds the lines and emphasizes the solemn passages, while the *carpet pages* create the organic link inside the book. The letters themselves become decorative elements: represented in different colors, arranged in columns or one under the other, they are emphasized by accompanying illustrations which form decorative cartridges together with the letters (ill. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6).

5. Text section¹⁸

¹⁷ Photo: The Times of Israel (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/in-post-war-bosnia-jews-celebrate-450-years-of-survival>).

¹⁸ Photo: Das Judentum in Deutschland (http://www.talmud.de/sarajevo/detailansicht_bild.htm).

6. Text section¹⁹

The illustrations are genuine visual comments and include scenes from the Genesis, the Flood episode (ill. 11, 12, 13), followed by the history of the Jewish people (*Mana* – fl.30, Finding of baby Moses – fl.20; Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law – fl.31; Burial of Jacob and Joseph – fl.21) to the blessing of Moses, aspects of the facade of the Temple, domestic scenes with the preparations for *Pessah* (*Seder* plate – ill.16) and the inside of a Spanish synagogue (*Departure from the synagogue* – fl. 33 , 34 – ill.14).

7. Genesis²⁰

¹⁹ Photo: The Times of Israel (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/in-post-war-bosnia-jews-celebrate-450-years-of-survival>).

²⁰ Photo: Das Judentum in Deutschland (http://www.talmud.de/sarajevo/detailansicht_bild.htm).

8. Genesis²¹

The Jewish specific elements are distinguished from the theological perspective of topics. The *Genesis* (ill. 7, 8) is a recurrent subject in Christian Psalters, but what makes its representation different in the Jewish manuscripts is the absence of any anthropomorphized representation of God or other heavenly creatures. The Divine Presence is given by the Divine Hand, or by the bundle of rays that sweep over the couple Adam and Eve in Paradise (ill. 9, 10).

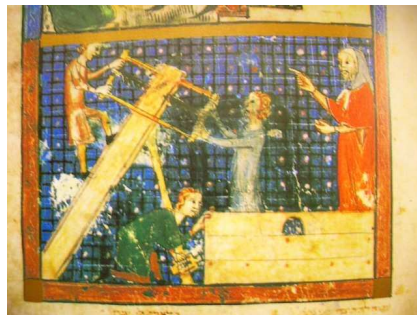
9. Genesis²²

²¹ *Idem.*

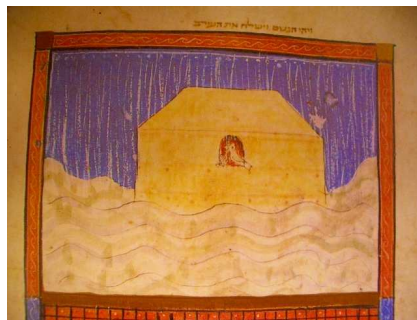
²² *Idem.*



10. Genesis²³



11. Noah's ark²⁴

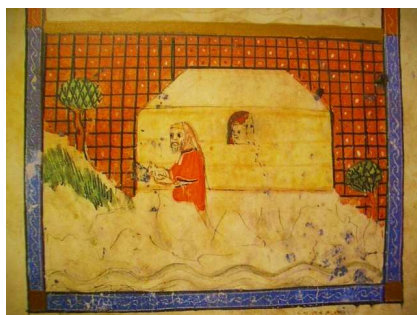


12. Noah's ark²⁵

²³ *Idem.*

²⁴ *Idem.*

²⁵ *Idem.*

13. Noah's ark²⁶

Another specific Jewish element is the representation of the synagogue. But a particularity is given by the representation *Aron Kodesh* (Torah ark), this appearing with the doors opened during the departure from the synagogue scene to reveal the Torah scrolls. It thus marks the opening of the Mercy Gates stressed by the payer (ill.14).

14. Departure from the synagogue
(*Aron Kodesh* is opened)²⁷

²⁶ *Idem.*

²⁷ *Idem.*

The *Haggadah* also includes an explanation of the symbolism of the *Pessah* which is actually the most important part of this text. As a development of the text in *Mishna Pessah* 10:5, the inserted fragment explaining this symbolism is known as the “Teachings of Rabbi Gamaliel.”

According to the sacred text, the presence of this fragment in *Haggadah* is justified as follows: “We need to give explanations to the dinners in a language they understand, and if the householder does not know the sacred language, then he reads it in a translated *Haggadah*. For a very strong reason it is necessary that everyone understands the meaning of the terms of *Pessah*, *Matza*, *Maror*, Rabbi Gamaliel said in that fragment...”. Therefore, Rabbi Gamaliel figure is painted in the illuminated manuscripts containing *Haggadah* text (ill.15).



15. Rabbi Gamaliel and his disciples²⁸

Together with the *Pessah*²⁹ lamb and bitter herbs – *maror*³⁰ –, *matzot*³¹ represent a symbol which the liturgy itself is based on and becomes an

²⁸ Photo: <http://www.bibleodyssey.org/people/related-articles/pharisees-and-rabbinic-judaism.aspx>.

²⁹ Exodus 12:27.

³⁰ Exodus 1:14. *Maror* (מרור – ebr.), bitter herbs consumed on *Pessah*, with the lamb and the *matzah*.

³¹ Exodus 12:27.

essential figurative element in the *Haggadah*. If the lamb was a symbol specific to the period of the Second Temple, which is currently missing, the other two elements – *matzot* and *maror* – are better represented now when the community is in diaspora. They are oversized, centrally exposed, stylized and monumentalized by their framing with decorations and accompanying figures (ill.17).



16. *Seder Plate*³²



17. *Maror*³³

³² Photo: <https://insertawittyblognamehere.wordpress.com/tag/sarajevo-haggadah>.

³³ Photo: The Time of Israel (<http://www.timesofisrael.com/hostage-to-politics-glorious-sarajevo-haggadah-languishes-in-crumbling-museum>).

The representation of Rabbi Gamaliel and his disciples in the *Haggadah* text, as well as the representations of *matzot* and *maror* are specifically Jewish. Representing specific *Pessah* items is not considered iconic by the Orthodox rabbis, solving the dilemma between the divine transcendence and immanence and handling subtle multiple meanings³⁴. *Matzah* (מצה - ebr.) is the unleavened bread traditionally eaten on *Pessah*. It is seen by Michael Batterman as a key image of 13th-14th century Hebrew manuscripts, a symbol of great significance for both Hebrew community and in a visual discourse of the power that goes beyond religious boundaries, being a true microcosmos of Jewish-Christian relationships in the medieval Spain³⁵.

Stylistically speaking, the *Sarajevo Haggadah* follows the 14th century Italian Gothic School practice applied by artists in Catalonia: decorative borders, ornamental cartridges containing the beginning words of the verse, presented at the beginning of the sections, *carpet pages*, frontispieces in arcades. The small number of illustrations in the text is a specificity of the Oriental *Haggadah*. The most used colors are blue and vermilion red, as well as ocher, green, purple or magenta. Gold is the most frequently used pigment in illuminated manuscripts, applied as an ink in micrographic lines.

Such "books" circulated within the Jewish community, between communities throughout the European area, representing vehicles that ensured the survival of sacred language in the absence of a state to protect it and in a geographic area of a diaspora scattered across several continents. Illuminated manuscripts became sacramental instruments by means of which Jewish history was soteriological reenacted. Books were those who accompanied and served the pilgrims as one of the catalysts for aesthetic aspirations of a people who is supposed to deny the "image".

³⁴ Michael Batterman, „Bread of Affliction, Emblem of Power: The Passover Mazzah in Haggadah Manuscripts from Christian Spain”, in *Imagining the self, imagining the other: visual representation and Jewish-Christian Dynamics in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period*, Eva Frojmovic (ed.), Brill, 2002, p. 66.

³⁵ Cf. Michael Batterman, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-91.

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INTERVIEWS

ON ART AND INNER REALMS

ILINCA BERNEA, GRAHAM LYNCH

GRAHAM LYNCH is a British composer. He has a PhD in composition from King's College London, and he also spent a year at the Royal College of Music. Graham's music has been commissioned and performed in over thirty countries, as well as being frequently recorded to CD and featured on radio and television¹.

ILINCA BERNEA is a Romanian writer, a theatre woman – stage director - and a complex artist, initiated in contemporary dance, acting, painting and new media. She has a PhD in philosophy from the University of Bucharest and she is specialized in aesthetics and art theory. She was awarded a few prestigious literary prizes and she is a well-regarded photographer².

Bernea: I have always been a bit reluctant towards the expression “down to earth”. In English, saying this about someone is rather a compliment, meant to point out a person's modesty and good sense, if I am not mistaken. But, in French, we have the expression “terre à terre” which is not a compliment at all. It refers to a primitive, dull, disgraceful and even rude way of being. Someone “terre à terre” appears to be a person that lacks fantasy in the first place: the opposite of an artist. I

¹ See: <http://grahamlynch.eu/>

² See: <https://ilinkars.wordpress.com/>

have learned this when I was a child and I could not cope with the English sense of the “earth” orientation, later on, when I started speaking the language. To me, “down to earth”, is not a compliment. Well... Is it for you? Would you call yourself a realist person? My question is related to the “realist” art movements. Do you think that art is meant to mirror a social reality and to provide an interpretation for this reflection? How do you cope with “realism” in general?

Lynch: Composing takes much time, peace and quiet, and so I have become a realist in respect of the organisation of my life; I try to negotiate the outer aspects of my life in an adaptable manner so that time will be available for me to write. My artistic inclinations are not however towards realist art in general. Although I enjoy, for example, the novels of Zola, Balzac, and Flaubert, my heart feels closer to the writings of authors like Nerval and Aragon. I am not so much interested in art reflecting life – and where is the ‘truth’ in this, anyway? – as art conjures up alternative ways of thinking and being.

Bernea: I need to clarify something: no art shape floats beyond reality. If an art piece is unplugged from reality it appears to be fake and pointless. There are social and political implications in the background of every single human expression. But art questions the reality, transfigures, re-dimensions it. I need to feel, in any art-shape, the confrontation, the contrast, the tension existing between desire and reality, between dream and reality, between the inner and the outer world, I need to feel the drama of the human subject. You mentioned Nerval. I have always been inclined to think of reality in romantic terms, as being the exile of the soul in an impersonal frame. The reality is, in my view, whatever the external world could mean – a field of interference between all beings and between them and natural phenomena, something that we are part of, but in a way that does not let us express our inner truth entirely... I think that one of the purposes of art was to figure out a way to give a shape to this inner truth, which is, in some aspects, purely particular and, in some others, applicable to the entire species. But, speaking in objective terms, there is no *one* reality out there. There are as many realities as living beings. To each one of us “the

same" social/natural environment appears in a different way, it tastes differently. "Cherchez la femme!"... you know. "Et la Réalité", I would say.

Lynch: Maybe, as a musician, my art form is already removed from a direct confrontation with the real world, and there will always be a debate as to just what music can or cannot legitimately express. I would agree that every human action must, in some ways, have a social implication but I do not find myself looking for these in my favourite works of art. I am drawn to the experiences that cannot be expressed in any concrete fashion, that border on dream, and point in the direction of something timeless. It is as if one were trying to see behind a mirror. Curiously, with music, one needs a highly organised and rational language in order to be able to express the irrationality of emotions and dreams, and not forgetting the powerful aesthetic experience that can be produced by musical structure.

Bernea: Contemporary art forms, validated by the mainstream, tend to become more and more like a critical discourse pointed towards what happens on the world's stage (a world understood as a socially rooted dimension, a space of interference between individuals), in other words, arts tend to be focused rather on the external reality than on the impact of its features over the inner human realms. What do you think about the consequences of this orientation of contemporary arts? It is true that there have been currents and movements that alternated throughout the whole art history, which appeared to be more interested in investigating inner – or outer – realities (personal or collective, individual or mutual) but, I have the intuition that this turn, things have gone a bit too far with the "realism". What is your opinion?

Lynch: I totally agree. The scientific and exoteric viewpoint is all pervasive in contemporary culture. Any discourse to do with inner experience, with what has traditionally been called *soul* and *spirit*, has disappeared in a generally accepted way. There is, of course, a large industry devoted to the alleviation of personal emotional trauma, and other unsettling psychological experiences, but these come under the 'scientific' heading of psychology. Anything that lies outside the realm

of science has ceased to have meaning, and this is partly the fault of university art courses that require external and quantifiable validation.

Bernea: The current chamber and orchestral music proposes the audiences, quite often, noisy, violent and disturbing pieces. Personally, I think that one must be a bit perverted to really enjoy such sonic torture. Do you think that these compositions have something to do with the paradigm of the “realism”?

Lynch: Realism in music is more problematical to assess, because apart from the verismo style of some Italian opera it is not so obviously apparent. I do not have a problem with the music of the Second Viennese School (Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern), and I like it a lot for its darkness and unsettling expressionist nature. It was communicating something vital about human experience, and in a precise and artistically calculated way. The music that came after this period (Stockhausen, Boulez, Xenakis, for example) seemed to lose some touch with what it was trying to communicate and at times became simply an exploration of new technical possibilities. Ultimately this has led to a musical sterility in some facets of contemporary music, and audiences have lost interest. If there is a realist dimension, it has been in the need for compositions to be justified by a technical apparatus that can be explained, which is seen as showing artistic merit, when, of course, it is nothing of the sort.

Bernea: I never really cared about the “illusion” matter, but about that graceful feeling which comes along with inspiration. In matters of human interferences there is no objective truth. The roots of desire and attraction are not seated in a palpable reality, but in our deepest instincts. Most artists confessed that they create in an “altered” state of mind. There is a boiling point where the pieces of one’s mind enter a different state of aggregation, one that produces the inspiration. Are you this kind of artist? And, if so, what does such a “boiling point” imply for you? Inspiration, in your case, where does it come from?

Lynch: As a composer, it can take months or years to write a piece, working on a daily basis. In this context inspiration is not something that can suddenly arrive and complete a work in a short space of time. The popular view is that an artist is a special sort of person who feels things in a deeper way and whose individual personality is able to turn these deeper sensations into art. But I disagree with this and find myself in sympathy with the attack that T.S. Eliot made on the 'substantial unity of the soul'. I perceive myself as a fragmented being that has many possibilities and that I am not expressing my personality, but, instead, working in the medium of music to express things that I have often drawn from other arts. My view of inspiration is that it happens when things link up inside me in a way that allows a piece to proceed smoothly for a time; that inner fragments combine to create meaning. Although a work will have a title at the end that will possibly refer to something in the exterior world, or another art work, in the process of composition there will have been many things that were drawn into the magic circle of the music and helped it take shape. I am interested to know if you consider your art (meaning all your artistic practice, whether visual or literary) as having a language that develops and then there are changes in your ways of working - of developing different connections and techniques - conscious explorations of a technique, or changes in technique arise from changes in emotion and the development of your individual personality. In other words, is the technique, the process, a result of a conscious development, or a need to find a way of expressing something different that you experience?

Bernea: I try to adjust the language (and by this I mean a certain style/shape of expression) to the nature of the message I aim to transmit and to the flavour of the associated feeling. I try to imprint in my writing or painting a certain tonality, tension, taste, that are inherent to an experience or situation or reflection. The creative language is meant to transmit these issues "directly" not "indirectly". More specifically: saying X is very sad because he has been announced that his best friend passed away is an indirect way of describing a situation, the most indirect language being the standard-expressions (either lexical, sonic or visual) associated to various life matters. The direct way to express

someone's desolation is certainly not the statement: X is desolated, but an unpredictable (original) way to express this without naming the desolation. We cannot be moved by stereotype formulations or by the simple name of an emotion. Our brains are used to ingest these names and consecrated expressions automatically and on a purely cognitive level. Even the artistic-shapes, that once seemed very touching, suffer perceptive erosion in time. One cannot be as impressed by the same tastes and shapes every day. Every language becomes a routine, if it has not been aesthetically challenged. That is why the artistic language has to always renew and improve its means and strategies. To answer your question even more clearly: in my case, the process is a result of a conscious development. As I gained experience, I succeeded better in avoiding common places and "indirect" expressions.

Lynch: Are you organized in the way you develop, through reading for example, or do you tend to explore new ideas through what you are passionate about at a time, and what intuitively seems interesting?

Bernea: I rely mostly on my instinctive drive and intuition. I seem to be a cerebral person because I need, more than others, perhaps, to put order in my mind and thoughts. Especially because I am not quite organized and rigorous in my way of living, I need to invest time in reflection and analysis. *Ha, ha*. I live my life in the relaxed mode, being very open to many possibilities. My expectancies are usually flexible. I rarely sulk and I try to cope with unfortunate things with humour. But when it comes to creation and love matters, things become serious. I am extremely disciplined in these respects. I have a huge capacity of concentration, I would say obsessive. I get extremely focused and I can push my limits (emotionally, physically and intellectually) to a dangerous point. And I... kind of... like it. In such circumstances I become secluded. I lose appetite for anything else. Passion, in its highest, appears to be a lustful form of pain. It is something instinctive, anyway. The animals in heat must feel the same. I felt, many times, when writing or dancing, a special interest in exploring extreme feelings and thoughts. I even found that art could provide me the chance to experience what it would be like to "lose control". Have you ever had a similar inclination?

Lynch: There is the routine of composing that I described earlier, and that forms the backbone of what I do. But alongside this there are wonderful highs, and also very dark lows. The situation you describe, of intense focus on a project and the exclusion of everything else, is something that can happen to me in the later stages of writing a piece; and I rather enjoy this experience in which most of the pieces of my life are cast aside. All that is left is the work as the sole object of contemplation, and I get a curious ecstasy and 'high' from this, even if it is fairly short lived.

Bernea: I know that one of your favourite books is a collection of essays written by Italo Calvino. I was concerned by his insights exposed there, too. One of them is particularly meaningful to me, because it expresses, in modern terms, the fact that the essential role of the arts was to produce a language able to induce a catharsis. The "lightness" that he talks about is a sublimation of the raw experiences... We cannot achieve it but by situating ourselves at a certain distance from our emotional ego and from its intellectual claims as well. This lightness is neither "zen" contemplation, nor detachment, nor a simplifying view over a given subject, but the capacity of seeing things in a mental state of serenity. Only rarely can one reach it spontaneously and I think that, if this happens in real life, it is due to the influence of artistic models. It is art's mission to evoke serenity, says Calvino, to turn a cloudy experience into pure blue... I even think that certain human mental processes have been coined by art experiences in the first place. Don't you think? I have a hunch that this serenity was an aesthetic experience in the beginning.

Lynch: This question touches on many areas, and goes to the source of what role arts play in our lives. From my point of view there are certain experiences, states of mind that would have been impossible for me to experience outside of an aesthetic model. Ordinary life experience is fragmentary and chopped into small moments that range from the physical (including sexual), emotional, cerebral, sensations of the heart, and so on. These often come to us in a random and unplanned way, mainly from causes outside of our control. In a good work of art these scattered facets of experience are condensed into a single unified

event (poem, painting, piece of music) which situates them in a different dimension of being; often a balanced whole that is full of interior tension and meaning, but which has a kind of stasis and serenity.

Bernea: Personally I consider this ~serenity~ to have the same roots with humour. What is humour? What part does it play in our lives? How important is it? Is humour able to produce catharsis? For me, humour is a contact point of the human conscience with the sublime.

Lynch: I think humour can act as a lightening conductor to extreme situations, and often dark humour is the funniest. It can diffuse an emotion, like a bomb that's been made safe, and bring down to 'human' level events that are so much greater than ourselves and which otherwise might threaten to overwhelm us.

Bernea: Which is the first thing that comes through your mind when you hear the word "world"?

Lynch: Hmm... Well, a sense of something that belongs to everyone and we would better look after it.

Bernea: And the word "act"?

Lynch: To write music.

Bernea: Which one, among the 5 senses, do you identify the most with? To what extent is art a sensorial experience for you?

Lynch: Probably sight. Which may be strange for a musician, but as a composer much of the music I relate to goes on inside my head, rather than an aural experience of sounds outside me. Visual art, and the mere presence of colors, are vital to me. Colors in isolation contain emotion, but this is not true of harmony (e.g. a single chord) it only functions and comes to life in a context. Western harmonic practices are culturally conditioned, and a recent invention, but color is more biologically rooted in us as an experience. As a visual artist, do you

perceive individual colors as encoding sensations? And does this in any conscious way reflect on how you construct your paintings?

Bernea: I think so. To me, painting is a more sensorial experience compared to the other arts I practice. There is a certain “need for color” in the background of my appetite for painting.

Lynch: Why does black and white appear to me to be more magical, vocative, sensuous, interesting, and curious?

Bernea: The “black-and-white” suggests dramatic lines and complementary elements and accents and emphasizes the contrasts. Also, it evokes something shadowy, obscure, ambiguous, and this ambiguity comes up with semantic complexity. There is certain essentialism in the “black and white” art shapes and a higher degree of transfiguration of the basic images provided by the surrounding reality.

Lynch: Is art appealing to us when it is the ‘incomplete’ black and white photography, or the neutral piano sound, because it relates directly to the way we see things through memory, and in the ‘unreal’ way becomes a stronger part of our inner reality? A Debussy piano prelude is already like a memory, as is b & w photography.

Bernea: What you say is very interesting. It sounds Proustian, somehow! I think that all arts have, in their own specific way, the ability to access and activate our affective memory and to bring fresh air into our inner realities, but I never felt that there is something neutral in an art shape that touches me. On the contrary, to me, Black and White photography comes up with a dramatic accent, because it makes the contrast appear more clearly. Is there really a neutral sound or image - not only in art, but also in the surrounding environment? We are naturally programmed to interpret our sensorial experiences, to decode them and to transpose them into meanings. Some abstract artists exploited the fact cleverly: take Jackson Pollock for instance. Changing the topic, what do you think about the so called militant-art? I am referring to those art-shapes that are ideologically rooted?

Lynch: I am not sure that those works of art I value most can be crystallized down to a single meaning or ideology; the best works radiate many alternative readings. For this reason I mostly find ideologically driven art to be monocultural and dull. This is one of the problems I have with much conceptual art, where an accompanying linguistic description of what it is about is given for one to 'understand' it. How do you relate to most of the modern conceptual art?

Bernea: I find it a little too cerebral and demonstrative for what I normally expect from an art work. It is also reductionist, because of the clarity of the message. A clear message is a univocal one. They provide an explanation for their content inside of the composition, it is like buying an elegant dress that has written beside a manual of instructions suggesting *in what circumstances to wear it, at what temperature to wash it* and so on... Now, seriously, I do not like to be told how to understand an art work, I want to be free to do it in my own way. My linguistic sensibility tells me that any special qualification attributed to an art work diminishes its value. For instance, saying about a painting: *this is a piece of art* means more than saying: *this is a piece of engaged art*. Sometimes, the specific determinations of the qualities of an object straiten, on perceptive level, its field of valences, significance and virtues. The same thing happens with the adjectives and epithets associated with already praising characterisations. Saying about a painting that it is very beautiful means less than saying: *this painting is beautiful!* I do not necessary agree with that famous "less is more" of Van der Rohe, but in some circumstances I think it is true.

Secondly, I think that any authentic art piece is engaged somehow. No matter if it militates for freedom, scepticism or cynicism, for anarchy or lust, it emphasized a message. All art shapes are militant, to a certain extent. But the art that is totally submitted to ideological purposes is outrageous, of course. It is simple propaganda.

Bernea: What is your favourite art work? And why?

Lynch: Impossible to answer! Could you? It depends very much on my mood at any time, and whilst I have certain artists that I will

always be close to and periodically return to, I could never privilege one over the others.

Bernea (laughs): I could. I am obsessed with Egon Schiele's *Freundschaft*. So, that is my piece.

Lynch: Music seems to be the only art form that you do not directly work with, but what part does music play in your life?

Bernea: I am inspired the most by music. I am totally addicted. Music is the main catalyst of my emotional drive.

Lynch: Is the culture of your country rooted in your own work, or do you think your output would be much the same wherever you had been brought up?

Bernea: Since we do not live in isolated or purely traditional cultures, it is basically impossible to be entirely influenced by a single one. We all grew up reading literature, listening to music or watching movies and enjoying art pieces from various times and cultural spaces... Is the Romanian culture purely Romanian? Is the French culture purely French? This would be a first question. Like any living organism, a culture has many dependences and influences and is meant to evolve and to become. Someone who lacks human contacts gets emotionally and intellectually dry; his personality turns grey and dull. An animal in captivity suffers and falls ill more easily: it is disrupted from its natural fate. That is natural for cultures too. They need to communicate. The worst thing in communism was this closure, I would say. A culture kept in "captivity" and controlled by a totalitarian regime alters and goes rotten quickly. This is what happened to the Romanian culture during the time of the Cold War. When I was born, the cultural environment was a nightmare. I cannot identify with it, no way... By the contrary: I did everything possible to escape it. I tried to find my roots in other cultures. The best thing is that a culture is grounded in the air. Ha! It is something ethereal, then accessible, with means that are not dependant on material-contexts.

It is true that the social context plays a crucial role in the process of our becoming. If this context is favourable, we identify ourselves with its values, but if it is hostile, we tend to grow in opposition with its features and values. That is the point.

Lynch: It is always been much harder to define British culture, as, for example, compared to French, German or Italian. We have always tended to assimilate culture from outside and too often be late on catching up with artistic changes in the rest of Europe. And we are more a nation of individual creators than movements. Words like 'culture', and 'intellectual', are treated with a kind of derision and suspicion over here, and I would be unable to define my own specifically British cultural experiences.

Bernea: Beginning with the Renaissance time, when the art-creator gained another status and took on the right to interpret the world in his own terms, the cultural traditions have been challenged and transfigured and, sometimes, left aside. The language exploded and flourished, achieving unexpected meanings and shapes, enlarging the frontiers of understanding. The more particular the artistic expression became, and independent from the given cultural frames, the more universal its contents and meanings turned out to be. This is not a paradox, it is something obvious. The claim for "independence" of the Renaissance artists could stand for a revolution in the art history, don't you think? How do you relate with them, by the way?

Lynch: For me, the Renaissance sits artistically between the two cultural periods that interest me most: Ancient Greece, especially its bucolic aspect; and the modern European city, epitomised by 19th-20th century Paris. We all have that experience of trying to relate to the world of nature (and in a manner that can only ever be fictional and artificial), and we also experience the alienation of the modern city. The Renaissance drew its inspiration from how it imagined Ancient Greece, and re-vitalised its paganism into new forms and depths of expression, a real revolution of spirit. This was gradually projected forward in time, and the enquiry into individual experience became more of a

relationship between a person and their city environment. Many insights of the likes of Baudelaire, the Goncourt brothers, Huysmans, Rilke (on Paris), Breton, and Aragon, seem very relevant to our contemporary experience. Without the breakthrough of the Renaissance this would have been impossible.

Bernea: In what concerns the “specific difference” that sets forth the distinctive features of a culture, I have a particular curiosity related to the English-kind. I have my own anecdotic guide marks and references “in the domain” and I use to improvise jokes with Englishmen, you know, but I am very interested to hear what you appreciate as being the essence of Englishness and to compare, eventually, our views.

Lynch: I honestly find that impossible to answer! I also don’t feel specifically English – my father was Irish, and I’ve lived much of my adult life in the far north of Scotland, and for the last fifteen years in Cornwall; all of these places have strong Celtic connections. Although I spend a lot of time in London these days, I sometimes feel I’m the only British person there. The concept of ‘Englishness’ is currently undergoing national scrutiny, and, when I was younger, it did not exist as a separate category, and it does not much interest me. I would be interested to know what you see as Englishness from the outside?

Bernea: I think that what is specifically English is the avoidance of complicating one’s life by directly and personally telling things that could be said impersonally or kept under silence, a reluctance towards confessions and sincerity, a very polite and impersonal manner of saying offensive things, a very strong, even obsessive, sense of ridiculousness that comes along with a keen sense of humour – this is the *bonus track* – and also a vivid unspoken imagination doubled with much social suspicion. In my novel, *The Black Box*, I said, somewhere, a resuming phrase: “The civilized man is balanced, dry, calculated, distant, scared of embarrassment, terrified of superlatives, in a word: English”. (...) “A well-educated English man would much sooner admit to have been roaring drunk than to have dropped a tear to one of Tom

Jones' songs". Do you remember when you asked me once, how I would define my style and I replied English? (Laughs). My *English style* helps me, sometimes, to waste a lot of time and energy trying to cover my discontent with some people, struggling to invent reasons or excuses for my lack of interest in others, unnecessary flattering annoying and superficial blokes or heroically putting up with some harsh pestles. And I would rather admit that I got very emotional or sexual because of being drunk than for other reasons. A Romanian fellow would have invoked even metaphysical reasons to justify such effusions. No Romanian is ever drunk. You know? This is the most intriguing thing for me. In Romania smoking is the most usual practice and socially encouraged. There are smokers everywhere. You barely find a public place for non-smokers... But the alcohol is almost a social *tabu*. On the contrary, in England, drinking alcohol is the most common practice, but smoking is culturally blamed and discouraged and strictly forbidden in all public places.

Lynch: Yes, alcohol... is certainly ingrained in British culture! And your analysis of 'Englishness' is accurate, although in the last few decades we have surprised ourselves by loosening up a bit. This is partly as a result of people travelling more, something which was always more common throughout the rest of Europe.

Bernea: Compared to the period of your studentship (the late '70s) how is the artistic and cultural life in England? Is the audience more aware and demanding or more indifferent? Is the free-art-market more diversified or more restrictive? Is it more difficult for an independent artist/ musician/poet to gain an audience now or was it harder then?

Lynch: I think that any changes that have occurred are fairly universal in all developed countries. Money has dominated the art market at the exclusion of taste or quality. Corporate funding and government money have also influenced the market for arts, and individual creators find it harder to make a living as consumers of art expect things for free (especially music). There has been a huge increase

in the number of creators – helped by the internet – but a diminution in high quality arts criticism and discourse.

Bernea: I would like to propose you a game. Tell me, in a few words, how you would describe – mentioning their most distinctive features – each one of the decades of the recent history, beginning with the '60's. Of course, I am interested in the evolution of the artistic phenomena. I will come up with my own description afterwards. I would like to confront the views.

Lynch: This is another difficult question! Because I have lived in remote parts of the UK, without TV or newspapers in my life, I've not been very aware of cultural changes. In the last decade I have become more aware of what is happening and more interested. My broad view would be that the post war decades ('50's-'80's) still contained the last stages of the careers of some of the 20th century's important creators – for example, Samuel Beckett. Once that generation gone, and with the serious arts being gradually devalued in education and the media, there has been a slow decline in the quality of artistic output. But I would be very interested to hear your perspective on this.

Bernea: We are talking here about the UK, because in Romania, during those years, we lived in communism and the situation was completely different. The '60's were agitated and driven by utopian social euphoria, with energetic youngsters ready to build a brand new world. And they partly accomplished their goal, but this new world was not necessarily a better one. The '70's came up with the withdrawal symptoms following the intoxication with various utopian ideas and also with some very interesting artistic experiments, the '80's have been the most creative and reflexive and lucid and, what's most important, favourable to emerging and independent artists, the '90's were still creative and humanist oriented – I would say that especially cinematography developed and evolved a lot back then (the best movies I have seen were made during that decade) – and, with the new era, the corporatist system started to take hold of every component of society and culture, including the art market that became less and less free. In

our days, social changes are rapid and spectacular! With every generation a world is dying. It is amazing and kind of frightening how quickly the society transforms! I have lived no more than 4 decades on earth and I barely recognize familiar mentalities and values around and, I cannot quite understand the actual world. I feel a like misfit. In the '90's, for instance, I had a strong feeling that I understood what was going on. I do not have it, anymore. Formerly, in other centuries, the changes occurred in a longer time, so people did not have such a powerful suggestion of the mortality of all things.

Lynch: This experience of release and experiment ran out of steam as the arts have become more of a corporate and bureaucratic world. After the financial crash arts organisations have increasingly needed to satisfy a broad social and inclusive remit, which in many ways can be good but runs the risk of making the arts safe and just another commodity.

Bernea: Personally, I identify myself with my generation and with yours, because I used to look up to it, when I was a teenager. The world, in the way I understand and like it, is the one conceived by our generations and coined in our creations. By the way, this is a question I ask myself often and I want to ask you too... Do you identify yourself with your creations? The strange fact is that most people tend to identify themselves and, particularly, their feelings with what they love, not with what they come to express. Most people feel that their favourite art - works and music represent their *true self* in a larger measure and even better than what they come to say about themselves. In my case it is true anyway. Even though I am pleased with my creations, I still feel more related to my favourite books, paintings and music. I find myself projected in what I love not in what I come to express. Maybe it is normal, if we do not have narcissist disorders or other such things. I do not know. What do you think?

Lynch: In many ways what I create feels rather foreign to me. I hear the faults of my music, its incomplete nature, and I cannot get any distance from it as I can with other works of art. I powerfully identify myself with my favourite poets, novelists, and painters (and also

composers, but to a slightly less extent for some reason), but I cannot see myself in my music, in the same way that I do not 'know' myself anyway. Even if I feel some pleasure at a piece I have written it is not because I perceive anything of my personality there. I would agree with Eliot, that a work of art is representative of an artist working in a medium, but not of the artist's personality.

I sometimes wish I felt more content with my music...

Bernea: What does composition bring you, Graham? I mean, what does the creation offer you as a human being? In my case, it comes up with a certain sense of freedom, definitely.

Lynch: In the physical world one is always contained within a specific space, there is constantly a limit, a visible horizon. In the interior world, where creativity takes place, there is a sense of infinite freedom. Wandering around this inner landscape can be a liberating experience but one has to be careful not to get lost in it, and to use one's powers to project some unity out of this and into the 'real' world. But I agree with you, there is this sense of freedom.

Tiparul s-a executat sub c-da nr. 3899 / 2016 la
Tipografia Editurii Universității din București