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# Summary

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R.J. CARDULLO

***Gesamtkunstwerk*, Synesthesia, and the Avant-Garde: Wassily Kandinsky's *The Yellow Sound* as a Work of Art** .....5

Oana ȘERBAN

**The Critical Theory of Artistic Capitalism** .....22

Andreea Elena MATIC (MIRICĂ)

**The Artistic Creation and the Juridical-Political Context of the Human Communities** .....34

Marcus Cesar Ricci TESHAINER and Vanessa Cunha Prado D'AFONSECA

**Tragedy and comedy in the ethical thinking of Giorgio Agamben** .....46

Mădălin ONU

**Cultural Heritage, Art and Politics in Wagner's *Lohengrin* A Dialectical Reinterpretation** .....65

Petru BEJAN

***Arbor Vitae* dans l'iconographie franciscaine** .....73

## Varia

Anton ADĂMUȚ

**On Chastity and Acces to Truth – Two Models** .....80

Ștefan BOLEA

**Maupassant's Empty Mirror: From the Phenomenology of Anxiety to the Constitution of the Not-Man** .....85

## Interview

**I compiti della filosofia contemporanea** .....93

*Intervista ad Antonio Di MAURO a cura di Tudor Petcu*

## Book review

Frăguța ZAHARIA

**La vision sur la vie à travers le prisme de l'art** .....109

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## ***Gesamtkunstwerk*, Synesthesia, and the Avant-Garde: Wassily Kandinsky's *The Yellow Sound* as a Work of Art**

**Abstract:** While completely repudiating representational or realistic art in *The Yellow Sound*, Wassily Kandinsky embraced some models of avant-garde drama and prefigured others. Influenced by the principles of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the symbolist theory of “correspondences,” Kandinsky also explored some of the themes of expressionistic drama, such as the eternal contradiction between Dionysian frenzy (yellow) and Apollonian “classicism” (blue) and the never-ending battle between the spiritual and the physical. In emphasizing the importance of collage and the juxtaposition of different arts within a total work of art, he also anticipated the Dadaist theories of automatic writing, chance collages, and random stage compositions. Finally, however, *The Yellow Sound* in its pure form cannot be identified with any particular avant-garde movement: instead, it is *sui generis*, presenting its own form and perhaps its own movement. This essay explores *The Yellow Sound* – a stage composition, as Kandinsky described it – in depth.

**Keywords:** Kandinsky, *The Yellow Sound*, avant-gardism, Dadaism, expressionism, synesthesia, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, *Blaue Reiter*

After studying law at Moscow University, the Russian-born Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) lectured on jurisprudence there until 1896, when he declined a professorship at the University of Dorpat (today the University of Tartu, in Estonia) to study painting in Munich. There he was able to gain traditional training as a painter while associating with many young experimental artists working in Munich at the turn of the century. In 1908, Kandinsky began to create expressionistic landscapes, and, from this point on, he moved steadily in his painting toward more abstract visual forms. Along with Franz Marc, he founded *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider) in 1911, a group that embraced a wide range of art devoted to the exploration of the artist's inner life.

In 1912, Kandinsky and Marc edited *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach*, which included the first publication of Kandinsky's play *Der gelbe Klang* (*The Yellow Sound*). Written in 1909, this work occupies a significant place in the history of theater as one of the first abstract dramas (itself barely anticipated by the

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ideas in the Russian composer Alexander Scriabin's symphonic work *Prometheus* [1910]) and also one of the earliest of modern light-and-sound "events." Its musical score, by the Russian composer Thomas von Hartmann, was unfortunately lost during the Russian Revolution of 1917.

At about the same time as he was writing *The Yellow Sound*, together with the plays *Daphnis and Chloe* (1908), *The Green Sound* (1909), *Black and White* (1909), and *Violet* (1911), Kandinsky published his main theoretical tract on modern art, *On the Spiritual in Art* (1911), in which he advocated the creation of increasingly non-objective art, free from the confines of physical representation. As a member of the Bauhaus beginning in 1922, Kandinsky continued to influence the development of this movement – whose primary goals, like his, were to reunite the arts, break down the barriers between artists and craftsmen, and make artistic products available to the common people as well as make them an integral part of daily life – until it was shut down by the Nazis in 1933.

Kandinsky's stage compositions *The Yellow Sound*, *Daphnis and Chloe*, *Black and White*, *Violet*, and *The Green Sound* were written at the very same time – the early 1900s – that he was attempting to break away from naturalism in art and create abstract painting. By renouncing the material object and the human figure in abstract painting, Kandinsky established a new relationship between form and color. Similarly, by renouncing individualized character and psychological motivation in stage composition, Kandinsky introduced a purely theatrical, ecstatically spectacular form whose goal was to have an exclusively spiritual, even regenerative relationship with its audience.

Indeed, inspired by the Wagnerian notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Kandinsky aimed at creating a wholly synthetic genre – the total work of art. Arguing, however, that the Wagnerian concept is based exclusively on the principles of representational art, in which all connections between and within different arts are artificial and external, Kandinsky offered his own model of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. He named his new model a "stage composition," a form centered on the principle of internal spiritual connections among sound, movement, and color. Kandinsky first presented his concept of purely theatrical, synthetic form and its relationship to the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* in his manifesto "On Stage Composition" (1912), which prefaced *The Yellow Sound* in the *Blaue Reiter Almanac*.

In this theoretical introduction to his ideas about the total work of art, Kandinsky reacts against the separation from one another of the three main performing arts: theater, opera, and ballet. He notes that separation or "specialization and the further elaboration of parts [are] the first consequence of materialism" (Kandinsky 1974A, 194). Materialism is concerned with *external* action, completely ignoring any cosmic, spiritual element: from this point of view, each of these arts is immensely "external"

in itself and thus separated from the others. In Kandinsky's theory, materialism ultimately becomes equated with realism, whose principles he, like many other avant-garde artists, denounces. Kandinsky argues, in "On Stage Composition," that "[t]he nineteenth century is distinguished as a period that lay far from inner creation. Its concentration on material appearances and on the material aspects of appearances logically caused creative powers to decline to the point of their virtual disappearance" (Kandinsky 1974A, 192).

Wagner's major error, according to Kandinsky, was in making external connections among plot, music, and movement – connections that could only lead to further externalization or isolation of each constituent part within a total work of art. In "On Stage Composition" he writes that "Wagner tried to intensify the means and bring the work to a monumental height by repeating one and the same external movement in [different] forms" (Kandinsky 1974A, 195). Thus music and movement in Wagner's art are inescapably predetermined by plot and the external actions of characters. And the causal unfolding of events and psychological expression of individual character presuppose a particular musical development. Wagner did not intend to alter the representational function of art, as Kandinsky knew; Wagner's aim was to create a grandiose art form that would produce a unanimous response from the audience and in the end serve a didactic purpose.

Unlike Wagner, Kandinsky contends that the three elements of his *Gesamtkunstwerk* – sound, movement, and color – should *not* have external or narrative connections with one another. He emphasizes, instead, the necessity of inner unity among these elements, which opens up the possibility that each element can keep its own external life, or manifestation, even if it contradicts the external life of another element (Kandinsky 1974A, 201). The inner unity among sound, movement, and color itself arises out of each one's inner connections with itself as well as with the other elements. Kandinsky stresses the importance of basing these inner connections, not on plot or dramatic action, but on the "inner sounds" of every art and the "inner vibrations" of the audience. The didactic or moral purpose is absent here (as it is not in Wagner), for the audience's response is not programmed or directed and thus becomes totally personalized, completely subjective.

As one might deduce, Kandinsky's proposed *Gesamtkunstwerk* repudiates any logical connections within a piece of art. Different art forms within the same artwork are outwardly juxtaposed, contrasted, or conflated, which creates aesthetic confusion that leads to external chaos. A decrease in musical tempo may coincide with an increase in dance movement. A bright, intense color may coexist with a passive, static gesture. Such external irregularities and conflicts within an art, and among the arts, stand side by side with the generative principles of "inner necessity" and "inner

collaboration.” Every art, consequently, has its own “inner sound” that can create different effects each time it communicates with an audience. These different effects depend upon diverse combinations of “inner sounds” within the total work of art. Kandinsky further maintains, in “On Stage Composition,” that it is possible “[t]o use as a method the inner sound of only one element [within a work of art]. To eliminate the external action (=plot) so that the external connection collapses of its own accord, just like the external unity, and [so] that the inner unity gives rise to an endless series of methods that earlier could not exist” (Kandinsky 1974A, 201).

The “inner sound” of each art is expressed through its movement. Kandinsky underlines three possible movements: the movement of music; that of psycho-physical sound, expressed through the physical movements of people and objects; and the movement of color. He rejects the governing triad of realistic drama – psychology, causality, and morality or providentiality – and creates instead his own formula in which the causal-motivational relationships among characters and events are governed by the internal or subjective causality contained in sound, movement, and color. Kandinsky’s formula does not deny the presence of characters and objects onstage; their presence, however, serves a purpose different from the one it would serve in any realistic play. Psycho-physical movement replaces verbal communication, and the word as a carrier of meaning ceases to exist: the same word, repeated frequently and disconnected from other words, loses its meaning and turns into pure sound. Character becomes abstract when thus deprived of verbal grounding as well as rational connectivity. A character’s actions and physical movements can then be comprehended only by relating them to the “inner sounds” of music and color. In this way, the principles of stage composition become similar to the principles of abstract painting.

Kandinsky’s concept of “inner sounds” is closely interwoven with the symbolist theory of synesthesia or “correspondences.” Fascinated by the idea of exploring the spiritual effect of the arts on the audience’s senses, the symbolists based their theory of “correspondences” on Baudelaire’s argument, in the essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863) as well as the poem “Correspondences” (1857), for the existence of an inner, spiritual reciprocity among the arts. This principle of reciprocity allows an artist to replace or merge one art with another, for different art forms can potentially affect the same senses and produce the same “inner vibrations” in audience members. As Frantisek Deak explains in his book *Symbolist Theatre*, the theory of “correspondences” implies that “a musical work can be seen as a poetic work, and a poem can be seen as a musical work” (Deak 1993, 100). This theory reflects the essentially symbolist understanding of the world as a “universe composed of a certain number of analogous systems. The components of one system correspond ... with the components



of any other system. Through the use of symbols, the relationship between the analogous systems is evoked” (Deak 1993, 100). Within this myriad of analogous systems, a particular piece of music can suggest ideas comparable to those invoked by a particular painting or implied by a certain literary work. Attuned to the theory of “correspondences,” Kandinsky in his book *Sounds* (1912), for instance – in which he paired thirty-eight of his poems with woodcuts – experiments with the possibility of “corresponding” or paralleling visuals and words. The pure sound of language should, according to the artist, call forth images and associations similar to those produced by a specific picture – an illustration of the poem, as it was.

In *The Yellow Sound*, Kandinsky further developed and somewhat altered the symbolist theory of “correspondences.” He was interested not merely in exploring the inner reciprocity among music, movement, and color, a reciprocity that would compel each art to suggest analogous ideas or invoke corresponding feelings by affecting the same senses in the audience; he was also concerned to affect the audience through a number of arts simultaneously. This idea of Kandinsky’s – of the total, inner synthesis of the work of art, according to which one art could substitute for or replace another – can be seen as a departure from symbolist theory. By uniting different art forms and creating internal connections among them, Kandinsky desired to originate a complex combination of “inner vibrations” in the audience, which then would have its collective imagination awakened.

In his treatise *On the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky fully delineates this definition of art as a catalyst of the audience’s imagination. The recipient – the audience – while “experiencing” art, becomes the creator of its own perceptions. Kandinsky thus conceived of the total work of art as a mysterious creation that provokes the audience to find its own connection to, and within, that work. In this sense, Kandinsky is a symbolist, for his conception of art as a mysterious, unknown, and unpredictable “space” in fact coincides with the symbolist understanding of the arts and the world. According to him, and to the symbolists, the truth was to be found beyond external reality – in a spiritual art form.

In *The Yellow Sound*, Kandinsky attempts to combine his theory of “inner sounds” with theatrical practice. (Kandinsky never saw *The Yellow Sound* performed during his lifetime, however. He and his *Blau Reiter* colleagues, including Franz Marc, August Macke, and Alfred Kubin, worked intensively on a planned 1914 Munich production, with an original musical score by Thomas de Hartmann, but it was cancelled by the outbreak of World War I.) In this stage composition, the audience’s “inner vibrations” are supposed to be invoked by the interconnections within Kandinsky’s triad – interconnections among sound, movement, and color. Instead of real characters, the audience encounters five giants, some vague creatures, people in flowing robes, and people in tights. These “characters” are highly

depersonalized by their puppet-like movements and reactions. The brief appearance of a boy and a man is unexpected within this non-representational setting, yet their bizarre costumes and movements, not their personalities, are significant for the form of Kandinsky's composition. All the characters function as the creators of the "inner sound," or "sounds," of a psycho-physical movement. There is also a chorus backstage conflicting with an offstage musical orchestra: this conflict produces the "inner sound" of musical movement. The third element – color – almost becomes a character, for with its constantly changing tone it suggests a new relationship between the physical movements of the characters and the aural movements of the music.

The composition of *The Yellow Sound* is episodic and consists of a prelude and six "pictures," each of which seems to be complete. There is no intelligible plot that would unite the action of the characters. One can, however, discern some external connections among the "pictures" or scenes: the giants and the people who move from one picture to another; the combinations of the same colors in every picture; and a similar relationship between the chorus and the orchestra throughout the piece. The verbal aspect is almost absent; words do not unite the composition thematically. Nonetheless, after the chorus sings a couple of disjointed phrases during the prelude, in Picture 2 the people in flowing robes recite the following verses in uneven voice:

The flowers cover everything, cover everything.  
Shut your eyes! Shut your eyes!  
We are looking. We are looking.  
Cover conception with innocence.  
Open your eyes! Open your eyes!  
Gone. Gone. (Kandinsky 1974B, 217)

In this scene one experiences a sequence of "inner sounds" derived, not from the words, but from juxtaposed colors. The blue and yellow colors dominate the stage. Their relationship produces the quick appearance of green, red, white, and black tones. The green and white tones seem an extension of the blue color: a green hill coexists with a blue curtain; the blue color often dissolves into a white one. Red is an intense continuation of yellow. In Picture 1, for example, while the yellow giants are still onstage singing, "quickly from left to right fly vague red creatures, somewhat suggesting birds with large heads that are remotely similar to human heads" (Kandinsky 1974B, 214). Similarly, in another picture, the stage is bathed in a cold red light that slowly becomes brighter and yellow. The color black, for its part – if not total blackness – appears onstage as a result of the ongoing confrontation between the blue and yellow tones.

Indeed, there is a direct struggle between these two conflicting colors, blue and yellow. The blue backdrop and a blue light represent the blue color. Yellow is expressed through the yellow figures and faces of the giants, as well as the yellow flowers appearing in different parts of the stage. In Picture 1, the yellow giants introduce the battle between the yellow tone and the blue backdrop: the “flat, matt, blue, rather deep-colored curtain” (Kandinsky 1974B, 213) is almost exploded by the appearance of yellow. In the form of the giants, the color yellow invades the stage, which destroys the infinite quietude or peacefulness of the atmosphere created by the blue curtain, by the broad green hill at the rear, and by the backstage chorus “sounding, without feeling, quite wooden and mechanical” (Kandinsky 1974B, 213).

The appearance of the giants is anticipated by the movements of color and music. “After the chorus stops singing, a general pause: no motion, no sound. Then darkness” (Kandinsky 1974B, 213). The next moment, the yellow giants begin to fill the space of the stage. Their movements are odd when not awkward: “gliding over the stage” (Kandinsky 1974B, 213), they sometimes move their arms in various ritualistic gestures. In addition, “they remain far back, standing beside each other – some with hunched shoulders, others with drooping shoulders, with strange, indistinct, yellow faces” (Kandinsky 1974B, 213). Kandinsky thus makes these figures look extremely non-human. Always together whispering, singing, huddling, and moving, they create a unified image onstage with their exaggerated facial expressions and hunched or drooping shoulders. Visually, then, the giants become kinetic objects rather than real characters.

Both the presence of the yellow giants onstage and the later emergence of a huge yellow flower, blossoming alone on the green hill; precede the appearance of the people in Picture 2. Kandinsky continuously tries to avoid the representational portrayal of these people as actual human beings: deprived of individual names and wearing shapeless (but colorful) robes, they appear to be animated puppets or just objects in motion. They move and speak in ritualistic unison, keeping close to one another. They even have indirect physical and verbal communication with the color yellow. Each of the people holds a huge white flower that resembles the yellow flower on the hill. They are all fascinated yet frightened by their surroundings, as we saw in their lines, “The flowers cover everything, cover everything, and cover everything. / Shut your eyes! Shut your eyes!” (Kandinsky 1974B, 217). In this scene the color yellow is becoming more and more powerful, and the people, who may be part of the blue environment (yellow is completely missing from their robes), can well be considered victims of a yellow invasion. Indeed, the white flowers in their hands turn yellow as they walk “slowly to the front of the stage as if in a trance, and gradually move farther away from each other” (Kandinsky

1974B, 218). From this scene on, the color yellow will never disappear from the stage until the very last image of the composition. The yellow giants themselves are always there, more distinct and audible in some scenes than in others.

The dramatic development of the battle between the yellow and blue colors in Kandinsky's scenario turns out to be circular, however. The yellow "sound" celebrates its victory only temporarily, and Picture 3 is the culmination of its triumph. The yellow giants become taller as they separate from one another and occupy the whole stage. The backdrop and the floor turn black; music is completely absent. This is the most "tragic" moment of the entire composition. Starting with the next episode, though, the yellow tone begins to lose its vigor. The people in tights, a new group, are gaining in power. There is no direct confrontation between the color yellow and the people in tights. The struggle is represented instead by an intense change of color: "various lights sweep the stage and cross each other" (Kandinsky 1974B, 223). Music is also involved in this conflict: "In the orchestra – confusion. The shrill shriek of Picture 3 becomes audible. The giants shudder" (Kandinsky 1974B, 223).

The people, not the giants, are the main characters in the third episode. They inhabit the whole space, and their movements are similar to those found in modern dance. Some of these characters are

running, leaping, running to and from each other, falling. While standing, some figures rapidly move only their arms, others only their legs, or their heads, or their torsos. Some combine all these movements. Sometimes these are group movements. Sometimes whole groups make one and the same movement. (Kandinsky 1974B, 224)

As a result, the yellow giants gradually become invisible and are eventually consumed by total darkness. Kandinsky writes that "it seems as if the giants are being snuffed out like lamps, that is, the light flickers several times before total darkness descends" (Kandinsky 1974B, 224).

The final scene, which "must appear as quickly as possible" (Kandinsky 1974B, 225), resembles the beginning of the composition. The blue backdrop is dominant again. One giant is still onstage, though his face is absolutely white, not yellow. The other four giants have permanently disappeared. The last giant – a trace of the bygone struggle – "slowly raises both arms (with palms facing downward) alongside his body and grows taller" (Kandinsky 1974B, 225). The finale itself is totally unexpected. Seeing a serene blue backdrop at the beginning of the last picture, the audience cannot anticipate the following change at the end: when the lone giant's figure begins to resemble a cross, darkness suddenly devours the stage. Only music, "as expressive as the action on stage" (Kandinsky 1974B, 225), is heard. The last picture by no means clarifies the juxtaposed

relationship of diverse “inner sounds” in the composition. Is the struggle between colors infinite? Does the cross at the end symbolize some sort of reconciliation? Does this allegorical sign of Christianity somehow coincide with the apparent search for knowledge undertaken by the frenzied, fleshly giants, who are otherwise supernatural creatures linked to the Titans of ancient Greek mythology (in particular Coeus, Titan of intellect, and Prometheus, Titan of forethought).

In line with his theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Kandinsky not only introduces conflict within one movement in *The Yellow Sound* – within musical sounds, physical motions, or colorful tones; he also emphasizes the significance of the conflict between these different movements: between sounds and colors, or between sounds and gestures. The music in the orchestra, for example, vehemently reacts to the invasion of the stage by the color yellow. When the yellow flower begins to glow more brightly, the music in the orchestra “becomes nervous, leaps from fortissimo to pianissimo” (Kandinsky 1974B, 217). In another case, when the color yellow celebrates its triumph onstage, the music responds with total confusion. As written by the composer Thomas de Hartmann, the musical portion of this stage composition, in combination with the various colors as well as the physical movements of the characters, can be considered the beginning not only of simultaneity in performance, but also of the noise of brutism. Since there is no musical motif or melody that could externally convey or reflect the actual action of this composition, the only answer is the complete disharmony or chaos of conflicting musical sounds.

In each picture of *The Yellow Sound*, it can be said; Kandinsky establishes a new kind of relationship within his triad of sound, movement, and color. The people in shapeless robes, who, in a very timid way, react against the yellow aggression, are followed, in Picture 3, by the people in tights, who, together with the orchestra, courageously fight the color yellow, gradually producing total bedlam onstage and ousting the giants. Conversely, the tiny, imprecise creatures, “going from right to left, (...) vaguely green in hue, [and] walk[ing] very slowly over the hill” (Kandinsky 1974B, 217-218), strengthen the effect and power of the color yellow. Right after these creatures walk onto the stage in Picture 2, the yellow flower begins violently to convulse, to the point that all the white flowers held by the people in robes gradually turn yellow.

The chorus and orchestra in this composition function separately. The chorus, for its part, more or less reflects the movements of the color yellow. In the prelude, it introduces the struggle to come between yellow and blue by singing about “tears and laughter. (...) Prayers while cursing. (...) The joy of union and the blackest battles” (Kandinsky 1974B, 210). It is still dark-blue dawn, yet the chorus can foresee the inevitable confrontation. In Picture 3, when the stage and the floor turn black and the yellow giants

grow bigger and taller, the soloist of the chorus – a tenor – seems to get involved in the struggle as well: “Suddenly a shrill, terrified tenor voice can be heard from behind the stage, rapidly shrieking completely unintelligible words” (Kandinsky 1974B, 219). The orchestra, by contrast, seems to be an extension of the color blue, for it becomes most audible in its violent response to the yellow giants. At the beginning of this confrontation of colors, then, Kandinsky himself suggests the struggle between the orchestra and the chorus and their direct association with either the blue or yellow tone. Later, when “the orchestra struggles with the chorus and defeats it, [a] thick blue fog completely obscures the stage” (Kandinsky 1974B, 214).

By juxtaposing or conflating different arts in this way, Kandinsky is simultaneously trying to find an “inner” justification for his method. He attempts, for example, to establish an “internal” musical equivalent for every color and physical movement. When the group of people in tights appears onstage – colorful tights to go along with their colored hair – the movement of each person corresponds to a musical sound in accordance with the color he or she represents. Kandinsky specifies in his stage directions that “[c]orresponding to each color-sound, single figures rise from different places: quickly, hastily, solemnly, slowly, and as they move, they look upward. (...) [Then] in the orchestra again single colors are heard” (Kandinsky 1974B, 223).

Kandinsky also notes that the atmosphere created by color or physical movement and the mood evoked by music should not be the same, which further demonstrates his break from the symbolist theory of “correspondences.” In other words, the victory of the yellow sound in color does not correspond to the victory of the same sound in music. To wit: in Picture 3, “[a]s the light increases, the music becomes lower and darker (these motions suggest a snail withdrawing into its shell). (...) When the light is most intense, the music has faded away entirely” (Kandinsky 1974B, 219). Kandinsky indicates here two opposite motions: the motion of the color and that of the music. He creates the same effect with physical movement: when the yellow light becomes powerful, the giants that actually represent this color remain motionless. They also remain motionless in Picture 5 – giving the people in tights enough space to create their own dance – and at the very moment the giants assume their motionless posture, the music, in a kind of counterpoint, becomes intensified.

Kandinsky calls, finally, for the total liberation of art from previous traditions by creating a composition where the simultaneous existence of logically unrelated actions stimulates, for the audience, a process of infinite, nearly extra-aesthetic associations, and in this his work is a predecessor of Dadaism and futurism. The Dadaists, in particular, were fascinated by Kandinsky's stage composition *The Yellow Sound*, probably regarding it as a loosely constructed scenario that would allow them to create onstage a

series of their signature collages. Hugo Ball himself was rehearsing *The Yellow Sound* in Germany in 1914, intending (but not succeeding) in turning its performance into the first Dadaist manifesto. In his posthumous book *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary* (1974), Ball indicated that *The Yellow Sound* enormously attracted his attention: “The struggle between tonalities, lost equilibrium, ‘principles’ falling apart, unexpected drumbeats, big questions, apparently aimless aspiration, apparently desperate urgency and longing shattered the chains and attachment that make several things one antagonism and [a series of] contradictions” (Ball 1974, 230). Antagonism and contradiction, for Dadaists, create the possibility of liberating the audience’s fantasy and imagination. For them as for Kandinsky, all forms, including those of antagonism and contradiction, exist exclusively as a form of the inner spirit; and in *The Yellow Sound*, according to Ball, “[t]he spirit creates a form and goes on to another form” (Ball 1974, 230).

One could argue that the Dadaists’ ideas about bruitism, simultaneity, and automatism (automatic writing, action painting) were partly influenced by *The Yellow Sound*. Indeed, in their performances the Dadaists developed a principle of theatricality in which it was precisely a fusion of the arts that would attempt to affect the audience’s unconscious mind. In his “Zurich Chronicle” (1920), Tristan Tzara describes one such performance from a Dada Evening:

Boxing resumes: Cubist dance, costumes by Janco, each man his own big drum on his head, noise. Negro music (...) literary experiments: Tzara in tails stands before the curtain, stone sober for the animals, and explains the new aesthetic: gymnastic poem, concert of vowels, bruitist poem, static poem, chemical arrangement of ideas, (...) vowel poem (...) new interpretation: the subjective folly of the arteries, the dance of the heart on burning buildings, and acrobatics in the audience. (Goldberg 1988, 64)

Such brutal juxtaposition of widely divergent artistic and non-artistic elements confuses and ultimately overwhelms spectators, who must slowly search their minds for their own connections to the material onstage.

Like the Dadaists, Kandinsky does not try to manipulate the audience; rather, he gives it a certain freedom to construct its own mental images. While playing with different ideas and perceptions, spectators thus become involved in the artistic and intellectual process of constructing their private “inner” connections to, and within, a particular piece; and in this process, the importance of chance replaces that of consequence or predictability. In Dadaist performances themselves, however – where the notion of chance or randomness was carried to the extreme according to the principles of collage-cum-montage – spectators were concerned less with spiritual or “inner” connection than with external connections (or the lack thereof) in what they were witnessing. The Dadaists favored the motif of the circus, for

example, with its unrelated acts devoid of any psychological or transcendent interest and based purely upon technical virtuosity. These avant-garde artists were concerned more with juxtaposing, in a more or less mechanical, haphazard way, disparate elements within an improvisational structure than with finding any psychic connection or correspondence among such elements.

While offering his audiences an opportunity to play with a collage of images and find, by chance, their own "inner" connections among them, Kandinsky himself, as creator, does not juxtapose the "inner sounds" in any fortuitous way. He orchestrates a very precise structure in which no improvisation is possible; performers and designers must follow Kandinsky's stage directors to the letter in order to reconstruct a composition such as *The Yellow Sound*. In fact, the entire composition, as written, can be seen as an extended set of stage directions. Nonetheless, if one disregards Kandinsky's concept of "inner sounds," *The Yellow Sound* can indeed be seen as a dada-like collage or montage of music, moving objects, and assorted colors, all of which become intensified or diminished by the amount of light projected onto them.

In this collage-cum-montage, Kandinsky even combines elements of representational art with those of non-representationalism. Picture 4 of *The Yellow Sound*, for instance, seems to contradict the otherwise unconventional dramatic development of this stage composition, for it is the only episode in which Kandinsky introduces individual characters: the man and the boy. There is nothing extraordinary about their behavior, either. "A small boy in a white shirt sits on the floor (facing the audience) and slowly and regularly pulls the lower end of [a] rope. At stage right, a very large man is standing dressed entirely in black" (Kandinsky 1974B, 220). The rope is connected to a bell in a turret on the roof of some building. When the man yells "Silence!!!" (Kandinsky 1974B, 220), the boy drops the rope.

In this episode, Kandinsky continues to play with different colors, presenting here a combination of red, blue, and gray tones. Moreover, there is a contrast in color between the boy and the man: the boy is dressed in white, whereas the man is in black. Does such a picture relate to the composition's blue-yellow confrontation? Or in a work like this does any search for such meaning or external connection become pointless? More likely, Kandinsky is teasing the audience's imagination here. He intentionally inserts a seemingly representational situation into his stage composition to upset the audience's expectations, for the episode to follow brings the audience back to the unconventional nature of *The Yellow Sound* and its dramatic conflict: at the start of Picture 5, "Gradually the stage is bathed in a cold red light that slowly becomes brighter and yellower. At this moment the giants in the back become visible (as in Picture 3)" (Kandinsky 1974B, 221).



Kandinsky also plays with the notion of a representational set in *The Yellow Sound*. A representational landscape, consisting of the hill and some rocks at the back, is part of his stage composition. The “set,” however, quickly loses its representational aspect and becomes associated with the “inner sound” of colors. The green hill comes to coexist with the blue curtain; the red rocks become an extension of the yellow tone. Furthermore, the representational landscape at the beginning of the composition is not the only instance of such a setting or milieu in Kandinsky’s stage piece. Other instances of representational art in *The Yellow Sound* – at least in its printed version – are the illustrations that Kandinsky and Franz Marc placed next to every picture or episode in their edition of the *Blauer Reiter Almanac*. The illustrations, most of which were taken from various traditions of folk art, are titled “German,” “Russian,” “Egyptian,” “Dance Mask,” and “Bavarian Glass Painting,” and can hardly be considered abstract paintings. Apart from two illustrations that include symbols of Christianity – the cross and the fish – the book illustrations exist in a different “dimension” from the stage composition itself. Referring to the notion of “inner necessity,” Kandinsky himself, though, would perhaps argue for the “inner-sound” connections that exist between the more or less representational illustrations and the abstract stage performance of *The Yellow Sound*, and thus would he repudiate somewhat the Dadaist principle of illogical collage in which no connection – internal or external – between disparate elements is discernible.

What decisively distinguishes Dadaism and its notion of collage from Kandinsky is the importance for the latter of formal relationships in any stage composition. The principles of Dadaist collage did not include the importance of form; none of the Dadaist performances were concerned with constructing form or structure onstage. The space of any production of *The Yellow Sound*, by contrast, creates its own form. In his treatise *On the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky argues that “form itself, even completely abstract, resembling geometrical form, has its own inner sound” (Kandinsky 1982, 163). The form of *The Yellow Sound* is created by the spatio-temporal arrangement of its colors, music, and objects. That form, taken as one unified “inner sound,” will eventually affect the audience and invoke its “inner vibrations.” And, within this form, any contradictory *or* logical relationship is possible.

Form in combination with color is, of course, the most important feature of abstract painting. As in abstract painting, form in *The Yellow Sound* is mostly determined by the use of space. In its stage performance, in fact, this composition can be presented as a succession of abstract paintings accompanied by music. When the people in tights enter the stage, they arrange themselves into a number of different groups that by themselves create a painterly, spatial composition. But such “paintings” consist of

movement, color, and music that are constantly changing; the composition is by no means static or inert. The giants and the other characters, for example, exist or move on different spatial planes. "The movements," according to Kandinsky, "are different in each group: one walks fast, straight ahead; another, slowly as if with difficulty; a third now and then leaps joyously; a fourth looks around continually; a fifth advances in a solemn theatrical manner, arms crossed; a sixth group walks on tiptoes, each with one palm raised, and so on" (Kandinsky 1974B, 222). Contrasted (not blending) colors and lights also can coexist, in the same episode, in various places or on different spatial planes on the stage, forming distinct, independent *mise-en-scènes*.

The form, in this way, becomes a multidimensional composition in which the stage space is allocated to many different, and differently dispersed, groups. Kandinsky controls the audience's attention by constantly changing the focus, mainly with the help of light and color. When he wants to switch the audience's attention to the giants, for instance, he makes them more yellow and therefore more visible. Musical and physical movements can also increase the importance of one compositional group and weaken the physical presence of another. Yet it is not the "physical presence" or external connections of the groups that is essential to *The Yellow Sound*, but rather the "inner sounds" they create within Kandinsky's triad of sound, movement, and color.

Significantly, Kandinsky had a theory about different colors and their effect on the other arts as well as the audience. In his Dada-Merz experiments in collage from 1918, Kurt Schwitters later explored his own theory of colors, yet without proposing any spiritual connections to music and movement. The Italian futurists also dealt with colors, at least on the external level. In Fortunato Depero's work called *Colors* (1916), "the 'characters' were four cardboard objects – Gray (plastic, ovoid), Red (triangular, dynamic), White (long-lined, sharp-pointed), and Black (multiglobe) and were moved by invisible strings in an empty blue cubic space" (Goldberg 1988, 28). Kandinsky's theory of colors, for its part, partially explains the conflict of "inner sounds" in *The Yellow Sound*. He writes that

Yellow is the typical earthly color. (...) If one compares it to the human mind, it could have the effect of representing madness – not melancholy or hypochondria, but rather mania (...) or frenzy – like the lunatic who attacks people, destroying everything, dissipating his physical strength in every direction. (...) The deeper the blue becomes, the more strongly it calls man toward the infinite, awakening in him a desire for the pure and, finally, for the supernatural. It is the color of the heavens (...) Blue unfolds (...) the element of tranquility. (Kandinsky 1982, 181)

Kandinsky goes on to compare the black color to absolute nothingness and “eternal silence without future, without hope” (Kandinsky 1982, 181). The white color symbolizes another kind of nothingness: the nothingness before birth, when all hope still lies in the future. Red is a color of warmth, strength, and maturity; green is the most peaceful color, the one that appears to resolve the conflict between yellow and blue. Kandinsky argues, in *On the Spiritual in Art*, that the green color “does not move in any direction, has no overtones of joy or sorrow or passion, demands nothing, calls out to no one” (Kandinsky 1982, 181).

In addition to defining the role and purpose of each color within a stage composition, Kandinsky considers the effect that each color can have on the audience. Yellow, for example, is a warm color and thus moves toward spectators, whereas blue is cold and moves away from the audience. The movements of the other colors are directed toward themselves, not toward audience members. White, for example, shows internal resistance toward every other color, while black indicates the complete absence of such resistance. Red is identified with movement within itself, “which (...) is very little directed toward the external” (Kandinsky 1982, 186), whereas the extremely stable green does not move in any direction whatsoever.

In Kandinsky’s triad, then, the function of psychology is taken over by different colors and their psychological effect on the audience or on one another. And even though Kandinsky argues for the independence of all three elements in his triad – sound, movement, and color – and balance among them, it is color that actually dictates the action. Color replaces not only psychology in the triad, but also causality or cause-and-effect relationships, for changes in color program the movements of the other elements in Kandinsky’s composition: music and dance. Indeed, if one applies his theory of colors, combined with his theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, to *The Yellow Sound*, this stage composition becomes less a collage of disparate artistic elements than, finally, an expressionistic drama dominated by color.

The German expressionists were particularly attracted to the theme of the infinite struggle between heaven and earth, soul and body, spirit and flesh; and they saw in this struggle a never-ending conflict between spirituality and material substance. In Kandinsky’s theory, this eternal struggle is delineated through the antagonistic struggle between the yellow tone, which Kandinsky associates with earth, and the blue tone, which he associates with heaven. The composition begins with dawn, “which at first is whitish and later becomes intense dark blue” (Kandinsky 1974B, 210). This is the beginning of life, at which point the heavenly blue color has not yet been juxtaposed against the earthly yellow one. A blue fog is peacefully settling down upon the stage, but the internal spirit identified with blue is soon to be disturbed by the outer body identified with yellow. In the

next stage picture, by directly contrasting blue and yellow, Kandinsky is indicating the eternal conflict between inner spirit and external matter.

In another expressionistic drama, *Murderer, the Hope of Women* (1907), which was written a bit earlier than *The Yellow Sound*, Oskar Kokoschka also introduces the battle between the flesh and the spirit. Kandinsky may have been influenced by this work and used its organizing principle as the theme for his own composition, for it is noteworthy that in his play Kokoschka employs almost the same set of colors to be found in *The Yellow Sound*. The blue color, which is associated with the Man in *Murderer, the Hope of Women*, symbolizes light and the inner world, whereas the red color – the Woman – signifies the flesh that leads ultimately to darkness, destruction, and death. In Kandinsky's composition, yellow at some point also becomes red and resembles blood; in Picture 2 of *The Yellow Sound*, even white flowers turn suddenly to red, and they "seem to be filled with blood" (Kandinsky 1974B, 218).

As in Kokoschka's drama, the inner spirit in *The Yellow Sound* – the blue color – longs for transcendence. Spiritual transcendence is unobtainable, however, because the yellow giants – the frenzied flesh – are given life and become powerful. At times when these giants occupy the entire theatrical space – whispering, flailing their arms, running around, falling down, or gliding frighteningly over the floor – the lights go off and the stage turns totally dark, revealing the futility of any further attempt on the part of the spirit to transcend. Except for the first picture of *The Yellow Sound*, in which the power of the inner spirit remains strong, the other episodes in fact conclude in complete darkness. The end of this composition proves the final impossibility of the inner spirit's survival.

It's true that the last giant – the only one left at the finish – is willing to sacrifice himself, as the following stage direction suggests: "when he extends to the full height of the stage, (...) his figure resembles a cross" (Kandinsky 1974B, 215). His sacrifice, nevertheless, is not accepted. The stage again suddenly becomes black, without any trace of the blue color. As a result, Kandinsky's composition seems more pessimistic than Kokoschka's drama. Unlike *Murderer, the Hope of Women*, *The Yellow Sound* shows the inability of the inner spirit to conquer the outer body. The inner spirit is unable to register any triumph, but the flesh does not celebrate its victory, either. Blackness – the final image of the composition – proves the impossibility of any attempt on the part of body and spirit to inhabit the same space together for very long. Devouring the stage, the black color simply ends the contest. It is nothingness – the nothingness of the last sound, the undefeated yellow one – that is expressed by the orchestra. Nothingness prevails. The movement is finished.

While completely repudiating representational or realistic art in *The Yellow Sound*, then, Kandinsky embraced some models of avant-garde drama and

prefigured others. Influenced by the principles of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the symbolist theory of “correspondences,” Kandinsky also explored some of the themes of expressionistic drama, such as the eternal contradiction between Dionysian frenzy (yellow) and Apollonian “classicism” (blue) and the never-ending battle between the spiritual and the physical. In emphasizing the importance of collage and the juxtaposition of different arts within a total work of art, he also anticipated the Dadaist theories of automatic writing, chance collages, and random stage compositions. Finally, however, *The Yellow Sound* in its pure form cannot be identified with any particular avant-garde movement: instead, it is *sui generis*, presenting its own form and perhaps its own movement.

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# The Critical Theory of Artistic Capitalism

**Abstract:** This article takes up Lipovetsky's discussion on artistic capitalism in *L'esthétisation du monde. Vivre à l'âge du capitalisme artiste*, to trace its definitions and methodological construction, but also in order to create a critical theory of artistic capitalism, based on the following working-hypothesis: the production of art and the production of self, understood in the sense of a Foucauldian project of the aesthetics of existence, represent correspondent purposes in artistic capitalism. My research will be focused on examining previous attempts of developing such a critical inquiry, claimed by Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello, and Luc Ferry. It is my thesis that the failure of a homogeneous critical theory of artistic capitalism is owed to different inconsistent interpretations of contaminating ethics with aesthetics in order to create an ideal of morality and authenticity for the existence of the individual inspired by contemporary techniques of art production, aspects that were conceived by Lipovetsky as parts of the process of the "aestheticization of the world".

**Keywords:** artistic capitalism, aestheticization of the world, production of art, society of consumption, critical theory, culture

## 1. Introduction

Considering art under capitalism, nowadays, depends on overcoming the traditional attempts of limiting its reception to a concentration of creativity invested with a social function and dominated by market constraints. If the canonical gesture of modern art was "tearing away from materials, ideologies and formalisms"<sup>1</sup>, creating an opposite attitude of the early-capitalist art, that of constituting a "symbolic legitimation" (Bourdieu 1993, 128) for a class society, for increasing rationality in the cultural industry and for requiring its autonomy as a proper reaction to a politicized discourse, the capitalist art receives the task of facing consumption and its implications for the production of art. The puzzle of capitalist art begins with the need of legitimising art in the social life as a principle of order and self-constitution of the individual, following Oscar Wilde's ideal of regarding our existence as a work-of-art. How can capitalist art be relevant for the aesthetics of the existence, for inspiring individual liberties and moderated behaviours in the contemporary society of ready-made pleasures, when its own liberty is

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questioned in terms of art markets, production, reception and popularisation of artworks and institutional practices of exposure? Is art relevant for the quotidian society exclusively due to its function as a “sub-system of the capitalist world system?” (Ray 2014, 135-136) Is capitalist art, after a century of avant-gardes, disputing the liberties of creation, innovation and representational discourses, a new aesthetic revolution, in the middle of the consumption society? Furthermore, to what extent is it possible for it to be both “autonomous and” part of “a social fact?” (Adorno 1997, 5) These questions, raised from the challenges that the contemporary individuals face in the assimilation and interpretation of current artworks, reflect the accurate need of developing “a paradigm of interpreting capitalism through a critical theory” (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005, 32). If art is to be considered an independent cultural phenomena as well as a related social fact, then a social critique should be addressed to artistic capitalism. Upon closer review, however, art is inevitably confronted with the paradox of providing the means for an authentic life of the individual in the full era of artificial and technological social experience.

The main aim of this article is to examine and define artistic capitalism, by explaining its relevancy and authority as a scientific field of artistic research. I will reinforce Lipovetsky's perspectives on this matter, pointing out the interdisciplinary contents and the correspondent methodology of artistic capitalism. This paper will also question what kind of social critique is viable for it and what are the conditions that such a structure should respect in order to provide a sufficient and plausible explanation for this cultural paradigm?

## 2. Artistic Capitalism: Norms and Evolutions

In this section I will provide a brief overview on artistic capitalism, which was for the first time enforced as an autonomous domain of research by Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy in 2013, through their last book, *L'esthétisation du monde. Vivre à l'âge du capitalisme artiste*.

“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 effects of the consumerist universe.” (Lipovetsky 2013, 12)

Their main argument is that taking into account the historical power of aesthetics to organize itself around different economic and political conditions, one can easily observe that its main capacity is providing alternative models of self-governing for different societies. In capitalism, its main role was that

of liberating the artistic production from the exigencies of industrial culture, inspiring the constitution of an ideal of authenticity for the existence of the modern individual, accommodated with predetermined standards of life and depersonalisation through alienated work. Artistic capitalism engaged the modern era in the challenge of recreating the current society as a work of art, following Marcuse's ideal (Marcuse 2007, 123-137). Nevertheless, capitalist society surprises the modern individual in a continuous challenge of subjecting him to the accelerated norms of production and consumption, forcing himself to resist to the routine of hedonist life. Conciliating these two paradigms means, for Lipovetsky and Serroy, finding inside the capitalist society the necessary tools for aestheticizing the world, meaning, constituting a coherent and consistent ideal of a satisfactory and a moral life. In other words, the production of art and the production of self, understood in the sense of a Foucauldian project of the aesthetics of existence, represent correspondent purposes in artistic capitalism. Life as a work of art, as well as art in itself, are discussed in terms of aestheticizing the world. According to Lipovetsky, there are four ages of artistic capitalism, understood as aestheticization of the world. The first one is the age of integrating consumption goods and practices in the quotidian life. Related to this, the two French authors conceive a new definition of artistic capitalism, as "the economic system which functions through the systematic aestheticization of consumption markets, of goods and current environments" (Lipovetsky & Serroy 2013, 45). Consumption must seduce the individual and for this, PR strategies, publicity and psychological manipulation of the consumer arise as a social and economic exigency. The second wave of artistic capitalism is that of generalising entrepreneurial dimensions of cultural and creative industries: "artworks get, in this logic, to be judged depending on their commercial and financial results, despite their aesthetic character." (46) Symptomatic for this cultural period is that artistic values are subordinated by economic ones. The third significant period belongs to the flourishing activity of specialised groups in creating artworks or artistic objects, such as fashion brands. Lipovetsky considers, at this level, that economy reveals to be creative in itself – galleries, museums, houses of fashion increase their reputation by their economic power. The last age of artistic capitalism is that of destroying old artistic and cultural hierarchies, as a consequence of what Luc Ferry would recognize being the democratisation of taste and creation of art. The ascension and overcoming of kitsch, the privilege that contemporary artistic environments do to technologized instruments of art production, especially in the new media field, the expansion of art to virtually mediums and immateriality made room, in fact, for a new dynamics of individualisation as self-creation, concentrated on "a decorative market of personalisation" (354) high-life and cosmopolitanism, spectacle and entertainment, hedonism. How could



the individual avoid his appetite for spectacle and artificial emotions since the most high-rated artworks are developed, nowadays, by exploiting exactly these dimensions? This question remains open, in order to approach the capitalist particularities of these challenges, in the form of a social critique, which I will largely expose in the subsequent section of my article. Up to this point of my research, artistic capitalism reveals being the project of post-industrial era that confronts the autonomy of individual and his self-constitution in an individualist and democratic society, with the double character of art, that of being both autonomous and a social-fact. My thesis is that a critical theory should be addressed to the ideology of artistic capitalism, in the traditional sense of Horkheimer's perspective on such a theoretical construction, which aims to "liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave him" (Horkheimer 1982, 244) – in this case, from consumption. Analysing the manners in which artistic capitalism changed society as a whole, in a historical specificity – namely the industrial and post-industrial era, and reshaping the discourse of modernity by engaging new and particular significances for individualism, autonomy of art, society of consumption, life style and morals, I will argue that such a critical theory is possible, taking into account some punctual principles, derived from my inquiry. In my opinion, there are two major attempts in this direction: one represented by the Boltanski-Chipello model of constructing a critical theory of capitalism, which applies also to artistic capitalism as subordinated domain, and one extracted from Luc Ferry's analysis on *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of the Taste in the Democratic Age*<sup>2</sup>. An important mention is that none of them was conceived in the formula of a critical theory of artistic capitalism, but, according to the criteria that I have identified as necessary for such a critical inquiry, that will be later exposed, they can be considered feasible models submitted to this attempt. The main concern of the following section will be the completeness character of each discussed model, observing potential corrections and amendments that could adjust the model of a homogenous critical theory of artistic capitalism.

### **3. The Failure of a Homogenous Critical Theory on Artistic Capitalism: the Boltanski-Chiapello Model and its Corrections**

On the one hand, reflecting on what is called by Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy as "artistic capitalism" – an autonomous domain of determining art as a social tool for the aestheticization of the world and resistance to all the temptations of a hedonistic life inspired by consumption – involves understanding if this notion explains a new artistic regime, correspondent to a historical phase of modernity or postmodernity, or if it represents such a phase in itself. In order to answer this question, I adopted Luc Boltanski's and Eve Chiapello's theory on the four types of capitalism, that I will

confront with the four ages of artistic capitalism, that Lipovetsky and Serroy presented in their book. Hence, Boltanski and Chiapello distinguish between:

- “(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 freedom, autonomy and creativity of the human beings who are subjected, 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 to 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 opportunism and egoism which, by exclusively encouraging private interests, proves destructive of social bonds and collective solidarity, especially of minimal solidarity between rich and poor.”<sup>3</sup>

Combining these four types of capitalism in a homogenous criticism still represents a milestone for any theoretical project of reconstructing the main phases of capitalism, according to Boltanski's theory. Each type of capitalism is gathered around some native “indignations” and “nostalgias”: for example, the disappearance of authenticity and personal values is confronted with the impersonal domination of the market, while the ideals of equality and transparency are still historically contrasted with the clash of social classes that promoted the bourgeoisie and accelerated capitalism. Hence, Boltanski and Chiapello argue for *a social critique* and *an artistic critique* that should diagnose properly all the insufficiencies of each phase of capitalism. Normatively, the two of them are constituted independently. My argument is that the first model, that of the social critique, has the privilege of opening a taboo subject for artistic capitalism, meaning “the rejection of any contamination of aesthetics by ethics.” (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005, 38) Socially, this critique considers that the life style of an individual is modelled by personal aspirations to welfare, reflecting, on the same time, symptoms of decadence and inauthenticity. The artistic mercantilism appears, in the terms of this social critique, responsible for encouraging the reception of an art object as a criteria for social inclusion and validation, since it reflects either the belonging to the same social class, tested through the power of making an expensive acquisition, or the homogenisation of the individual's judgments of taste in different masses of consumption, with certain financial standards. The artistic critique will face, consequently, the rational management of the production of artworks that puts in question the social role of the artist, as well as its claims for professionalization. However, during the realist capitalism, meaning the '50s, this ideal of recognition

inspired one of the greatest cultural manifestos, signed by four pop artists that addressed an official letter to the Minister of Education and Cultural Affairs from Westphalia, requiring the social integration of the artist and rehabilitating the status of the art production, as it follows:

“... Of course today every worker is needed in business or industry but if nothing else should be left for us except to earn a livelihood by working at a lathe or on a construction site after 8 semesters of the art academy it would probably make more sense to take this situation to its logical conclusion and break with tradition, dissolving the painting departments at art schools, including teaching positions and departmental employees. Aged 31 and 27 respectively, we still believe that the visual arts are necessary, also in a time characterized by industry, whether as part of a percent for art scheme, as wall-mounted pictures, or as avant-garde experiment.”<sup>4</sup>

Crating policies of recognition for the social status of the artist opened, unfortunately, the Pandora's Box of other nostalgias, that for self-creation and discipline. The artist himself became the symbol of the absence of any other artistic production, excepting his self-constitution, depicted as a work of art. This shift, from a material creation to a spiritual one, generated the figure of the dandy: in the era of standardized behaviours and consumption, the ideal of aestheticizing your own existence and satisfying personal desires without social constraints appeared as a form of liberty, anticipating as much as possible the hedonist life-style that the artistic capitalism proposes nowadays. However, the two critiques, the social and the artistic one, contain, according to Boltanski and Chiapello, a modernist and an antimodernist tendency. The artistic one reveals itself to be modern when is focused on liberating the individual from social standards and behaviours engaged to his own subjectivity, and is anti-modern when it proposes the disenchantment of the individual from a social, political or cultural paradigm. The social critique behaves as a modern construct as long as it encourages the destitutions of inequalities, but reacts as an anti-modern discourse in its attempts of criticizing individualism and discussing ideals such as solidarity and social empathy.

Are these two critiques enough to sustain a larger social criticism dedicated to capitalism and, sequentially, to artistic capitalism? Both Boltanski and Chiapello consider that they fail in providing a unitary apparatus of criticism, since “even in the case of the most radical movements, it (A/N each critique) shares 'something' with what it seeks to criticize.” (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005, 40) The lack of a distance between the real and the theoretical realm inflicts the failure of this social criticism, divided in the two models – social and artistic – that are exceeded starting with the ‘70s. The authors stress that the former becomes the source for a new theory, demanding the security of the individual, while the latter is reinforced as a

theory for the autonomy of the individual (167). Security and autonomy are not only compatible, but also contradictory. At a first glimpse, they cohabitate in the terms of procuring welfare, comfort, even autonomy. But, in fact, they also synthesize what Daniel Bell recognized as the first age of the cultural contradictions of capitalism (Bell 1979, 75), that of accelerating consumption by destroying the old ascetical ideology of savings and abstinence, followed by a second wave of paradoxes, assisted by the confrontation of dictated and standardized behaviours with the morals of authenticity and liberation, concentrated by Lipovetsky's new moral imperative, "Be yourself!"<sup>5</sup>

Hence, what amendments should be addressed to the Boltanski-Chiapello model, in order to develop a sustainable social critique of artistic capitalism? In my opinion, the first problem is represented by the clash between the ethical and the aesthetic level of such a critical theory, that inspires particular "indignations" and "nostalgias" for each of the two aspects of such a theoretical construct, as Boltanski and Chiapello agreed. The key to create the synergy between the ethical and the aesthetic level of interpretation is represented by the attempt to consider them as integrated parts of a modern project of social criticism in which the switch from a Webberian protestant ethic which dominates the capitalist society, to a Lipovetskyan hedonist moral assists the individual also in his quality of art consumer. The social critique should treat, in my opinion, artistic capitalism, in its two aspects – social and artistic – as part of a certain phase of modernity, through which it proves its historical legitimacy, authority and particularity. A similar argument appears in Luc Ferry's pages, who considers that modernism continues, a century later, the work of modern society, that of promoting democracy and liberating the individual from the codes of traditions and mimesis. (Ferry 1997, 256) In this manner, any model proposed for the social theory of capitalist art should take into account the fact that modernity is focused exclusively on "the subjectivation of truth as primary conception of art expressing a distinct and original individuality." (278) In the line of this arguments, Luc Ferry offers a new solution for the modern tensions between the ethical and aesthetic level of individualism and its receptions in capitalism. His thesis is that there are three significant moments of the accomplished compatibility of ethical and aesthetical concerns on individualism: (1) the understanding of a work of art as an extension of the artist; (2) the understanding of science as an objective theoretical discourse guided by the needs of a subject; (3) the historical constitution of the Subject through the determination of autonomy as value and principle of existence. Hence, excellency, meritocracy and authenticity became the main values that modern individualism operates in the age of artistic capitalism. Even though they are social values, that express human nature, individual aptitudes and efforts or moral criteria for the constitution

of the self, they are transposed in the artistic field as marks for the originality, brilliancy and concurrency in the artistic field of production. My conclusion is that at this level, Ferry's model of critical theory of artistic capitalism is successful, since it creates normative correspondences between the ethical and the aesthetic levels of such an inquiry, applying the operating principle of axiological transmutation, which was considered, in the Boltanski-Chiapello model, impossible to exercise and, therefore, invalid.

An important mention is that Ferry's model is adapted, somehow, to previous models of a critical theory of art in the age of capitalism, even though, it was never intended such an objective. Relevant is, in this concern, the model of critical theory constituted by the Frankfurt School, which is based on two main hypotheses. The first one is that art represents an autonomous fact, while the second states that art is a social fact. There are no inadvertences between the two working-hypotheses, as Adorno, for example, considered. These two aspects, that inspired the late critique pioneered by Boltanski and Chiapello, in a very popular structure, but with its previous presented reserves on its success, are not accidentally replicated. From the Frankfurt's School, the double character of art – social and artistic – remained a necessary working-hypothesis in any attempt of creating a critical theory of art in the age of capitalism.

My argument is that to the operational principle of axiological transmutation, very efficient in Ferry's model of social critique, some other important hypothesis should be added in order to obtain a complete and homogenous model for such an inquiry. Firstly, bringing modern individualism into discussion involves understanding that the status of the artist has been consequently modified. Buying a signature instead of a work of art is the most common example reflected in the jargon of art consumers for understanding the brand-culture as the effect of the exigencies of modern individualism – buying a Van Gogh means an acquisition of \$82,500,000<sup>6</sup> while having a Picasso<sup>7</sup> costs \$95,200,000. Secondly, the individuality of the artist represents an authoritative argument for contesting or confirming the aesthetical quality of a work of art. The example of Robert Morris' Litanies, "aesthetically withdrawn" through a notarial legalised statement<sup>8</sup> signed by the artist is eloquent for understanding the new paradigm for art consumption that capitalism advanced. Art is uncertain, the main quality of an art object being its anxiety: each time, a work of art is regarded with suspicion, since it might not be considered to be one by alternative criteria, from other artistic perspective or interpretation. The status of the work of art was withdrawn, in Morris' case, through a "verbal exorcism" (Rosenberg 1972, 29) performed by its creator. This process opened the de-definition of art, also announced by Rosenberg as de-aestheticization, responsible for creating new boundaries and cannons for the mass production, as well for the artistic exposure. De-definition

reflects not only a radical new paradigm of defining a work of art, but also the expression of capitalist inequalities, addressed both to the creators and consumers of art. It imposes a simplified production of the art object, mainly through accessible instruments or recycled ones, as the eco-empire of the capitalist aged disposed. On the one hand, this context promoted the expansion of conceptual art; as an example, Morris' statement was considered a piece of art, since it was exposed in different galleries, taking into account the institutional art theories. Rosenberg was asking why should not be necessary, in these terms, a second statement for Morris' withdrawal, that could guarantee the lack of aesthetic content for the original document. On the other hand, artistic capitalism reflects the liberation of art from the dominance of industrial canons, market mechanisms and economic constraints. The echoes of this emancipation are given by the artistic project of Arshile Gorky WPA Federal Art Program, whose objective was to create poor art for poor people. Arta Povera, for them, does not mean low and cheap art, created by inexpensive elements, but the alienated art existent in the art market. At least in the last phases of artistic capitalism, art was engaged in a fervent movement of opposition against consumption criteria for producing and distributing artworks. From the de-definition of art is inspired the third important aspect of my revised model of social theory: art is de-territorialised, based on the fact that the institutional theory of art became old-fashioned and the democratization of different spaces of artistic exposure begins as a signal of requalifying art as a social phenomenon. The most illustrative example is given by the revolutionary motto from Marinetti's Futurism, "Burn the museums!", which anticipates what Dubuffet recognized, in the "Asphyxiating Culture", being the production of a "falsified substitute" for the "free culture", "which acts like an antibiotic" (Dubuffet 1986, 8), mostly alimented by the institution of the ministries of culture in different European regions. In a sense, Rosenberg's opinion that the death of art liberates the power of creation from individuals and transfers it to all of us (Rosenberg 1977, 208) makes sense, only if the contribution of art to the culture and its significances for the society of the capitalist era is clarified. It is true that culture is understood, nowadays, in two alternative senses, that of "works of the past" (Dubuffet 1986, 8) and that of determining the creative intellectual activity, with material or spiritual outcomes. According to Dubuffet, whose radical opinions I do not share but I find relevant for the current argument, State acts as a cultural police, creating policies of selection, founding, popularisation and acceptance of different artworks and artists in a national heritage. Regardless the criteria applied in order to realize such a selection, Dubuffet considers that all the policies and public mechanisms initiated by a state are for the social good, which is never the same with the interest of an individual. Hence,

“To confer a socially meritorious nature to the production of art, making it an honoured social function, is to seriously falsify its meaning, for the production of art is a strictly and strongly individual function, and consequently entirely antagonistic to any social function. It can only be antisocial function or at least an asocial one...” (Dubuffet 1986, 12)

This is why I strongly consider that in order to accept the working-hypothesis that art is both autonomous and a social fact, it should be clarified that modern individualism does not interfere with the public life and community. Art for masses can be consumed individually or not: as an example, the seductive universe of the 3 and 4D contemporary cinema represents the highest form of consumption culture, addressed exclusively to the individual's expectations, comfort and entertainment. Therefore, individual pleasure maximizes economic profit for cinematic institutions, as well as their capacity to achieve and expose more artworks for its public. But, what Dubuffet targeted in his argument was the expression of free cultural manifestations, assumed as an objective for his *Art Brut*<sup>9</sup> program, despite cultural policies and mechanisms of advertising and public recognition. The artist succeeds in remaining the figure of the individual par excellence when he resists to cultural assimilation: his creative impulses should not be solidary with social expectations on art production; otherwise, the entire culture will be asphyxiated. What I want to stress here is that autonomy means both liberated creation and cultural resistance in a social field. In these terms, art is still autonomous and a social fact, reinforcing Adorno's perspective: it confirms the former character, by ignoring cultural practices and trends of art production, while the latter character is respected by expressing the art of naïve “outsiders”, which are part of the social reality, even though they are ignored or oppressed. At limit, the *Art Brut* program could be treated as a new paradigm of discussing and criticizing the production of art in post-industrial societies, in order to understand the new significances that the double character of art obtained in the last years.

#### 4. Conclusions

In order to understand the contemporary contamination of ethics with aesthetics, artistic capitalism proves to be the most suitable historical interval of postmodernity to be looked at, assuming this task by treating the production of art and the production of human identities in very similar terms. Developing a critical theory of artistic capitalism enforces the current challenges of reconsidering the social role of art and its autonomy, recently after the century of the dominance of technical rationality on all the forms of culture and existence, as the members of the Frankfurt School

argued. This very particular domain of artistic capitalism opens original hermeneutical paths of reconstructing the sense of postmodernity, surprised in the middle of the clash between industrial and post-industrial societies, that provide for the art consumer new senses for the democratisation of the taste, as well as for the consequences of consumption on the life-styles and authenticity of individuals.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> To be consulted J.M. Bernstein, Lydia Goehr, Gregg Horowitz and Chris Cutrone, “The relevance of critical theory to art today”, in *The Platypus Review*, Issue 31, January 2011, 2.

<sup>2</sup> To be consulted Luc Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of the Taste in the Democratic Age* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Boltanski, Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 37.

<sup>4</sup> Manfred Kuttner, Konrad Lueg, Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter, *Living with Pop – A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism*, in Robert Storr, Gerhard Richter (ed.), *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, The Museum of Modern Art (New York: Art Publishers INC., 2002), 32.

<sup>5</sup> It is not the place in this article to develop the subject, but a larger argument on this matter is conceived in the first section of the book *Artistic Capitalism. The Consumption of the Work-of-Art in Four Steps: Marcuse, Baudrillard, Debord and Lipovetsky*, in which the author argues that the models of the social criticism dedicated to the artistic capitalism should be theoreticized also taking into account the sum of ruptures that the history of the individualist-democratic society had, as Luc Ferry and Daniel Bell noticed. See Oana Șerban, *Artistic Capitalism. The Consumption of the Work-of-Art in Four Steps: Marcuse, Baudrillard, Debord and Lipovetsky* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> The acquisition of Van Gogh’s painting, “Portrait of Dr. Gachet”, made in 1990, is accompanied by a twisted story: “Up for auction and purchased by Japanese businessman Ryoei Saito, this was – at the time- the most expensive painting in the world. Saito (then 75) caused controversy at the time, stating that when he died, he’d have the painting cremated along with him. This was later cleared up as he claimed that he was only using the expression to show his intense affection for it.” M.C. Whinkle, “The 20 Most Expensive Paintings in the World”, in *Whudat*, 25 May 2014, online source: <http://www.whudat.de/top-20-most-expensive-paintings-in-the-world/> (accessed at the 20th of July 2016)

<sup>7</sup> For Picasso’s “Dora Maar au Chat” was paid the second highest price ever fetched at auction, by an anonymous buyer. “Auctioned in 2006, a mysterious Russian bidder took this home (along with a Monet and a Chagall, spending over \$100 million) and no one has since found out who he was. The ownership of the painting has still not been made public.” M.C. Whinkle, “The 20 Most Expensive Paintings in the World”, in *Whudat*, 25 May 2014, online source: <http://www.whudat.de/top-20-most-expensive-paintings-in-the-world/> (accessed at the 20th of July 2016)

<sup>8</sup> His manifesto was signed at November 15<sup>th</sup> 1963.

<sup>9</sup> This example is very atypical in the history of modern and contemporary art. Dubuffet attempted to define through the expression of “art brut”, meaning “rough” or “raw art” a form of art which resists to a cultural trend and to social expectations on art. It is the art of “outsiders”, of conciliated exclusion, belonging to those who, normally, would not be considered artists, such as psychiatric patients or children. His program reflects a cultural manifesto against institutionalised art and could represent a powerful precedent in creating a critical inquiry for mass art in artistic capitalism, nowadays.



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## The Artistic Creation and the Juridical-Political Context of the Human Communities

**Abstract:** In the present paper I intend to analyse how the artistic creation, especially the literary one, is influenced by the political regime, the organization, and the juridical norms of the state where it appears. My thesis begins with the idea that human beings, as social beings, develop their artistic activities of creation within the environment where they live, being influenced by it. In their turn, human beings considerably influence their social environment. The artistic creation and people's lives cannot be separated in an objective manner; and the human being as an artist is affected by censorship, different financial and legal aspects etc. In a totalitarian state, where juridical norms strongly impregnated politically are institutionalized, while in a democratic state the restrictions are mainly financial, but what is generally accepted as valuable depends on the taste of the wider public (whose taste may seem quite dubitable at times). Because the work of art is in my opinion the product of human beings as social beings, it is affected by the social environment where it appears and where it is broadcasted or published, and it is influenced by the more or less legitimate juridical norms of the state. The freedom of creation and expression is dramatically limited in a totalitarian regime, but it is not without pressure in a democratic state, which theoretically allows, encourages, and ensures the appropriate circumstances for the artistic manifestations.

**Keywords:** art, politics, law, legal philosophy, human rights, censorship, success, financing art, freedom of expression, pursuit of happiness

### 1. Introduction: The appearance of the artistic manifestations

The spiritual need to create is an inherent attribute of the human being. The artistic creation accompanied human civilization from the very start, cheering and emotionally moving our hearts and the hearts of our ancestors. The researches made by specialists show that the human DNA is less than 1% different than the DNA of our closest relatives, namely the chimpanzee, which means that an extremely little difference in the human genes is responsible with the mastering of the language and with inventivity – that are both essential for the artistic manifestation, as well as for the other

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specifically human activities. The major difference, anatomically speaking, between the human being and the other species consists in the massive dimension of the brain, as we, the human beings, have the biggest brains comparative to our total body weight.<sup>1</sup>

So, probably, the mystery of our creativity and language is somehow related to brain chemistry, but things are not as simple as they may seem at a first look. In this way, although the size of the brain is a necessary condition for our present development, yet it is not a sufficient condition. By interpreting the archaeological discoveries the scientists showed that “our ancestors adopted the vertical loco motor habit around 4 million years ago, while the evolution of the brain size began around 3 million years ago, so we became *Homo erectus* around 1.7 million years ago, and we became the archaic *Homo sapiens* 0.5 million years ago. (...) As a result, the evolutive growth in size of our brain began around 3 million years ago mainly ended around 100,000 years ago. Have the archaeological proofs of human inventivity grown proportionally with the growth of the brain size? Such archaeological proofs included rupestral paintings, portable art, jewellery, musical instruments, worked tools, graves, complex weapons such as the bow with arrows, complex shelters, and sewed clothes. If these signs of human inventivity had appeared gradually as the brain became bigger in size, then we would have a simple explanation of human inventivity it would really be the result of the brain size” (Diamond 1999, 44).

But the signs and proofs of art and human inventivity have not appeared from the very start, from the very moment when our brain started to develop until it reached its actual size. Our ancestors were of African origin 100,000 years ago, they had rudimentary tools, and they were not very skilful hunters. As for the artistic manifestations, there were none at those times. Moreover, the signs of inventivity are completely absent when it comes to the Neanderthal man (who lived then in present times Europe), whose tools have changed extremely little for an interval of 100,000 years. Although anatomically speaking 100,000 years ago, human beings had a brain as big as that of the modern man, and it was practically identical with it (around 99.99% identical), yet they missed an essential element, namely that element which is responsible of inventivity and creativity.

The first proofs of human inventivity were discovered in Western Europe and they are around 38,000 years old. The archaeological proofs of human art which are that old consist of musical instruments, rupestral paintings, statues, jewellery, and clay figurines.<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that around the same period the first religious rituals appeared. This is the moment of the first cultural revolution of the human civilization; some scientists name this moment The Great Leap Forward, and they consider that it was based on the appearance of those “genes responsible for the development of the spoken language” (Diamond 1999, 47). The communication through a

complex language is characteristic of the human being, and it biologically depends on the way our vocal tract is configured. A complex and profound communication is difficult to conceive apart from the language. How else than through language could we review, for instance, a painting that we appreciate? How would the state have appeared? How would have the transmitting of knowledge and information from one generation to another been possible?

If previously to The Great Leap Forward the archaeological discoveries reflect a relatively small number of tools belonging to our ancestors and a total lack of paintings, musical instruments or jewellery, after that moment their number becomes increasively big, and their evolution and perfecting was extremely rapid: “In opposition with [the tools and the art of the previous periods], the tools and the art of the Cro-Magnon vary so much from a millennium to another and from one region to another, that the archaeologists can use them as indicators of the age of a certain place and of their relation” (Diamond 1999, p.46).

From this moment on, human culture practically started to blossom, it developed and diversified enormously in a short interval of time (compared to the previous three millions of years) until the actual level (which is not at all a terminus). From one stage of hi evolution onward, man started to prove one’s desire for luxury, comfort, civilization, and culture, which could only be obtained within well organized, structured and oriented towards such goals communities. By the collaboration of human beings, building comfortable and secure shelters became possible, electricity was invented, technics evolved, and the material elements of our existence were permanently accompanied and completed by the artistic creation through its various shapesand ways.

## **2. The Juridical Acknowledgement of the Artistic Creation within the Democratic State**

Since the initial moment of the appearance of language and inventivity, the artistic creation was an important aspect of our spirit, and it accompanied us incessantly while evolving as a civilization. As our instruments, shelters and clothes have become more sophisticated, the level of comfort and of civilization has grown, and along with it, the aesthetic sense has evolved and refined.

Next, art became an essential dimension of human life and of human communities, accompanying our evolution from the most rudimentary ways of social and political organization to the modern state. Any type of artistic creation delivers a message to the other. Art was created for the spirit to rejoice, and to move us emotionally. The work of art is “destined to symbolize and transmit something” (Hentea 2014, p.13), which as a rule

refers to the feelings and the impressions of the artist, but to the interests of those who finance the work of art, as well, as it is known that usually artists do not have the financial resources that would allow them to create on their own and have (and also had) to make art on commands from the rich or the authorities of the state in order to be able to make a living. Along the centuries of human civilization the social and political organization of the human communities suffered different kinds of transformations, from the initial state which appeared around 6,000 years ago in the Ancient East—Egypt, Babylon, China, India, and to actual state of right, which is considered the most adequate (meaning the least intrusive) when it comes to exercising the fundamental rights and liberties of man. The state of right is that type of a state which reflects democracy in its entirety, meaningly the state where the power is exercised by representatives chosen by means of the secret, direct, and free vote, oriented towards the public good, and where the laws are strictly respected: “Only the juridical norms limit the power within the state of right; individual freedom becomes possible only by turning them into subjective rights, and by proclaiming the national sovereignty the democratic principle will be guaranteed (...) In this way, the state of right implies a total trust in the law” (Chevallier apud Ploscă 2015, 61). In other words, the political power can be exercised only within a democratic and legal environment well configured where all the fundamental rights and freedoms (as The Universal Declaration of the Human Rights, The European Convention of the Human Rights, and all the other international treaties of the kind state them) are assimilated by internal legislations which are strictly respected.

Of course, neither the state of right lacks its problems and it is not beyond any criticism, but, presently, it is considered to be the most functional type of state, as it allows the most freedom when it comes to attaining personal scopes, exercising the rights, and the pursuit of happiness (the second paragraph of the United States Declaration of Independence,<sup>4<sup>th</sup></sup> of July 1776 is essential for showing this idea: “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”<sup>3</sup>). Obtaining individual happiness is an extremely complex, which implies “a subjective situation of absolute contentment regarding one’s own needs and desires, and the subject can see any desired thing as something absolute, so as something absolutely satisfying, no matter if an object is as such in itself. Therefore, the subject can be happy for an infinity of things (money, power, sex, food etc.), and we can call happiness the situation when one possesses such things, except for the situation when one realizes afterwards that one’s happiness is only apparent because the object of one’s desire was overestimated” (Craiovan 2010, 422). In my opinion, the artistic phenomenon also presupposes this

element of pursuing happiness, because domains such as literature, theatre, and cinema often consider the theme of pursuing, obtaining or missing happiness by the human subject. I think that from a juridical point of view the works of art can be considered to be products of our human freedom of expression. There are no such rights as the legal right to art of the human being, but as through art messages are delivered and the emotions, ideas and feelings of the artists are expressed, and the intended scope is to stir similar emotions and strong impressions in the receiver of the message, the art consumer, we can consider that the works of art are expressions of the freedom of expression, a right acknowledged to belong to any human being within a democratic state. The Freedom of Expression is provided by the first paragraph of Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights which establishes that “everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.”

The provisions of the 10<sup>th</sup> article regard especially the freedom of the press and of the other mass media means of communication. In a democratic state, the freedom of the press guarantees for the freedom of expression and for the transmitting of the information. Although in the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph of the 10<sup>th</sup> article the limits of the exercising of the freedom of expression are stated (“the exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary”), yet the practice of the European Court of Law, as well as the internal legislations of the democratic state are extremely permissive towards what can be published or asserted in the mass media. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish between the freedom of expressing one’s opinion and some forms of racial discrimination or instigating to violence, which break the fundamental rights of men (for instance, the breaking of the 14<sup>th</sup> article of ECHR that legally forbids discrimination). This way, many times The European Court of Law thought that the internal authorities of the states should be extremely prudent so that the press were not stopped neither to acknowledge the discussions of the problems that generally interest the people of the democratic states, and nor to comment on them.

The cultural rights are specially brought under regulation by the international pact regarding the economic, social, and cultural rights –

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – adopted by The United Nations General Assembly on the 16th of December 1966, that passed the seals to Romania in 1974 and was adopted in 1976. This pact admits among other things “the right of persons to take part in cultural life” (article 15, paragraph 1, letter(a)) and “the right to benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author” (article 15, first paragraph, letter c). Moreover, the 3rd paragraph states that “the States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity”. The present Constitution of Romania acknowledges the freedom of expression in article 30, paragraph (1) and in paragraph (2) directly forbids censorship. This regulation totally opposes the provisions of The 1965 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Romania, as we shall see.

The internal laws of the democratic states undertake international specific norms that protect by Constitution the freedom of expression, as well as the authors’ rights and the connected rights, punishing those who break them. Our legislation contains several normative acts for these, the most important being The Law 8/1996 regarding the authors’ rights and the connected rights which was modified and added to later on, and Law 204/2006 regarding the proper behaviour of those who are involved with scientific research, technological development and innovation, which was modified and added to later on.

Usually, philosophers are reserved when it comes to discussing the state, considering that in time the state (though its representatives) acted more in order to restrain the rights and the freedoms of the citizens and to censor or manipulate intellectual thinking and artistic creation than in order to defend them, encourage or allow them to manifest freely. So the state was seen as a necessary evil. And historical sources show that this thing is as true as possible. The artistic manifestations were never absent, in any historical period or human civilization, and they succeeded in imposing and in gaining their place in history and in our souls in spite of any pressures, manipulation and political influences, and they proved that human spirit is and remains free in its essence.

### **3. Literary Art (Literature) and Political or Juridical Restraints**

Yet, it is difficult if not impossible to imagine the artistic manifestations outside their social context. In the following paragraphs, I will try to analyse some of the obstacles and difficulties that appear against the artistic creation within the social and political environment where it appears.

The main problems when it comes to popularizing the artistic creation in a democratic society seem to be the financial resources and the taste of the

public that in the case of the totalitarian regime are dominated by censorship and the cult of the personality of the dictator. Those in charge who have the power in the totalitarian regimes impose by constraint what to be published, what monuments or paintings to be exhibited, what plays to be performed, and what films to be produced. There are a limited number of themes allowed and they regard the idealizing of those who have the power, anything that opposes them being a subject of censorship. In this way, the 1965 Constitution of Romania provided at article 29 that “the freedom of the written word, of the press, of meetings, manifestations and demonstrations cannot be used against the socialist order and against the interest of the working class.” In Romania of those times there was a Council of State for the Press and Publishing that used to decide which books are allowed to be published, what plays are allowed to be turned into performances, what films are allowed to broadcast and so on. This institution was dissolved in 1977, but its members continued their activity of censorship as they had key roles within the Communist party and the public institutions.

Practically, any political government, military or religious administration has the tendency to “limit the expressing/broadcasting of information, opinions, ideas (in a larger sense even intellectual creations), that the public has the right to know depending on the values that it feels obliged to protect at a certain time” (Petcu 1999, 12). Along history, the examples are infinite, but the first that comes to mind is related to the church and the domain considered dis the scientific one: the publishing of Galileo Galilei’s book *Dialogo di Galileo Galilei sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo Tolemaico e Copernicano* in 1632. Previous to its publishing Pope Urban VIII imposed on the scientist to present heliocentric theory as a hypothesis and a theoretical possibility, and not as a scientific certain discovery. But Galileo took advantage on a series of circumstances and published the manuscript in its original form. And the consequence of his act of courage was a trial initiated by The Inquisition, whose sentence was that the Italian astronomer should deny the scientific statements of the book.

Censorship can be done in many ways so that it comes with “a diversity of types regarding their thematic, semantic or temporal development, along with certain constraints of rights or, even more serious, individually acknowledged” (Troncotă 2006, 17). In communist Romania censorship reached its most serious consequences including the death of some authors that were not liked by the totalitarian regime. The legal norms for the authors’ rights were more restrictive in communism in order to ensure the certitude of the dictatorship; the licenses and the patents, the inventions, the artistic creations and other intellectual products were not considered to be acts of opposition against the regime. Even from the beginning of the communist period, precisely since 1949, those publications that were



considered to oppose the regime were put on a list and they went so far that “the censorship eliminated without reason any cultural creation that ideally or imaginatively could have had any possible connection to any other social system, apart from the communist one” (Ficeac 1999, 38). Previously to this moment more normative acts were edicted with the purpose of institutionalizing censorship and punishing by law those who did not respect the political orders: Decree no. 211 by which The General Direction of the Security of the People within The Ministry of Internal Affairs that was supposed among other to “assure the security of RPR against the conspiracies of the enemies from inside and outside the country” (article 2 of Decree no. 211 from the 30th of August 1948). The enemies had in mind were especially the intellectuals who opposed the regime, Decree no. 303/1948 by which the cinematographic industry nationalized and Decree 17/1949 regarding the editing and distributing of books.

The fight against censorship is replaced in democratic societies by the financial struggle for publishing and making the artists famous. In this social field where everything is possible, people play the game chosen by the producer, the paintings of those financially supported are exhibited, and when it comes to literature the same rule applies. This time, the restriction is no longer an ideological, but a financial one and it depends on the caprices of those who have money (and sometimes limited culture and dubitable good taste). But the problem is neither new nor necessarily contemporary. If we consider the case of the 19th century France when famous writers like Gustave Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire lived, and when “money ruled everything everywhere and the fortunes of the new key administrators – manufacturers who made incredible profits from the technical progress and the support offered by the state, but many times only profiteers – who make a show out of their private luxurious houses of the haussmanian Paris or out of the splendour of their carriages and of their outfits. The current practice of the official candidate allows getting political legitimacy by entering the general assembly made of new men, and a large proportion of whom were businessmen, as well as establishing a very tight connection between the political and the economic worlds, which step by step started to control the press, the more it was read and money-making” (Bourdieu 2012, 77). Those men who were less than cultured and they had superficial tastes, and far from the aristocratic scholar societies of the 18th century start to control the market financially and to impose what and how to publish. In this environment serial superficial novels were primary published, but “poetry associated with the great Romantic struggles, to the bohemia and the underprivileged is deliberately and aggressively repudiated” (Bourdieu 2012, 78). In this way they brought suits against some of the poets as well as the publishing houses who publishes poets such as Charles

Baudelaire or Leconte de Lisle), so some of the publishing houses go bankrupt and their owners go to jail because of their debts.

In those times, the artists had the opportunity to meet those in power at exhibitions where the latter had in mind to “impose their own perspective on artists and prove their power of settling things and legitimating mainly through what Sainte Beuve calls *litterary press*; in regard to the writers and the artists, they were acting as applicants and intercessors, and sometimes as real pressuregroups as they were struggling to gain immediate control over different kinds of material and symbolic gratifications that the state offered” (Bourdieu 2012, 79-80). The political arms of control that act and settle or at least influence what to publish, exhibit or perform in the theatres are very complex – “as the ways of domination and autonomy are complicated” (Bourdieu 2012, 81). The real power of the artistic domain is controlled by the magazines’ directors who decide what to publish and who can by a single article “make a reputation or open up someone’s future” (Bourdieu 2012, 82).

As the market evolves the power of the wider public grows when it comes to imposing or making certain writers or artists forgotten. This kind of public hidden behind anonymity makes the writers have ambivalent attitudes: on the one hand, they wish to be famous, and on the other hand they criticise the public for its dubitable taste and its lack of culture. The great writers such as Gustave Flaubert or Charles Baudelaire are overtly disdainful towards the representatives of the public, by considering it a regime of “unrefined parvenus completely under the signs of fakeness and artificialness” (Bourdieu 2012, 89). Those writers reacted by dedicating to the “independent art, to the pure art and because art need the matter they would go and look for that matter either in the past or in the present, but they would turn it into simple objective representations as disinterested as possible” (Cassagne 1979, 212-213). Gustave Flaubert wrote in his letter addressed to Louise Colet on the 22nd of September 1853 that the external environment did not offer him anything anymore and that he had to keep one’s head dipped into his writings “just like a mole”. Because of their open opposition and denial of the concessions that many writers made toward the requests of the market which meant renouncing on literary exigencies and style in favour of gaining social privileges, Gustave Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire realised “the progressive affirmance of the autonomy of the writers” (Bourdieu 2012, 91).

Perhaps, the authentic work of art has to be in total opposition against the requests of the market at a certain time, because the requests are usually made by a superficial public, with a dubitable culture, and it should be a purely artistic product. Such a purpose also implies surpassing the opposition against certain social trends; as such an attitude contains in itself a negative element that hinders from creating an authentic and valuable

work. That disdain towards the requests of the market implies the isolation of the artist and the restraining of one's bread and butter, sometimes living at subsistence level. It is a fact that the real work of art has no commercial value, but assuming such a purpose can have dramatical consequences on the authors who have no other financial support.

At the opposite end, while the market evolved a new category of editors developed who only accepted publishing those works that could become best-sellers. Any manuscript should respect certain rules: to have a target public, to belong to a certain genre (fiction or non-fiction) and so on. In order to be published the manuscript of a writer should discuss the themes that proved successful in the past, which obviously could be detrimental to literature itself. Within such a complicated system where what is published is decided depending on the requests of the market, an atypical writer such as Yevgenia Nikolayevna Krasnova may seem to have no chance of being published or successful as a book writer. Her example is accurately and humorously described Nassim Taleb in his book *The Black Swan*. Yevgenia's work *A Story of Recursion* was refused by more publishing houses on the pretext that it would not enter the current genres, being written in a very personal manner, having lines in multiple languages and so on, so that the author posted the content of the book on the internet where it was noticed by the owner of a small and unknown publishing house "who used to wear pink sunglasses and spoke a very primitive Russian but thought that he was fluent" (Taleb 2010, 52). After publishing the book "it became more and more successful, one of the biggest and strangest hits in the literary history and it reached millions of copies sold and was very appreciated by the critics. Meanwhile, the small publishing house became a big corporation with a polite receptionist at its entrance saying hello to visitors (...) Afterwards, many editors reproached Yevgenia that she did not approach them first, being convinced they would have appreciated the qualities of the manuscript" (Taleb 2010, 52-53). The lack of distinction between fiction and non-fiction that was reproached to the author in the first place became "archaic" when the book became a success and a best-seller. This example illustrates the paradoxes that may arrive in a democratic society when it comes to the artistic creations.

#### 4. Conclusions

Out of all the possible ways of governing the laws of the democratic state offer the larger amount of freedom regarding the artistic creation and its promotion. Today, the restrictions regarding the promotion or the publishing of the works of art seem to be juridical, financial limitations and depending on the taste of the wider public and, of course, on the respecting of the fundamental rights of men. Actually, today celebrity and the fame of

an artist or of a work of art dependant on how well it sells, how much it is seen, listened to etc. Sometimes, not rarely, those in control with the media and who decide what is valuable because of its value on the market and what is not are surprised by the success of some works which do not respect the anticipated rules, rules that were established by means of minute market researches.

The internet became the ideal environment for making ideas popular, the virtual medium where artists can show their works with minimum of expenses, and where the wider public can access them and possibly appreciate them. Perhaps, in this way “the art for arts’ sake” becomes possible once more; it refers to the artistic creation that consider art in itself, independently of social, political and financial pressures that functioned in time censoring, limiting and even mutilating the work of art.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Our brain is about four times bigger than that of the chimpanzee and a lot bigger compared to our total body weight than the brain of any other animal species. I admit that other attributes are also necessary beyond the developed brain” (Diamond 1999, p.43)

<sup>2</sup> “The most amazing creations out of the inventivity of the Cro-Magnon Homo sapiens are those Sistine Chapels of the Late Paleolithic, as there are the Lascaux cave and Altamira cave.” (Diamond 1999, 46).

<sup>3</sup> The authors of The Declaration of Independance used the expression “pursuit of happiness” in order to underline the diversity of human beings, as well as the freedom that they should have when they choose their life purposes. Attaining happiness is in the power to any of us and, as long as we do not infringe on the rights of the others, we are free to search for it wherever we want.

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## Tragedy and comedy in the ethical thinking of Giorgio Agamben

**Abstract:** Starting with Agamben's statement that the tragic paradigm can no longer be used in contemporary ethics, the authors investigate the works of Agamben to analyse the relationship of the Homo Sacer with Pulcinella and to attempt to uncover between comedy and tragedy the foundation of contemporary ethics. To that end, it was necessary to examine the thought of the Italian philosopher regarding time, history, tradition, and transmission and, as a result, to examine Agamben's thinking with respect to political philosophy. The issue of paradigm gains relevance in the structure of the article until we reach the conclusion that Pulcinella, an Italian comedy character, achieves a balance with Homo Sacer, a tragic figure of Roman law, to conclude that Pulcinella is the paradigmatic figure of a very paradigmatic function.

**Keywords:** homo sacer, Pulcinella, ethics, paradigm, comedy, tragedy

L'eroe greco si è congedato da noi per sempre,  
non può più in alcun caso testimoniare per noi;  
non è possibile, dopo Auschwitz, utilizzare in  
etica un paradigma tragico<sup>1</sup> (Agamben 1998,  
91-92)

Il segreto di Pulcinella è che, nella commedia  
della vita, non vi è un segreto, ma solo, in ogni  
istante, un via d'uscita.<sup>2</sup> (Agamben 2015, 130)

In this article, we problematise the categorical statement of Giorgio Agamben in *Quel che resta di Auschwitz* regarding the impossibility of using the tragic paradigm in contemporary ethics. To do so, we have selected dialogue from certain passages – specifically, passages in which tragedy appears as a

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witness to an ethical experiment in language – in one of his most recent works: *Pulcinella ovvero divertimento per il ragazzino*. In this text, published in 2015, the tragic experience acquires in comedy its uniqueness, its signature (*signatura*), in a movement of tension with the universal, “poetry”.

A first point to be affirmed regarding Pulcinella is that his figure constitutes an operation of exclusive inclusion with the figure of the Homo Sacer. Pulcinella is coherent with a paradigmatic method that consists in, given the etymological literality of the term para-digm, the act of putting aside, and responds to, as a distinction which is irreducible to seriation, the emerging issues of the other paradigm that he borders, the Homo Sacer:

Alla fine di Homo Sacer I, dopo aver evocato una serie di brevi biografie – Il *Flamen Dialis*, l'*Homo sacer*, Il Führer nel Terzo Reich, Il Musulmano a Auschwitz, l'oltrecomatoso nella camera di rianimazione – in cui *zoe* e *bios*, corpo biológico e corpo político, esistenza privata Ed esistenza pubblica sembrano tragicamente indeterminarsi, avevo provato a definire la forma-di-vita come un *bios* che è soltanto la sua *zoe*. Ma che cosa può significare “vivere la propria zoe”, che cosa può essere un modo di vita che ha per oggetto soltanto la vita corporea, che la nostra tradizione politica ha sempre già separato in nuda vita? Che cos'è, in questa prospettiva, la forma-di-vita di Pulcinella?<sup>23</sup> (Agamben 2015, 133)

There is a second point to be affirmed regarding Pulcinella: if, with the Homo Sacer paradigm, the issues of politics in the relationship with art and poetry, present in Agamben's early career as a critic, were subsumed within the new focus on the relationship between language, politics and law, with Pulcinella, what was thus subsumed acquires strength to be reasserted retrospectively.

Therefore, the figure of the Homo Sacer, which had been highlighted in an exemplary manner from the linguistic and legal perspective and which was of concern to Agamben in the Homo Sacer series, is now the background of Agamben's figure-project in the first movement of his work. This project's motto could be identified as an attempt to unify a word that enjoys a close relationship with knowledge but that remains removed from its subject, philosophy, with another that detains the object without, however, knowing it, poetry. In the words of Agamben, what he seeks with critique is to uncover the unit of the word itself shattered in a scission that divides it “fra una parola inconsapevole e come caduta dal cielo, che gode dell'oggetto della conoscenza rappresentandolo nella forma *bela*”<sup>24</sup> (Agamben 1977, XIII) – poetry – “e una parola che ha per sé tutta la serietà e tutta la coscienza, ma che non gode del suo oggetto perché non lo sa rappresentare”<sup>25</sup> (Agamben 1977, XIII) – philosophy.

Hence, the poetic word in the form of comedy appears, in the first few pages of *Pulcinella*, already confused with philosophy, but distinct from tragedy:

(...) Al di là di ogni dubbio non soltanto che la commedia è più antica e profonda della tragedia (...) ma anche che essa è più vicina di quella alla filosofia – così vicina che, in ultimo, pare quasi confondersi con questa<sup>6</sup> (Agamben 2015, 10). Tragedy will, in the last pages of the book, verbalise the indistinction between *zoe* and *bios* until then theorised by Agamben based on the *Homo Sacer* paradigm. (We quoted this section above: – [...] in cui *zoe* e *bios*, corpo biologico e corpo politico, esistenza privata ed esistenza pubblica sembrano *tragicamente* indeterminarsi...).

The tragic distinguished from the comic. In fact, in *Pulcinella*, the indication of the difference between comedy and tragedy is essential. The movement of the book revolves entirely around this distinction. Why? Why the distinction if, in texts appearing before the *Homo Sacer* series, poetry was not detached from itself into divisions like tragic and comic, or Dadaist and ironic, but was universalised under the name of “poetic word” and the distinction itself was what appeared to be the problem? In “*Programma per una rivista*”, we read:

Il compito, che la situazione impone alla rivista, non può perciò essere definito semplicemente come una, pur necessaria, ‘distruzione’ della tradizione, ma, piuttosto, come una ‘distruzione della distruzione’, in cui la distruzione della trasmissibilità, che costituisce il carattere originale della nostra cultura, venga portata dialetticamente alla coscienza. Ed è solo in una tale ‘distruzione’ che, come in una casa in fiamme il progetto architettonico fondamentale, potranno diventare visibile le strutture categoriche della cultura italiana. *La scelta della commedia e il rifiuto della tragedia* (...) la preminenza del Diritto insieme a una concezione creaturale dell’innocenza umana (...) sono solo alcune delle categorie sulla cui tensione antinomica si sostiene il fenomeno italiano<sup>7</sup> (Agamben 1978, 145-6) (Emphasis added).

Why, after “*Programma per una rivista*”, in which Agamben indicated the need to seek in the debris of tradition the meaning, in Italy, of comedy’s surpassing tragedy, is there a choice in *Pulcinella*, as has already occurred in *Categorías Italianas*, of a distinction via the *materials* of tragedy and comedy and not so much historic or contingent between these two orders of the poetic? Finally, does that which is designated in *Quel che resta di Auschwitz* as the decline from the tragic paradigm to contemporary ethics stem from tragedy’s *material* dimension?

Da Hegel in poi, il colpevole-innocente è la figura in cui la cultura moderna ha interpretato la tragedia greca e, con questa, i propri dissidi più segreti (...) Il conflitto di cui Hegel parla non ha, però, comunque la forma di un caso di coscienza, che opponga semplicemente un’innocenza soggettiva a una colpa



oggettiva; trágica è, al contrario, l'assunzione incondizionata di una colpa oggettiva da parte di um soggetto che ci appare innocente (...) Nulla di più lontano da Auschwitz di questo modello. Poiché qui il deportato vede crescere a tal punto l'abisso tra innocenza soggettiva e colpa oggettiva, fra ciò che egli ha fatto e ciò di cui può sentirsi responsabile, che non riesce ad assumere alcuno dei suoi atti. Com un'inversione che rasenta la parodia, egli si sente innocente exatamente per ciò di cui l'eroe trágico si sente colpevole e colpevole là dove questi si sente innocente (...) Ma a diffidare dell'adequatezza del modello tragico a dar ragione di Auschwitz, induce soprattutto la facilità com cui esso è evocato dai carnefici (...) essi lo invocano non tanto per sfuggire alla condanna (...) quando per presentare ai loro stessi occhi la propria situazione nei termini evidentemente più accettabili – di un conflitto tragico. 'Il mio cliente si sente colpevole dinanzi a Dio, non dinanzi alla legge'<sup>8</sup> (Agamben 1998, 89-90).

Thus far, the succession of cited excerpts indicates that understanding the place of tragedy in the thought of Agamben will be tortuous for the reader. In fact, in *Quel che resta di Auschwitz*, the aspect of the tragic experience that, in the "Programma per una rivista", Agamben attempted to bring into contemporary times by way of a "destruction of the destruction" of the non-transferability of a past not accessible by tradition does not appear.

On the contrary, when the exhaustion of the tragic paradigm is affirmed, there remains no trace of the anachronistic temporality, previously held as method of this double destruction, in this text that denies the paradigmaticity of tragedy by what the interpretations of the tragic in the works of Hegel or of Nietzsche's eternal return could bequeath to the present from a modern understanding of ancient tragedy.

At this point, the assimilation between source and tradition is confusing for the reader. Because the historical data determines the disappearance of tragedy through the birth of philosophy, as in the dating proposed by Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (2005), in which the tragic phenomenon arises and fades in less than a century, the index of decline is the rise of a philosophical discourse already unable to understand it.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, we have the absolutely relevant discussion, even in latter moments of Agamben's work, of the destruction of tradition to access the hitherto inapprehensible history of sources. In *Signatura Rerum* (2008), the agonistic relationship of the researcher with tradition and its transmission function is what allows him to glimpse something of the archaeological emergence of sources. In this case, archaeology is a practice that "non può misurarsi con la tradizione, senza decostruire i paradigmi, le tecniche e le pratiche attraverso cui essa regola le forme del tramandamento, condiziona l'accesso alle fonti e determina, in ultima analisi, lo stesso statuto del soggetto conoscente"<sup>10</sup> (Agamben 2008, 90).

This “very statute of the knowing subject” can be termed in Agamben – as has been named by the philosophical tradition when observing the limits of knowledge – as critical.

In *Stanzas*, Agamben (1977, XIII) directs his critique to a point before or beyond the division between philosophy and poetry, to a point where this scission reaches its extreme and uncovers the unit of the broken word itself. This process is for the Italian author the process of an ironic self-denial, against a “negatività assoluta e senza riscatto, la quale tuttavia non rinuncia per questo alla conoscenza”. It is the point at which criticism differs from the dialectical form of reading irony’s negativity, considered by the author as provisory: “quella provvisoria della dialettica, che la bacchetta magica dell’*Aufhebung* è sempre già in atto di trasformare in positivo”<sup>11</sup> (Agamben 1977, XII).

In *Signatura Rerum*, the affirmation of this absolute negativity locates its historical cause. Founded on the threshold of the separation between philosophy and poetry, critique could not manage without the effect of breaking the word in order to, before or beyond division, aim at a unit that would be nothing more than mythical – “the unit of the broken word itself”. Therefore, our hypothesis is that the quotation of the tragic in Agamben’s work, supported by the radical negativity of his paradigmatic archaeology, attempts to adopt different appearances in different temporal dimensions: sometimes showing us, his contemporaries, something of its phenomenon not yet transmitted by tradition, and sometimes pointing to a total non-transmissibility, as in the face of post-Auschwitz historical positivity that marks the impossibility of the tragic paradigm for contemporary ethics.

If we are correct, Agamben’s description of tragedy can be understood in coherence with the problematic constellation of archaeology, critical, and historical time as condensed into a notion that Agamben himself conceives as an oxymoron: a past that never occurred. It is the figuration of an impossible unit that appears to us essential to understanding the function of the paradigmatic method.

Comprehending the logic of the movement of tragedy’s negation by the paradigm function in the context of a past that never occurred is, therefore, our goal. We continue to consider the issue of differentiation between tragedy and comedy through the approach delineated in this introduction as defined in the works of Agamben: the distinction by material and by historical incidence.

## **1. The material of comedy and the material of tragedy**

It is now time to return to a text on which Agamben was working when he met with Italo Calvino and Claudio Rugafiori to formulate a project to

discuss Italian categories. This project was not completed, but it generated independent texts from each of the three authors. In the case of Agamben, remnants of this project were published at the end of *Infanzia and Storia*, with the title “*Programma per una rivista*”, while the text he was writing at the same time, titled “*Comedy*”, was published in 1978 in *Paragone* 347. The two texts were subsequently reunited in the collection “*Categorie Italiane*” in Italy and “*End of the Poem*” in the US.

Thus, “*Comedy*” was written between 1974 and 1976 with the purpose of discussing, in an essay, why Dante, despite being an admirer of Virgil, abandons tragedy to write a work in the vulgar style of comedy. It was an act that, according to Agamben, influenced all of Italian literature.

In this text, the philosopher establishes differences between the tragic and the comic, and he lists several differences that appear immediately in the comparison between these two poetic forms. These differences had already been discussed by ancient and modern commentators and consisted of a comparative analysis between the form and the content of tragedy and comedy: while tragedy starts peacefully and ends tumultuously, comedy starts full of rumours and discord and ends in peace and calm, or, comedy represents a break with the past, while tragedy represents continuity of the past into the present, or yet another, tragedy refers to issues of public order, while comedy concerns the private sphere.

However, subsequently, Agamben doubts that differences in content or form are, in fact, relevant to differentiating between the two. Instead, he proposes a distinction between the *material* of comedy and the *material* of tragedy to properly understand what distinguishes them. From this, the theme of man’s guilt as subject and in the face of the merit or demerit of his free will emerges. New oppositions are highlighted: between man’s salvation and damnation and between the subject with free will or subject to divine justice.

This move from form to material interests us, as it makes evident the relationship between ethics and guilt. This theme is absolutely relevant to *Quel che resta di Auschwitz*. We continue to comment on “*Comedy*”.

According to Agamben (1999), the Aristotelian interpretation of tragedy includes the misfortune of the righteous man, a misfortune that would lead to a conflict between objective guilt and subjective innocence with regard to what Aristotle terms *Hamartia*, sometimes translated in Latin as sin. Man, wrenched from his prosperity, is thrown into misfortune due to a sin, i.e., it is the innocent man in front of divine justice.

Considering this same *Hamartia* in respect to comedy is different because in comedy, given free will, man is guilty of his own misfortune in search of prosperity.

Referencing Christian mythology, Agamben sustains a balance between the fall of Adam, the original sin, and tragic thought, on one side, and

Christ's passion, on the other. Comic thought would be close to Christ's passion in relation to guilt.

The fall of Adam, for Agamben, refers to the moment when he becomes mortal, or more precisely, when all mankind, through him, becomes mortal. Adam is a prosperous man who disrespects a divine rule and is thrown into misfortune and mortality to remedy his guilt. That is when original sin is established.

In Adam's sin, personal guilt is not present. On the contrary, if it is "human nature itself" that sins with him, this guilt "falls to every man through his own origin" (Agamben 1999, 10). Thus, in original sin there is a division between nature and person, which creates the dichotomy between natural guilt and personal guilt. This guilt transmitted regardless of individual responsibility, in Agamben's analysis, possesses the characteristics of a tragic fault.

The penalty imposed on Adam for his sin, which spreads to all humans, is shame with regard to his nudity.

However, according to Agamben, with respect to Christ's passion, in Christian mythology an inversion takes place from tragic guilt into comic guilt, as there is a reversal between natural guilt and personal guilt.

Christ's passion arises to satisfy the guilt that man cannot atone for, the original sin. Christ alone, facing natural guilt, exerts personal atonement, transforming the "irreconcilable objective conflict into a personal matter" (Agamben 1999, 12), making comedy possible and freeing man of tragedy.

Thus, from the fall of Adam to the passion of Christ, the passage from personal innocence articulated as natural guilt – which, due to this aspect, is a tragic guilt – to a natural innocence articulated as personal guilt is concluded.

In this sense, in tragedy, for Agamben, it would be impossible for the tragic character to confess his guilt. Personally innocent before natural guilt, the tragic hero would not take shame upon himself. As for the comic character, for in this case the guilt is personal, he would purify guilt by living his shame until the end, accepting the fracture between nature and persona.

Personas are the masks used in Greek tragedy. In "*Comedy*" (1999), Agamben describes the Stoic criticism of indistinction between the tragic actor and his mask: because mask and actor are confused, the emergence of an actor's subjectivity is prevented due to the emphasis given only to the personality of the character in an indistinction, then, between nature and persona.

In comedy, however, there would be a division between actor and persona, a division that Agamben interprets as separation between innocent human nature and guilty persona or as existing duality between the historic

individual and man in general. This duality would indicate the division between a natural innocence and personal responsibility.

Here, returning to the affirmation of Agamben in *Quel che resta di Auschwitz* that the tragic paradigm can no longer be used in ethics, we can assume that the ethical and aesthetic support of natural guilt articulated into personal innocence is no longer relevant today, and thus a new way of examining ethics is required. "The ethical problem has changed radically", Agamben asserts in *Quel che resta di Auschwitz*, "Al di là del bene e del male non sta l'innocenza del divenire, ma una vergogna non solo senza colpa, ma, per così dire, senza più tempo"<sup>12</sup> (Agamben 1998, 95).

Given that statement and returning to the questions we raised in the introduction of this article with the support of a critical differentiation between *material* and historical incidence, it appears possible to affirm that the evocation of meaning given to Agamben's utterance regarding the depletion of the *material* of tragedy is partial. Hence, we believe it is relevant to also consider the temporality implied in what the Italian philosopher determines as "without time".

## 2. Time and History

In his first book, *L'uomo senza contenuto*, 1970, Agamben already raises the question of the difference between poetry and philosophy, in this case, between art and aesthetics. If in art a poetic work is *produced* – and here we have highlighted the term produced – in the second case, aesthetics, the act that asserts it is rhetorical.

The use of the term production is not arbitrary. In his genealogy, Agamben seeks in the Greek term *Poiesis* the contemporary translation for the act of the artist producing a work that, other than for the spectator, to whom belongs the field of aesthetics, denies art by speaking about it. The activity of the spectator, who is more interested in non-art to assert what art is, is bound not so much to *poiesis* but to *techné*.

By approaching the work of Walter Benjamin, more specifically Benjamin's theories regarding technical reproducibility, Agamben (1970/1994) brings to his contemporaries a discussion initiated by the Greeks. As the term technique became restricted to the act of doing and poetic became restricted to aesthetic thought, the question of originality must be brought to the work of art.

Therefore, there is a fundamental difference between the artist and the craftsman. If the craftsman reproduces his product through technique, the artist seeks originality in the work of art.

However, a short circuit was formed on the threshold of contemporary art when Duchamp raised a product of the cultural industry to the category

of artwork. *Pop art* reproduces a work so many times that its original character is reduced. An oscillation between artistic production and the aesthetics rhetoric begins to take place.

At this point Agamben comments on the process that leads to the nothingness of the work of art, specifically stating that it is from its nihilist aspect that the artwork is affirmed in its time. The contemporary crisis, as Agamben understands it, is not a crisis of art but of the poetic substance of man: “Qual è, allora, il carattere dell’opera in cui siconcreta l’attività pro-duttiva dell’uomo?”<sup>13</sup> (Agamben 1970/1994, 96), he asks himself.

The difference, then, is between *poiesis* and *praxis*. In the first case, to pro-duce would be to bring the non-being into being, to impart existence to what is not – this would be the task of the artist. In the second case, it would be simple human production, connected to work, in the sense of doing in pursuance of biologic subsistence.

The balance continues to swing when Agamben (1970/1994) refers to Nietzsche to assert the impossibility of an aesthetic rhetoric. From Nietzsche’s dialogue with Kant, Agamben asserts that everything that arises as philosophical question is thought of as art because for him, thinking of art as does Nietzsche is to rest one’s feet on the truth.

Thus, to think of art is already to think of man, in the sense that man produces himself, and there would thus be no sense in sustaining a thought as the thought of someone who sees from the outside, a rhetorical aesthetic thinking.

That said, let us return to the question of tragedy. Agamben (*L’uomo senza contenuto*, 1970/1994) always comprehends that when the traditional mystical system begins to decline, it is art that comes to occupy the space of tragedy to reconcile the conflict between the old and the new. The dialogue with Kafka becomes relevant then. As it is impossible for contemporary man to grasp his historical time, it is Kafka who turns this impossibility into grounds for man to discover himself again. Kafka places man in the face of judgement day. Man is deluded that this day is yet to come when, in fact, it is in front of him (Agamben 1970/1994, 169).

From the issue of art proceeds the issue of time, as art, for Agamben, is the last thread linking man with his past. It is the last because, in a traditional system, culture exists only from its transmission.

When culture weakens the means of transmission of the past, the past accumulates on man’s back, while the future, which he does not yet possess, cannot provide him any light. Rupture with tradition breaks the link between old and new.

It is from reading Benjamin regarding citations that Agamben arrives at this diagnosis of rupture with the past in our time. Citation is destruction. It is the removal of something from its original context with the consequent loss of a witness function in favour of the revelation of a potential for

strangeness. Thus, for Agamben, it is possible to affirm with Benjamin that quoting is an act similar to collecting. The collector removes the object from its context, whether spatial or of usage, and places it in a context of authenticity, giving it another use that only holds meaning within a collection. That is, the collector “cites” the object out of its context, which results in releasing the object of its obligation to be useful.

Outside of the relationship of utility, the collection of cited objects already indicates for Agamben the impossibility of transmission. If no transmission is possible without a tradition, then citation, or collection, is the destruction of tradition. Objects collected for their aesthetic beauty alone become representative of the impossibility of transmission. We must recall that in *Quel che resta di Auschwitz* tragedy no longer offers an ethical testimony to contemporary man.

In Kafka, Agamben retrieves the possibility of restoring to art the role of transmitting the transmission. Art abolishes the difference between the thing to be transmitted and the act of transmitting. The traditional mystical system, in which there is identity between these two facets of transmission, is approached.

We can now, in the light of *L'uomo senza contenuto*, consider Agamben's statement in *Quel che resta di Auschwitz* that the tragic hero does not provide testimony to the ethics of our time. If, in the text from 1970, the tragic hero is still perceived as “che esprime in tutta la sua grandezza e in tutta la sua miséria il senso precario dell' azione umana nell' intervallo storico fra ciò che non è più e ciò che non è ancora”<sup>14</sup> (Agamben 1970/1994, 169), one might think that, contrary to what Agamben states, it is precisely the contemporary ethical man who would be tragic, as for him “la rottura della tradizione, che è per noi oggi un fatto compiuto, apre infatti un' epoca in cui fra vecchio e nuovo non c'è più alcun legame possibile”<sup>15</sup> (Agamben 1970/1994, 163).

Hence, the ethical rupture of Auschwitz appears to have raised new issues for Agamben. They are so new that his theoretical gesture will be to propose another figure who becomes heroic in relation with time: Pulcinella, who is a comic character, instead of tragic.

To think of this character, we will use dialogue with another text of Agamben's aesthetic period, *Il linguaggio e la morte* (1985). This text has the peculiarity of being the first to address the figure that will represent the great paradigm of Agamben's political work, the Homo Sacer. For that reason, the Homo Sacer appears to have the power to render visible a transitional field of problems between *L'uomo senza contenuto* with his praise of the tragic hero, the subsequent project of understanding Italian categories, comprising the text we analyse, “Comedy”, in which the need for distinction via material between tragedy and comedy is already present, the affirmation of the death of the tragic testimony in *Quel che resta di Auschwitz*, and finally, Pulcinella.

### 3. Pulcinella

Il problema etico ha qui mutato radicalmente (...). Al di là del bene e del male non sta l'innocenza del divenire, ma una vergogna non solo senza colpa, ma, per così dire, senza più tempo<sup>16</sup> (Agamben 1998, 94-95)

Without time and without guilt. In the theorised ethics of *Quel che resta di Auschwitz*, we note a double claim by Agamben: the claim of a temporality that contests a temporal order that would conceive the continuation of the tragic testimony by an alleged transmissibility via tradition; and the attempt to dissolve the matter of guilt as the traditional coupling that ties tragedy to philosophy.

In this book, in fact, the ethics considered by Agamben as testimony of a de-subjection – which in that context is called shame – is the archaeology of the metaphysical operation with language, which the author has recognised as a development of the tragic experience since his 1985 seminar on negativity, published under the title *Il linguaggio e la morte*. In *Quel che resta di Auschwitz*, we notice that the spelling of the term voice with an uppercase V (Voice) recalls the distinction set forth by Agamben in 1985 between voice and Voice to contemplate the non-articulation between nature and language. Already in the 1980's, this distinction was intended to remove from the anthropogenic reflection the need for a negative foundation for man, which is repeated in this book of the Homo Sacer series:

Sia la vecchia definizione filosofica dell' uomo come *ζῷον λόγον ἔχον*, il vivente che ha il linguaggio (...) questa articolazione sia stata cercata, in generale, in direzione di um Io o di una Voce – voce silenziosa della coscienza che si fa presente a se stessa nel discorso interiore da una parte, e, dall'altra, você articolata, *phone énarthros*, in cui la lingua si connette al vivente iscrivendosi nella sua stessa você. Resta che, ogni volta, questa Voce risulta essere, in ultima istanza, un mitologema (...) Ma proprio questa impossibilità di congiungere insieme il vivente e il linguaggio, la *phoné* e il *logos*, il non-umano e l'umano (...) è ciò che permette la testimonianza (...) *La testimonianza ha luogo nel non-luogo dell'articolazione* (...) E proprio perché la relazione (o, piuttosto, la non relazione) fra il vivente e il parlante há la forma della vergogna, dell'essere reciprocamente consegnati a un inassumibile, l'*ethos* di questo scarto non può che essere una testimonianza – cioè qualcosa d'inassegnabile a un soggetto, che costituisce, tuttavia, l'unica demora, l'unica possibile consistenza di un soggetto<sup>17</sup> (Agamben 1998, 120-121).

In *Il linguaggio e la morte*, the philosophical need for a voice articulated as Voice meets tragedy in a stroke of “development and overcoming”. Philosophy, according to Agamben, seizes the silent experience of the tragic



hero and universalises it as being the foundation of what is more properly human: the separation from the animal voice.

In this philosophical development and overcoming of tragedy, it is the enchainment between a silent voice – which Agamben observes is already operating in the tragedians as an articulator of the theme of *con-science*, as the “knowing with oneself” – and guilt that is transmitted as foundation to philosophy: “È questa muta e angosciata coscienza, questa *sigetica* che si apre fra l’essere nato dell’uomo e il suo essere parlante, che la filosofia, raccogliendo così l’ esigenza più profonda dello spettacolo tragico, pone come fondamento tanto della logica che dell’etica”<sup>18</sup> (Agamben 1982, 114).

Furthermore, if the division that organises the conscience sustained in the Voice is the same as that on which Agamben will conduct all his work as if written on “the mystery that divided it” – the division between living being and language, it is not by chance that Pulcinella is presented, at the end of the homonymous book, next to the Homo Sacer paradigm with a specific methodological function: the deactivation of the bipolar device between *zoe* and *bios*. Agamben theorises that philosophy and tragedy are originally bound by the conflict that both addressed, which he claims to be an “irreconcilable” conflict in both, between the logical being of man and his natural being. However, with Pulcinella the indistinction between these two forms of being is presumed and, even more so, the impossibility, coming from the indistinction, of keeping the intelligibility that guaranteed over time the conceptualisation of its forms.

Si tratterà, pertanto, di mettere in questione e neutralizzare lo stesso dispositivo bipolare *bios/zoe*, per investigare non tanto l’articolazione che li tiene uniti, quanto la divisione che li ha separati. Occorrerà chiedersi, cioè, in che modo e secondo quali strategie essa potrebbe essere neutralizzata [...] Non vi è, in Pulcinella, una vita vegetativa separata dalla forma di vita, una *zoe* che possa essere distinta e separata dal *bios*. Egli non è, in verità, né l’una né l’altro<sup>19</sup> (Agamben 2015, 133-135).

Previously, in *Il linguaggio e la morte*, Agamben had been attempting to discover this way of disabling in a reading of *Oedipus at Colonus* conducted retroactively to the attempt of disassembly performed by Nietzsche of the articulation between philosophy and tragedy. After commenting that Nietzsche’s attempt, although relevant, failed in its function of disarticulation, as he kept thoughtless the mythologeme of Voice, Agamben reviews *Sophocles*:

Alla fine dell’*Edipo a Colono*, quando è giunto per l’eroe, ormai completamente rasserenato, il momento di morire, egli fa giurare a Teseo, che l’accompagna in quegli ultimi istanti, che nessun mortale ‘proferirà voce’ sulla sua tomba (...). Se Teseo rispetterà questo voto, egli avrà ‘un paese per sempre senza dolore’ (...). *Spezzando il legame fra linguaggio e morte, Edipo – L’ultimo degli uomini de dolore’ – pone*

*fine alla catena della colpa tragica che si trasmette interminabilmente nel nesso fra le due moire dell'uomo*<sup>20</sup> (Agamben 1982, 121) (Emphasis added).

If this disabling is the final project of *Il linguaggio e la morte*, furthermore, if it is in this text that the figure of the Homo Sacer is referenced for the first time in Agamben's work, we may hypothesise that this new reversal of the issue, in the tension between tragedy and comedy, is required by the methodological development that arises later in the Homo Sacer series with *Signatura Rerum*. The assumption appears consistent to us because it aligns the search of an ethics without guilt to a historical temporality without time.

As guilt would not acquire the cathartic, but the historical, theoretical and critical means to its atonement in this reversal operated by Agamben with *Oedipus at Colonus*, we believe that it is the issue of the paradigmatic method that arises requiring yet another critical movement.

In this respect, it must be stressed that the method of destruction of the destruction of non-transferability was fully covered in the section of the seminar we were analysing: the archaeology of the origin of philosophical tradition in tragedy; the identification of an “unspeakable transmission” bequeathed as heritage to contemporaries through philosophical tradition; the disassembly of the articulation between living being and language through the critics of the ethical mythologeme of a voice of conscience understood as the negative foundation of man (which is the focus of the seminar) and, with it, of the access to the tragic through the articulation between knowing with oneself and guilt; and, finally, the return to the tragic with the apparatus not of tradition (with Aristoteles or Plato or Hegel), nor of the critique of tradition (with Nietzsche and his Oedipus as the last philosopher), but by directly quoting their writings. It is worth noting that in this excerpt from *Language and Death* Agamben quotes the tragic texts directly, preserving in his writing the ancient Greek alphabet.

However, even after this trajectory, Pulcinella is necessary. Our hypothesis is that if, in the archaeology of the division that separated poetry and politics, Agamben uncovers the tragic, at a point before philosophical discourse, the use of the concentration camps and the figure of Auschwitz as a paradigm has generated a problem that was perhaps glimpsed, but not completely theorised, before the paradigmatic proposition of the Homo Sacer: the division between *bios* and *zoe*, which is juxtaposed, without clearly establishing the passage from one to another, between living being and language:

La domanda: ‘in che modo il vivente ha il linguaggio?’ corrisponde esattamente a quella: ‘in che modo la nuda vita abita a polis?’ Il vivente ha il logos togliendo e conservando in esso la propria você, così come esso abita la polis lasciando eccpire in essa la propria nuda vita. La politica si presenta allora come la struttura in senso proprio fondamentale della metafisica occidentale, in quanto

occupa la soglia in cui si compie l'articolazione fra il vivente e il logos. La 'policizzazione' nella nuda vita è il compito metafisico per eccellenza, in cui si decide dell'umanità del vivente uomo (...) <sup>21</sup>(Agamben 1995, 11).

This question has always been articulated in Agamben as a utopian topology in which it is necessary to rethink, on every occasion, time and space. That is because ethics is to the author the very political dwelling of man. Hence, we understand that the question raised with Pulcinella, in parallel to the subject of guilt, is a question regarding time and, more specifically, regarding the temporality of paradigmatic thinking as past that never occurred, without time: "Che, nell'economia dela fine dei tempi, tutte le cose si recapitolino in Pulcinella, implica per lui uma nuova, diversa sperienza della storia, dela vita e del tempo, che vale la pena di provare a comprendere" <sup>22</sup>(Agamben 2015, 18).

It is exactly from this indication of the specific temporality of the figure of Pulcinella that Agamben describes the experience of this figure of Italian comedy who stares at the past and death, finitude and survival, with eyes that see only gnocchi and pasta.

From Pulcinella arises an experience of the limit of language closer to laughter and tears than to archive and conscience, that is, distant from a Voice that is the negative foundation of man.

From Pulcinella arises an experience specific to the fall of personality and phantasm as ideals of reference for the I and historical development:

Il non-vissuto ha due forme: il carattere e il fantasma. Il carattere è il guardiano della soglia che veglia a che il non-vissuto rimanga per sempre tale, imprimendone sul volto l'inconfondibile traccia [...]; il fantasma è il tentativo di vivere ciò che è rimasto non vissuto: esso manca ogni volta il suo scopo, perché il non-vissuto viene compulsivamente evocato próprio e soltanto in quanto inaccessibile. Pulcinella sfugge a entrambi: al carattere, perché renuncia al volto per uma maschera; al fantasma, perché si affida soltanto alla sua infantile smemoratezza <sup>23</sup>(Agamben 2015, 113).

From Pulcinella arises the experience of a life in which mythical and historical time interplay in a poultry genealogy, crossing the semi-divine, the semi-feral and the below human in an archaeology of the non-human source of theatre in order to consider a subject of philosophy as non-I, an archaeology, therefore, of the past that never occurred, of a philosophy founded on the indistinction between man and animal.

Pulcinella is, hence, a hybrid figure whose name, derived from "chick", recalls his birth from an egg (Agamben 2015, 47). In this animalistic form, Pulcinella is a figure placed next to a philosophical archaeology that will identify, in Plato's Socratic dialogue, the also hybrid character of a Socrates that is less a man than a satyr or Silenos – "Nella Republica [...] I dialoghi socrati sono um quarto genere, il cui protagonista non è um uomo, ma um sátiro" <sup>24</sup>(Agamben 2015, 42), a non-human figure who finally

achieves tragedy when it discovers, in Aristotle's *Poetics*, the annotation of a satirical source on the developments of tragic action and hero (Agamben 2015, 43).

Finally, from Pulcinella arises a critical experience of an ethics formed historically from the subjectivation by guilt and conforming of docile bodies to a disciplining and judicialisingbiopower. While his body is deformed by art, his gesture "è la liberazione del carattere empirico da ogni riferimento a um carattere intellegibile e del carattere intellegibile da ogni funzione di imputazione giuridica o morale"<sup>25</sup> (Agamben 2015, 121).

At the same time, it is in comedy that Agamben discovers an escape route to understanding tragic theatre as the representation of the action staged in the technology of speech. Pulcinella is not only an escape route from theatrical tradition for Agamben. He is specifically the character who demands new politics, away both from its reference to action and from the reference to the word as support for the legally responsible subject: "l'azione che, secondo un'antica e venerabile tradizione, è il luogo della politica, qui non há piú luogo, há perso il suo soggetto e la sua consistenza"<sup>26</sup> (Agamben 2015, 71). Thus, Pulcinella is evidence to Agamben of a questioning of praxis that renders it possible to reflect upon politics when the impossibility of action is reached, "Ma Pulcinella non è, per questo, semplicemente impolítico, egli anuncia ed esige un'altra politica, che non ha piú luogo nell'azione, ma mostra che cosa può um corpo quando ogni azione è diventata impossibile"<sup>27</sup> (Agamben 2015, 71).

Accordingly, Pulcinella can be considered a figure of a point-to-point experience, important to Agamben. Nonetheless, it is an experience whose ability to grasp part of the positivity of that past that never occurred, that has not been lived, only arises at the junction with the paradigmatic method described in the *Signatura Rerum*. More specifically, it arises in the work of erosion of the phantasm still required after the archaeological regression via the dismantling of tradition and its emergence as a paradigm.

We understand that this phantasmal emergence of the paradigm is what impels an archaeological method deployed beyond the dismantling of tradition. In *Signatura Rerum*, Agamben establishes an analogy with the format of the psychoanalytic regression to consider, simultaneously, contemporaneity between a past that has not been lived and the present, as it is exactly because of its characterisation as not realised that the past that has not been lived, accessed through such regressions, is best defined as the present. In the words of Agamben, this is "un passato che non è stato vissuto e che non può quindi definirsi tecnicamente 'passato', ma è rimasto, in qualche modo, presente"<sup>28</sup> (Agamben 2008, 103).

It is again the condition of not-lived that requires a methodological operation such as the evocation of the phantasm. For Agamben, it is the

phantasmal form that offers this curious historical object the edges of contact and separation between conscious and unconscious, remembered and forgotten, lived and not-lived.

Finally, after evoking the phantasm, it is a matter of wearing it out until “fargli perdere il suo rango originário”<sup>29</sup> (Agamben 2008, 103). This original condition does not concern as much the phantasmal content as the possibilities, modalities, conditions and logical operations of separation involved in their emergence and definition and that establish it as the source of a particular historical fact.

The necessity of this development for Agamben is such that he claims the archaeological erosion of the phantasm to be the only access road to the present: “solo a questo punto il passato non vissuto si rivela per ciò che era: contemporaneo al presente, e diventa in questo modo per la prima volta accessibile, la con-presenza ‘fonte’”<sup>30</sup> (Agamben 2008, 103).

Hence, if we are correct, Pulcinella would not only be the character of different politics but the paradigmatic figure of the very paradigm function in Agamben; the witness of a new ethic but also of another theoretical action to be exercised after Auschwitz: without time, without guilt and with a form of life that inhabits the not-lived; a form of political dwelling beyond the division between active and contemplative life that, supported in the distinction between *zoe* and *bios*, traditionally has excluded from politics the hybrid beings of the poet and the philosopher.

Finally, therefore, Pulcinella can be understood as a tortuous way (this is after all the requirement for traversing the phantasm) of making possible the heretofore mythical “unity of the broken word itself” pursued by Agamben since his inaugural works. The answer to an issue already envisioned in the “*Programma per una rivista*” that we quoted in our introduction: “il problema non è tanto se la poesia sai o meno rilevante rispetto alla politica, ma se la politica sia ancora all’altezza della sua coesione originaria com la poesia”<sup>31</sup> (Agamben 1978, 149).

Does tragedy no longer witness? Maybe not before the methodological operation of denying it as a paradigm via the route of Pulcinella. However, following that, in the traces of what had already been rehearsed with *Oedipus at Colonus*, what will be discovered is the dissolution of the separation between comic and tragic, not in a tragicomic unit but in an alterity to the very logic that made them separate. Responding to the Italian journalist Alessandro Leogrande (2015) in an interview on Pulcinella, Agamben offers the following statement to the question of whether Italy’s true national character is tragicomic: “Ma più que tragicomédia, preferisco parlare, comè piaceva a Manganelli, di ‘ilarotragedia’. Pulcinella fa saltare i confini chi separano i duo genere, e lo spazio che si apre fra di essi, che non è più né trágico né comico, ma nemmeno tragicômico, è quello che m’interessa.”<sup>32</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Greek hero has left us forever; he can no longer bear witness for us in any way. After Auschwitz, it is not possible to use a tragic paradigm in ethics.

<sup>2</sup> Pulcinella's secret: the comedy of life has no secrets, but only, at all times, a way out.

<sup>3</sup> At the end of *Homo Sacer I*, after having evoked a series of brief biographies – the FlamenDialis, the homo sacer, the Führer in the Third Reich, the Muslim in Auschwitz, the person in a state beyond coma in the resuscitation camera – in which zoe and bios, biological body and political body, private existence and public existence seem tragically undetermined, I have tried to define the form-of-life as a bios, which is solely its zoe. But what does it mean 'to live one's own zoe', what can be a form of life that has for object solely the corporeal life, which in our political tradition has always been separated as bare life? In this perspective, what is Pulcinella's form-of-life?

<sup>4</sup> In an unconscious word, and as if fallen from the sky, which enjoys the object of knowledge representing it in graceful form.

<sup>5</sup> And a word which possesses all seriousness and all consciousness, but which does not enjoy its object, as it is not able to represent it.

<sup>6</sup> (...) Beyond any doubt, not only is comedy older and deeper than tragedy (...) but comedy is also closer to philosophy than tragedy – so close that, ultimately, it appears to be almost confused with philosophy.

<sup>7</sup> The task that the situation imposes on the journal cannot therefore be defined simply as "destruction" of tradition, even though it is necessary, but rather as "destruction of destruction", in which the destruction of transferability, the unique character of our culture, is brought dialectically to consciousness. And it is only in such "destruction" that, just like the architectural design of a house on fire, the categorical structures of Italian culture may become visible. The choice of comedy and the resignation of tragedy (...) the pre-eminence of Law attached to a creatural conception of human innocence (...), these are just some of the categories in whose antinomic tension the Italian phenomenon is sustained.

<sup>8</sup> Beginning with Hegel, the guilty-innocent person is the figure through which modern culture interprets Greek tragedy and, with it, its own secret discords. [...] The conflict, of which Hegel speaks, however, is not merely a matter of consciousness, in which subjective innocence is simply opposed to objective guilt. What is tragic is, on the contrary, to unconditionally assume an objective guilt in place of an apparently innocent subject. [...] Nothing is further from this model than Auschwitz. Here the deportee sees such a widening of the abyss between subjective innocence and objective guilt, between what he did do and what he could feel responsible for, that he cannot assume responsibility for any of his actions. [...] With an inversion that borders on parody, he feels he is innocent precisely for that which the tragic hero feels he is guilty; and guilty exactly for that which the tragic hero feels he is innocent. [...] But it is, above all, the ease with which this is remembered by the executioners [...] that leads us to suspect the tragic model as suitable to understand Auschwitz [...] they invoke it not so much to escape condemnation [...] as, rather, to make their situation appear to their own eyes in clearly more acceptable terms – those of a tragic conflict. "My client feels guilty before God, not before the law".

<sup>9</sup> "Tragedy emerges in Greece at the end of the 6th century. Even before one hundred years have passed, the tragic essence had already been exhausted, and when Aristotle, in *Poetics*, in the 4th century, seeks to establish its theory, he no longer understands the tragic man whom, so to speak, has become strange to him. Succeeding epopee and lyric poetry, and fading when philosophy triumphs, tragedy, as a literary genre, appears as the expression of a particular type of human experience, linked to certain social and psychological conditions". (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 2005, 8).

<sup>10</sup> Cannot confront tradition without deconstructing the paradigms, techniques, and practices through which tradition regulates the forms of transmission, conditions access to sources, and ultimately determines the very status of the knowing subject.

<sup>11</sup> That of provisory dialectics, which the magic wand of the *Aufhebung* would always be turning into something positive (...) but an absolute negativity and without redemption, that nonetheless does not, for this reason, resign to knowledge.

<sup>12</sup> Beyond good and evil is not the innocence of becoming, but a shame not only without guilt, but, so to speak, without time.

<sup>13</sup> What is, then, the character of the work, in which the pro-ductive activity of man takes place?

<sup>14</sup> The one who expresses in all its greatness, and in all its misery, the precarious sense of human action in the historical interval between that which no longer is and that which is not yet.

<sup>15</sup> The rupture of tradition, which is today an accomplished fact, actually starts an era in which between the old and the new there is no longer any possible connection.

<sup>16</sup> The ethical problem has changed radically (...). Beyond good and evil lies not the innocence of becoming but, rather, a shame that is not only without guilt but, so to speak, even without time.

<sup>17</sup> One must consider the old philosophical definition of man as *zoon logon echon*, the living being who has language [...] such articulation has been generally sought in the perspective of an I or a Voice – as a silent voice of conscience that appears to itself in inner discourse, on the one hand, and on the other, as an articulated voice, *phone enarthros*, in which language is tightly bound to the living being, inscribed in its very voice. Still stands the fact that, ultimately, this Voice is a mythologeme [...]. However, it is precisely this impossibility of uniting the living being and language, *phoné* and *logos*, the non-human and human [...] is what allows for testimony. [...] Testimony takes place in the non-place of articulation. (...) Precisely because the relationship (or, rather, non-relationship) between the living being and the speaking being encloses the form of shame, because we are reciprocally consigned to something that cannot be assumed by a subject, that the ethos of this separation can only be testimony, that is, something that cannot be assigned to a subject but that nevertheless constitutes the subject's only dwelling place, its only possible consistency.

<sup>18</sup> It is this mute and anguished conscience, this *sigetics* opened between the being-born of man and his speaking being, which philosophy, embracing the most profound demand of the tragic spectacle, proposes as the foundation for both logic and ethics.

<sup>19</sup> Hence, the procedure will be to question and neutralise the same bipolar device *bios/zoe*, to investigate less the articulation that keeps them together than the division that separated them. One must ask, therefore, how or with what strategies this division can be neutralised (...) In Puccinella there is no vegetative life separate from form of life, a *zoe* which may be distinct and separate from *bios*. In fact, he is neither one nor the other.

<sup>20</sup> At the end of *Oedipus at Colonus*, when the now-serene hero reaches the hour of death, he begs Theseus, who has accompanied him in those final instants, that no mortal should “utter a voice” at his tomb. [...] If Theseus respects this vow, he will have “a country forever without pain”. [...] By breaking the link between language and death, Oedipus – “the last man of pain” – puts an end to the chain of tragic guilt that is interminably transmitted in the nexus between the two *moiras* of man.

<sup>21</sup> The question “In what way does the living being have language?” corresponds exactly to the question “In what way does bare life dwell in the polis?” The living being has *logos* by taking away and conserving its own voice in it, even as it dwells in the polis by letting its own bare life be excluded, as an exception, within it. Politics therefore appear as the truly fundamental structure of Western metaphysics insofar as they occupy the threshold on which the relation between the living being and the *logos* is realised. In the “politicisation” of bare life – the metaphysical task par excellence – the humanity of living man is decided (...).

<sup>22</sup> That in the economy of the end of time, all things are summed up in Pulcinella, implies for him a new, a different experience of history, of life, and of time which is worth trying to understand.

<sup>23</sup> The non-living has two forms: character and phantasm. Character is the guardian of the threshold, who veils so that the non-living shall remain that way forever, printing on the void an unmistakable trait (what marks our void is not what we saw, but what remained unseen); the phantasm is an attempt at living what was not lived: every time its objective is lacking because the unlived is compulsively evoked as inaccessible. Pulcinella escapes from both: the character because he renounces the void with a mask; the phantasm because he relies only on childish oblivion.

<sup>24</sup> In the *Republic* (...) the Socratic dialogues are a fourth genre, in which the protagonist is not a man but a satyr.

<sup>25</sup> Is the release of the empirical character from any reference to an intelligible character and of the intelligible character from any function of legal or moral imputation?

<sup>26</sup> Action, which, according to an ancient and venerable tradition, is the sphere of politics, has no room here, as it lost its subject and conscience.

<sup>27</sup> However, Pulcinella is not for that reason simply apolitical, he announces and requires different politics, which no longer take place in action, but he shows what a body can accomplish when every action becomes impossible.

<sup>28</sup> A past that has not been lived, and therefore that technically cannot be defined as “past”, but that somehow has remained present.

<sup>29</sup> It loses its original condition.

<sup>30</sup> Only at this point the past that has not been lived reveals itself as what it was: a contemporary of

the present, and thus, it becomes accessible for the first time, introducing itself as a ‘source’”.

<sup>31</sup> The question is not as much whether poetry would be relevant or not with respect to politics as whether politics would still be at the height of its originating cohesion with poetry.

<sup>32</sup> But beyond tragicomedy, I'd rather say, like it pleased Manganelli, the ‘ilarotragedia’. Pulcinella blasts the frontiers that separate both genres, and the space that opens up between them, which is no longer tragic, or comical, or even tragicomic, is what interests me.

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## Cultural Heritage, Art and Politics in Wagner's *Lohengrin* A Dialectical Reinterpretation

**Abstract:** The “forbidden question” – leitmotif of so many legends since the Antiquity – is staged by Wagner in an opera portraying the medieval story of Lohengrin, the son of Parsifal (the King of the Grail). Elsa, the main feminine character, violates, as happens in all the legends, the interdiction. The thesis I will prove in the present paper is the following: the fact that Elsa, although she was warned of the consequences, asks the mysterious Knight who saved her and who she married to confess who he is and whence he came, does not situate her outwards the ideal of *eternal feminine* (*das Ewig-weiblich*) – sought by the romantics and by the composer himself. I claim, contrary to the most interpretations which state that Wagner's opera develops the symbolism of the binomial “transcendent virtues – corruptibility and the fickleness of the terrestrial world”, that the interdiction to ask is not a criterion to determine whether or not Elsa is the feminine reflection of Lohengrin (in order to be possible their absolute union). On the contrary, in my opinion, the true moral imperative is precisely the opposite: to ask the question! This fact becomes clearer if we notice that the main conflict of Wagner's *Lohengrin* is, in fact, a dialectical-historical one (in the Hegelian sense) i.e. the conflict between the contradictory political entities of the Duchy of Brabant. Regarded through the prism of dialectics, Elsa proves out not to be the symbol of fickleness, but, like Brünnhilde (from *The Ring of the Nibelungs* – Siegfried), Senta (from *The Flying Dutchman*) or Elisabeth (from *Tannhäuser*), a saviour.

**Keywords:** Wagner, Hegel, dialectics, cultural heritage, politics, philosophy of history

The Duchy of Brabant, the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Heinrich I, the first King of the German States, comes to call the nobles to fight the Hungarians, but finds himself in the midst of a conflict of succession. Friedrich von Telramund, advised by his wife Ortrud, accuses Elsa (the heiress of the throne) of fratricide, committed in complicity with a secret lover. As the protector of Gottfried – Elsa's disappeared brother who was supposed to become Duke – Friedrich asks the King to appoint him as the new leader of the Land.

The above political-amorous intrigue is staged by Wagner in the First Act of the opera *Lohengrin*. Then follows the process, during which King Heinrich realises he will not be able to reach a rationally founded verdict.

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He has no other option than to appeal to the divine justice: the guilty to be designated through a fight. Elsa falls to her knees, prays, and then the miracle happens ("ein unerhörtes, nie gesehenes Wunder!", *A miracle has happened, a miracle never before seen or heard!* – the nobles exclaim): a mysterious Knight brought by a swan offers to help her, with one condition: never to ask him to reveal his identity and the place whence he came: "Nie sollst du mich befragen!" (*You shall never ask me!*)

As expected, Elsa accepts the pact. She promises to marry him: "Mein Held, mein Retter! Dir geb ich alles, was ich bin" (*I give you all that I am!*), being fully aware of the sexual implications of this act: "Geb 'ich dir Leib und Seele frei" (*I freely give you my body and my soul*). The Knight defeats Friedrich. The next day he marries Elsa. The morning after, the literary motif of "forbidden question" gets the same denouement as in all the legends: the pact is violated. At the request of his wife, the Knight confesses, in front of Heinrich and of the army prepared to go to the battle, that he is Lohengrin, the son of Parsifal – the King of the Grail, came from Mount Monsalvat to bring justice. The secret being compromised, he is forced to return immediately, while Elsa dies.

I will not dwell on the events happened between the moment of the promise and that of the confession, nor on the multiple meanings of Wagner's operas: the symbolism of the antagonisms: divine – mundane, old magical pagan religion (Ortrud) – Christianity, purity – terrestrial fickleness, spiritual love – sensorial passion (the dilemma of the romantics); about Lohengrin and the ideal of virtue, or as a symbol of the artist who wishes to be understood and accepted – the alter ego of Wagner (the composer explicitly affirms this connotation). What intrigues me is something much simpler: why Elsa should not have to ask?

In the Romanian cultural space, there is a story with a similar theme. The husband, endowed with magical powers (he builds overnight a bridge decorated with precious stones and transforms the shabby house of his parents into a castle) also hides a secret, whereof his lover is forbidden to ask. Yet, this time, it is the King who grants him his daughter's hand, as a reward for his deeds, without her to consent beforehand. And differs also something else: the husband is a pig. Fortunately for the princess, he undresses his animal skin during the night, thus turning himself into a handsome man. The reason she no longer resists, violates the pact and burns the pigskin is obvious. As a consequence, the husband disappears. She is forced to look for him, thus going through a long formative journey. At the end, she saves the Prince from the curse and receives forgiveness.

Elsa does not face such a situation. It is not the lack of life experience that makes her ask the forbidden question, he does not suffer from pure curiosity as Pandora, nor feels an uncontrollable desire to feel the divine nature of her lover in its fullness, as happens in the romance between

Semele and Zeus. On the contrary, she has a religious vision upon life and reflects all the high ideals and moral standards that Lohengrin symbolises.

Secondly, their marriage is not arranged in advance, being imposed to her an unknown partner who, thereafter, might prove to be a good prince in pigskin or the evil King Bluebeard. Elsa already knew the Knight and was in love with him. The attraction did not result from an intentionally ambiguous game of seduction, which could have left behind many unanswered questions. On the contrary, their first meeting happened the only possible way her doubts would have been dispelled: at the occasion of an ecstatic vision provoked by prayer (the guarantee for the Knight's virtue). Ortrud does not understand this fact and accuses her of having a secret lover. King Heinrich, after seeing her transfigured, reliving his spiritual experience during the trial (aria "Einsam in trüben Tagen"), becomes more cautious and suggests Friedrich to reconsider his charges ("Friedrich, du ehrenwerter Mann, bedenke wohl, wen klagst du an?", *Friedrich, you honourable man, think carefully, whom are you accusing?*)

The appearance of Lohengrin represents, therefore, a reunion with her beloved, not a surprise. Elsa has no reason to inquire whether or not his future husband hides something bad. The musical composition is suggestive in this regard. The leitmotif of the Grail (the symbol of purity, justice and virtue) is repeated at the moment the Knight enters the scene. The forbidden question itself combines a grave musical theme ("Nie sollst du mich befragen, noch Wissens Sorge tragen...") with one similar to that of the Grail ("... woher ich kam der Fahrt, noch wie mein Nam und Art"), which rather suggests the nostalgia for the place he left ("I came from light, not from darkness" he confesses during their wedding night), than a danger, a menacing secret. The King believes Lohengrin, also the nobles from Brabant.

What made, therefore, Elsa to violate the pact and, of course, why such a pact was necessary? The answer: Lohengrin was part of the brotherhood of the Grail, whose regulations obliged him to remain anonymous does not seem to me to rend the essence of the problem. In this opera (which is a secondary story of the legend of Parsifal), the Grail does not have a strictly religious connotation. It rather symbolises a sum of values incarnated by the concrete human individual. Moreover, if it would have been only about an objective rule of anonymity, why is not allowed for Elsa the forgiveness and the redemption and must instantly die?

A second explanation: the future duchess was supposed to prove that virtue cannot be corrupted by the evil, stifling the seed of doubt sown by the stirrer Ortrud. This too seems to me incomplete. Indeed, Elsa is troubled, but not necessarily by the accusations of witchcraft that Ortrud made circulate, but by the need her innocence to be confirmed in the privacy of their marital relationship. She is afraid, secondly, that her partner

will suddenly disappear. However, are all these reasons sufficient to break the pact?

I claim, contrary to the most interpretations which state that Wagner's opera develops the symbolism of the binomial "virtues of the transcendent world – corruptibility and the fickleness of the terrestrial one", that "Nie sollst du mich befragen!" is not a criterion to determine whether or not she is the feminine reflection of Lohengrin (in order to be possible their absolute union). On the contrary, the true moral imperative is the opposite: "Ask the question!" – "Do sollst befragen!".

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Immanuel Kant observes the existence of two types of moral principles: maxims and laws. The firsts derive, more or less visible, from the desire of a person for a certain determined result. For this reason, Kant says, they are contingents. The moral law, by contrast, is universal and does not depend on a specific content. The categorical imperative – "So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle of a universal legislation" (Kant 2002, 45) – excludes the particular desire of the person who formulates it.

The imperative enounced by Lohengrin is a maxim. Its purpose is determined and personal: to save their union, to validate their mutual trust, to fulfil the spiritual love and confirm her virtue. Yet, universal and historic value can be assigned only to its opposite – that which Elsa applies it, assuming herself all the risks. This fact becomes much clearer if we notice that the main conflict of Wagner's opera is, in fact, a dialectical-historical one (in the Hegelian sense), the romance between them being only the mechanism which produces the becoming of the world-spirit.

Wagner composes Lohengrin in a tense period of time in terms of politics, hoping to revive the dream of a unified Germany. Not accidentally the first scene depicts, with fast, Heinrich der Vogler, the founder of the medieval Germany, preparing to start a fight that brought together all the nobles and made them realize the importance of a strong state, able to protect its borders.

The initial conflict – of the political world of Brabant – constitutes the first moment of a dialectical triad. Both involved instances are contradictory. In Hegelian terms, the object does not correspond to its concept. Ortrud and Friedrich are a political entity which unifies the theoretical reason and the action, the praxis. Its essence is, however, its own self. They want to enjoy the benefits brought by the rank of Duke instead of ruling for the welfare of the others – as the concept of *leader* supposes.

The moral qualities and wishes of Elsa reflect it. For Hegel, however, in the absence of its real objectification, any concept remains only an abstract construct. Elsa does not possess the concrete possibilities of political action. Brooding spirit, lacking the necessary tools for undertaking concrete actions (political governance, participation in war alongside Heinrich), she reflects

the concept only *in itself* (as latency), not *for itself* (in the act). This second entity is, therefore, also contradictory.

Hegel describes, in the *Phenomenology of spirits*, at least two similar situations: at the transition towards the “Unhappy consciousness” and in the chapter entitled *The world of self-alienated Spirit*, in the context of the conflict between *faith* and *Enlightened reason*. In both (just as for Brabant), the options available in the real-historical world are contradictory. The so-called “unhappy conscience” is preceded by the unsuccessful experience of two attitudes – the stoicism and the scepticism – the only by which the servant – for it is about him in this fragment – could, at that moment, to know himself from its relationship with the physical world and thus to become free. As a result, it remains for him only the certainty of this failure and the formal thought (as a result of the scepticism) that he is trapped between something non-essential and something essential. Since it is his own failure, both his consciousness and the physical world are no-essential. Consequently, essential can be only the negative of both, something radically different of them. The solution, in other words, cannot come elsewhere than from outside, from the transcendent world.

This way consciousness meets, for the first time, something of a higher order than it. Its capability to understand the cult, religion is, however, an early and naïve one. Consciousness is not able to capture the Absolute in its truth: “For the Unhappy Consciousness the in-itself is the beyond of itself” (Hegel 2004, 139). In order to access it – consciousness thinks at this time – it “must liberate from itself”, deny itself. Another solution it cannot conceive for it is not yet aware of its unity with the Absolute (as will be after experiencing another several stages of its paideic journey), but only about the differences; hence her unhappiness.

The protagonist of the second fragment is consciousness became, meanwhile, spirit, *i.e.* knows it is a part of the historical world and that essentially depends on other self-consciousness. This time also, the available possibilities it has in order to raise itself, through education, above its natural state, are exhausted. State power and wealth, used separately or both assimilated by the “noble conscience” (or by the *ignoble*), the service brought to the leader or the advice, all proved to be contradictory. They do not guarantee the good, as it was initially assumed. When translated into the real world, they produce an opposite effect. For consciousness, it remains available only the “pure thought”, without any specific content, therefore, this time also, it must head towards the transcendent world. If compared to the first manifestations of the cult, *faith* – as it appears at this moment – is a superior form by which consciousness reports itself to the Absolute. But this time also, it is not sufficient for itself, for it is not revealed religion – as the spiritual consciousness will discover it in the last part of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. This actuality of the essence, Hegel explains, is not an

actuality of the real consciousness. "Although it is raised into the element of thought it does not yet count as a thought for this actual consciousness; rather it lies for the latter beyond its own actuality, for it is the flight from this actuality. Religion – for it is obviously religion that we are speaking about – in the form in which it appears here as the faith belonging to the world of culture, does not yet appear as it is in and for itself" (Hegel 2004, 322). Its shortcomings will come out soon, as a result of the confrontation with its negative, with the Enlightened pure insight.

The historical course of Brabant cannot be continued by the couple Ortrud-Friedrich or by Elsa, because both these options are contradictory. The salvation, therefore, should come from elsewhere: from the transcendent world of pure virtues of the Grail. The arrival of Lohengrin initiates, thus, the second moment of the dialectical triad. The couple Elsa-Lohengrin reflects the concept of leader *for-itself*. But, this time, it lacks its *in-itself*. Their union is impossible, self-contradictory. Both have rather the conscience of their difference. During the two days their terrestrial relationship lasts, Lohengrin realizes he is not fully aware of his mission: saviour? lover? leader of the army of Brabant in the battle? Only at the end he finds out that, for instance, the swan which brought him was actually Gottfried, Elsa's brother, turned into an animal by Ortrud. Elsa, in her turn, realizes she will never be able fully to understand her husband.

Semele gets pregnant and then gives birth to Dionysus. So happens with the princess from the Romanian fairytale about the pig. For Elsa, the wedding night, instead of being the moment of their union, is that of their irreconcilable separation. The sexual intercourse, assumed from the very beginning, does not happen.

In *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Freud reports the case of a 30 years old woman suffering from severe obsessive behaviour (Freud 1920, 221-236). Several times a day, she runs into the room next to her bedroom, sits at the table, calls the maid, gives her various orders or, sometimes, fires her without reason. The cause of these obsessions, Freud explains, is her unsuccessful wedding night. Ten years ago, she married a much older man, who ran during the entire wedding night between the two chambers, trying unsuccessfully to get ready for the sexual intercourse. In the morning, for not to embarrass himself in front of the maid and of those who might have found out, he split red ink on the sheet. He failed this time also because he split it in another place than that in which was supposed to be the stain. Visiting the room, Freud observes a splash of red ink, this time, on the tablecloth. The place the young woman was sitting was specifically chosen so the maid, when entering the door, easily sees the splash. Thus, the obsessive gesture not only reproduces the traumatic scene but corrects it, in an attempt to save the husband.

The case of Elsa, if regarded through the prism of Freudian psychoanalysis, turns out to be even worse. The wedding night is not failed because of Lohengrin, a fact that might cause, in the future, a neurotic behaviour. The way Wagner builds this scene suggests, perhaps more than the composer himself thought, the impossibility of their union. The sexual intercourse is brutally interrupted. Friedrich rushes into their room and attacks Lohengrin. The last, trying to defend himself, kills him. Eros, the sexual instinct of life, is not blocked, as in the case of the young patient, but is replaced with *Todestrieb* – *the death drive*, the drive of self-destruction. *Trieb* and *Instinkt* oppose each other: when established, the death drive causes behaviours opposite to those dictated by the vital instincts. Freud observed this fact by treating soldiers returned from the front. This experience made him write the book *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). *Todestrieb*, he explains, leads to repetition, not to an evolution. The soldiers suffered from recurrent dreams of the trauma, contrary to the expectancy of pleasure from the sleep. This drive made them repeat the traumatic experiences instead of reminding them as something belonging to the past.

Thus regarded, Elsa's trauma accentuates the contradiction. It is clear, from now on, that also this second dialectical moment must be denied. Yet, the *negation of the negation*, for Hegel, does not return us to the initial moment, repeating it, but generates a third one which resolves the first two. The historical-universal aim at which the couple Elsa-Lohengrin participates is the fight of Heinrich for the unification of the nation. When considered separately, the second moment – that of their amorous relationship – has its own goals and moral maxims. Yet, regarded from the viewpoint of the *world-spirit* (*i.e.* of universal history), it turns out to be a mere contradictory intermediary moment, which is required to be exceeded. Elsa has to choose between acting for a particular purpose or in favour of the universal law. She chooses, when she becomes aware of the impossibility of their union, the second one. "The forbidden question" must receive an answer, the terms of the contradiction must be acknowledged in their truth, even this will produce the denial of both of them.

"I will be the woman who, by her love, will save you", Senta says to the Captain of the Flying Dutchman, doomed to sail forever. And so it happens. Siegfried is saved by Brünnhilde, Elisabeth by Tannhäuser. The Pope does not forgive him for visiting the Mount Venus, the place of pleasure, despite his pilgrimage to Rome and his penitence. "You will be forgiven when my staff will blossom", the Pope says to him. Tannhäuser returns disappointed and finds out that Elisabeth died while praying for him. In the last scene of the opera, the pilgrims announce the miracle: on the Pope's staff sprouted new leaves. Elisabeth sacrificed herself, thus saving his soul.

Unconditional love and salvation coming from the part of that woman who embodies the ideal of *eternal feminine* (*das Ewig-weiblich*) is a recurrent theme in Wagner's operas. The composer himself sought, and seems he managed, in the end, to find that women able to save him and to bring peace to his soul, just as Gretchen, from the heaven, saved Faust ("Das Ewig – weiblich / zieht uns hinan" ("The Eternally Female draws us onward")) – are the lyrics which end Goethe's *Faust II*.

By asking the "forbidden question" Elsa does not situate herself, as it may seem, outward the ideal of *Ewig-weiblich*. Yet, it is not Lohengrin who she saves, but the course of history. Her death – the last scene of the opera – is not a simple negation, is not a punishment, but produces a transformation. Elsa sacrifices herself, Lohengrin disappears, and history is continued by Gottfried, her brother brought back to human form. It is him, in fact, who reflects the concept of the leader of Brabant *in- and for-itself i.e.* a leader able to fight alongside Heinrich for the universal-historical purpose of unifying the nation.

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## *Arbor Vitae* dans l'iconographie franciscaine

### *Arbor Vitae* in Franciscan Iconography

**Abstract:** Taddeo Gaddi, a disciple of Giotto, is the author of a fresco called "Lignum vitae", located in the heart of the Basilica of "Santa Croce" in Florence. Inspired by the theological and philosophical writings of Bonaventura and Ubertino da Casale, the work in question has been the subject of many attempts to elucidate, understand and interpret it. The most recent and comprehensive retrospective synthesis – equally critically and hermeneutically – is analyzed in the following pages.

**Keywords:** iconography, Franciscan philosophy, *Arbor Vitae*, Bonaventure, Taddeo Gaddi, Ubertino da Casale

Jusqu'au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle, la culture de l'Europe occidentale s'inscrit dans un paradigme philosophico-politique « vertical », dominé par Un, l'anagogie et la hiérarchie, basé sur une idéologie de l'autorité pyramidale, théocratique, déduite de prémisses plutôt néoplatoniciennes qu'évangéliques. Au début de l'époque suivante, on ressent un changement de paradigme, faisant place à des figures « horizontales » à la façon du monde, de la nature et de la liberté. Petit à petit, de nouveaux ordres monacaux, depuis longtemps en recherche d'une nouvelle identité, apparaissent. L'appropriation de l'ethos évangélique, l'idée de *l'Imitatio Christi* gagne de plus en plus terrain, calquées sur une nouvelle théologie de l'histoire – dont la forme est donnée par le calabrais Gioacchino da Fiore (1135-1202), qui prophétisait la suprématie évidente des moines (*virī spirituales*) sur les institutions ecclésiastiques. L'Ordre fondé par François d'Assise (1181-1226) va répondre justement à ces exigences. Sensible et généreux, François dédie des poèmes à la « nature » qu'il considère comme étant d'essence divine. *Cantico di frate Sole* (« Le chant du frère Soleil ») exalte les vertus fraternelles de la « langue » naturelle de la divinité, dans laquelle le soleil, la lune, le vent, l'eau, le feu, la terre tiennent lieu de lettres (François d'Assise 1997, 136-137; Hesse 1993, 62-63). Grâce aux moines franciscains, les renouvellements culturels sont nombreux. Les plus importants d'entre eux présentent une charge éthique, politique, philosophique et iconographique.

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Avant tout, François d'Assise aurait voulu changer le monde, le guérir de ses obsessions de richesse et de pouvoir absolu. Ceux qu'il visait, étaient les nobles, les rois de l'époque, mais aussi les têtes de l'Eglise de Rome, qui avaient « oublié » la signification du message chrétien qui leur avait été transmis pour être mis en pratique, et servaient plutôt un orgueil démesuré, un égoïsme et une avidité sans limite.

Le message de Saint François semblait, également, utopique et idéaliste. A la place de la guerre, les franciscains prêchaient la paix ; à la place de la discorde et des acharnements, ils invoquaient les bienfaits de la douceur et de la fraternité. Une morale élémentaire, tenant du bon sens, portait à l'attention des choses simples, mais essentielles. Le sens de la vie devait être recherché dans les nombreux actes de charité et non pas dans la volupté de l'épargne. L'écoute du prochain, la pauvreté, la simplicité, le refus des privilèges, l'humilité et l'égalité ont été les thèmes préférés des moines qui se sont destinés au pèlerinage pastoral. Quel enseignement prêchait les franciscains ? Comment se dédier entièrement aux autres ; comment être en vérité « le plus petit des plus petits » pour servir ; comment valoriser le prochain, concrétisant en actes le bien et la beauté... Celui-ci explique peut-être, la sympathie dont ont joui tout au long des années les membres de cet ordre, ramifié aujourd'hui dans le monde entier.

Assise est la petite ville qui a changé les fondements de la compréhension du pouvoir et sa gestion. Le pouvoir du leader doit consister dans le soutien et la protection des autres et non pas dans la possibilité de les dominer, de les contrôler et de les manipuler. L'importance n'est pas dans les responsabilités temporaires, mais dans l'opportunité que donnent celles-ci d'être de façon inconditionnée « à la disposition » ou « au service » de la communauté. Combien fantaisistes et invraisemblables sont ces idées pour le monde d'aujourd'hui...

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Sur le plan philosophique, les éléments innovants sont aussi importants. Le franciscanisme modère dans une certaine mesure le naturalisme aristotélique, faisant du monde un lieu de passage vers un bonheur proche et accessible. Le concept d'une nature « déifiée » sera argumenté avec plus de vigueur philosophique par Bonaventure (1221-1274) dans son *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, texte où il explique « les marches de l'élévation vers Dieu et sa contemplation par ses signes dans le monde » (Bonaventura 1994, 9; Merino 1993, 84-89). L'univers est structuré symboliquement; le monde est comme une échelle par laquelle nous montons vers le Créateur. Ceci peut être perçu par ses *signes* (ses traces) dans le monde sensible, « car les choses créées de ce monde signifient les choses invisibles, celles de Dieu » (Bonaventura 1994, 25). Chaque chose est l'écho sensible du *Logos* divin. On arrive ainsi à une perception « symbolique » du signe, différente de celle

jusque-là familière aux théologiens scholastiques occidentaux. Le symbole ne peut pas être séparé de ce qu'il symbolise. Si le monde est la création de Dieu, il faut voir dans chaque chose *le signe, la trace* ou *l'effigie* du Créateur. Une tradition philosophique de la meilleure facture s'est maintenue dans cet esprit. Alexander Hales, Jean de la Rochelle, Bonaventure, Roger Bacon, Piero Giovanni Olivi, Raymundus Lullus, John Peckham, Robert Grosseteste, John Duns Scotus, Williams Ockham ne sont que quelques-unes des voix autorisées de la théologie et de la philosophie franciscaines.

Les franciscains se sont impliqués de façon décisive dans la « querelle des universaux », c'est-à-dire touchant à la nature des concepts universels (s'agit-il de « noms », de calculs linguistiques, ou d'entités « réelles » ?) tranchée de manière spéculative par la dispute entre nominalisme et réalisme (Alain de Libera 1996). Comment pouvons-nous déterminer le rapport entre l'universel et les formes individuelles ? Même s'il considère toute la discussion comme une « folie », Roger Bacon (1214-1292) donne un verdict essentialiste ; l'individualisation n'est pas contenue dans la matière, mais dans l'essence ou le propre de chaque chose (Maloney 1983, 120-154). Ceci préfigure la solution de John Duns Scotus (1265-1308). Les universaux ne sont pas des fictions de l'intellect. L'individualisation s'explique en faisant appel aux ressources sémantiques du mot *haecceitas*, par lequel nous identifions ce qui fait qu'une chose est ce qu'elle est, tout en se différenciant des autres par l'ajout de certaines caractéristiques positives. De façon générale, l'existence individuelle naît par l'addition à l'essence générale – *quidditas* – de qualités qui distinguent l'individuel. « L'homme » se distingue de l'animal si on ajoute « à la vie » – leur caractéristique commune – *l'humanité*, comme note distinctive (Duns Scotus 2007; Dumitriu 1995, 104; Merino 1993, 265-269).

Lorsque William Ockham (environ 1280-1347), « le plus qualifié nominaliste scholastique », contredit la thèse traditionnelle de la métaphysique de l'universel, il prétend que le problème mène à l'affirmation de l'individuel et argumente en faveur d'une « ontologie du concret singulier », accessible par l'expérience directe (Alféri 1994, 15-105).

Le Franciscain Roger Bacon, l'illustre *Doctor Mirabilis* de la théologie scholastique, élabore une théorie des signes incluse dans son *De signis*, avec l'intention de donner un fondement consistant aux sciences, partant de considérations d'ordre linguistique et sémiotique. Mobilisé aussi sur un autre front idéatique, Duns Scotus, *Le Docteur Subtil* de l'Ordre Franciscain, considère utile la recherche d'un concept adéquat, omni compréhensible, qui efface les différences entre le discours métaphysique et théologique et soit applicable à la fois à Dieu et aux créatures. Celui-ci va être le concept « des univocités de la personne », considérer l'instrument mental qui pourrait ouvrir l'homme à la réalité totale, finie et infinie, humaine et divine, contingente et nécessaire. Les idées de son *Opus Oxoniense o Ordinatione*

reconsidèrent de façon concrète la philosophie classique, pensée sur le mode de l'analogie, inaugurant la possibilité de contenir de façon univoque et synthétique le monde, ainsi que Dieu.

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L'iconographie franciscaine, illustrée en particulier par les créations de Cimabue et Giotto, aura plus tard, un impact décisif sur l'art européen. La Basilique « San Francesco » d'Assise, La Chapelle « Scrovegni » de Padoue, la Basilique « Santa Croce » de Florence ne sont que quelques-uns des lieux emblématiques de la tradition franciscaine. Que doit-on aux artistes attachés à cette tradition ? « L'invention du corps », dans le sens anatomique, moderne, nouveauté observée sur *les Crucifix* réalisés par Cimabue et Giotto à Florence (Laneyrie-Dagen 2006, 100), bien avant les représentations dues à Léonard de Vinci et Michelange. Giotto, de plus, « change l'art de la peinture, en le faisant passer de la forme grecque à la forme latine, moderne » (Cennini 1977, 36). Il propose un langage qui révolutionne la peinture, réexaminant les rapports entre espace, couleur et volumes, tout en intégrant la lumière dans la figuration des corps. Le même Giotto introduit un principe « narratif » dans le déploiement des scènes peintes, lues comme des tableaux distincts et il impose aussi une grille de lecture inédite, de gauche à droite (Vasari 1962, 214-226; Stoichiță 2015, 32-51).

La représentation des vices et des vertus dans la Chapelle « Scrovegni » mise sur les ressources de l'allégorie et du symbole qui engage celui qui regarde à faire un effort de reconstruction ou de rassemblement sémantique. Important sera aussi, sur le plan de la technique picturale, le passage de la perspective frontale du portrait (propre aux icônes qui « idéalisaient » le visage de Jésus) à la représentation de profil – plus dynamique, réaliste et profondément humanisée.

Parmi les éminents disciples de Giotto nous trouvons Taddeo Gaddi, auteur d'une fresque intitulée *Lignum vitae*, peinte dans le cénacle de la Basilique « Santa Croce » à Florence. Inspirée par les écrits théologico-philosophiques de Bonaventure et d'Ubertino da Casale, l'œuvre en question a fait l'objet de plusieurs essais d'éclairage, de compréhension et d'interprétation. La rétrospective la plus récente et la plus synthétique – à la fois critique et herméneutique – est analysé dans les pages suivantes.

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*L'art et l'esthétique franciscains des XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles*, livre signé par Eugen Răchiteanu (Răchiteanu 2017), peut être situé à la confluence de l'histoire de l'art et de la philosophie. Le premier domaine est exploré à l'aide d'instruments iconographiques et iconologiques, dans le sens consacré par Aby Warburg et Erwin Panofsky (Panofsky 1980), tandis que la philosophie est abordée surtout sous l'angle de l'esthétique spéculative. Le doctorat en

« Sacra Teologia – iconographie », soutenu à la Faculté Pontificale St. Bonaventure à Rome, et également l'exercice d'enseignement de l'esthétique philosophique pratiqué dans un Institut Théologique Franciscain sont les preuves que l'auteur couvre, à un haut niveau, les deux compétences. En qualité de « directeur spirituel » à la Basilique « Santa Croce » de Florence (lieu où aujourd'hui il coordonne la parution de certaines publications à caractère religieux), Eugen Răchiteanu a pu admirer quotidiennement, dans la salle à manger du couvent, la fresque impressionnante de Taddeo Gaddi. Voilà... le détail qui nous offre un premier indice sur son inédite option thématique.

Construite et argumentée géométriquement, la démarche d'Eugen Răchiteanu a l'allure d'un vaste chantier. L'auteur recueille des informations, les confronte l'une à l'autre et les rassemble en fonction de ce dont elles relèvent, cherchant à chaque pas des sources, des affinités et des influences.

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L'iconographie franciscaine a une spécificité que l'on ne peut en aucun cas confondre; elle stipule les règles concernant le contenu de l'image, le nombre de personnages utilisés, leur place dans le cadre, leur gestuelle, les éléments de décor, les couleurs, l'interprétation d'ensemble de la composition, de sorte que le message ainsi maximisé a toutes les chances d'atteindre son but. La philosophie franciscaine a comparé l'art figuratif à la *Biblia pauperum* : en contemplant les images, l'homme simple, découvre le contenu des Saintes Ecritures, et élève ainsi sa pensée vers ce qui le dépasse. L'art sacré offre au croyant une voie d'accès à la beauté de la vie, de la nature et de Dieu. La pierre d'angle, selon le concept franciscain, de la représentation plastique est *l'incarnation du Seigneur* : « Et le Verbe c'est fait chair et il a habité parmi nous » (*L'Evangile selon Jean 1, 14*).

Réplique de « l'arbre de la connaissance », *Arbor vitae* a été théorisé et représenté dans la culture franciscaine dès l'origine des temps, perçu comme un grand *arbre*, haut, richement ramifié, en forme d'*axis mundi*, unifiant le ciel et la terre, l'esprit et la matière, pour rapprocher l'homme de Dieu. L'arbre édénique serait la préfiguration de la croix chrétienne, annonçant la résurrection de la vie par le sacrifice du Christ. Les franciscains opèrent le passage de la représentation du *Christus triumphans* (Christ vainqueur de la mort) à celle du *Christus patiens* (Christ suspendu sur la croix). Aux environs de l'an 1200, constate Eugen Răchiteanu, l'image de Jésus sur la croix gagne en réalisme ainsi qu'en dramatisme: seuls les bras cloués maintiennent le poids du corps, les yeux sont fermés, le front sillonné de rides, les doigts des mains sont blessés, le corps apparaît contorsionné et cabré, les pieds cramponnés au bois de la croix.

Les sources d'inspiration de Taddeo Gaddi ont été identifiées dans les écrits de Bonaventure et d'Ubertino da Casale, exponents remarquables de

la pensée franciscaine. La fresque florentine semble être la transposition en images du *Lignum vitae*, écrite par Bonaventure. Celui-ci conçoit le texte sous la forme d'un diagramme qui organise de manière accessible l'information, facilitant en même temps la mémoire, la lecture et la méditation. L'opuscule a la forme symbolique d'un arbre: chaque branche représente un chapitre des épisodes bibliques qui racontent les événements de la vie, de la mort et de la résurrection du Christ. Chacune de ces trois parties est divisée en deux « fruits », correspondant aux chapitres. L'arbre est un arbre de la vie; la souffrance de Jésus est représentée par les branches qui poussent du tronc vertical. Pour Bonaventure, le thème va devenir emblématique, son œuvre représentée plastiquement soit par une croix, soit par une croix d'où germent la vigne et ses sarments.

Dans l'œuvre de « Santa Croce », Gaddi décrit quarante-huit épisodes christologiques; le tronc de « l'arbre de vie » est substitué par le bras vertical de la croix sur laquelle le Christ est crucifié et d'où sortent douze branches couvertes de fruits. Dans le *Lignum vitae*, aux pieds du *Croix arbre*, Bonaventure reste à côté de Saint François, écrivant sur un parchemin les premiers mots de son traité (« *O crux frutex salvificus* »). Texte et image, lettre et esprit. On rencontre ainsi les figures qui hypostasient la vocation intellectuelle et institutionnelle de l'Ordre – d'un côté, la vocation spirituelle ou mystique – de l'autre.

Eugen Răchiteanu croit que pour Gaddi une deuxième source aurait été *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu*, d'Ubertino da Casale (1259-1330), théologien influencé, lui aussi, par Bonaventure. Indépendamment de tout cela, tandis que *Lignum vitae* fait référence exclusivement à la vie du Christ, les cinq parties de l'œuvre d'Ubertino incluent aussi l'Histoire de l'Eglise, c'est-à-dire une perspective eschatologique. Pour identifier les points communs, mais aussi les différences, l'auteur fait une étude comparative des deux textes, en présentant en miroir, la *philosophie* de l'art franciscain et *l'art* de la philosophie franciscaine de Toscane des XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles.

Eugen Răchiteanu en conclut que Bonaventure, ainsi que pour une grande part, Ubertino da Casale, gardent le schéma traditionnel de l'Arbre comme image de vie. La vision bonaventurienne de la vie et la de beauté est subsumée à l'idée que l'univers est pénétré de la présence du Créateur. Ubertino propose en plus une philosophie de l'amour envers la nature, du respect envers toutes les créatures de l'univers, inspirée par les idées de Saint François.

Les auteurs analysés perçoivent l'art et la beauté dans une double perspective: à la fois gnoséologique et métaphysique. La connaissance et la contemplation de Dieu sont indispensables à l'économie de tout projet ontologique visant au bonheur. Même si d'essence différente, l'art divin et l'art humain sont liés entre eux. L'homme peut être la création de Dieu dans l'ordre de la nature, mais aussi du peintre qui le traduit en image, même s'il

s'agit d'un registre dérivé, artificiel. La représentation de « l'arbre de vie » devient exemplaire pour les « frères » franciscains; par la contemplation de la croix « arborescente » du Christ, chacun se sent comme une « branche » de l'histoire sainte, une partie intégrante de l'arbre qui porte du fruit, aspirant à la connaissance de soi-même, à la connaissance de Dieu, à l'accomplissement au sens chrétien du terme.

Argumenté et documenté de façon convaincante, le livre d'Eugen Răchiteanu a de nombreuses qualités. Un de ses premiers mérites est celui d'avoir assumé un projet difficile et de l'avoir approfondi dans des directions analytiques parmi les plus culturellement enrichissantes. Un deuxième mérite est d'avoir testé « par lui-même » certaines hypothèses et conclusions, permettant d'en assumer personnellement la démarche. Impressionnante par l'érudition et le contenu, la biographie est consistante et a recours à des sources de bonne facture, à l'utilisation d'études critiques actuelles; la densité des notes, des analyses et des commentaires constitue un atout supplémentaire, et donne du poids à l'ensemble. Le livre est le test final d'un chercheur sérieux, qui explore avec passion et discernement le vocabulaire de la philosophie, de la théologie et des arts visuels dans leur configuration actuelle.

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# V A R I A

Anton ADĂMUȚ\*

## On Chastity and Acces to Truth – Two Models –

**Abstract:** The cult of love is not in marriage, it is outside and in chastity. Faithfulness of this kind is unjustified; when one justifies it, one masks it. Love – passion is asceticism, pedagogy, spiritual exercise and in this exercise one can find what is called *fine amor*. This is an erotic of the possession of the desire that makes the difference between “close love” and “love from afar”, both being based on self-control and mastery of desire. Socrates, in the *Symposium*, is wise also in the fact that it is in his power not to respond to the provocative beauty of Alcibiades. Chastity is not foreign to access to truth and it is more than a model of abstinence. In the same way, the cult of truth is not outside it, but in itself. And, despite all appearances, although they seem to constrain definitively, and truth and love end up making us free, whether we want it or not. A Socratic model and a medieval one speak in this text precisely about these things to which we remain true, even if we do not always realize this fact.

**Keywords:** truth, love, chastity, faithfulness, eroticism

I begin in this text from the premise that, in the Platonic erotic experience, love and sexuality are not compatible, the same way as in courtly love it comes to the situation to claim that love and marriage are not compatible. If courtly love (or of chivalry against marriage), the central term is that of “faithfulness” and this one is against for both marriage and “fulfillment of love” (not “fulfilled love”, which is valid also in the Platonic erotica and in the chivalry one). Faithfulness is identical with the passion that the disciple shows the master unconditionally. Passion defeats lust, philosophy defeats rhetoric and the Platonic homoerotic is exactly like a perfect “marriage” but not consumed, for precisely here lies the perfection of such marriage. But not consuming marriage is an affront for the citadel and an obstacle to the

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couple! But for love, obstacles are its way of being, for the Greeks did not love in desert. They loved with passion and, deeper than that, they loved ascetically.

The Platonic erotica (and I am not referring here to the Plato character!) is an ascetic erotic, a chaste one. The same way the chivalry and romantic one. Maybe its hidden mechanism sees the elementary appetite increasing if pleasure is delayed. In Sparta, for example, Lycurgus recommends to young people the prolonged abstinence, hence the following fact: chastity becomes the natural obstacle against instinct. Except that, in this case, the purpose was a vital one: love to always remain new, the children to be vigorous. The erotica of Platonic type suspends the relation instinct – purpose (passing lust in the act); lust is transferred towards an aspiration that is no longer defined, it has no vital purpose, it even is the opposite of such a purpose. The Eros is unextinguished longing, divine delirium, enthusiasm (“fools for Christ”, in another register). Eros, if it is lust, it is so only in the form of absolute lust, form in which one cannot wish for the one or the other because thus you would obey the relative, the accident. However, in absolute, one is under the influence of fatality, so that the supreme lust is the negation of lust, not its privation. Negation is absence; privation is an incomplete form of presence. In the report that establishes between absence and presence it is reached to the fact that the absence of lust is not also absent. Denis De Rougemont says that this dialectics of Eros is “*the endless overcoming*, the raising of human to his God. And this path has *no return!*” (de Rougemont 1987, 56; Evola, 1994, 294-309; Marías, 2000, 74-84). Absolute lust feeds relative lusts in order to sacrifice them. And the erotic lust is lust only in and under the condition of the fellow, the neighbor, so that no one can love in absolute and remain at the same time as it was. Eros, as indefinite desire, cannot be fulfilled in this world and it even rejects the temptation to be performed here.

Later, troubadours and Cathars will glorify the virtues of chastity (for example, when the Cathars were receiving the baptism specific for their sect – the baptism of the spirit, for they reject the water baptism (Barthélemy, 2002, 649-652 – the paragraph entitled “The cold water test”) – promised, among many others, to refrain from any contact with their woman *if they were married*; if not, not!. Cathars even called marriage as “the lawful depravity” (*jurata fornicatio* – de Rougemont 1987, 80, 87-88). Five kinds of debauchery are distinguished by the Christian tradition: simple fornication, adultery, incest, dishonoring and rape. Saint Thomas will add, to these five which he also takes over, a sixth sin: *vitium contra naturam*. In *De Malo*, q. 15, art. 3 Thomas speaks of *tertio quaeritur luxuriae, quae sunt fornicatio, adulterium, incestus, stuprum, raptus et vitium contra naturam* (where *stuprum* means “defilement”, “dishonoring” and *raptus* means “to take by force”, “to drag”. The sense

here is of “kidnapping of the virgin / virginity”, rape / defloration – *raptus virginis; illicita defloratio virginum* says Thomas).

The simple fornication is unlawful depravity and it ceases when the woman becomes a *good* (i.e. she is married), it ceases as a fornication but can continue as adultery. The simple fornication implies that the two persons are not connected either between them or with / by someone else. The sexuality of the bachelor is always depravity and Thomas, still in *De malo* (the same place – q. 15, art. 3) even makes the etymology of the term: “fornication” comes from *fornix* that can mean “vault”, “arch”, “covered passage”, “arch of triumph” (*arcu triumphali*), in the end “brothel”, the place where women gathered (or men, if applicable) to indulge in prostitution.

In the twelfth century, chastity was imposed by the laws of courtship; in the nineteenth century, it is imposed by the bourgeois tradition. It is a degradation, in fact, concretized in the shift from fatal Eros to vital Eros. On the other hand, poets of the twelfth century “adopt as theme pederasty, (and) it is often difficult to determine if we are dealing with imitating some literary models (*imitatio*), or with personal feelings” (Curtius, 1970, 138). Middle Ages appear to reclaim a place in Ovid. This place is retrievable in *Amores*, a paper of year 1 or 2 our era. The poet says somewhere: *Aut puer aut longas compta puella comas* (“Whether a boy or a girl with long hair”). Curtius comments: “this «either ... or» of Ovid meant in the Middle Ages often «both ... and»” (Curtius, 1970, 139). And an abbot (Baudri) explains why both virgins and boys sang: “my songs love a sex and also the other one”. A bishop of Rennes (Marbod) pities in senescence the errors of young age: “My mind was wandering, mad with the fire of desire [...] / I were not that [girlfriend] or that [boyfriend] dearer than light of eyes? [...] / And an embrace of the one sex and of the other make me sick now”. A certain Hilarius (itinerant school boy that heard Abelard, the archetype of the philosopher in love from the Middle Ages – de Libera, 2000, 152) epistles nuns and young boys. He writes to one: “yellow hair, proud face and white and clearly neck, / soft and delicate word – why do I enumerate them in vain? / for you are entirely beautiful, without shadow in your being, / and to bow chastity such face one could not”.

Curtius’ conclusion agrees terribly to the point of view that I have supported throughout this text. By Curtius I reiterate, in fact, what I meant to say, which applies also to the Socratic era and to that of the centuries, at least, XI-XII. “Here, says Curtius, also places the poem of an anonymous depicting the debate between Ganymede and Helen if it is preferable the love girls or of ephebes” (Curtius, 1970, note 1, 140). I am interested in the argument in favor of the love of ephebes. Here it is: “This game we play has been invented by the gods / And kept until today by the most important among men”. Then it is said: *Rustici, qui pecudes possunt appellari, / Hii cum mulieribus debent inquinari* (“Peasants, who can be counted as animals / Must

sleep with women”). It is clear, according to Curtius, that such a polemic of erotic type corresponds to the distinction of social status. The poem continues and says in strophe 40: “We know that this is permitted by the important ones, / For those who hold power and primacy in the world / And who call themselves judges of morals and crimes / Do not despise the tender leg of a child”. And Curtius quotes, for reinforcement, Henri-Irénée Marrou with a text from 1947 (*evue de Moyen Âge Latin*, p. 88 and the following): “The study of ancient pederasty has exposed to us such remarkable findings regarding the Greek soul, that we must admit as a certain thing that a similar survey, covering the medieval era, would not be less useful” (Curtius, 1970, 139-141; 685-686). As a “symmetry” of Sapphic type we have a Latin poem entitled “The Council of love in Remiremont” (80 strophes) and “which is a cynical description of the erotic orgies from a monastery of nuns from Lotharingia: it is the libertinism of passion”. Against this excessive “emancipation of the body” rise the “three Bernards”: Bernard Silvestris, Bernard of Clairvaux and Bernard of Morlas – (Curtius, 1970, paragraph “Eros and Morals”, 146-149). Later, in the thirteenth century, in “diametric contrast with the chivalrous love [...] it is given the alarm against love. Eros gave away the spot to sex” and the literature of genre of the period is profoundly and perfectly misogynistic. In the *Novel of the Rose*, an old procuress proclaims: “all women for all men and all men for all women” (Curtius, 1970, 146-150). The idea is related to “the proverbial ecclesiastical suspicion against love: being in love is a dangerous thing” (Delumeau 1998, vol. II, 141). That means that many of the clergymen “have included excessive love for the other one by means of blamable behaviors” (Delumeau, 1998, vol. II, 144, 127-145; vol. I, 252-260).

But in the end, the cult of love is not in marriage, it is outside it and in chastity. Faithfulness of this kind is unjustified; when one justifies it, one masks it, kills it. Marie de Champagne, daughter of the erudite Alienor of Aquitaine (together were a sort of Sappho for men in the twelfth century and among the first ones who felt that they could train men), “has stated unequivocally the difference between the conjugal union and the union of the lovers: «lovers understand each other perfectly and without the thought of reward. Spouses should, *out of duty*, to obey one another and do not refuse anything to one another» (Eliade 1991, 102). Love-passion is asceticism, pedagogy, spiritual exercise (with mentioning that in courtly love the terms of the relation are opposites, not similar, are male and female), and in this exercise one can find what Gaston Paris called in 1883 *fine amor*. This is an “erotic of the dominion of desire”, “even when the lover is lying naked next to his lady”, which differentiates between “close love” and “love from afar”, both are based on “self-control and mastery of desire” (Régnier-Bohler, 2002, 28, 29, 30).

Socrates, in the *Symposium* (217a-219e), is wise even by that it is in his power not to respond to the provocative beauty of Alcibiades. Chastity is not foreign to access to truth and it is more than a model of abstinence. Maybe that is why “Platonic love is claimed falsely from this philosopher” (Weischedel, 2012, 45), from Plato. And Andreas Capellanus concludes on how love is an innate passion (*amor est passio quaedam innata procedens*) and if nature refuses something, love is ashamed to embrace what nature refused (*nam quidquid natura negat, amor erubescit amplecti* – Capellanus, 2012, 10-11; 14-15).

In *Poetics*, 1454 a 20, Aristotle says that even a woman can be good, a slave can also be good. However, the woman is rather an inferior being, the slave is a being completely worthless. Aristotle’s expression is not contradictory for a Greek. A relatively late myth, that’s true, tells us what and how about the origin of masculine democracy and the origin of Athenian marriage: “at the time of the conflict between Athena and Poseidon for the protection over the stronghold of Kekrops, the king would have received, says Varro, an oracle that demanded him to ask, regarding the choice of the polyadic divinity, all Athenians, including women; since women were more with one than men, Athena was chosen. Men took revenge, deciding that «from now on, the Athenian women will no longer vote, the children will not be known anymore after the mother’s name and no one will call Athenian the women»” (Vidal-Naquet, 1985, 328). And things happened exactly like that: in Athens we no longer speak of Athenian women, but of wives and daughters of Athenians, and this is valid even in comedy (Aristophanes himself does not speak of “the gathering of Athenian women”, but of “the gathering of women”!).

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## Maupassant's Empty Mirror: From the Phenomenology of Anxiety to the Constitution of the Not-Man

**Abstract:** Maupassant's short horror story *Horla* (1887) contains a treatment of anxiety that can be analyzed in the context of Existentialist philosophy: Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Levinas or Cioran all observed the anticipatory trait of this affect. From a psychological point of view, anxiety leads to neurosis and/or psychosis, to the splitting of the principle of identity. This inner duality is famously expressed in the short story's scene of the "empty mirror", where the main character fails to see his own reflection. The descent into madness of *Horla*'s diarist makes us think that he experiences the possession of the monster in terms of radical alterity, something that Cioran has called the *not-man*. I argue that through the lenses of this category of (psychological and theological) *inhumanity* we can understand *Horla* as a Nietzschean evolutionary tale that cautions against the end of mankind as we know it.

**Keywords:** existential anxiety, inner duality, radical alterity, inhumanity, (d)evolution, demonic possession, psychosis, Maupassant

Anxiety is present in one of the earliest entries of Guy de Maupassant's *Horla*'s diarist. On May 16 he writes: "I am constantly aware of a feeling of imminent danger, and I sense some impending disaster or the approach of death, and it all amounts to a presentiment which is quite likely the first sign of some illness which has yet to declare itself, but is already germinating in my blood and in my flesh" (Maupassant 1998, 277). That sense of impending disaster [*un malheur qui vient*] reminds us of one of Kierkegaard's statements, which marks the birth of the phenomenology of anxiety ("a more precise and correct linguistic use links anxiety with the future" -- Kierkegaard 1981, 197) or of the paradoxical Cioranian intuition ("anxiety [...] a sort of *remembrance of the future*? – Cioran 1999, 76). Moreover, the anticipatory characteristic of the affect described by Maupassant can be analyzed in the context of Heidegger's treatment of the concept in *Being and Time*: "That which is detrimental, as something that threatens us [...] is coming close" [*Das Abträgliche [...] als Drohendes [...] naht*] (Heidegger 1978, 179-180).

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One can claim that the distance which must be covered by the *Drohendes* (the displacement of the future trauma) in its way to the *Dasein* (the fact that "I" am here and the "enemy" is not here (yet)) only feeds anxiety, which in turn becomes denser and darker. This coming close [*es naht*] (the feeling that you are followed, surrounded or under siege) is more terrifying than the unavoidable meeting with disaster [*es ist schon da*]. One could clarify this idea through the well-known association between anxiety and death, discussed by Cioran: "The only fear is, in fact, the fear of death" (Cioran 1996b, 26). The Romanian philosopher seems to suggest that the source of every anxiety is the fear of death: had death never existed, we would be immune to fear. Only when we meet death, when Epicurus' death is "here", we "walk over" anxiety, because the *Abträgliche* has already harassed us and the Birnam forest (Levinas' example for this situation) has besieged Macbeth's fortress (Levinas 1989, 41-2). But when death vibrates from the distance, when the forest only begins to murmur, when the threat begins its threatening ritual, the black sun of anxiety hypnotically rises at the horizon.

The anxiety of the narrator takes shape (on May 25) with the "dying of the light", when the Apollonian lights of awareness are conquered by the Plutonic *Unheimlichkeit* of the *id*: "As evening approaches, an incomprehensible feeling of anxiety comes over me, as though the night ahead held some terrible threat" (Maupassant 1998, 277). The character seems to understand that night brings along with it a Harrowing of Hell or even a soteriological attack: will I emerge safe after the dominion of darkness, after the infernal trap that seeks to shatter my soul? We are reminded here of the terrible description of the "infinite night" from the novella *La petite Roque*: „Mais la nuit, la nuit opaque, plus épaisse que des murailles, et vide, la nuit infinie, si noire, si vaste, où l'on peut frôler d'épouvantables choses, la nuit où l'on sent errer, rôder l'effroi mystérieux, lui paraissant cacher un danger inconnu, proche et menaçant!" (Maupassant 1979: 641).

Beyond the *abstract* intimations of anxiety, which we all experience as *Daseins*, the immersion into sleep as in „a pit of stagnant water" [*un gouffre d'eau stagnante*] (another symbol of the *id*, after the terrifying night), brings us, not unlike in the painting *Nightmare* by Johann Heinrich Füssli, the *concrete* feeling of anxiety: "I get into bed and wait for sleep as some await their executioner [...] I fall into sleep as a man falls into a pit of stagnant water to drown [...] I'm also aware of the approach of someone who looks at me, touches me, gets onto the bed, kneels on my chest, takes my neck in both hands, and squeezes and squeezes with all his strength." (May 25, Maupassant 1998, 277). Comparable to Füssli's incubus, the "presence" described by the narrator in July 4, steps over his chest, "sucking the life out of me through my mouth, yes, drawing my life out of me like a leech" (Maupassant 1998, 281). This expression shows that between the main

character and the demonic apparition, between Ego and shadow (or servant and master, in Hegelian terms) a life-and-death battle is about to take place. There can be no armistice between two parties that share as unique battleground the body of a sole faction. In a fragment reminiscent of Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll* ("Man is not truly one, but truly two" – Stevenson 2002, 55), Maupassant's narrator infers the fundamental duality of the human being [*il y a deux êtres en nous*], who is at the same time A and non-A, violating the principle of noncontradiction: "If so, I have been walking in my sleep and, without knowing it, living a mysterious double life which makes a man suspect that two separate beings exist inside us, or that there are times, when our soul is lulled and torpid, when an unknown, invisible alien takes over our captive body which it obeys as it obeys us, only even more readily" (Maupassant 1998, 282).

The nightmare of possession, made famous by the horror movie tradition, fuels this fear of the shadow, understood as radical alterity. Maupassant personifies the shadowy figure, which literally "sucks the life" out of us. However, bracketing the phenomenology of anxiety from *Horla*, isn't it obvious that in the *night of Dasein*, in the depths of our *id*, resides someone else? Perhaps we all hide a shadowy subpersonality, an inner *alter ego*, a deeper *das Andere*, whom we anticipate in all our fierceness, in our repressed fanaticism... And maybe like Eminescu and Nietzsche, we have all been concealing an inner Dr. Jekyll, a subliminal Tyler Durden, an autonomous *Doppelgänger*, whom we are destined to meet only at the end of our psychoses. When the pale light of awareness fades away, we tend to turn to our inner alterity.

The narrator even provides us more concrete actuality in the entry of August 6, using the Jungian function of sensation, one that offers immediate access to reality: "This time, I know I'm not mad. I've seen him! I saw him with my own eyes! There's no doubt in my mind now: I saw him! My blood still runs cold. I can still feel the fear in my bones. I saw him!" (Maupassant 1998, 290). From the nightmarish intuition of Füssli's succubus, who stays on the narrator's chest and feeds with his *prāṇa*, we are led to the permanent *sensation* of possession, of sharing the same body: "I feel him near me, spying on me, watching, probing, dominating me" (August 8, Maupassant 1998, 292). Where Ego once ruled, there is only shadow, the proverbial light of the consciousness dims in the presence of darkness. It seems that we are listening to a sonata of *possession* and *dominance* in four movements:

1. *allegro furioso*: "I have lost the ability to will anything: but someone else is doing my willing for me; and I do what he says" (August 13, Maupassant 1998, 292).

2. *largo*: "I am nothing inside, merely a spectator enslaved and terrified by everything I do" (August 14, Maupassant 1998, 293).
3. *scherzo*: "What sort of creature is it who has taken control of me? He is invisible, unknowable: is he a roving member of some supernatural race?" (August 15, Maupassant 1998, 293).
4. *presto agitato*: "It is as if men, from the moment they began to think, have always sensed the presence of a new kind of being whom they have feared, stronger than they are, who will one day be their successor in this world" (August 17, Maupassant 1998, 294).

From (1) and (2) one might derive the "blackening" of the Ego, the death of the inner sun, which becomes the puppet of an evil director. Will the frightening master ("a roving member of some supernatural race", „an occult being", "a hazy phantom ... born of fear"?, August 15-17, Maupassant 1998, 93-4) be man's successor? (A question left for the end of this paper.)

A key-scene from *Horla* takes place on August 19 (a date repeated in the diary: proof of the narrator's confusion descending into madness?), when the main character stalks the monster, desiring to "to gaze into the face of absolute evil" (Jung 2014, §19, p. 10) or to „stare ... into an abyss" (Nietzsche 2001, 69).

So I was sitting there, pretending to write to allay his suspicions, for he too was watching me. Then all at once I sensed that he was there, reading over my shoulder, almost touching my ear. I leaped up with my arms out and turned round so quickly that I almost fell over. And then ...? It was as bright as day, but I could not see myself in my mirror! [...] It was empty, very bright, bursting with light! But my reflection was not there [...] and I was standing directly in front of it! I could see the tall, clear glass from top to bottom" (Maupassant 1998, 299).

In empirical terms, the *Horla* blocks the narrator's reflection, the shadow stands between the mirror and the Ego. In symbolical terms, analogous to Tolkien's Sauron or to the demon presented in the horror production *The Blair Witch Project*, the absolute evil is invisible (and vice versa). We can make two observations. First, when someone fails to see himself in a mirror, we might say that this is a classic symptom of derealization, of the breaking down of consciousness. His identity (that famous  $A=A$  of Schelling and Fichte) is shattered: He is no longer himself. Second, losing his "spatial root", he flies beyond the territory of beings, beyond the *Dasein* GPS, being transported in a *Neverland of the id* where "la vida es un mal sueño", he Transgressing the realm of reality, he enters a dream land. A quote from Maupassant's letters, proved to be apocryphal, but very useful in this context, emphasizes the deep connection between the losing of one's reflection and the dissolution of identity: "Do you know that when I stare for a while at my own image



reflected in a mirror, I have sometimes felt myself losing the notion of the ego?" (apud. Kessler 1995, xlv).

Discussing the narrator's alleged psychosis, many critics observed that insanity is not present in the text from a syntactical point of view. On one hand, "the narrator's logical coherence shows no sign of deteriorating and there is no trace of pathological semantic or syntactic distortion" (Traill 1996, 132). On the other "[à] la différence de ce qu'a tenté de faire Gogol dans *Le journal d'un fou*, Maupassant ne traduit pas la lente désagrégation de la pensée logique. La folie est contenue dans le texte, mais elle n'affleure pas dans la lettre du texte" (Camet 1995, 160). From this refusal of the portrayal of the psychotic disorganization, the French writer adds to the ambiguity of the story: if the character is not mad, the threat is even more real. However, the clinging to reason of the diarist could be the final defense of a superego harassed by id's *noche oscura del alma*.

In another paper (Bolea 2015, 33-4), I have used the Cioranian concept of the *not-man* to define an anthropological mutation which might supervene in the destiny of the *Dasein*. The monster called Horla could be well circumscribed – not only after a logical criterion but also from a psychological perspective – as *inhuman*. Let's take another look at the Cioranian texts before judging if Horla can be redefined as *not-man*.

There are among men some who are not far above plants or animals, and therefore aspire to humanity. But those who know what it means to be Man long to be anything but ... If the difference between Man and animal lies in the fact that the animal can only be an animal whereas man can also be *not-man* – that is, something other than himself – then I am *not-man*. (Cioran 1996b, 68-9)

Cynics are no longer supermen or submen, they are post-men. One begins to understand and even love them, when a confession addressed to one or maybe to no one escapes from the pains of our absence: *I was man and I no longer am now...* (Cioran 1996a, 126)

The not-man is man's radical alterity. Moreover, just like the Nietzschean overman, the not-man can be a symbol for a future development of the human being, for a genetic project project of self-transcendence. The man becomes not-man, Cioran shows, only when he is different from himself. Furthermore, there comes a moment when humanity becomes our past, when we can no longer be human. This touch of *inhumanity* is visible in Jean Lorrain's short story *The Possessed*. If Maupassant's not-man is a devilish invisible being, who terrorizes its host and drives him to suicide, Lorrain's not-man adds to this extraterrestrial component (shared with Horla and even Cthulhu) a disgusting animal feature. Because of his propensity to a shattering anxiety, J. Lorrain's narrator cannot distinguish between reality and hallucination, dehumanizing his peers and transforming the concept of not-man through a reverse Nietzscheanism into a *subman*:

I'd taken the tram from the Louvre to Sèvres, and the distressing effect of the suburban landscape ... brought me to such a pitch of anguish while I watched all those ugly faces, that I had to get off near the Pont-du-Jour. I couldn't bear it any longer; I was possessed, so sharply that I could have cried out for merciful relief, by the conviction that all the people facing and sitting to either side of me were beings of some alien race, half-beast and half-man: the disgusting products of I don't know what monstrous copulations, anthropoid creatures far closer to the animal than to the human, with every foul instinct and all the viciousness of wolves, snakes and rats incarnate in their filthy flesh ... [R]ight in front of me, there was a cigarette-smoking hag with a long, mottled neck like a stork's, and hard, widely-spaced little teeth set in a mouth that gaped like the mouth of a fish [...] That foolish woman seemed to me to be the archetype of an entire species, and as I looked at her, an unreasoning dread took hold of me that if she should open her mouth to speak, no human language would emerge, but only the clucking and cackling of a hen. (Lorrain in Stableford 2001, 128-9)

Echoing Lorrain and Maupassant, we could say that the *Dasein* veers to psychosis when he encounters the not-man, in his self or the outer world. The transgression of humanity brings us closer to the feeling of the numinous. After all, humanity can be compared to a prison where we were jailed for thousands of years. Therefore, the inhumanity is, in Maupassant's writing as well, an evolutionary experience. From a theological point of view, Horla can be seen as a not-man. The devilish aspect of the monster has already been exposed, being obvious that it departs from the pattern of "likeness" (Gen 1, 27). From a psychological perspective, Horla is the bringer of madness and of the dissolution of identity, destroying and splitting the Ego. Both Maupassant and Cioran show that the not-man is an extreme alterity, who can succeed once the human race is enslaved: "After man, the Horla" (the final entry from 10 September, Maupassant 1998, 302).

Now I know, I understand: man's reign on earth is over.

The thing is here, the One so feared by early peoples in their primitive terrors! The One whom anxious priests fought with exorcisms! The One whom sorcerers summoned at dead of night but never did see. The One whom men with second sight, sensing the existence of these elusive masters of the world, clothed in grotesque or pleasant shapes in the form of goblins, ghosts, djinns, fairies, and sprites [...] From the beginning, the vulture has eaten the dove; the wolf has eaten the lamb; the lion has devoured the sharp-horned buffalo; man has slain the lion with arrow, sword and gun. But the Horla will use man as we have used the horse and the ox: he will make us his chattel, his slave, and his food by using nothing more than the power of his will. Woe betide us!

Yet sometimes an animal will turn and kill its master!" (August 19, Maupassant 1998, 296-7).

Echoing Nietzsche's para-Darwinism, Maupassant sketches an evolutionary narrative, which does not end with the crowning of man, as Medieval

theologians would have conceived it. The breaking down of the anthropological structures of humanity (along with the death of God) brings us closer to an almost Lautréamontian dominion of the not-man. The mentioning of the human being as a mere predator is ironic and disdainful. We have mastered the animals with “arrow, sword and gun”: nothing is said of reason, intellect or soul. Horla will be the successor of the man also because humanity distinguished itself through the disregard of other species, which were either imprisoned or exterminated. The only comfort of the human race is to leave the masters’ side [*Herren*] and join the Nietzschean herd [*Herden*] and hopefully start a “revolt of the slaves”. Following the principle of anarchism (“I shall be the *enemy* of every higher power” – Stirner 2000, 165), man should aspire to the revenge of the “insulted and humiliated”, as Dostoevsky would have put it. “After all, dogs sometimes bite their masters; don’t they go for the throat?” (August 17, Maupassant 1998, 295).

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## I compiti della filosofia contemporanea

*Intervista ad Antonio Di Mauro\* a cura di Tudor Petcu\*\**

### *Introduzione all'intervista*

Che cos'è la filosofia? Oppure potremmo domandare: che cosa potrebbe essere oggi la filosofia? Questa è la domanda più difficile ma anche sensibile che può mettere alla prova la coscienza filosofica ai nostri giorni, prendendo in considerazione il fatto che viviamo in una società pragmatica per cui i valori spirituali o quelli del pensiero non sono più così tanto importanti. Possiamo dire da una parte che la società di oggi, la cosiddetta società postmoderna, ha optato per una visione lontana dai valori della ragione classica che nei secoli precedenti fu la caratteristica della filosofia. Allora, se questa è davvero la situazione della filosofia contemporanea, dovremmo dire che una tale filosofia si basa su una spiritualità nichilista che uccide in qualche modo la ragione per lasciare spazio solo al decostruttivismo?

Dall'altra parte, per quel che si sa, la scienza e la tecnologia hanno conosciuto un certo sviluppo nel ultimo secolo e la filosofia fu estromessa dal campo della conoscenza e non ebbe più una forza evocatrice come ebbe in passato. Non è facile spiegare una tale situazione, la debolezza della filosofia contemporanea di fronte alla scienza, ma questo dialogo ha tentato, per quanto fu possibile, di rispondere a una domanda essenziale: come potrebbe la filosofia diventare di nuovo la regina delle scienze?

Inoltre, un altro soggetto importante di questa intervista, che riguarda senz'altro la filosofia, fu la prova di trovare e analizzare il rapporto tra filosofia e religione e, non ultimo, il modo in cui la filosofia contemporanea potrebbe o dovrebbe spiegare l'esistenza di Dio. In altre parole, una coscienza davvero filosofica, anche quella postmoderna, ha la responsabilità di interrogarsi sull'esistenza di Dio e sui argomenti ontologici della sua esistenza, per ritrovare la dimensione spirituale perdita.

*Tudor Petcu*

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**TP:** *Qual è l'importanza che la filosofia può avere ai nostri giorni e come la società contemporanea dovrebbe accogliere la filosofia?*

**AM:** L'importanza della filosofia nel nostro tempo è immutata, per la semplice ragione che la filosofia – come io la concepisco – non è se non l'umano pensiero, quello che è nelle teste di tutti noi, sia pure reso più perspicace poiché depurato dei preconcetti correnti e divenuto consapevole delle sue origini storiche e altresì dei suoi limiti. Detto diversamente, l'esercizio filosofico si mani festa come approfondimento o dispiegamento della ragione naturale, ancorché culturalmente condizionata. Ecco perché fra la filosofia e le ulteriori forme di produzione intellettuale – specialmente le scienze naturali e umane e la storiografia nelle sue varie forme speciali – vi è un nesso strettissimo, che non dovrebbe mai venir meno. La filosofia vive e prospera laddove si esercita la riflessione critica intorno al fondamento e agli scopi delle scienze, dell'indagine storica, dell'arte, della religione, dell'economia, come di qualsiasi altra branca del sapere e dell'agire. Non riusciremmo a comprendere nemmeno una riga di Platone o di Aristotele, di Kant o di Hegel, e di qualsiasi altro filosofo autentico, se non prendessimo in considerazione quelli che furono nel loro tempo i problemi sociali e politici, i progressi delle discipline scientifiche, le peculiarità della produzione artistica, e via scorrendo. La risposta che il filosofo propone vuole essere valida universalmente, comprensibile in linea di principio agli uomini e alle donne di ogni epoca e società; ma quella risposta, valida für ewig, è stata inevitabilmente suscitata in lui da domande riconducibili a condizioni storiche determinate.

Ecco perché fra filosofia e società vi è stato e vi sarà sempre un legame inseparabile. Giambattista Vico diceva di se stesso che era filosofo mondano e non monastico, per alludere al fatto che filosofare vuol dire contribuire a diradare i problemi intellettuali che di volta in volta sono suscitati nelle coscienze dalle creazioni dell'arte, dagli eventi della politica, dalle scoperte scientifiche, e così via. Questo e non altro è sempre stato il compito del filosofo. Finché avremo una società civile, avremo delle filosofie che cercano di criticarla, ossia di interpretarla al di fuori di condizionamenti dogmatici. Non mi persuadono i pensatori che pretendono di astrarsi dal loro tempo e trattano i loro concetti e argomentazioni come se fossero aridi modelli matematici, senza rapporto alcuno con i drammi del presente o anche solo della loro stessa vita personale...

Aggiungo infine che l'odierna società globale, oltremisura complessa, «interconnessa» e ipertecnologica, non esautora la filosofia alla stregua di un relitto d'altri tempi, anzi. Mai come oggi avvertiamo il bisogno vitale di neutralizzare in ogni campo le cristallizzazioni ideologiche e di schiudere a noi stessi nuove strade mercé l'esercizio della critica.

**TP:** *Può la filosofia diventare di nuovo la regina delle scienze e se sì, come?*

**AM:** La concezione che faceva della filosofia il culmine delle scienze è riconducibile a un modello intellettuale irrimediabilmente antiquato, per certi versi teologizzante, e che involontariamente svalutava lo stesso lavoro filosofico. Se con l'espressione «regina delle scienze» si vuol dire che la filosofia dovrebbe rappresentare il perfezionamento e la sintesi conclusiva delle indagini scientifiche particolari – analogamente, per intenderci, alla distinzione gerarchica posta da Hegel fra l'intelletto e la ragione, astratto e analitico il primo, concreta, sintetica e dialettica la seconda, quali che fossero le profonde motivazioni che indussero Hegel a tracciare quella distinzione per più versi disputabile –, temo che siamo vittime di un grave abbaglio. Lo scienziato nel suo campo non ha bisogno di ammaestramenti da parte del filosofo, e quando questi monta in cattedra per dargliene, casca ineluttabilmente nel ridicolo. Ma sarebbe d'altronde inammissibile concludere che si possa fare scienza senza filosofia. Per comune ammissione, anche il più gretto materialista fra i cultori di scienze naturali – è il primo esempio che mi sovviene – non può non prendere le mosse, nel delineare le sue indagini e nell'interpretarne i risultati, da premesse in senso lato filosofiche, per quanto rozze. Egli crede di procedere senza filosofia, mentre in realtà è prigioniero inconsapevole di una rete di categorie non elucidate criticamente, ossia di una cattiva filosofia.

Lo si avverte di frequente, oggigiorno, nelle più disparate specialità scientifiche. Pensiamo agli sviluppi, per altro verso lodevoli, delle cosiddette neuroscienze: nelle monografie e ancor più nei manuali dei cultori di queste discipline trapela di continuo il presupposto inconfessato che l'attività mentale si lasci spiegare alla luce dei processi cerebrali più recenti dal punto di vista evolutivo e in essi si risolva. Sogni, percezioni, ricordi, costrutti linguistici: tutto infallibilmente localizzato nelle aree della corteccia e nelle sue funzioni modulari. Nessuna professione esplicita di riduzionismo materialistico, intendiamoci; altrimenti, come potrebbero poi quegli scienziati seguitare a ribadire orgogliosi il carattere sperimentale delle loro indagini? Ma che un'ipotesi di metafisico materialismo – indimostrabile sperimentalmente e perciò bisognosa di fondazione critica – si insinui genericamente nelle pieghe dei loro discorsi, ben difficilmente potrà essere revocato in dubbio da chi legga con attenzione i loro testi. Sicché ci si attenderebbe da quegli scienziati che assumano veste di filosofi e che divengano criticamente consapevoli delle astratte categorie da cui – purtroppo a loro insaputa – trae origine il loro universo «sperimentale». Rigetterebbero il loro materialismo inconsapevole? Non sta a me dirlo; di certo esso verrebbe finalmente formulato in termini espliciti e ne uscirebbe determinato criticamente, ossia perderebbe il suo carattere di preconetto,

ragion per cui in virtù di questa nuova consapevolezza le loro stesse indagini empiriche assumerebbero almeno in parte diverso indirizzo.

Liberarsi della filosofia, insomma, è impossibile; ciò che solo lo scienziato può fare è approfondire criticamente le premesse categoriali che, piaccia o no, orientano il suo mestiere. Ecco finalmente chiarito per quale ragione, alla radice delle teorie dei più grandi scienziati di ogni epoca, troviamo sempre un pensiero autenticamente filosofico, anche se non sempre svolto in guise sistematiche. Abbiamo senza dubbio una filosofia di Galileo e una filosofia di Newton; meno immediatamente visibile, ma presente e operante, abbiamo una filosofia di Darwin, una filosofia in Freud e in Jung, la filosofia di un Pareto fra i sociologi ed economisti, la filosofia di un Santi Romano per citare un esempio illustre fra i giuristi, e si potrebbe proseguire a piacimento. E abbiamo poi, ahinoi, le cattive filosofie di tanti neuroscienziati, biologi, psicologi, sociologi, matematici, ecc., che si professano indifferenti alla speculazione teorica e alla riflessione metodologica.

Sarebbe ciò un riproporre l'antiquata funzione «regale», gerarchicamente sovraordinata, della filosofia rispetto alle scienze al plurale? Niente affatto. Si tratta di un punto delicato che occorre chiarire con cura. La filosofia non viene dopo le scienze, quando queste ormai hanno completato il loro lavoro. Come detto sopra, lo scienziato non è in attesa della sanzione di un filosofo che, ignaro di scienza, approvi o disapprovi o ulteriormente elabori e giustifichi i risultati del lavoro scientifico. La filosofia, cioè, non è un'attività intellettuale per principio separata dall'investigazione scientifica. La filosofia, invece, è dentro le scienze, e si svolge e determina man mano che quelle compiono il loro lavoro, orientandolo e venendone riorientata di riflesso. Una filosofia che aspiri a una malintesa indipendenza dal lavoro scientifico (fosse quello del matematico come quello dello storiografo o del filologo, poiché il concetto di scienza è latissimo e comprende sotto di sé ogni produzione intellettuale criticamente rigorosa), si risolverebbe in un cumulo di sterili pregiudizi. Non è pensabile, ad esempio, una filosofia della politica che non si misuri costantemente con gli esiti della ricerca storiografica e delle scienze politiche; parimenti, non è pensabile una teoria estetica che prescinda dall'esercizio della storiografia e critica letteraria e artistica, e tantomeno è pensabile una filosofia morale che non tenga davanti agli occhi le ricerche della psicologia, della pedagogia, delle neuroscienze, della bioetica, e così via. E ciò perché senza l'aggancio al concreto, i problemi che la filosofia agita si scoprono generici, verbosi, evaporano in un'indeterminazione stucchevole e boriosa, che è immune da qualsiasi anelito di critica.

Negare alla filosofia il ruolo di regina delle scienze non significa tuttavia riservarle il malinconico ruolo di ancella – l'assunto che qui propugno, non è una reviviscenza di positivismo. La filosofia non troneggia sopra le scienze, ma non si colloca neppure in posizione subalterna a esse. Dico



invece che sta dentro le scienze, e che le scienze sono dentro la filosofia, poiché non vi è schietta riflessione filosofica che non incroci a un certo punto la concreta problematica dello scienziato. E, viceversa, non vi è schietta indagine scientifica che non avverta a un certo punto l'esigenza di chiarire problemi di ordine generale, che sono di natura filosofica. Fra filosofia e scienze vi è dunque un rapporto di concomitanza o, se si preferisce, di correlazione inseparabile. L'espressione che io preferisco è: unità dialettica di filosofia e scienze. Che è quanto dire che il lavoro del filosofo e dello scienziato sono solo astrattamente distinguibili, sicché quando filosofia e scienza si voltano le spalle, l'esito nefasto è una filosofia verbosa e inconcludente, e una scienza che si risolve per intero nella miope determinazione di fatti bruti, scevri di inquadramento assiologico e critico.

**TP:** *La prego di dirmi qual è il contributo che la filosofia può apportare alla società contemporanea. Inoltre, possiamo parlare di una novità filosofica nella nostra epoca? se sì, quale sarebbe questa novità?*

**AM:** Come ho anticipato di sopra, credo che il maggiore contributo che essa può offrire consiste nel risveglio e nella diffusione dello spirito critico, fosse anche solo presso singoli individui o piccoli gruppi. Uno dei più gravi problemi del nostro tempo, a mio modo di vedere, risiede proprio in ciò, nella diffusa assenza di senso critico e nella correlativa attitudine a coltivare ingenuità e dogmatismi nei più svariati campi. In questo la nostra epoca rivela un tratto paradossale. Mai come oggi, infatti, abbiamo a portata di mano così tante opportunità di leggere, di studiare, di allargare le nostre conoscenze e – cosa più importante – di riflettere liberamente: pensiamo solo all'immenso patrimonio librario del passato convertito in formato digitale e reso liberamente disponibile sul web o alla gran quantità di corsi e lezioni di ogni tipo fruibili su YouTube. Ma nel contempo oggi assistiamo a un deperimento senza pari della vita intellettuale e culturale. La Rete toglie con una mano quel che dà con l'altra; i social network, inutile negarlo, sono soprattutto il trionfo del narcisismo esibizionista e del conformismo. E questa deriva conformistica e dogmatica, fomentata dai media, non mi sembra validamente contrastata dalle istituzioni. Le università – mi riferisco al contesto accademico italiano, di cui ho avuto lunga esperienza – sono essenzialmente centri di potere burocratico. La politica, non solo in Italia, ha cessato ormai da tempo di essere una palestra di impegno e vita civile: il numero di coloro i quali si iscrivono a un partito e ne coadiuvano le attività è nettamente scemato. A mio parere, questo disorientamento e questa crisi di legittimità istituzionale dipendono in primo luogo dalla mancanza o dall'azione scarsamente incisiva di ceti colti, che siano da esempio particolarmente ai giovani. Come ci si può illudere che rinascano degli ideali etico-politici e che si gettino le basi di una nuova cultura, quando un

giovane seduto sui banchi del liceo o dell'università non trova di fronte a sé maestri, ma burocrati o imbonitori?

**TP:** *Quale sarebbe, dal suo punto di vista, la migliore alternativa/direzione filosofica per la società contemporanea?*

**AM:** La sensibilità filosofica contemporanea, pur nella diversità dei suoi orientamenti, mi pare univocamente orientata al ripudio di quelle che sono state definite le «grandi narrazioni», con la loro pretesa di esaurire la comprensione della società, della storia, della natura, a partire da taluni univoci principi di fondo. Non da oggi il pensiero contemporaneo rigetta la pretesa di offrire una rappresentazione omnicomprensiva della realtà nella forma di un sistema sintetico. Anche la speculazione filosofica – beninteso, quella che non si pasce di neologismi altisonanti e che ancora si sforza di fare dell'analisi critica prosaicamente intesa la sua missione –, non diversamente dalla scienza, attende a corroborare ipotesi, a riaprire senza sosta gli esiti delle sue investigazioni, ad argomentare verità al plurale che occorre rivisitare e integrare sempre di nuovo. L'aspirazione metafisica a restituire un'immagine complessiva della realtà viene collocata idealmente alla fine o all'estremo limite di tutti i processi di investigazione analitica e di fatto tende a essere obliata, ricomparendo a tratti nella sua funzione di criterio direttivo del pensiero e di interrogativo ultimo insoddisfatto.

La filosofia del nostro tempo è una filosofia che conosce più problemi che soluzioni e che attende a convertire sempre di nuovo le soluzioni in problemi. Essa non è pertanto nelle condizioni di porgere direttive omnicomprensive e univoche a una società che si scopre sempre più complessa e senza confini prestabiliti. E che la filosofia non possa impartire direttive, mi affretto a soggiungere, è una gran fortuna. Prescrivere un indirizzo ideo logico determinato alla società sarebbe infatti per essa il più grave pericolo: lo abbiamo visto con i regimi autocratici del Novecento, i quali con le loro inaudite miserie materiali e morali hanno spalancato le porte a quella che Hayek chiamava the road to serfdom, la strada verso l'asservimento indiscriminato. L'imposizione di un'ideologia determinata – anche se rivestita di una patina filosofica – sarebbe pur sempre l'imposizione del punto di vista di pochi a molti: cosa esecrabile, anche quando fosse fatta con le migliori intenzioni.

A ciascun indirizzo ideale deve invece esser garantito il diritto di manifestarsi, dibattere, confrontarsi, e a nessun indirizzo deve essere assicurata aprioristicamente la facoltà di soverchiare gli indirizzi antagonisti. Se mi si chiede quale dovrebbe essere la cornice ideale della società sarei tentato di indicare proprio questa: la garanzia per tutte le tendenze e le idee di confrontarsi liberamente e competere, così che ciascuna possa dare il proprio contributo, piccolo o grande che lo si giudichi, alla vita del proprio

tempo. Siamo agli antipodi della posizione secondo cui la filosofia dovrebbe indicare agli uomini la strada da percorrere. L'orizzonte ideale condiviso del nostro tempo ha da essere piuttosto di carattere problematico o negativo: non si tratta di dire agli uomini ciò che dovrebbero fare; occorre invece che gli uomini sappiano ciò che non è loro consentito fare poiché si tradurrebbe in violazione dei diritti di libertà altrui. Il lettore che abbia qualche dimestichezza con la storia delle dottrine politiche non avrà difficoltà a ravvisare in questa presa di posizione la cornice teorica essenziale del liberalismo: nel quale non a caso a un certo punto si è voluto vedere una vera e propria concezione dell'uomo e del mondo, addirittura una religione laica e critica, in quanto tale scevra di dogmi e «miti». L'inestimabile fondamento filosofico del liberalismo come criterio di vita etica oltre che come dottrina giuridico-politica corrisponde infatti proprio a un orizzonte di pensiero problematico o ipotetico, che accoglie per principio anche i diversamente pensanti. L'animo liberale non crede di possedere in maniera esclusiva i valori dello spirito (bontà, bellezza, giustizia, ecc.) e che gli altri ne siano per principio esclusi. Egli è piuttosto portato a sottoscrivere il convincimento di Lessing, secondo cui il destino dell'uomo, e la sua inalienabile dignità, non consiste nel presunto possesso della verità, bensì nella ricerca indefinitiva della verità. In quest'ottica, anche gli avversari e i diversamente pensanti esercitano un ruolo insostituibile: è solo grazie alla loro attiva opposizione che possiamo definire sempre meglio i nostri ideali e pensieri e ampliarne senza preclusioni i limiti. In ogni caso, alla ricerca non è dato apporre la parola fine: potrebbe bene accadere, nel corso di essa, di riconciliarci con i nostri avversari o addirittura di rigettare le nostre ragioni per abbracciare le loro. Ecco, in conclusione, perché sono tratto a credere che prescrivere una direttiva ideologica univoca e totalizzante alla società vorrebbe dire preparare la sua involuzione autoritaria. È indispensabile perciò garantire democraticamente il pluralismo, ossia la libera competizione delle tendenze sociali, mercé le risorse del diritto e un'oculata attività politica e legislatrice ma soprattutto mediante l'alacre diffusione di idee ragionate presso la stampa periodica, nella pubblicistica scientifica e letteraria e nelle scuole di ogni ordine e grado.

**TP:** *Se Lei è d'accordo, vorrei parlare con Lei anche della vocazione spirituale della filosofia. Qual è la sua opinione in merito?*

**AM:** La filosofia ha una vocazione spirituale inalienabile. Ma a questo riguardo non vorrei che si fraintendesse quanto ho detto di sopra circa l'unità dialettica di filosofia e scienze. L'immanenza dell'interrogativo filosofico nell'investigazione scientifica fa sì che quest'ultima non si riduca a un'operazione di mero accertamento o quantificazione di fatti grezzi, e ciò perché la filosofia in ogni caso non si risolve in una metodologia empirica delle scienze.

Essa reca nella concretezza del sapere positivo un alito di universalità, un orizzonte critico e assiologico che trascende la determinazione del dato particolare, verso cui prima facie la scienza si indirizza. Affrancata per sempre dal miraggio di sintesi enciclopediche totalizzanti e destinata a concrescere con la ricerca rigorosa intorno a problemi particolari e circoscritti – ricerca che merita eo ipso il nome di scienza –, la filosofia non cessa ciononostante di offrire una rappresentazione dei valori della vita spirituale.

**TP:** *Come interpreta Lei il libro di Gianni Vattimo, Credere di credere, e quale sarebbe la sua importanza per la filosofia italiana contemporanea?*

**AM:** Confesso di non aver mai letto questo libro. Delle polemiche che ha suscitato, mi è giunta solo qualche eco. Ma il tema della demitizzazione del Cristianesimo e della sua perdurante, sovente disconosciuta efficacia anche nell'Occidente secolarizzato, è del più grande interesse. Per me è tutt'altro che un tema nuovo. Posso dire che a questo nucleo problematico in passato ho dedicato parecchi sforzi: esso è al centro della mia monografia sul problema religioso in Benedetto Croce, libro che ha avuto una certa risonanza e che ha contribuito a rinnovare alquanto il discorso critico su questo sommo filosofo e storico, intorno al quale molti in Italia si ritengono in diritto di parlare e scrivere senza averne letto nemmeno un rigo<sup>1</sup>.

Dalla mia ricostruzione del pensiero di Croce risulta che noi continuiamo ad abbeverarci alle sorgenti evangeliche del Cristianesimo e ai suoi millenari sviluppi dottrinari, molto spesso senza esserne consapevoli, anche quando siamo fuori di ogni Chiesa, anche quando, cioè, giudichiamo obsoleta e arbitraria la veste teologica e mitica in cui la religione di Cristo ci è stata tramandata. Può apparire paradossale, ma quella che è stata storicamente la progressiva svalutazione della forma religiosa del Cristianesimo non ha prodotto l'estinzione degli insegnamenti cristiani, i quali hanno anzi subito una trasvalutazione nell'ambito di orientamenti dottrinali che sovente non erano e non sono soliti richiamarsi al Cristianesimo e addirittura tendono a distaccarsene polemicamente.

Molte delle idee portanti della nostra civiltà rivelano incontestabilmente una remota origine cristiana, o quantomeno recano il segno indelebile del pensiero e del sentimento cristiani (anzitutto evangelici) anche solo alla stregua di una ideale premessa. Si potrebbero fare moltissimi esempi, tratti dai campi più disparati. Mi sovviene anzitutto un'idea come quella di progresso, che ha illuminato la civiltà del Settecento e dell'Ottocento e che quantunque entrata in crisi e intensamente problematizzata durante il Novecento, non ha per questo cessato di suscitare interrogativi e aneliti in

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<sup>1</sup> A. Di Mauro, *Il problema religioso nel pensiero di Benedetto Croce*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2001.

direzione di una sua possibile riformulazione o restaurazione, quasi si trattasse di un orizzonte di valore irrinunciabile come l'aria che respiriamo, poiché in fondo sentiamo che se non procediamo innanzi torniamo indietro, in ogni ambito della vita individuale e associata: concetto, questo, che invano si cercherebbe fra i principi guida dell'ethos occidentale prima dell'apparizione della religione cristiana.

Oppure si consideri una categoria come quella di rivoluzione, che dall'ultima decade del Settecento è venuta occupando un ruolo preponderante nel lessico politico e politologico. Nello svolgimento storico e intellettuale della Rivoluzione francese (ma altresì nella materialistica Rivoluzione d'Ottobre!) affiora ben presto l'idea che la rivoluzione è destinata a inaugurare un *novus ordo*: un rivolgimento complessivo della società, dal quale dovrebbe sorgere un uomo nuovo. La distruzione delle vecchie strutture istituzionali, politiche e sociali, nelle rivoluzioni che hanno segnato la storia europea, non è mai stata fine a se stessa: era, nell'intendimento dei loro fautori, la premessa di una *renovatio*, di un rivolgimento antropologico vero e proprio. Impossibile che nella mente dei rivoluzionari potesse formarsi una rappresentazione siffatta senza la perdurante influenza di concezioni profetico-millenaristiche, riconducibili in ultima istanza alla tradizione giudaico-cristiana; per tacere del fatto che non si dà rivoluzione come invenzione di un *novus ordo*, se non presupponendo un ideale di progresso storico e sociale, che invano si cercherebbe presso gli antichi, e cioè prima del Cristianesimo.

Si considerino poi gli ideali liberal-democratici, quali si sono venuti affermando nel corso dell'Ottocento e soprattutto del Novecento. Prendiamo anzitutto l'idea di uguaglianza giuridica dei cittadini, che è custodita nelle nostre costituzioni e che è inseparabile dall'idea di libertà. Certo già la democrazia ateniese nel V secolo riconosce e valorizza l'ideale egualitario: come non rammentare a questo proposito il mirabile epitaffio di Pericle (Tucidide, II, 37-39), ove è detto che la grandezza della democrazia ateniese riposa essenzialmente su due fondamenti: isegoria, cioè a dire libertà di parola, per gli aventi diritto, in assemblea, e isonomia – «di tutti il nome più bello», dichiarava questa volta Erodoto –, ossia l'uguaglianza di tutti i cittadini di fronte alla legge? Nonostante i tentativi che alcuni storici hanno fatto di colmare lo iato, incommensurabile resta tuttavia la distanza fra il modo in cui concepivano l'uguaglianza i Greci e il modo in cui la concepiamo noi, che siamo stati plasmati dal modo di pensare e di sentire cristiano. L'uguaglianza, nelle *pólis* elleniche, era riservata ad alcuni, non era invocata per tutti. Ne erano esclusi anzitutto donne e schiavi. Era un'uguaglianza giuridica che non riposava su un ideale morale di uguaglianza esteso per principio al genere umano nella sua interezza. Mentre l'uguaglianza come l'intendiamo noi comprende l'ambito strettamente politico delle assemblee ove si delibera collegialmente, ma in esso non si risolve. Il nostro ideale di uguaglianza si fonda su un sentimento di pari

dignità umana e sociale (come si legge, tra l'altro, nell'art. 3 della Costituzione italiana), senza discriminazioni di sesso, di lingua, di cultura, di razza, di condizione economica, ecc. Un simile ideale non sarebbe neppure lontanamente concepibile, senza la remota ma pur sempre efficace premessa storica dell'etica cristiana; senza, cioè, l'assunto – formulato da Paolo di Tarso nella lettera prima ai Corinzi – onde tutti noi, «sia Giudei, sia Greci, sia schiavi, sia liberi, siamo dissetati da un solo Spirito»<sup>2</sup> e perciò siamo uguali quanto a dignità e umanità.

In generale, poi, il principio capitale del moderno liberalismo – il diritto del singolo a dissentire e, in ogni caso, ad affermare l'inviolabilità della sfera interiore dei suoi pensieri e sentimenti contro le ingerenze di ogni potere costituito – non avrebbe mai potuto esser formulato se non fosse stato scritto (con parole diverse nei tre Vangeli sinottici): date a Cesare quel che è di Cesare, a Dio quel che è di Dio<sup>3</sup>. Che è la premessa del regime separatistico di Stato e Chiesa e del convincimento liberale onde il potere costituito, quand'anche sia riconosciuto nella sua legittimità dai cittadini, non può travalicare i suoi limiti e coartare gli intangibili valori e gl'imprescrittibili diritti di libertà della persona. Come disse Luigi Einaudi in un luogo aureo delle sue Lezioni di politica sociale, sono da stimarsi cittadini liberi e consapevoli quegli «uomini, i quali a chi comanda di compiere un atto contro coscienza sappiano rispondere: no, fin qui comanda Cesare, al di qua ubbidiamo solo a Cristo e alla nostra coscienza»<sup>4</sup>.

Ma non vorrei suscitare l'impressione arbitraria onde solo le dottrine politiche liberali o democratico-liberali avrebbero un'origine storica riconducibile al Cristianesimo. Mi sovviene in proposito un esempio, credo, suggestivo. Nella lettera agli Ebrei San Paolo afferma: «noi non abbiamo quaggiù una città stabile, ma andiamo in cerca di quella futura»<sup>5</sup>. È il dualismo di città presente (ossia la società effettuale, intaccata dal peccato) e città futura (ideale o divina), che ritroviamo alla radice del noto dualismo agostiniano di città terrena e città celeste. La città terrena è il dominio della perdizione e della sofferenza; la città divina che verrà e che già si annunzia, rischiarata dalla purezza dei valori evangelici, rappresenta per contro il riscatto dal male, dalla carne, dal peccato, e a essa i fedeli debbono tendere con tutte le loro forze, sebbene persuasi che Dio porterà a compimento il suo regno nonostante le opposizioni degli uomini di cattiva volontà. Nel 1917 il giovane Antonio Gramsci, ardente rivoluzionario, redige per intero

<sup>2</sup> Lettera prima ai Corinzi, XII, 13. Cfr. *La Bibbia concordata. Nuovo testamento*, Milano, Mondadori, 1982, p. 443.

<sup>3</sup> Matteo, 22, 21; Luca, 20, 25; Marco, 12, 17.

<sup>4</sup> L. Einaudi, *Il buongoverno. Saggi di economia e politica (1897–1954)*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2004, p. 295.

<sup>5</sup> Lettera agli Ebrei, 13, 14. Cfr. *La Sacra Bibbia*, a cura di F. Frezza, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, p. 4239.

un numero unico a cura della federazione giovanile socialista piemontese, il cui titolo non può essere casuale: «La città futura». Nessun riferimento, come è naturale, in quel foglio del materialista Gramsci, alle scritture sacre. Ma come non cogliere, nell'immagine della polis redenta dai mali del lavoro alienato e della disuguaglianza e conflittualità di classe, un'eco profonda della dottrina millenaristica del pensiero cristiano?

Ma anche in ambiti distanti dalla storia delle dottrine politiche in senso stretto si potrebbero agevolmente reperire tracce durature della sovente disconosciuta efficacia del Cristianesimo. Si consideri ad esempio il concetto del lavoro. I Greci – lo ha mostrato, tra gli altri, uno storico come Jean-Pierre Vernant – non riuscirono mai ad attribuire un significato positivo al lavoro, redimendolo dall'idea unilaterale della fatica, dello sforzo penoso in quanto *ponos*, inerente come tale alla condizione di schiavo. Anzi, nemmeno ebbero, del lavoro, un concetto unitario, di genere, per così dire, che si sollevasse al di sopra dei singoli mestieri e occupazioni e tutti li ricomprendesse dentro di sé. Con il Medioevo si assiste anche in quest'ambito a una svolta epocale. Fu decisiva la rappresentazione biblica secondo cui Dio ha creato l'uomo a sua immagine e somiglianza. Questa rappresentazione tornò in auge specialmente dal XII secolo, ha osservato Jacques Le Goff, ossia quando ebbe inizio il rinnovamento umanistico dell'età di mezzo. E da quel momento il lavoro umano venne concepito sul modello del lavoro divino, ossia come energia inventiva e creatrice, capace di trarre cose mirabili *ex nihilo*. Non è un caso che la rivalutazione del lavoro, di cui siamo debitori al Medioevo e al Cristianesimo, passi anche attraverso il monachesimo, dal momento che i monaci erano tenuti a imparare e a esercitare un lavoro manuale ed erano tenuti in gran considerazione in tutta la società civile.

Un capitolo bellissimo, ancora tutto da scrivere, è poi quello che concerne il rapporto di scienza e Cristianesimo. Non di rado la religione cristiana – innanzitutto la Chiesa – è stata dipinta come nemica acerrima della scienza nel corso dell'età moderna e anche al presente. Sicché la *communis opinio* – oggi abilmente assecondata da scaltri accademici autori di best seller – è indotta a credere che la scienza, per affermarsi e progredire, quantomeno dai tempi di Leonardo e Galileo, ha dovuto muovere lancia in resta contro credenze e dogmi religiosi e quando non ha potuto averne ragione, si è adattata a convivere con essi nelle guise del compromesso o della doppia verità. Non sono pochi gli uomini di scienza che rivendicano esplicitamente il loro ateismo, quasi che il lavoro scientifico presupponga, come suo insuperabile orizzonte, il materialismo e la negazione di qualsiasi credenza nel trascendente. Non prenderò qui posizione su questo atteggiamento, che peraltro sconfina facilmente nel dogmatismo. Desidero solo osservare che fra le premesse intellettuali che hanno reso possibile l'impresa scientifica moderna nella sua grandiosa multiformità, occorre

annoverare ancora una volta concezioni riconducibili al Cristianesimo. Il che non significa disconoscere il fatto storico incontestabile onde a più riprese la Chiesa cattolica (e a dire il vero inizialmente anche il Protestantismo, in primis Lutero e Melantone) ha avversato con tenacia la scienza e i suoi eroi e, in generale, le manifestazioni del libero pensiero nei campi più disparati.

Mi limiterò qui a taluni cenni, anche perché non ho competenze specifiche nella storia del pensiero scientifico. Nel Cristianesimo riveste importanza capitale la dottrina dell'Incarnazione, la quale esprime «la possibilità per il Dio eterno – ha scritto Alexandre Kojève, esaminando a sua volta il problema del rapporto di scienza moderna e Cristianesimo – di essere realmente presente nel mondo temporale in cui noi viviamo, senza tuttavia decadere dall'assoluta perfezione»<sup>6</sup>. Il Cristianesimo inaugura la persuasione che l'assoluto, l'universale, Dio non vive e opera se non nell'omnimode determinatum, nell'individuo, come insegnano in primis la cristologia e la dottrina della redenzione. A ben considerare, è a partire da concezioni come questa che lentamente entra in crisi la visione, tramandata dall'aristotelismo, onde il cosmo si dividerebbe in un "alto" e in un "basso"; in un dominio celeste che non è soggetto a mutamenti, la perfezione e razionalità del quale non soffre eccezioni, e in un dominio terrestre segnato dall'incessante divenire, dalla generazione e dalla corruzione. La scienza moderna – dapprima la fisica e l'astronomia e via via le restanti discipline della materia inorganica e organica – è sorta sulle macerie dell'antiquata cosmologia dualista, la quale presupponeva una fisica celeste e, da questa distinta per principio, una fisica terrestre; una fisica del sopramondo e una fisica del mondo. Tutte le singole scoperte sperimentali, tutti i costrutti teorici della scienza moderna almeno da Copernico e Keplero s'inquadrano entro questo generale rivolgimento di paradigma e da esso sono rese possibili.

Cos'era accaduto? In che modo è potuta maturare quest'idea del cosmo tutto come di un ordine unitario e omogeneo, nel quale le leggi che regolano i moti dei pianeti si fondano sugli stessi principi che regolano i rapporti di causazione che intercorrono fra i più semplici oggetti che manipoliamo nella vita quotidiana? Senza dubbio l'idea dell'incarnazione, liberata dal suo involucro mitologizzante e antropomorfo, è stata un presupposto cruciale per la formazione di queste vedute. L'istanza capitale della scienza moderna – la matematizzazione della natura – muove dall'assunto che non vi sia frammento o particella di realtà – sia pure nell'umile e continuamente cangiante mondo sublunare –, che non sia suscettibile di essere spiegato alla luce di rapporti numerici quantitativi; anzi, che non abbia entro di sé i rapporti, le forme, le universali categorie della matematica. Ecco il punto essenziale: il numero, le relazioni matematiche non esi stono solo in astratto;

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<sup>6</sup> A. Kojève, *Il silenzio della tirannide*, Milano, Adelphi, 2004, p. 134.



esse s'incarnano nella realtà effettuale e consentono di spiegarla ed entro certi limiti almeno, di prevederne lo svolgimento. Era, questa concezione, l'adattamento o la metamorfosi sotto specie matematica e di filosofia della natura del principio cristiano dell'incarnazione o dell'unità di spirito e materia corporea.

A ragione gli storici hanno sottolineato il platonismo di Keplero e soprattutto di Galileo, e nel contempo l'avversione di entrambi verso l'aristotelismo di scuola, di cui il Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi offre una rappresentazione sferzante, quando Galileo mette in bocca a Simplicio il motto: «non bisogna nella scienza naturale ricercar l'esquisita evidenza matematica»<sup>7</sup>. Ma ancor più della suggestione che spirava dalla dottrina platonicipitagorica del Timeo, con la raccomandazione a oltrepassare il piano della mera percezione sensibile in direzione di una scienza della natura tutta intessuta di rapporti geometrici e quantitativi, seguitava ad agire nella mente di Galileo quella che potremmo definire una premessa intellettuale di portata epocale, ignota tanto ad Aristotele quanto a Platone, e riconducibile invece alla dottrina cristiana, onde non solo l'ideale, lo spirito, s'incarna e vive nel particolare, nella natura, ma in quell'atto redime il fatto particolare in quanto lo riscatta e gli attribuisce un valore non perituro. Gli storici della scienza e della filosofia – quelli fra loro, beninteso, che non si appagano di affastellare date e dati ma si dedicano a illustrare criticamente i documenti che vengono raccogliendo – hanno rilevato che la moderna fisica d'impianto ipotetico-sperimentale e matematico non avrebbe mai potuto delinearsi nella mente di Galileo, se questi non avesse oltrepassato insieme con il dualismo aristotelico di mondo lunare e sublunare, il non meno radicale dualismo che Platone introduceva fra la razionalità incontaminata delle forme ideali e la materia come “ombra”, ontologicamente mutevole e assiologicamente vana. E chi altri se non degli scienziati figli di una cultura imbevuta di simboli e concezioni cristiane, avvezzi a sentir parlare da sempre di incarnazione e di redenzione, avrebbero mai potuto compiere una tale rivoluzione intellettuale?

Certo, occorre non perdere mai di vista il fatto che il Cristianesimo in tanti secoli è con cresciuto insieme alle molteplici manifestazioni che la cultura e civiltà cristiana veniva via producendo. Esso dava e nel contempo riceveva, trasformava e veniva trasformato; come del resto conferma la sua plurisecolare e ricchissima storia teologica, nella quale si rispecchiano i mutamenti intellettuali e filosofici che hanno segnato il succedersi delle diverse epoche storiche. La redenzione del particolare, della materia, della carne persino – che, ignota agli antichi e agli orientali, fu inaugurata dal Cristianesimo con la dottrina dell'Incarnazione – richiese molteplici

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<sup>7</sup> G. Galilei, *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo*, Pordenone, Edizioni Studio Tesi, 1992, p. 291.

approfondimenti, dovette abbattere molti ostacoli e preconetti, prima di giungere a dispiegare per intero il suo significato e a manifestare senza preclusioni le sue inaudite conseguenze. Fu un processo che si protrasse per molti secoli. I Padri della Chiesa erano soliti disprezzare la corporeità e le sue funzioni, e di loro non si può certo dire che accogliessero il principio dell'incarnazione in tutte le sue possibilità e implicazioni teoriche; diverso atteggiamento terranno, molti secoli dopo, Tommaso d'Aquino e, in generale, i filosofi della piena e della tarda Scolastica, nei quali l'avversione per la natura viene attenuandosi e la Grazia spirituale e divina appare diretta a perfezionare la natura, non già ad annullarla<sup>8</sup>. Ma quel che importa sottolineare ancora una volta è che tutti questi sviluppi e rimodulazioni ebbero luogo entro il solco tracciato dal Cristianesimo e furono come l'approfondimento della sua intentio originaria. Davvero occorre tornare a meditare le pagine in cui Benedetto Croce dava risalto al carattere plastico e fecondo di quella che egli definiva la «rivoluzione cristiana» e che era da lui intesa alla stregua di una fonte inesauribile di stimoli e suggestioni, cui di continuo si è abbeverata la cultura e civiltà dell'Occidente<sup>9</sup>.

Non ignoro, naturalmente, che filosofi e gente comune a più riprese hanno scagliato il loro anatema contro il Cristianesimo. A volta a volta la religione di Cristo è apparsa fonte di corruttela, di ipocrisia e finzione, di un ascetismo preconetto che nega i diritti della corporeità, ed è persino stata qualificata come un'ideologia appositamente prodotta allo scopo di favorire interessi materiali occulti. E tantomeno ignoro che in un mondo integralmente secolarizzato come il nostro, parlare di una perdurante efficacia del Cristianesimo potrebbe apparire una esagerazione bella e buona. Su un punto non sono consentiti dubbi: l'intero complesso di rappresentazioni mitiche del Cristianesimo appare oggi irrimediabilmente svalutato. Nessuno – anche chi sinceramente si dichiara cristiano – può oggi rappresentarsi alla lettera il mondo e il sopramondo con l'ausilio dei simboli e delle leggende che riempiono le sacre scritture. Ma resta il fatto, a mio avviso incontestabile, che scavando in profondità nel terreno della nostra civiltà e cultura, radici cristiane affiorano di continuo, ed esse paiono il segno di una vitalità perdurante.

Non vorrei d'altronde che la metafora delle radici inducesse a fraintendimenti. Non ritengo, cioè, che i contenuti del cristianesimo, poiché integrati nei fondamenti della nostra civiltà e cultura, siano da considerarsi cosa del passato, inadatta a indicare al presente orizzonti verso cui tendere e nuovi ideali da perseguire. Si pensi anzitutto all'etica evangelica

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<sup>8</sup> Cfr., ad esempio, E. Cassirer, *Dall'Umanesimo all'Illuminismo*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1995, in particolare p. 123.

<sup>9</sup> Mi sia consentito il riferimento alla mia monografia su *Il problema religioso nel pensiero di Benedetto Croce*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2001, in particolare p. 287 ss.

dell'altruismo. Vi sono ottime ragioni per credere che essa rappresenti ancora oggi un'autentica pietra di scandalo sociale. Si pensi solo all'Italia e all'Europa. Il grave squilibrio generazionale nel lavoro e nelle garanzie sociali, la chiusura verso i migranti, il sordo egoismo che traspare nei reciproci rapporti fra le nazioni del consesso europeo e che tenta di giustificarsi mercé le argomentazioni tecniche tanto care a politici e alti burocrati: sono solo alcuni dei temi di attualità che palesano soprattutto la carenza del nostro sentire cristiano e nel contempo l'indispensabilità di una rinnovata *abundantia cordis*, dalla quale non tarderebbero a uscire soluzioni politiche e istituzionali adeguate.

In definitiva, mi pare che il fondamentale retaggio del Cristianesimo si lasci compendiare nella disposizione ad accogliere e promuovere la vita nelle sue manifestazioni più disparate. Anche se dichiaratamente laici o agnostici, siamo figli della religione di Cristo quando senza preclusioni tentiamo di comprendere e proteggere l'umanità e la natura; siamo fuori e contro tale religione, invece, allorché ci disinteressiamo dell'uomo e della natura ed egoisticamente ci rinseriamo nella relatività del nostro particolare, scambiandolo per universale e assoluto.

**TP:** Perché l'uomo dovrebbe studiare la filosofia ai nostri giorni?

**AM:** Nessuno deve sentirsi obbligato a studiare alcunché. Solo un'esigenza interiore incoercibile – un tarlo che scava senza requie nella mente – giustifica l'idea di dedicarsi agli studi filosofici. Peraltro, chiunque sia animato da verace volontà di comprensione, quale che sia il suo campo specialistico di studi, si troverà ricondotto alla filosofia. Anche senza esserne consapevoli, un punto di vista filosofico è sempre nella mente di chi prende a esaminare un qualsiasi problema intellettuale. Anche il pensiero volgare, frammisto di pregiudizi, è filosofia, quantunque sia una *philosophia inferior*. Necessariamente, cioè, la disamina critica di una questione intellettuale qualsiasi presuppone un punto di vista logico di tipo universalizzante, fosse anche quello puramente negativo dello scettico o del materialista.

D'altronde, secondo quanto ho sostenuto in precedenza a proposito dell'unità di filosofia e scienze, non vi è pensiero filosofico che non si determini e precisi attraverso la disamina di problemi intellettuali particolari, come tali di natura scientifica. Oggi più che mai, di fronte all'impetuoso sviluppo delle scienze, è la formazione tradizionale dello studente (e dello studioso) di filosofia che dovrebbe mutare in profondità. Trascorrere gli anni universitari e quelli del praticantato accademico con la schiena curva sui soli testi della tradizione filosofica, dall'antichità a oggi, sulla base del presupposto dogmatico che la filosofia, la sua storia e i suoi problemi, rappresentino un campo a sé, ben delimitato e inconfondibile rispetto a tutti gli altri ambiti del sapere, rappresenta una vera iattura. Da subito, invece, lo

studente di filosofia dovrebbe essere gradualmente abituato, man mano che prende dimestichezza con qualsiasi autore, maggiore o minore, della tradizione filosofica, a riconoscere le condizioni storiche fra cui l'opera di quell'autore è sorta e a discernere la peculiare problematica (scientifica, politica, sociale, etica, biografica, e simili) che l'ha animata. Non vi è maggiore stortura del concepire la filosofia come un cristallo, le cui trasparenze incontaminate offrirebbero allo sguardo solo nude strutture concettuali. La vera filosofia è sempre "impura", materiata di passioni e di esperienze umane, senza le quali il rigore logico e speculativo non avrebbe contenuto alcuno su cui esercitarsi e si rivelerebbe solo un congegno friabile e insulso.

Frăguța ZAHARIA \*

## La vision sur la vie à travers le prisme de l'art

(Eugen Răchiteanu, *Arta și estetica franciscană din secolele XIII-XIV*, Éditions de la Fondation Académique AXIS, 2017, 339 p.)

Le volume signé par Eugen Răchiteanu, *Arta și estetica franciscană din secolele XIII-XIV/ L'art et l'éthique franciscaine dans les XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles*, se situe „à la confluence entre l'histoire de l'art et la philosophie”(affirme le Professeur Petru Bejan, dans sa *Préface* au volume, p. 12). Le premier domaine est exploré avec les outils de l'iconographie et de l'iconologie, tandis que la philosophie est assumée, prioritairement, sous l'angle de l'esthétique spéculative.

Quelle est la raison principale pour traiter ce sujet? La réponse est bien simple: l'intérêt suscité dans les milieux universitaires d'Italie et de Roumanie donnent à la l'auteur la conviction qu'il est nécessaire de développer la vision sur la vie à travers le prisme de l'art – dans une approche herméneutique. Plus précisément, l'intérêt de l'auteur porte sur *la tradition et l'innovation dans l'art iconographique* reflétées dans les écrits de Bonaventure, d'Ubertin de Casale et d'autres représentants, pour finir avec une incursion dans l'iconographie franciscaine médiévale. Dans la perspective esthétique, celle-ci représente la description particulière d'un sujet lié au contenu de l'image, par exemple : le message, l'interprétation, la composition et le nombre de personnages utilisés, leur position et leurs gestes. Le sujet iconographique relatif à l'esprit franciscain primaire, comme prototype de ce segment, se constitue à partir de l'iconographie consacrée au saint François d'Assise et à d'autres saints franciscains. Par conséquent – le Père Eugen Răchiteanu en est convaincu – l'homme lui-même, en contemplant l'art, devient icône de Dieu, réalité manifestée par l'intermédiaire du culte envers l'art sacré. Outre tout cela, il remarque l'attachement et l'amour de François d'Assise envers le Beau artistique, amour qui a éveillé chez les peintres des siècles XIII-XIV, tels Cimabue (« Vierge à l'Enfant avec les saints ») et Giotto (« Saint François d'Assise recevant les stigmates »), le désir et la possibilité de réaliser des œuvres artistiques avec une haute charge spirituelle. Une interprétation plus réaliste de l'art pictural, avec une tonalité plus sincère, bien que rustique parfois, puise ses origines dans la région toscane. Alors, l'art créé n'est qu'une manière d'exprimer *le message*

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*évangélique*, dans le but d'être compris et contemplé dans son sens authentique, en s'ouvrant à la fascination pour tout ce qui est beau et vrai.

L'œuvre *Lignum vitae* (Bonaventure, 1260) inclut des méditations sur le mystère de l'origine de Jésus Christ, de Sa Passion et de Sa Glorification. Les sujets choisis se concentrent sur la compassion et l'humilité de Jésus Christ, aussi bien que sur les vertus qui naissent dans les âmes de ceux méditant sur ces mystères. Perçue par les artistes comme un schéma complexe et à la fois complet de la vie, de la passion et de la glorification du Seigneur, elle a été transposée dans des peintures au cours du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Par exemple, dans la toile *Lignum vitae*, peinte à Florence par Taddeo Gaddi dans la salle à manger du couvent *Santa Croce* (à présent le Musée de l'Opéra *Santa Croce*), Bonaventure partage avec François d'Assise la même position aux pieds de la *Croix-Arbre*. Vêtu en franciscain et portant la mitre épiscopale, saint Bonaventure est assis sur la terre et il écrit sur un parchemin le premier vers (« O crux frutex salvificus ») d'un hymne inséré dans son œuvre. « Ici – conclut le Prêtre Eugen Răchiteanu – l'œuvre met en évidence l'essence intellectuelle et spirituelle de l'Ordre, tandis que St. François, pieusement orienté vers la Croix, représente la vocation mystique originale ».

Si les choses sont ainsi pour Bonaventure, l'autre auteur analysé par le Père Răchiteanu, Ubertain de Casale, semble vouloir se dépasser soi-même pour appréhender des problématiques philosophiques et théologiques sur le sacrifice de Jésus Christ sur la croix. Lors de la période passée comme maître à l'école parisienne et ensuite dans *le couvent de Verna* – Italie, de Casale arrive, en 1305, à parfaire l'un des plus beaux traités: « *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu* », qui allait avoir un fort écho dans la philosophie et dans la spiritualité franciscaine. Toujours inconnue dans l'espace philosophique roumain, l'œuvre ubertinienne (« *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu* ») inspirée par celle de Bonaventure (« *Lignum vitae* »), sera utilisée par les théologiens et les philosophes franciscains dans les discussions sur la dimension kénosique de Jésus Christ.

L'étude comparative entre *Lignum vitae* et *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu* qui apparaît dans l'iconographie franciscaine, avant tout, comme affirmation de la vérité, principe d'élévation et de vécu moral pour le développement des sens supérieurs et fort véhicule de transmission d'un certain message, n'a pu être compris que dans la lumière de la doctrine chrétienne. Bonaventure se réfère au fait que Dieu, de son grand amour pour nous, a envoyé son Fils Jésus Christ qui, s'incarnant, s'est fait homme, en désirant ainsi de sanctifier la matière. L'iconographie réconcilie la dualité entre la matière et l'esprit, ajoute le Père E. Răchiteanu. Bonaventure et, en grande mesure, Ubertain, ne s'écartent pas du schéma traditionnel de l'Arbre, symbole de la vie. La vision bonaventurienne sur la vie et sur la beauté dans l'univers est orientée vers un permanent changement de ceux-ci, une mise à jour, car à la base des

réflexions se trouve l'homme doué de raison et prêt à accepter la continuelle interprétation symbolique du monde. Ubertin nous propose une philosophie de l'amour pour la nature, une attitude existentielle de respect envers toute la création dans l'univers. Le savoir et la science ne sont pas une allusion de la maîtrise de l'homme sur la nature, mais plutôt l'instrument qui lui permet de vivre au sein de celle-ci. Ce qui est spécifique à Ubertin c'est précisément le fait qu'il trouve les moyens de rapprochement de tout ce qui est vie, de tout ce qui est beau et bon. Mais les deux auteurs considèrent le beau et l'art dans une perspective gnoséologique et à la fois métaphysique. Du point de vue éthique-religieux, ils situent la contemplation des valeurs esthétiques dans une étape significative de l'homme orienté vers la contemplation de Dieu, ayant comme but ultime le bonheur.

Dans la conclusion de son étude, le Père Eugen Răchiteanu souligne le fait que, dans la sphère de l'iconographie franciscaine, l'éthique est devenue un point d'intérêt ainsi qu'un défi pour l'école philosophique contemporaine: en essayant de communiquer le mystère qu'elle représente, elle devient sujet philosophique et préoccupation esthétique. Avec, en tête, Bonaventure et Ubertin de Casale, la philosophie franciscaine a développé de manière systématique et authentique le rôle et l'importance du sujet de l'*Arbre de la vie*, par les traités *Lignum vitae* et *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu* ; la valeur est mise en évidence à la fois par la complexité spirituelle et artistique du thème ; les deux, conjointes, guident l'homme vers la découverte, en lui-même, du désir véritable de contemplation du Beau, à trouver dans l'immense source inépuisable de l'art.