



# aesthetics in action

edited by Krystyna Wilkoszewska





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Congress of Aesthetics, Cracow 2013

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# Table of contents

Krystyna Wilkoszewska	
Preface	9

## Plenary Panel Sessions

### Aesthetic Engagement (Arnold Berleant)

Arnold Berleant	
What is Aesthetic Engagement?	17
Mădălina Diaconu	
Grasping the Wind? Aesthetic Participation, between Cognition and Immersion	21
Nathalie Blanc	
Aesthetic Engagement in the City	37
Jale Erzen	
Aesthetic Engagement: Art Into Politics	49
Cheng Xiangzhan	
Aesthetic Engagement, Ecosophy C, and Ecological Appreciation	59

### Aesthetics and Politics (Aleš Erjavec)

Aleš Erjavec	
Art, Aesthetics, and Politics	69
Tyrus Miller	
On Albrecht Wellmer: Music and Modernism After Habermas	77
Miško Šuvaković	
The Return of the Political in Contemporary Aesthetics, Philosophy, and Art	87
Gabriela Świtek	
Architecture as Politics	97

## Somaesthetics (Richard Shusterman)

Richard Shusterman	
Introducing Somaesthetics: Aims and Challenges	111
Tanehisa Otabe	
On an Aesthetic Consciousness of our Being: Toward a Contextualization of Shusterman's Somaesthetics	117
Else Marie Bukdahl	
The Relation between Richard Shusterman's Somaesthetics and Selected Artworks by Carsten Höller, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Pan Gongkai and SUPERFLEX	125
Krystyna Wilkoszewska	
Transdisciplinarity of Somaesthetics	141

## Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics (Wolfgang Iser)

Wolfgang Iser	
Aesthetics beyond Aesthetics	149
Peng Feng	
Aesthetics and Contemporary Art: An Experiment in Venice	155
Eduardo Kac	
Bio Art: <i>In Vivo</i> Aesthetics	161

## Panel Sessions

### Aesthetics and Politics of Biotechnological Art (Polona Tratnik)

María Antonia González Valerio	
Being (in) Mediations	185
Miško Šuvaković	
Spectacularisation. The Philosophy of Contemporary Transitional Art and Form of Life	196
Polona Tratnik	
The Quest for Survival: Art with Biotechnology	205
Jos de Mul	
The (Bio)Technological Sublime	212
Melentije Pandilovski	
Toxicity at the Equidistance of Biotechnology and Biopolitics	225

## Cyberaesthetics – The Phenomena of Electronic Art (Sidey Myoo)

Sidey Myoo	
The Aesthetics of Electronic Worlds	235
Piotr Zawojski	
The Question Concerning Cyberaesthetics. One World – Hybrid Reality	246
Antoni Porczak	
Art between Cockpit and the Passenger. Breaking of the Gutenberg Era Customs	254

## Aesthetic Practice in the Life of East Asia (Takao Aoki)

Takao Aoki	
On the Concept of Geidoh in East Asian Aesthetic Tradition of Practice	265
Joosik Min	
Aesthetic Practice in the Life of East Asia: Fengliu or Elegant Life	283
Chen-Chu Chen	
Examining the Art Practices and Self-cultivation in Traditional East Asia: Zhu Xi and Ogyū Sorai on the Confucian Rites and Music	296

## City, Ruins and Landscape (Yuko Nakama)

Raffaele Milani	
The Idea of Grace and the Ideal City	311
Zoltán Somhegyi	
The Aesthetic Attraction of Decay. From the Nature of Ruins to the Ruins of Nature	319
Yuko Nakama	
Aesthetics and Landscape: Crystallization of Nature Images	327

## Chinese Aesthetics and Art (Keping Wang)

Keping Wang	
Waterscape Aesthetics in Perspective	341
Chengji Liu	
The Agricultural Trait of Chinese Aesthetics and its Manifestation in Landscape	353

Hongbao Niu	
Table Painting and Easel Painting: A Cross-cultural Analysis between Chinese and West Paintings	363
Curtis L. Carter	
Aesthetics and Action: A Perspective on Chinese Contemporary Art	374
<b>Applied Social Art: The Potential of Art and Criticism After March 11, 2011 (Akiko Kasuya)</b>	
Akiko Kasuya	
Introduction	391
Miki Okubo	
Proposition for Participative Art as an Avenue Toward Open-Mindedness in Criticism	393
Takafumi Kato	
A Tentative Theory: the Actual/Possible Matrix Extracted From Art	400
Miho Iwata	
Performance	407
<b>Aesthetic Account on Japanese Pop Culture (Hisashi Muroi)</b>	
Hisashi Muroi	
Introduction – How We Should Think about Pop Culture	413
Fuminori Akiba	
Can Aesthetics Treat Hybridity in Pop Culture? In Case of <i>Aesthetics of MOMOCLO</i>	418
Morihiro Satow	
Railfan and Photographic Collection: A Way to Possess the World	424
Author biographies	433



## Preface

The 18<sup>th</sup> volume of the International Yearbook of Aesthetics comprises a selection of papers presented at the 19<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Aesthetics, which took place in Cracow in 2013.

The Congress entitled “Aesthetics in Action” was intended to cover an extended research area of aesthetics going beyond the fine arts towards various forms of human practice. In this way it bore witness to the transformation that aesthetics has been undergoing for a few decades at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Apart from lectures the Congress presentations were also delivered in the form of debates – four plenary panels and about 20 panel sessions. The present volume includes all plenary panels and seven selected panel sessions. The remaining majority of the papers presented at the Congress will be published online.

Four plenary sessions were prepared by eminent scholars, usually authors of their own conceptions, who expand and modify the research area of aesthetics.

Arnold Berleant organized the session „Aesthetic Engagement” inviting Mădălina Diaconu, Nathalie Blanc, Jale Erzen and Cheng Xiangzhan to take part in it.

Outlining the subject of the debate, Arnold Berleant, the author of the topical concept, indicated the deep transformations occurring in art in the 1960s and 1970s. Innovatory artistic practices made art transcend its traditional limits and, in its new forms, demanded ways of perception different than the traditional ones. The aesthetic experience, which had been treated as a disinterested perception of a work of art by its perceiver since the days of Immanuel Kant, was now founded on involvement and participation.

At the same time it assumed a holistic, contextual and multisensual character. According to Berleant, the concept of “aesthetic engagement” and the conception of new aesthetics developed on its basis allow for a better understanding of the transformations that take place in contemporary art as well as for revitalizing of the perception of traditional art. It is this very category that is the focal point of all speeches delivered by the participants of the debate, dealing with various topics. For instance, while grasping the phenomenon of the wind, M. Diakonu indicates different forms of aesthetic engagement, N. Blanc considers the problems of aesthetic engagement in urban environment while J. Erzen ponders “how art and images can be effective in the symbolic ordering of our social relations.” On the basis of the idea of aesthetic engagement and in reference to deep ecology and “traditional Chinese aesthetic wisdom”, Cheng Xiangzhan offers his own conception of Ecosophy C.

Aleš Erjavec prepared the debate on “Aesthetics and Politics”. Asking the questions: Is art political or not? Is it political or politicized? and using three selected examples, he demonstrated the diversity and complexity of forms that the relation between art, aesthetics and politics may assume. Emphasizing that these relations were usually „difficult”, and frequently even conflicting, he discussed the problem mostly in reference to aesthetics of realism and formalist aesthetics in the days dominated by Marxist ideology. At the end he paid more attention to Rancière’s conception, which constitutes a new interpretation of the relations between art, aesthetics and politics. The participants invited to the panel session focused their attention on diverse issues: Miško Šuvaković claims that after the fall of Berlin wall and the end of the cold war conditions for re-examination of the concepts of “politics” and “the politic” came into being. “In postmodern and then globalised neoliberal society, politics has acquired the character of techno-managerial cultural practice, moving from fundamental social, global questions to individual cultural as well as artistic activities...”. Tyrus Miller executed a reconstruction of the views of Albrecht Wellmer, formed in polemics with the representatives of the Frankfurt School, mostly Adorno and Habermas, regarding functioning of art (especially music) in a multidimensional context. Gabriela Świtek discussed the problem of “architecture as politics” using one selected example – that of an exhibition of architecture in Poland in 1953 (the time of Stalinism and socrealism) – supporting her interpretations with Rancière’s views on art, aesthetics and politics.

The participants of the plenary session “Somaesthetics” organized by Richard Shusterman included Tanehisa Otabe, Else Marie Bukdahl and Krystyna Wilkoszewska.

The author of somaesthetics explained that this new term was necessary to cover the broad range of problems related to our body, our “tool of tools”. The body is the basis for our actions, perceptions and thoughts. Shusterman indicates that although in the main current of philosophy the problems of body were neglected, at the very beginning of Western philosophy as well as in the Eastern thought, it enjoyed attention. This tradition should be continued, since “our bodies express the fundamental ambiguity of human existence”: the body is both the subject and the object, it gives us the sense of species community as well as individual uniqueness, it makes us different from animals but, at the same time, relates us to them through evolution, it draws the limits to our freedom, but it also makes this freedom possible, and the same regards our perception (cognition). Shusterman emphasizes the meliorative character of somaesthetics; as an interdisciplinary research area it serves to improve the culture of life of both individuals and communities. The participants of the panel session spoke, in turn, about: the position of somaesthetics in the history of Western and Eastern thought and culture, possibility of somaesthetic interpretation of works of art, trans-disciplinary character of somaesthetics on the boundary between the humanities and natural sciences, especially in the context of new achievements in biotechnology and theory of evolution.

For the debate concerning “Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics” Wolfgang Welsch invited Peng Feng and Eduardo Kac, who are – though in slightly different proportions – both artists and theoreticians. He did it in accord with his conviction that nowadays artists as well as scientists contribute to better understanding of changes taking place in culture. Welsch reminded that he used the formula “aesthetics beyond aesthetics” for the first time in 1995 during the ICA in Lahti, having in mind the expansion of aesthetic research to the areas beyond art, especially since they are undergoing progressive aestheticization. Aesthetics should follow the path of the avant-garde of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which transgressed the boundaries of autonomous art (“art beyond art”). The plenary panel was supposed to be a continuation of this idea, especially that certain phenomena had become intensified. And so, both philosophers and artists perform a „transition from substance to process ontology”. Moreover, nowadays we move from thinking in the categories of opposition to that based on the idea of continuity. This regards

particularly the relation the man-the world or, in other words, human and nonhuman. „The human cannot be understood – as modernity would have it – exclusively in human terms”. Numerous artists follow this direction nowadays. On the basis of an example of the curated by him China pavilion at Venice Biennale 2011, Pen Feng showed how “aesthetics and contemporary art meet each other when they go beyond their boundaries”. Eduardo Kac, a world-renowned artist and the author of the terms “bio-art” and “transgenic art” introduced us – in the language of theory – into the trail of thought that accompanied creation of his subsequent works of art.

As regards panel sessions, the papers which were most representative for the subject of the Congress, and prepared by European, Japanese and Chinese aestheticians were selected for publication. (Unfortunately, not all participants delivered their papers prepared for publication.)

Polona Tratnik prepared a panel session on the subject of aesthetic and political aspects of biotechnological art and Michał Ostrowicki (Sidey Myoo) – that on electronic art.

Our friends from Japan were particularly active. The panel sessions which they prepared referred both more general issues: „Aesthetic Practice in the Life of East Asia” (Takao Aoki), „City, Ruins and Landscape” (Yuko Nakama) and the problems of contemporary Japan: “Applied Social Art: The Potential of Art and Criticism after March 11, 2011” (Akiko Kasuya), „Aesthetics Accounts on Japanese Pop-culture” (Hisashi Muroi).

The panel session concerning “Chinese Aesthetics and Art”, prepared for the Congress by Eva Man, is presented in this volume in a slightly different form, thanks to active help received from Wang Keping.

From three to five participants from different countries and, quite frequently, from different cultures took part in each panel session. We do hope that the papers comprised in the 18<sup>th</sup> volume of the International Yearbook of Aesthetics discuss the important and most vividly debated problems of contemporary aesthetics.



# Plenary Panel Sessions



# Aesthetic Engagement\*

(Arnold Berleant)

\* Articles included in the plenary panel “Aesthetic Engagement” were published in the “Contemporary Aesthetics” on line, volume 11, 2013





Arnold Berleant

## What is Aesthetic Engagement?

Developments in the arts associated with modernism began in the latter part of the nineteenth century with Impressionism and Post-impressionism. These movements were followed by a succession of stylistic innovations that came to a head in the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1960s and '70s, a proliferation of artistic practices emerged that trespassed conventional boundaries. Innovative practices gave rise to new perceptual features in the arts, breaking out of the frame of the canvas and extruding from its flat surface, descending from the proscenium stage into the audience, and other such modifications of appreciative experience that discarded the traditional separation of audience and art object. Not only did the arts incorporate new materials and practices; they reached out to incorporate surprising subject-matters. All the arts began to intrude on the formerly safe space of the spectator by demanding active involvement in the appreciative process. Audience participation became overt and necessary for the fulfillment of the art, not only in the visual arts but in theater, fiction, sculpture, and other art forms. The traditional separation between the sequestered, contemplative experience of art and the world of ordinary experience was deliberately breached.

Aesthetics was in a quandary and, for a time, became obsessed with the problem of defining art that had far exceeded its customary bounds. Moreover, traditional ways of characterizing appreciative experience, in particular a contemplative, distancing attitude joined with Kantian disinterestedness, seemed inappropriate and irrelevant to the world of art that had emerged. This was the context in which attention began to shift for some theorists away from a focus on the art object, which came to be called by the assumptive term 'artwork,' and to the appreciative experience

of art. In a series of papers and books beginning in the mid-1960s, the American philosopher Arnold Berleant began to develop a theoretical account that could accommodate these challenging developments in the contemporary arts. The central concept to emerge in this inquiry was the idea of 'engagement,' later specified as 'aesthetic engagement.' Aesthetic engagement became the central concept of an aesthetic that emerged as an alternative to the aesthetic disinterestedness that was central to traditional aesthetic theory.

Aesthetic engagement rejects the dualism inherent in traditional accounts of aesthetic appreciation and epitomized in Kantian aesthetics, which treats aesthetic experience as the subjective appreciation of a beautiful object. Instead, aesthetic engagement emphasizes the holistic, contextual character of aesthetic appreciation. Aesthetic engagement involves active participation in the appreciative process, sometimes by overt physical action but always by creative perceptual involvement. Aesthetic engagement also returns aesthetics to its etymological origins by stressing the primacy of sense perception, of sensible experience. Perception itself is reconfigured to recognize the mutual activity of all the sense modalities, including kinesthetic and somatic sensibility more generally.

The concept of aesthetic engagement, then, epitomizes a holistic, unified aesthetics in place of the dualism of the traditional account. It rejects the traditional separations between the appreciator and the art object, as well as between the artist and the performer and the audience. It recognizes that all these functions overlap and merge within the aesthetic field, the context of appreciation. The customary separations and oppositions between the functions of artist, object, appreciator, and performer disappear in the reciprocity and continuity of appreciative experience. Thus it is no longer necessary to maintain the fiction that turns different functions into opposed entities. They become aspects of the aesthetic process rather than discrete objects or actions, and the appreciative experience becomes perceptually active, direct, and intimate. Aesthetic engagement recognizes that beauty, or aesthetic value more generally, inheres not in the object or in the perceiver but is rather the leading feature of the reciprocal process of perceptual participation between appreciator and object.

Understood in this way, aesthetic engagement is a valuable concept for understanding and appreciating recent developments. At the same time, it reinvigorates our experience of the traditional arts. Aesthetic engagement has a transformative effect when applied to seventeenth century Dutch

landscape painting and portraiture, to the classical canon of music, to poetry and the novel, as well as to the modern arts. Moreover, aesthetic engagement lends itself particularly well to the wide interest in environmental aesthetics, where engagement offers a more appropriate description of environmental appreciation that has descended from the contemplative distance of a scenic outlook to tramping along a woodland trail or paddling a meandering stream. Aesthetic engagement is useful, too, for the still more recent interest in everyday aesthetics where, again, the Kantian model of disinterested contemplation becomes irrelevant.

The central issue now is not the difference between art and non-art but between aesthetic and non-aesthetic. Both for its theoretical value in accommodating artistic innovations, for its ability to encompass developments in aesthetic appreciation that extend to ordinary life and activity, and for its ability to provide a unified theory of the arts and the aesthetic appreciation of nature, aesthetic engagement has proved particularly useful. What is needed now are specific studies of the arts and other occasions of aesthetic value that will demonstrate its capacity to illuminate the experience of appreciation.

The papers that follow illustrate the resilience and wide applicability of aesthetic engagement.



Mădălina Diaconu

## Grasping the Wind? Aesthetic Participation, between Cognition and Immersion

“Vent ininterrompu. Que peut-on souhaiter de plus?  
Le vent, c’est de la poésie immédiate.” (Cioran)<sup>1</sup>

Aesthetic theory looks for concepts that are able to grasp (Latin: *conci-pere* – to conceive, but also to grasp, seize, capture) a specific experience that is renowned for its ineffable character. Such attempts to elaborate conceptually what is known without concepts (Kant) may inspire a skeptical attitude since a completely satisfactory conceptualization of the aesthetic experience is eventually as impossible as catching the wind. At the same time, it is precisely the poetical potential of the wind that may exemplify diverse aspects of aesthetic engagement. In its own way art succeeds in grasping the wind by representing, reflecting and engaging with the wind. Thus, just as a “soft side of stone” can be found in art, so can art manifest a “graspable side” of the wind.<sup>2</sup> That the wind exemplifies aspects of aesthetic engagement is essential for the present approach. Engagement “offers not argumentation but exemplification” because it is based on experience and requires an “empirical demonstration.”<sup>3</sup> In particular, the wind poses a challenge for the analysis because it has neither sides, parts, nor dimensions, no form and almost no matter. Because of its shapelessness and invisibility it hardly can be considered an object. I [D1] It is still a force that is experienced as a dynamic presence. But before going into the typology of aesthetic engagement, let us start with an example in which several forms of engagement are inextricably linked to each other.

### 1. Attunement and engagement

The protoaesthetic situation of feeling a gentle breeze seems to confirm the Kantian requirement of disinterested contemplation. At first sight, also Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem *The Eolian Harp* endorses this assump-

tion. The poet and the “pensive Sara” are sunk in contemplation, watching the clouds and the sunset, smelling exquisite flowery scents, listening to “the stilly murmur of the distant Sea” that “tells us of silence,” and to “that simplest Lute”

How by the desultory breeze caress'd,  
 Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,  
 It pours such sweet upbraiding, as must needs  
 Tempt to repeat the wrong! And now, its strings  
 Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes  
 Over delicious surges sink and rise,  
 Such a soft floating witchery of sound  
 As twilight Elfin make, when they at eve  
 Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land [...]<sup>4</sup>

As a matter of fact, the mood of tranquility evoked by the poem stems from the continuity and communication between the author and his multisensory environment; the gentle light and fragrances, “the soft floating witchery of sound,” and the caress of the breeze all pass on the lovers’ mood and fill them with cosmic harmony. Instead of focusing on the distinction between the subject and the object, such an experience is based upon a deep, almost mystical feeling of union between humans and the world, which is described as love for “all things in a world so filled.” The breeze that “warbles” in the “mute still air,” producing music, is but one of the symbols of “the one Life within us and abroad / Which meets all motion and becomes its soul.” Once this higher unity is attained, the differences between the senses are converted to a synaesthetic experience (“A light in sound, a sound-like power in light”), without generating confusion but evoking the well-known motif of the music of the spheres: “Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where.”

In such a tranquil atmosphere one is entitled to ask where traces of the subject’s activity can be found? First of all, contemplation is by no means a passive attitude but an extremely intensive one that requires concentration. It is possible to listen to the melodies only if one constitutes the melody in a polythetic structure (in several steps) and the unity of the melody as a process. The identification of its acoustic patterns and rhythms requires perceptual syntheses.<sup>5</sup> Also the relaxation unleashes “full many a thought uncall’d and undetain’d, / And many idle flitting phantasies” that “traverse [the poet’s] indolent and passive brain, / As wild and various as the random gales / That swell and flutter on this subject Lute.” Listening leads to the synchronization or attunement (German: *Einstimmung*) between

one's own feelings, rhythms, and thoughts and the music the eolian harp randomly produces. This state of mind suggests to the poet a stunning analogy and makes him reflect on the nature of the universe. Immersion and cognition become inseparable:

... what if all of animated nature  
 Be but organic Harps diversely framed,  
 That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps  
 Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,  
 At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

The metaphor of God as “one intellectual breeze” that animates nature is consonant with the symbolism of the wind in several religions, including Christianity, where it is closely related to the epiphany of the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Perceptive constitution of the object

Strictly speaking, the wind does not exist as such, but has to be verbally identified as wind. The same goes for the wind as an object of the natural sciences and an object of arts. However, the aesthetic dimension of the wind is inseparable from the experience of the wind, which is subjective, yet not strictly individual, since we usually agree whether the wind blows or not. Only the sensation is strictly individual and unverifiable, not the perception, which has a public, intersubjective dimension. According to the reinterpretation of aesthetics as aesthetics or theory of perception (Berleant, G. Böhme, Welsch), the wind has already an aesthetic dimension as a perceivable phenomenon. Moreover, even on this level the subject is not merely receptive but has to perform perceptual (and, following Merleau-Ponty, not intellectual) syntheses in order for a certain flow of sensations to qualify as wind. In other words, having the experience of wind requires the subject to engage with the environment, and become aware of certain aspects, that is, pay attention to them, to activate a selection of traits, to observe them, and to constitute (not produce!) the object phenomenologically.

Further, the phenomenon identified as wind receives a specific aesthetic dimension when it produces pleasant effects, given that pleasantness may be regarded – against the Kantian dichotomy between pleasure, Lust, and aesthetic satisfaction, Wohlgefallen – as a protoaesthetic value. The pleasant effects of the air currents are mostly tactile and thermal, but they can be

also indirectly auditory (for example, when, in cold winter weather, one sits in front of the fireplace and listens to the wind blowing outside), or olfactory and even gustatory (when one feels the salted water brought by the wind coming from the sea). The famous image of Marilyn Monroe's with her windblown dress records the tactile and thermal pleasure of feeling a refreshing wind on a hot day presented as a narcissistic, autoerotic experience or as the erotic engagement with a non-human partner.

Also the multisensory dimension of the wind requires one to amend the subject-object-dichotomy of modern philosophy and aesthetics since the wind is not perceived as an object placed in front of the subject, as in visual experience. The perceiving subject is the body itself, which is immersed within an environment and engages with the natural surroundings. Nevertheless, such an environmental perception proves to be pleasant only within certain limits. To follow the Kantian theory of the dynamic sublime, a strong and dangerous storm is hardly to be appreciated aesthetically by one who is not in a secure shelter.

In addition to this, the effects of the wind and weather in general are both physical and psychological: weather changes are felt with the entire body. Meteorology-dependent people know from their own experience to what extent weather may affect their mood, state of spirit, sensibility and Gemüt, power of concentration, blood pressure, etc., and invalidate once more the Cartesian abstract cleavage between body and soul. It is interesting that Leonardo da Vinci deliberately chose the wind as a metaphor for the soul that can never achieve good effects in a weak or sick body, just as the wind can never produce good music on an organ when one of its pipes is broken.<sup>7</sup> The soul is dependent of the body as much as the perception of the wind is dependent of an instrument to "capture" its movement and translate it into music.

Frequently the perception of the wind is culturally embedded: a current of air is identified as Föhn or Bora on the basis of an entire collective historical experience. Further, the wind is also a cultural phenomenon, whose natural perception is influenced by the history of a community and its corpus of knowledge, literary, or mythological sources. According to Herder and to Tetsuro Watsuji, the cultures are even determined by the climate, including the wind. For Watsuji<sup>8</sup> the "climate" (Japanese *fudo*, "wind and earth") belongs to the structure of the human *Dasein*, in the Heideggerian meaning, and cannot be reduced to its scientifically objectified dimensions. Watsuji even classifies the cultures according to their climates into three types: 1. The peoples from the Far East (India and



South-East Asia), who are influenced by the extremely humid “monsoon climate,” are prone to passivity and resignation, and to a contemplative and emotional attitude. 2. The unfriendly “desert climate” in the Arabian and African cultures forces humans to conceive life as a struggle with nature, to praise the power of will, and to adopt a practical orientation. 3. The “meadow climate” in Europe, in particular around the Mediterranean Sea, induces an anthropocentric, tranquil, introspective, and intellectual life.

Watsuji’s theory, which has often been rejected as poetic speculation, is indeed subject to various objections; one of them concerns the one-directional relationship between culture and weather. According to Watsuji, the natural environment is a determinant of the culture, while people – in spite of the ambitious projects of geoengineering – exert no influence on weather. Nevertheless, apart from this interpretation of the weather from the perspective of philosophy (Watsuji) or of the history of culture,<sup>9</sup> the possibility of an aesthetic experience of the wind attests that we are dealing with a culturally molded phenomenon.

Last, but not least, the perception of wind raises interesting questions concerning its representability. Otherwise stated, how can wind be represented in the visual arts or, generally speaking, how can it be represented by a medium, given that its very medial nature enables perception only by remaining in itself unperceivable? A first possible answer to this question regards the personification of the wind as in antiquity and on premodern maps when winds were named, received anthropomorphic representations, and became characters of narratives. A second option says that the phenomenalization of a medium is possible indirectly, by means of its effects. Lighted and shadowed sides of objects make light visible, just as “windblown hair, billowing drapery, fluttering ribbons”<sup>10</sup> suggest the animation produced by the wind.

The aforementioned details are specific motifs for the “classical Victories, Horae and, most particularly, Maenads.”<sup>11</sup> Warburg called them “bewegtes Beiwerk.”<sup>12</sup> These motifs “ubiquitously present in classical monuments, lovingly described in classical literature, explicitly recommended to painters by Leone Battista Alberti” around 1435 “become a real vogue” in the Italian Cinquecento, think of Sandro Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus*. Several other sculptors and painters, such as Claude Monet, resorted to the same strategy to visualize the wind through its effects. In Monet’s *Rue Montorgueil*, the flags flapping on the occasion of a celebration in Paris on the 30th of June 1878 evoke a vigorous wind that the spectator almost feels in her face. They

suggest an animated atmosphere and create a sonorous image. Modern natural sciences still use the Beaufort Scale of wind speed, whose quantifiable parameters, measured in knots, are accompanied by photographs showing the effects of the wind on water and by verbal descriptions of these effects.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Kinaesthetic performance and poetical participation: imagination, empathy and atmosphere

Perception is never mere receptivity, Husserl's *Affizierbarkeit*, but has to be bodily performed. Tactile perceptions require the subject's kinaesthetic engagement<sup>14</sup> and the same goes for sight, the sense of taste, and even smell. The correlation between sensation and movement in general is central to Erwin Straus's phenomenology of perception<sup>15</sup> while Gilles Clément regards activity as an essential attribute of every life being.<sup>16</sup> These movements can be performed either consciously, deliberately, and knowingly or in a habitual way if they belong to the latent memory of the body; or they can occur unwillingly and even reluctantly.

In the direct and aesthetic experience of the wind, a physical engagement appears to be mostly absent; quite the contrary, the exposure to a strong wind throws someone out of an aesthetic attitude. The aesthetic situation seems to imply a clear division of roles between the active "object" and the passive subject.<sup>17</sup> The situation is completely different when the wind is represented; the subject feels secure and thus free to take an aesthetic stance. In such cases, the spectator is engaged in the movement indirectly in an empathic and imaginative manner, for example, by watching how man and horse struggle to make their way against a gale in the opening scene of the film *The Turin Horse*.<sup>18</sup> The onlooker's involuntary identification with the character(s) is enhanced by the length of the scene: when man and horse finally reach their shelter, the spectator feels exhausted, too.

However, psychological empathy is not necessary in order to perform the observed movement inwardly, as kinetic art well knows and shows. The installations exhibited by the Lithuanian artist Žilvinas Kempinas (*Fountain*, *Flux* etc.) are directly linked to air vibrations and air currents). The agitation of the featherlight tapes of a magnetophon that are put into motion by ventilators in gallery spaces is transmitted also to their perceivers who feel light and restless, exposed to outer forces and like dancing with magnetic tapes.

Imagination is universally regarded as having a higher degree of activity than perception, just as productive imagination or fantasy is more intensive than the reproductive imagination in everyday life. This common distinction between two types of imagination becomes blurred when Gaston Bachelard considers that every act of imagination not only forms images but changes them, its object being less the image than the imaginary (*imaginaire*).<sup>19</sup> In particular, the element of air involves the “psychology of the imagination of the movement” and is linked to a strong mobility of images.<sup>20</sup> For example, the wind Bachelard discusses in a separate chapter<sup>21</sup> is able to unleash the power to invent narratives and to produce and combine images. Most dynamic are the images of the “violent air,” the storm, the furious wind and the elemental energy when the air is “all movement and nothing but movement,” and its effect on the imagination consists in a “participation essentially dynamic that is nothing else than engagement and empathic reenactment.”<sup>22</sup>

However, Bachelard’s exemplifications are exclusively literary; the fury and the cry of the wind are most impressive when they are imagined or heard, but not when they are visually represented: “The wind menaces and howls, but it takes a form only if it meets the dust: once it becomes visible, it is a poor misery.”<sup>23</sup> Being devoid of figure and form, the wind seems per se to be incompatible with the visual arts; its visible image would lend its rage and wrath a rather derisory aspect. In the end the wind is the “imagination without figure” and the reverie of the storm is guided not by the eye, but by the “surprised ear,” since “hearing is more dramatic than sight.”<sup>24</sup> Even when it is experienced without the intercession of art, such as when one watches the infernal hunt of the clouds, the violent and energetic manifestation of the storm is still conceived in literary terms: “we participate directly to the drama of the violent air.”<sup>25</sup> The storm symbolizes the pure energy that successively creates and destroys worlds; to paraphrase Bachelard, the phenomenology of the storm anticipates a phenomenology of the cry that is projected on a cosmological scale. Bachelard’s selective imagination of the wind may well be set forth by mentioning different musical works (which he does not), starting with Debussy’s *Le vent dans la plaine* from *Préludes*. On the whole the imagination of the wind is a multisensory experience.<sup>26</sup>

Bachelard’s conviction that the visualization of the wind is less able to produce aesthetic effects may be regarded as a challenge for the fine arts. Already the personification of winds had enabled their anthropomorphic representation in pre-modern Europe like the representation of astral bod-

ies and unlike rain and thunder. Later on, Góngora's images of the wind that combs the hair inspired Eduardo Chillida's sculpture *The Comb of the Wind*, precisely by reversing the poet's initial metaphor. The three pieces of metal placed on the coast of the Atlantic comb the wind itself, which is then imagined as being analogous to the hair or to a Maenad's braids that are like snakes. Moreover, their form and material remind one of tongs or pliers that present the unrepresentable attempt to grasp the wind. This artwork is interesting not only because it is integrated in the environment, but also because it is no more conceived as end in itself, but as a means for arranging, taming, and eventually humanizing a "wild" element. Moreover, *El peine del viento* shifts the perception from form to the process of forming, from the passive matter to the active masses of air. The artist casts the metal in a mould and the metal itself shapes the natural elements by filtering them as in a chain of reactions. To understand the sculpture is to perform mentally the gesture of using these pieces to comb the air. The same idea may even be reenacted bodily: by spreading our fingers, our hands, themselves, become combs for the wind. If Ulysses once chained the winds and had the hybris to try to subjugate nature, Chillida's gesture complies with a natural force and engages with it.

Also the expressivity of Chillida's *The Comb of the Wind* is much indebted to the atmosphere, for the wind has a strong poetical value precisely as an element that creates atmospheres. The theory of the atmosphere includes the wind among the so-called "half-things" (*Halbdinge*), along with the gaze, the voice, the darkness, the night, and the coolness.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the theory distinguishes atmospheres (*Atmosphäre*) from atmospheric elements (*Atmosphärisches*): the wind belongs to the atmospheric elements, which are less vague than atmospheres yet less physical than things, while atmospheres are moods and qualities, half-things that have attributes (e.g. 'balmy wind').<sup>28</sup> Besides, experience says that different winds, such as *Scirocco*, *Bora*, *Föhn* or the *Crivă* – to confine myself to the Mediterranean and Central European space – produce various atmospheres and represented a valuable source of literary inspiration.<sup>29</sup>

From another perspective, storms offer the most appropriate natural background for dramatic scenes, either romantic turmoil as, for example, in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* or sudden and profound historical changes, insurrections and revolutions, etc. The wind is frequently understood as the sign of an imminent change when incontrollable energies produce social disorders, just as strong winds are feared for causing natural

disorders.<sup>30</sup> Also, while thunder symbolizes Jahweh's or Jupiter's voice, the voice of the wind is the people's voice, whose shout and violent insurgence terrifies and snowballs. This analogy is widely used in literature and film and touches the reader or spectator emotionally, inspiring fear and aggressiveness, insecurity, or even a feeling of liberation.

#### 4. Semantic interpretation

Winds have always enjoyed a rich symbolism, being associated with vanity, instability, inconsistency, and fickleness. Various pneumatological interpretations in Hinduism and Christianity equate the spirit with the breath, whereas Chinese philosophy integrates the winds in complex correspondences with seasons, tempers, and elements. Some traditions assign the wind a cosmological role in organizing the primordial chaos (Bible) and regulating cosmic and moral balance (Avesta). The winds can animate, punish, counsel, and bring messages, as the angels do (Bible, Koran), and they even become deities in polytheistic traditions (Ancient Greece).<sup>31</sup> In the first place, the wind symbolizes the power of empty space: a stream of air usually looks like a void, but its power is stronger than earth, water, and fire, stronger than matter, more like a purely spiritual energy.

Given this complex symbolism, artworks and installations that play with air currents allow various speculations about their signification. Visualizing air currents is like picturing space, time, speed, and force. For example, Alexander Calder's kinetic sculptures or mobiles delicately respond to the slightest air movement and suggest the pure lightness of being. Other experiments have obvious spiritual connotations and invite the viewer to meditation exercises, such as Anish Kapoor's site-specific installation *Ascension*, which was first exhibited in gallery spaces worldwide (beginning with Galleria Continua in San Gimignano in 2003, and then in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Beijing) and afterwards in a sacral space (Basilica di San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, 2011).

The transnational artist Anish Kapoor explains the installation as follows: "In my work, what is and what seems to be often become blurred. In *Ascension*, for example, what interests me is the idea of the immaterial becoming an object, which is exactly what happens in *Ascension*: the smoke becomes a column. Also present in this work is the idea of Moses following a column of smoke, a column of light, in the desert..."<sup>32</sup> His work challenges the history of sculpture understood as the history of material:

“I am making works with the history of the non-material, between illusory and real, between mythology and ordinariness,” declared the artist.<sup>33</sup> And critics see in Kapoor’s works “the predicament of two contradictory elements of modernism, the materiality of a work of art and its opposite, the ideal and the transcendental.”<sup>34</sup>

Ascension is not merely an installation to be looked at (and one should add, to be listened to), but to be contemplated in the sense of pondering or reflecting on the dream of modern art to make the invisible visible and sensible. In front of *Ascension*, the spectator cannot avoid the vague feeling that the winding column of air is more than a work of art but is a sign, an epiphany of transcendence, the materialization of the spirit, a kind of Jungian archetype that operates on a subconscious level. The ineffable column is not only hard to grasp physically but also conceptually: it moves between earth and heaven, material and immaterial, form and formlessness, and even – to speak with Kant – between phenomenon and noumenon. If Roman Ingarden assigned an active role to the reader of literature, who has to fill the empty places in a text and specify what the author has left indeterminate,<sup>35</sup> such a column is almost a physically indeterminate place and the place of indeterminacy. Its perceiver struggles with the need to grasp it perceptually and reflectively without being able to apprehend it. Anish Kapoor succeeded in *Ascension* to create a mystery that is at the same time here and elsewhere, that manifests itself without delivering its essence, and reveals itself, remaining at the same time inaccessible, a sign without clear signification.

## 5. Poietical engagement: making art

Art meets modern technology not only in Kapoor’s installation but also in several kinetic installations that use the power of the air as, for example, in the previously mentioned installations by Žilvinas Kempinas, in which light materials are moved by the air currents produced by a ventilator. This poietical engagement with the element air is quite common in music, where currents of air produce melodies by touching strings (aeolian harp) or moving through pipes (wind instruments). In the case of the aeolian harp, the wind is natural and the music seems to be produced randomly; the subject’s activity consists of making the instrument from several strings with different thickness and then letting the wind blow through them. What we hear in this case is, as a matter of fact, not the tone produced by the friction

between the wind and the strings but the tone produced by the vibrating wire followed by a sequence of overtones that are always harmonious from a mathematical perspective, but consonant in the lower register and dissonant in the higher one.<sup>36</sup> Apart from this physical explanation, the aeolian harp remains a fascinating instrument because it makes the air appear as sound and thus converts a medium into a phenomenon.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the sounds made by the aeolian harp pour into the space without any frame or border and illustrate most concretely Hermann Schmitz's definition of the atmosphere as something that indefinitely streams out into space. The aeolian harp thus produces atmospheric music in several respects.

In the case of wind instruments, it is the musician herself who produces and modulates intentionally the currents of air or, otherwise put, it is the subject who makes not only the instrument but also produces the wind. The aesthetic engagement becomes here the active use of natural elements, building them into the instrument and engaging physically in making music. To paraphrase Watsuji, the wind makes us rush into the temple and pray for protection in the typhoon season, but it also makes boats sail and flutes play.<sup>38</sup>

In poetical engagement, the artist does not confine herself any more to feeling the wind or watching its effects but, for research or for practical purposes, makes devices that mediate between the body and the wind. Let us mention a technical and artistic experiment. Etienne-Jules Marey was well-known in the second half of the nineteenth century for his chronophotographs about the movement of men and animals. In 1888 he built a special aquarium in order to investigate the aquatic locomotion of the eel, and in 1893 he published a study of the velocity of fluids. From the water streams he then turned his camera to air currents. He first documented his photographic research in *Le vol des oiseaux* (1890) and then he moved to the very medium for the flight of birds. In other words, "he began by photographing the wing moving through the air and ended by photographing the air moving around the wing."<sup>39</sup> Marey's experiments on the movement of air awakened high interest at a time when aviation research was making its first steps. Marey was a consultant, adviser, and for some time even the "éminence grise of French aviation, yet he was aware of his limited capability to interpret his photographs mathematically and physically."<sup>40</sup> Among other photographs, he produced images of smoke fillets and then of air streams that he studied in a wind tunnel he constructed specially for this purpose. Retrospectively it is considered "the grandfather of those still in use today to visualize how air flows around an airplane wing."<sup>41</sup>

Let us move now to the classical example of building screens between the body and the wind: architecture. We begin with the literary description of a residence that was built to protect its inhabitants from strong winds:

Wuthering Heights is the name of Mr. Heathcliff's dwelling, 'Wuthering' being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there, at all times, indeed: one may guess the power of the north wind, blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few, stunted firs at the end of the house, and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. Happily, the architect had foresight to build it strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones.<sup>42</sup>

Walls and roofs, arcades, pergolas and other elements provide shelter for the body on one side against wind, precipitation, and extreme temperature, while on the other side, windows enable the air to circulate between indoors and outdoors. Therefore it would be short-sighted to consider that architecture builds only against the natural elements. As important as the protection from severe weather conditions is provision for opening oneself to outer space. Apart from border cases, such as bunkers or other exceptional capsules, buildings do not block but only regulate and filter communication with the environment. Houses, like bodies, are open systems with various degree of permeability depending on the climate. In recent decades, architects opposed to the uniformity of modern international architecture have returned to the vernacular traditions of building that integrate the natural elements (light, local building materials, air, etc.) into the construction.<sup>43</sup>

On a larger scale, urban planning has to take into consideration the most frequent direction and intensity of the winds in order to decide conveniently the placement and orientation of what will be built.<sup>44</sup> As a matter of fact, architecture and urban planning are themselves filters or combs of the wind since they build solid masses that hinder the natural air circulation and city highways that become channels for the wind. Thus artifacts do not only manifest (make visible or audible) the air streams; they also conduct the air and eventually shape it. By means of artistic engagement the impossible gesture of grasping the wind is converted into various successful attempts to form and lend sense to the immaterial.



## 6. Political commitment

This vision may well be dismissed as the product of a poetical fantasy. However, a radical change of context occurs when we move to the last type of aesthetic engagement, political commitment. It has already been mentioned that this can be expressed indirectly by using stormy weather as an atmospheric symbol for swift political changes. But the air belongs also to what Arnold Berleant has called “the perceptual commons,” the very ground of perception, and this requires a responsible and democratic “aesthetic politics of environment” to regulate the quality, the availability, and the access to basic natural resources.<sup>45</sup> The wish to breathe pure and fresh air instead of being exposed to atmospheric pollution counts among the “perceptual claims” that differ from other claims because of “their immediacy in experience and their primacy for sustaining life itself.”<sup>46</sup> One may certainly find examples of artists who make such claims and qualify their ecological and political engagement as an aesthetic (i.e. aisthetic) engagement. However, here again, as in perceptual engagement, aesthetics transgresses the realm of art to become, or rather to rediscover, its initial meaning as a theory of sensibility.

As a matter of fact, all the forms of engagement mentioned above are based upon sensibility, if sensibility is not reduced to the receptivity to stimuli of a passive subject but is understood as the faculty for reacting to the outer world and producing something new: new images, new emotions, new reflections, and new artifacts. In the case of the wind, this stimulus activates various faculties of the subject, those of perceptual discrimination, emotional empathy, reflection, taste, and inventiveness. The famous idea of aesthetic disinterestedness in the sense of the absence of any practical interests does not at all exclude the subject’s interaction with the environment and a highly participatory attitude. What eventually distinguishes the art of feeling, (re)presenting, symbolizing, and making the wind from any passive exposure to natural elements is precisely the attempt to capture the essence of the wind in a never-ending adventure.

## Endnotes

1. Cioran, *Cahiers (1957–1972)*, Paris: Gallimard, 1997, p. 963.
2. Arnold Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense. The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World*, Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2010, p. 101.
3. Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Engagement* (lecture delivered at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, typescript notes, May 1993).
4. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Eolian Harp*, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/183957>, accessed on July 10, 2013.
5. Alfred Schutz, *Fragments toward a phenomenology of music* in *Collected Papers*, vol. IV, Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1996, pp. 243–275.
6. John 20,22; Acts of the Apostels 2,2.
7. Leonardo da Vinci, *Philosophische Tagebücher*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1958, p. 103.
8. Watsuji Tetsuro, *Fudo – Wind und Erde. Der Zusammenhang zwischen Klima und Kultur*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992, pp. 21–104.
9. Wolfgang Behringer, *A Cultural History of Climate*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010.
10. Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, London: Paladin, 1970, p. 175.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. I, Leipzig, Berlin, 1932, p. 5.
13. For images of the Beaufort Scale, see: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Beaufort\\_Scale?uselang=de](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Beaufort_Scale?uselang=de), accessed on July 10, 2013. However, wind speed may be measured also with acoustic methods, either using vibrating tuner forks, or a tone generator, or even directly by trained listeners (cf. Mins Minssen, *Zur Phänomenologie des Windes und der Windmusik* in *Phänomenologie der Natur*, ed. by Gernot Böhme and Gregor Schiemann, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997, pp. 232–255, esp. p. 245.)
14. Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlaß: 1921–1928*. Husserliana 14, Dordrecht: Springer, 1973; Géza Révész, *Die Formenwelt des Tastsinnes*, vol. 1, Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1938.
15. Erwin Straus, *Vom Sinn der Sinne. Ein Beitrag zur Grundlegung der Psychologie*, Berlin: Springer, 1956, p. 238.
16. Gilles Clément, *Manifest der dritten Landschaft*, Berlin: Merve, 2010.
17. An exception may be found in a video documenting Anish Kapoor's installation *Ascension* from the Basilica di San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice that shows a visitor stretching her hand to feel or even "grasp" the wind that is technically produced inside the church.
18. *The Turin Horse*, directed by Béla Tarr and Ágnes Hranitzky (H, 2011).
19. Gaston Bachelard, *L'air et les songes. Essai sur l'imagination du mouvement*, Paris: José Corti, 1965, p. 7.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 257–270.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 257, my translation.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 256, 259.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 259; my emphasis.
26. Even the olfactory dimension of the wind is mentioned by Bachelard only parenthetically, at the end of the chapter (“balsamic breezes,” “scented winds,” *ibid.*, p. 270).
27. Hermann Schmitz, *System der Philosophie III.5. Die Wahrnehmung*, Bonn: Bouvier, 1978, § 245.
28. Gernot Böhme, *Asthetik. Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre*, München: Fink, 2001, p. 59.
29. To mention one single example, the lascivious, erotical, hot, and moist atmosphere in Thomas Mann’s *The Death in Venice* is typical for the Scirocco.
30. Cf. Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, pp. 1110–1112, ref. on p. 1112.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 1111.
32. Anish Kapoor, *Ascension in Venice* 2011, <http://www.designboom.com/art/anish-kapoor-ascension-in-venice-2011/>, accessed on July 11, 2013.
33. Quoted in Partha Mitter, *History, Memory, and Anish Kapoor in Anish Kapoor: Past, Present, Future*, ed. by Nicholas Baume, Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2008, pp. 104–119, ref. on p. 108.
34. Partha Mitter, *loc. cit.*
35. Roman Ingarden, *Das literarische Kunstwerk*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1965, p. 353.
36. See: Mins Minssen, *Zur Phänomenologie...*, p. 248.
37. “Es ist schon faszinierend wie diese Harfen die Luft zur Erscheinung bringen. Sie verwandeln die Luft in Klang. Wie die Luft ohne Grenze ist, so ergießen sich diese Klänge randlos im Raum. Die Luft ist das Grenzenlose, das apeiron – und ohne Anfang, ohne Ende und die Klänge so Harfe.” (Jens Soentgen, quoted in Mins Minssen, *Zur Phänomenologie...*, p. 249).
38. Watsuji Tetsuro, *Fudo – Wind und Erde...*, p. 16.
39. Marta Braun, *Picturing Time. The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904)*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 216.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
42. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, London: Penguin Books, 2003, p. 4.
43. For example, Kenneth Frampton’s critical regionalism (*Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1985).
44. For example, the refinery in Schwechat was built in the south of Vienna, given that the winds usually come from the north.
45. Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetic Politics of Environment in Aesthetics Beyond the Arts. New and Recent Essays*, Burlington: Ashgate, 2012, pp. 181–193.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 186.



Nathalie Blanc

## Aesthetic Engagement in the City

This article aims at showing how environmental aesthetics relates to the common environment, the ordinary environment that we discuss, share, and live in. Aesthetics has primarily been understood in relation to art and art history, but it has now been emancipated from this framework of interpretation. In the wake of John Dewey, aesthetics has become the problem of experience as ordinary sensitivity. One can even think that it is a question of adequately defining the world of sensitivity that rests on the faculty of perception: both the capacity to perceive and the concept of the perceptual commons that follows from this. The forms that are perceived could then very well be understood as those we have in common and that we discuss in questions of policy (formal commons).

Arnold Berleant, in his essay *The Aesthetic Politics of Environment*, explains:

Such a vision brings us to the need for recognizing and shaping environment. It may be that the perceptual commons identifies the establishing conditions of the human environment, that is, of the human world, and that in shaping environment we are enhancing and making coherent all its participating constituents.<sup>1</sup>

In the remarks that follow I would like to show just how much aesthetic engagement, involving active participation in the appreciative process, sometimes by overt physical action but always by creative perceptual involvement,<sup>2</sup> concerns urban lives and also, in spite of the eminently artificial nature of the urban environment, how much it draws on the depth of the perceptual experience involved. Indeed, if there is knowledge in our city-dwellers' gaze, it is not this erudition that gives the aesthetic experiences

their depth and liveliness, but the human capacity to project ourselves into these environments, to feel connected to them ecologically.

## 1. Aesthetic engagement in urban space

Today's worldwide urbanization has profoundly transformed humans' relations with their natural and built environments. The latter is often considered as an entirely artificial setting, but the presence of ecological dynamics shows that it remains a living environment for many species. Experiencing the city, in fact, attests to a natural dimension that contributes to a renewed appreciation of the urban life setting. The numerous mobilizations in favor of nature in the city are accompanied by an appropriation of the urban environment that has been encouraged by the awareness of overall ecological issues. The fact that urbanites are expressing a desire to reconnect with nature in the city is in keeping with the elimination of the subject-object dichotomy. But before going any further, I would like to make several remarks about the debates around aesthetic engagement, environmental aesthetics, and eco-aesthetics.

First of all, it is important to stress the practical experience of the urban environment and the relationships that make it a framework for experiencing the city. This practice constitutes the heart of a vital process that we can term *environmentalization*, that is to say, the creation of environments proper to the human being. The sensory materiality of the city contributes to this. Consequently, the representation of the environment is the result of a process involving keen aesthetic engagement. The individuals and communities sharing such aesthetic engagement do not dissociate the urban experience (as something appreciative, creative, central, and representational) from the production of the urban environment. Giving the urban setting its full meaning, this aesthetic engagement brings into play a learning experience, narratives, visions, landscapes, and panoramas.

Second, this experience of the city has recently taken a new turn that might be termed aesthetic and environmental. City-dwellers have gradually become aware not only of the importance of nature in the urban setting but also of the environmental issues arising from the damages caused by human activities, locally and globally. This growing awareness, through mobilizations, has gradually produced a change in the shaping of the city and has contributed to the creation of a new urban aesthetic (especially visible in eco-neighborhoods and other such experiments). In short, the

aesthetic experience of the city is not limited to what has been constructed but includes living environments as well.

Third, the idea of aesthetic engagement involves an active experience so that the aesthetic experience of environment increases the value of the environment and provides an opportunity to talk about it and about oneself at the same time. By simultaneously enhancing the self and the environment or a particular aspect of it, aesthetic engagement constitutes a recognition of oneself in the environment.<sup>3</sup>

Fourth, the perceptual habits governing our daily lives blot out part of the spectacular, monumental nature of the built city in favor of a singular syncopated experience that tends to be associated with urban rhythms. To cite one example, a contemporary analysis of aesthetic engagement inevitably refers to an experiential framework caught between the extremes of mobility and immobility. This gives the city and its different urban spaces an uncertain appearance, like a kind of hesitation waltz between the extreme fixity of the spaces as setting and the great fluidity of the processes – a phenomenon that is tied at once to contemporary capitalism and a desire to make urban spaces physically safe. Such a reading takes into account phenomena of mobility (roads and motorways, flows of data and persons, etc.), regardless of the speed, as well as relations between the built and the natural, and the tangible and the intangible. The particular aesthetic that emerges foregrounds the inhumanity of the situations encountered (from the high-speed motorways of urban networks to the traffic jams of the city taken as machine). All the same, the spread of mobility networks comes up against local and/or environmental resistances that take inspiration from novel forms of action to defend precious or endangered environments and species.

At the micro level, the city proclaims itself the site of friendly movement, such as *flâneurs*, improvised byways, and shortcuts. Various sources of legitimacy are invoked: pollution, the need to slow down, new perceptions of the urban landscape, all sorts of leitmotifs in remarks about the need for a “friendlier” aesthetic perception of the city, as well. In less than twenty years, we have gone from the hegemony of the automobile, in Western cities at least, to the renaissance of so-called friendly transport and the re-emergence of figures until now lost in modernity: the pedestrian, the cyclist, even the farmer.

This trend opposes two forms of disengagement. The first is tied to the professionalization and highly technical process of urban planning, which has altered the sensory features of the city and prohibited many customs

and practices (sleeping on the grass, savoring the odor of springtime, watching the stars, feeding the birds, etc.). The second form of disengagement comes from the privatization and commodification of the “public” space, where a significant portion of the road network is reserved for automobiles, advertising, and various means of blocking and closing off the space.

Here it must also be emphasized that the aesthetic experience, whether individual or collective, reflects forms of engagement in the environment that lead to understanding it in such a way as to resist normative injunctions concerning our ordinary behaviors. In this sense, turning the environment upside down means doing the same to ourselves. City-dwellers and their environment are closely interdependent on a conceptual level, which might be qualified as cultural ecology, and they perceive the depth of this interdependence. Thus, the beauty of neglected urban neighborhoods claimed by certain residents raises questions of ethics, individual dignity, and environmental justice.

The issue here is to elaborate an alternative way of understanding environmental processes. This alternative path rejects the social constructionism that endows societies and individuals with a kind of pure power to shape the environment. It also rejects a kind of naturalism or realism that would grant scientific objectification a higher power for revealing reality. This alternative path draws on research dealing with agency and intra-action. To begin by explaining these terms, we can say that the ongoing relations human beings maintain with their environments lead them to jointly construct and elaborate a shared world as a frame of reference.<sup>4</sup> Aesthetic engagement is a powerful means of shaping environments. Consequently, it is no longer possible to understand a given event without including the observational setup and even the ways in which the observation, the environment, and the actors are constructed. A few examples will allow us to illustrate the way aesthetic engagement accompanies thinking about the city.

## 2. The cockroach in the city: a shady animal

The first example deals with a truly urban creature, the cockroach. Interdisciplinary research on the population dynamics of this species in three French cities: Paris, Lyons, and Rennes, have demonstrated the usefulness of aesthetics to characterize the behaviors it sets off. The cockroach (or *Blatta*, to use its scientific name) is specifically urban because, like other



increasingly numerous animals, it profits from the ecological conditions provided by the modern city (constant, year-round heat in buildings, moisture, abundant hiding places, and the presence of food). In this sense, we are studying the ecology and ethology of this species of insect by situating it in a context that has not often been studied, that of the representations and practices it engenders.

This pioneering study, in both its form and content, has led to appreciating the significance of the aesthetics of the cockroach and the practices that characterize our reactions to it. In addition to bringing out its formal qualities and the way it is perceived (a dark insect with many feet, highly mobile, taking refuge in dirty places, fleeing human beings and light), the aesthetic experience of this creature includes a large place for the imagination. The same imagination is brought to bear on the aesthetics of the neighborhood and the people living there. This kind of insect contributes to a debate that makes its presence an element full of meaning, as an indication, for example, of the stigmatization of disadvantaged neighborhoods in which they proliferate.

A woman who used to live in the countryside thus conveys the shame she feels through this account of her life in an urban housing block:

People weren't used to seeing us in this kind of environment. That's how you discover who your friends are. It's the same for the building. People say, "Do you see where you're living, how it smells, what the people are like, their color?" For me, it was clear, I warned the people who were coming here: "There are cockroaches, if that bothers you, you leave, and if it doesn't bother you, you stay."

Her way of dealing with the cockroaches stems from a broader struggle to adjust to a place that represents the "slum belt" and the behavior of some of the residents (reciprocal intolerance, irresponsibility, etc.). She is trying to improve her living conditions.

People imagine that the animal is dark and associate it with building technology: the plumbing, the interstices between buildings, all kinds of crevices constitute its "home." This is where it settles, takes refuge when someone chases it, lies low in preparation for invading the nooks and crannies of private space. In other words, it is a shady animal taking up residence in the recesses of the everyday.

By extension, this animal of the shadows represents the foreigner, the other, who, in these housing blocks in the south of Rennes, a French city in Brittany with some 292,000 inhabitants, may be seen as a problem. As one

of the women queried explains: “One year, we came back from vacation and the walls were crawling. That must have come from somewhere. People say it’s because of the Arabs. Where it comes from and how it got there, but I don’t really know...” Two reasons are advanced: first, the insect is dark and likes the night, and second, it likes heat: “I’ve never studied the cockroach’s behavior. I’ve just noticed that we didn’t see any in the daytime and that it comes out in the evening.

Once I was in Tunisia and went into a store and there were [cockroaches]. It seems that there are a lot of them in warm countries.” These two features of the animal serve to associate it with the foreigner who, in France, comes from the South and has an olive-colored skin. In *Man and The Natural World*, Keith Thomas offers a striking example of this.<sup>5</sup> The author analyzes the exclusion affecting animals and parts of humanity between the 16th and 19th centuries. He cites a letter written in 1879 by an animal-lover whose house has been overrun by black beetles: “I hate making war even upon black beetles,” it runs, “they have as much right to live as black Zulus. But what can one do in either case?”

The metaphorical dimension of the approach to the cockroach also demonstrates the power of aesthetic engagement. The metaphorical universe, a bridge suspended over reality, brings out the latter’s illusory depth. The judgment that confers greater importance on one metaphor or another, to the point that some of them, like the sunset, seem perfectly obvious, recognizes the universality of the aesthetic experience. The metaphor creates a link with reality, offers the possibility of increasing the value of certain places: when we attribute one term to another, we are not simply enhancing the description of the first but giving it a value. The metaphor increases the value of an imaginative, poetic way of grasping the real; it manifests an awareness of relationships uniting us with the environment.

By way of example, the etymology of the word *cockroach* in French – *cafard* – is a marvellous tracer of the metaphorical construction of relationships between human beings and things. The two terms used to designate this insect in French, the scientific name *Blatta* and the common name *cafard*, bring out the fact that both refer to its nocturnal habits.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, *cafard* (1589) is probably borrowed from the Arabic *kāfir*, “unbeliever.” The pejorative suffix *-ard* replaced the original ending and the word was adopted with the religious sense of “poser” or “hypocrite” employed polemically in the sixteenth century, especially during France’s religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. It seems that the everyday meaning

of *Blatta* (*blatte* in French), attested from 1542, is a metaphorical use of “religious hypocrite” now applied to a dark-colored animal hiding from the light. This meaning was initially regional (Normandy, Berry) but spread into French as a whole by the nineteenth century. The term *blatte*, from the Latin *blatta*, which covers various insects “fleeing the light” (Pliny), follows the same lines. Through the intermediary of scientific Latin, the naturalists of the second half of the eighteenth century established *Blatta* as a genus of cockroaches. The animal’s night-time habits thus play a large role in the representations and practices surrounding it, as demonstrated by many literary texts (where the cockroach swarms, threatens, should be exterminated, renders uncomfortable, etc.).

### 3. Natural spaces in the city: sensory experience and scientific knowledge

Second, studies attempting to characterize people’s relationships to nearby patches of nature, and more specifically, to the greenways in the greater Paris area, have shown that sensory, aesthetic engagement permits the richness of nature to be characterized other than by the use of scientific terms that usually attest to particular knowledge. Thus, if neither the ecological dimension of biodiversity nor the spatial dimension of the continuity is clearly perceived, do we still have to conclude that there is no link between the attachment mentioned above and the existing biodiversity? Several questions from the survey addressed the users’ sensory perceptions in these spaces. On the basis of the findings, these perceptions bring out an ecological dimension that, even if it is not consciously defined, is reflected nonetheless in the interest these spaces generate. The presence of animals, for example, is important: no fewer than 88% of the sample state that they see animals. Even if we remove replies concerning pets such as cats and dogs, there are still 65% of the replies mentioning birds, more than 30% citing different kinds of mammals, 5% mentioning fish and nearly 3% talking about insects. On the average, users thus declare that they have seen between two and three animals and cite a total of nearly eighty species.

Vegetal diversity is also perceived. With regard to trees, 70% of those surveyed indicated that they have distinguished several species, with half of them able to cite at least two. The percentages are slightly lower for grasses (52% of users identified several kinds), with a total of nearly eighty

herbaceous plant species named by those surveyed. This attention paid to animal and vegetable species is also part of the attractiveness of these spaces, and even more interestingly, of the well-being they may generate. Forty-two per cent of the respondents declared that they heard pleasant sounds and 39% that they smelled pleasant odors. This feeling is directly tied to biodiversity: the pleasant sounds primarily come from animals (72%), and secondarily from vegetation or water (13%), while the odors depend above all on plants (69%). Sounds and odors related to biodiversity thus contribute directly in the well-being felt in these greenways, as well as the sites' "aesthetic quality" that is cited among the terms best describing these spaces, just after "calm" and "verdure." We thus observe a profound difference between the knowledge of biodiversity (practically non-existent) and its perception that constitutes a large part of the attraction felt for these spaces. The role of these sensory perceptions as "gateways" to a greater awareness of biodiversity ultimately brings out the importance of the places, considered both from the standpoint of their biological diversity and from that of their aesthetic qualities as landscapes.

#### 4. The experience of illness: rediscovering the senses

Third, aesthetic engagement helps to treat the symptoms of today's illnesses. In terms of the link with nature, this does not just involve a spiritual reconnection but everything affecting city-dwellers, directly and physically.

Here, the University Hospital in the north-eastern French city of Nancy offers an extremely interesting case in its "therapeutic garden" created by the hospital in 2008 for patients suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Conceived within the logic of horticultural therapy, the *Art, Memory and Life Garden*, as it is called, brings together elements stimulating the cognitive mechanisms of Alzheimer's patients. To that end, it is divided into four sections evoking the classical elements: air, earth, water, and fire.<sup>7</sup> The idea is to mobilize all the senses: sight, through the colors and landscapes; hearing, through the sounds of the fountains and sound sculptures; touch, through the plants; smell, through the scents and fragrances of the flower beds. Memory, language, and emotion are solicited by the cycle of the seasons and exchanges with the support staff. Strolling in the garden also provides a spatial and temporal frame of reference. Because it is outdoors and accessible to visitors, it is a place of openness and thus of mediation.

## 5. The senses and science

A final example concerning atmospheric pollution demonstrates how the capacity of aesthetic engagement for enhancing the value of everyday experience is such that the scientific knowledge that might be associated with it is sometimes not even mentioned. The study in question was based on nearly sixty semi-structured interviews concerning ordinary residents' practices and representations with regard to air pollution in the eastern French city of Strasbourg. Half of the sample was composed of individuals suffering from asthma or allergies to grass pollen, following the principle of the "case-control" study widely used in epidemiology. Two interviews with heads of the local Association for the Monitoring and Study of Atmospheric Pollution (ASPA, the organization that officially monitors air quality in the Alsace Region), as well as a study of ASPA articles in the press, complemented the survey. These elements were then compared with measures of air quality indoors and outdoors carried out by physicians and chemists. The findings of this study may be summarized in three main points:

1– The individuals queried paid little attention to information about air pollution. They relied on sense information (odor, sight, noise) to construct their understanding of the phenomenon.

2–The standard, objective scientific information disseminated about air quality by the ASPA was quite remote from the residents' empirical, sensory knowledge of air pollution. This was reinforced by an attachment to a concrete social context with which they identified. The opposition between these two spheres of knowledge about the physico-chemical phenomena is striking.

3–For the city-dwellers, the practical form of involvement against pollution is a way of linking it symbolically to other environmental phenomena. Some of those surveyed believed, for example, that the vegetation protected them from pollution.

Such reasoning was based less on scientific knowledge than on the feeling that greenery purifies and that the "garden" it suggests – Paradise in many religious cultures – could shelter them from the pollution they considered to be a product of unnatural human activities. We can thus see that the cultures of nature, relying on an engaged aesthetic perception of the environment, play a fundamental role in understanding that environment and, consequently, on the practices people follow.

## 6. Conclusion

If it is essential to take aesthetic engagement into account in urban development, it is just as necessary to remain critically vigilant about the methods and objectives of this integration. Indeed, today's decision-makers and developers do take aesthetic experience into consideration; but it nonetheless contributes essentially to an aestheticization of the environment that favors a spectacular vision of the city. But is it not possible to think of the city as an experience of discontinuity and syncopation? The light used to create striking night-time images of places that become impossible to miss, the greenery or the mix of city and nature all contribute to turning the city into a spectacle. The objective is to create hypnotic images of the urban space, to capture the tourist's eye, to produce instantaneity and silence, "ghostliness", or images that, coming back to haunt us, obliterate the reconstituted fluidity of the different experiences.

The city also becomes a mirror, a place reflecting a singular condition, a looking-glass. Urban policies, notably in France, tend to multiply sensory experiences to create a backdrop. (The Paris-Plages artificial beach is an example of this). Thus, the setting is increasingly understood as an attempt to improve urban well-being. The importance assumed by quality of life is symptomatic of this situation. Public authorities, but also representatives of civil society, are expressing a new demand for well-being that is deemed essential to the urban life of cities. It thus marks the transition from an urban *aesthetic* (space as setting) to an urban *aesthesis* or sense perception (urban environment as atmosphere), from a space of decors to a space of well-being. Urban strategies thus reflect this shift toward an ecological urbanism in the sense of a multitude of possible experiences. Certain places in the city would be able to produce emotions or new aesthetic experiences. It should be noted, however, that representatives of civil society, such as community garden movements, consider this environmental approach as a change of lifestyle. Nonetheless, these various changes tend to enlarge the place for the sensory and the living in systems in order to increase the value of the urban environment.

Do our bodies now contribute to the environmental fashioning of urban space?<sup>8</sup> The "sensorial" standards thus being created are now integrated into environmental policies, town-planning, and "landscaping" practices where artists participate as well. In a broad sense, the development of these ecological events plays a *de facto* role in producing public space. This involves, first of all, ejecting inhabitants deemed undesirable, whether these

are living species, such as pigeons, or the homeless, who are prevented from staying in the protected urban space. Second, the multiplication of sensory experiences in that space and the creation of a living environment that meets city-dwellers' demands for leisure activities underscore the theses of aesthetic capitalism:<sup>9</sup> capital is invested and produced in the commodification of the urban environment. The production of a green environment is part of the branding of the product "ecology" that is appropriated by capitalists and urban policy-makers to inject dynamism into a society keen on consuming new experiences. For the cities' political leaders and technical experts, the artist often appears to be the means of rehabilitating damaged or ailing environments in the "green" imagination of an ecology-oriented society. Navigating between local development and political manipulation, the artist offers the potential of a new reading or experience of the sites. The urban space, formerly dedicated to specific urban functions (services, production, etc.), becomes the very locus of experimentation and the creation of new events. Animals, vegetation, air, and climate are all part of this rereading of the city.

Translated from French by Miriam Rosen

## Endnotes

1. Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetic Politics of Environment in Aesthetics beyond the Arts, New and Recent Essays*, Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2012, p. 187.
2. Aesthetics is returned to its etymological origins by stressing the primacy of sense perception, sensible experience, and perception itself was reconfigured to recognize the mutual participation of all sensory modalities, including kinesthetic sensibility.
3. Axel Honneth, *La réification. Petit traité de théorie critique*, Paris: NRF essais, Gallimard, 2007.
4. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics And the Entanglement of Matter And Meaning*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007. See also: A. Gell, *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
5. Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800*, London: Penguin, PP History PB, 1991.
6. Translator's note: The English "cockroach" is also a borrowed word, apparently taken from the Spanish name for the same insect, *cucaracha*, and anglicized into *cock + roach*.
7. Horticultural therapy entails a comprehensive practical rehabilitation of the individual through gardening activities adapted to different kinds of handicaps (physical, sensory, mental, or multiple). It may serve as a preventive practice or as a form of therapeutic education.

8. Georges Canguilhem, *Le normal et le pathologique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966.
9. Olivier Assouly, *Le capitalisme esthétique. Essai sur l'industrialisation du goût*, Paris: Cerf humanités, 2008.



Jale Erzen

## Aesthetic Engagement: Art Into Politics

This paper is in three parts: first I will compare aesthetic and practical perception; second I will articulate ideas about the image and its engaging power; this will lead my argument to the investigation of how art and images can be effective in the symbolic ordering of our social relations.

### 1. Aesthetic and practical perception

We can claim that all perception is aesthetic, actively involving a sensory response through which the imagination constructs meaning. Today, however, both media transmissions and the industrial and mechanical forms imposed on the environment inevitably create an uninvolved practical perception that abandons its objects as soon as a functional interpretation results that causes immediate action. Many spaces, such as offices, coffee shops, supermarkets, shopping centers, airports, etc., are designed in a mechanical way where space is rendered shallow and the sense of place is negated.<sup>1</sup> In such places and under such conditions aesthetic perception and engagement are excluded to give way to operational behavior.

An example is the traffic light, a sign on the perception of which a practical response is given. Of course, traffic lights can also become aesthetic through artistic articulation, as seen in the above artwork. Practical perception consumes its object and does not leave any option for seeing or interpreting symbols. Aesthetic perception, on the other hand, is open ended, leading to changing interpretations and the creation of symbols; it abandons itself to the different and myriad interpretations and meanings afforded by a mental commitment to the object.

Engagement is an attraction that mentally and often emotionally commits the subject to the object without limitation of time or space. Looking at a work of art, reading a book involves us beyond time and space; we assume a kinship with an author from centuries past or from an unknown place. Engagement is total abandonment through the senses to the object without critical judgments or analyses; one is involved with the whole. Life could be seen as a total engagement: engaging with the world, with others, with society. Life is possible first through aesthetic engagement, through sharing the expressions of the world as our senses become involved with the objects of perception. According to Arnold Berleant, who has for many years developed a philosophy of engaged aesthetics, “Aesthetic engagement is not based on the demands of a logical structure or a philosophical system. It therefore rejects aesthetic experience and the presence of aesthetic value throughout human activity.”<sup>2</sup> However, it may be that an engaged and emotionally charged relationship to the world is mostly possible today in the arts.

Yet with the exception of mass media images, art images and images transmitted through the social media have a forceful effect in creating new spaces of solidarity, new concepts of the self and the other, new urban environments and social spaces. The visual image, more than any kind of sensory form, gives one immediate credibility of the real. Therefore, today, no matter how much one discredits media transmissions, television, films, videos and photography are effective tools in conditioning our relationship to the world.

There are images that are seen, those that are revelations of the invisible, images in blindness, dream images, images created in the vast realm of art, and images of social or political references that pave the way to the solidarity of resistance. Aesthetics, as the investigation into the meaning of form rather than that of content or narration, emerges as a discipline and a regime of thought with the Enlightenment. It is especially with Hegel that aesthetics begins to designate thinking related to art. Representation in whatever way it is understood, either as the mental image that is created in perception, as in the explanation of Kant, or as an interpretation, description, or created image of the thing seen or experienced, as Rancière claims, involves a relationship between knowledge and action.<sup>3</sup> However, as the discourse on art and on the image becomes intensified, at the same time as Hegel proposes, in the modern age the spirit is disconnected from art and, for that matter, from the image. Giorgio Agamben claims, in line

with Hegel's reasoning, that images or artworks today do not engage us any more as they used to before the medieval era. According to Agamben, involvement today with an image or with art is simply critical and inquisitive.<sup>4</sup> However, I will not dwell on this controversy.

## 2. The image and its engaging power

When we confront an image there is always a kind of shock at the first encounter. Seeing, confronting an image, especially images with the painterly touch, refuse any narrative explanation and lead to a silence. Adorno has written that all real experience is accompanied by a shudder. An image creates a kind of total empowerment, as in confronting a work of art. Ranci re explains that all great works of art give us a certain shock when thought becomes paralyzed. He goes on to say that although we always read an image with thought, the moment we are hit by the image we can no longer think, calculate, or assess. We are engaged totally. Aesthetic engagement at first creates a kind of incapacity, whereas in practical perception we are led to immediate practice, a way out of engagement.<sup>5</sup> According to Lyotard, the force of the image (of art) makes us powerless: the subject is disarmed by the sensible, which hits the naked soul confronted by the power of the "other." For him it is like the striking of the sublime, which elevates pathos and is irreducible to logos.<sup>6</sup> The power of art, then, is the immediate identity of the contradictions of logos and pathos (thought and passion). In Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, these are symbolized by the trance represented by Dionysus coupled with the discipline and order of Apollo. It is a process where the trance is then followed by the perception of intelligible order and form: This shift from one state to the other is typical of aesthetic engagement, which does not forsake its object but becomes open to continuous interpretations and sensory states. The symbol can never be consumed; it is open to myriad interpretations.

According to George Didi-Huberman, "there is no innocent gaze before the one that we place on an image... a knowledge precedes all approaches, all reception of images;...but something strange happens the moment our knowledge...is shattered...when the image appears."<sup>7</sup> "With the appearance of the image all our language is questioned... and suspended. Facing the strangeness of the image our language becomes enriched with new combinations and our thought with new categories."<sup>8</sup> According to him, this incapacity before the image has to do with the wider anthropological,

historical, and political dimension of images. Even in front of familiar images, there are breaks that emerge suddenly and put us in a state of bewilderment. As the image emerges in our consciousness, it opens a break in our thinking and we enter a museum of empty words; it is impossible to find words for this experience. According to Didi-Huberman, the image is only worth as much as it can change our thinking.<sup>9</sup> Even when we see the same image, we look at it through a new time dimension and a new space dimension. On the other hand, images of the media do not emerge; they bombard us.

Until now I have talked about the perception and involvement of the person who looks, of the spectator with the image or with the art work. The involvement and perception of the artist with the work of art is almost Dionysian, without any recourse to distancing and critical judgment.

In Agamben's words:

To look at a work of art, therefore, means to be hurled out into a more original time: it means ecstasy in the epochal opening of rhythm, which gives and holds back. Only by starting from this situation of man's relationship with the work of art is it possible to comprehend how this relationship – if it is authentic – is also for man the highest engagement, that is, the engagement that keeps him in the truth and grants to his dwelling on earth its original status. In the experience of the work of art, man stands in the truth, that is, in the origin that has revealed itself to him in the poetic act. In this engagement, in this being hurled-out-into the *έποχη* of rhythm, artists and spectators recover their essential solidarity and their common ground.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. How art/images can be effective in the symbolic ordering of our social relations

Art becomes work when it is shared with another person. Sharing is also engagement in the most basic sense. In articulating the relationship between art and politics, Jacop Lund refers to Bernard Stiegler's claim that the "[artist's] work is originally engaged in the question of the sensibility of the other. The political question is, in essence, the question of the relation to the other in a common or shared sensing..."<sup>11</sup> "The political is aesthetic in that it has to do with the symbolic ordering of social relations and our coexistence."<sup>12</sup> "Perception, sensation, feeling and taste are not only individual but at the same time social phenomena."<sup>13</sup> As Lund claims, "Art is directly associated with engaging members of a society in common

symbols and in common experiences afforded by cultural expressions, i.e., sounds, and cultural activities... Politics is the art of securing the unity of the city, the polis, in its desire for a common future... a political community is thus – in agreement with the Kantian idea of *sensus communis*, i.e. our shared ability to have feelings in common.”<sup>14</sup>

According to Rancière, artistic ‘means’ are the ‘means’ of participating in the configuration of a specific milieu.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, a large part of the world population has been turned into passive consumers (even of symbols) through global culture industries. For many people today aesthetic engagement is seldom possible; global culture industries subject people to alienating aesthetic conditionings through media imagery and through exposing people to spaces and phenomena devoid of meaning. “Politically active art changes the conditions of what we see and we speak about; it challenges the borders between the visible and the invisible... [I]t is thus through art that the world can be articulated in new ways.”<sup>16</sup> In this relation, a lot of contemporary art that diverts people from established canons of commercially viable art through its dissonance has contributed to political awareness. “Art’s relative autonomy and difference from everyday life... makes it possible for dissonant art to openly show the tensions, contradictions and aporias of the capitalist system.”<sup>17</sup>

I believe that because digital imagery can be shared on such a large scale, it also has great engaging power, as we have witnessed in the spreading of political uprisings of the last several years. Images of activist dynamics, images of how city spaces are turned into interactive communal areas, have had an immense power of engaging people.

All political uprising involve people mentally and ideologically, not only through concepts, but aesthetically through a sensory engagement that is triggered by images and sounds that are interpreted as symbols and stimulate one into direct response. The image engages us personally, both as a symbol that appears within our private mental space and as something that connects us to the world. Recent political actions have created their own ways of belonging to the city and claiming urban space.

Through these images we identify with the actors and engage in a common cause.

## Endnotes

1. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe, New York: Verso Books, 1995.
2. Arnold Berleant, *What is Aesthetic Engagement?* Introduction to the panel on Aesthetic Engagement at the International Congress of Aesthetics in Krakow, Poland, July 2013 and Introduction to this symposium.
3. Jacques Rancière, *L'Inconscient esthétique*, Paris: Galilée, 2001, p. 22.
4. Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content* (L'uomo senza contenuto), Macareta: Quodlibet, 1994.
5. Jacques Rancière, *L'Inconscient esthétique*, pp. 63–78.
6. Jean Francois Lyotard in Jacques Rancière, *L'Inconscient esthétique*, p. 76.
7. Georges Didi-Huberman, 'La Condition des Images,' *L'expérience des images*, trans. Jale Erzen, Paris: Œna Editions, 2011, p. 83. ("Il n'y a pas d'innocence du regard qui préexisterait à ce regard là que je pose sur cette image ci... Il y a un savoir qui préexiste à toute approche, à toute réception des images. Mais il se passe quelque chose d'intéressant lorsque notre savoir...est mis en pièces...qui commence avec l'instant même où l'image apparaît.")
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85 (L'Apparition d'une image...tout notre langage qui est...remis en question, interloqué, suspendu...devant l'étrangeté de l'image, notre langage s'enrichisse de nouvelles combinaisons et notre pensée de nouvelles catégories....).
9. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
10. Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, p. 63.
11. Jacob Lund, *Artistic Re-Appropriation and Reconfiguration of the Medium's Milieu*, "The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics", no. 44–45 (2012–2013), p. 117.
12. *Ibid.*, 117.
13. *Loc. cit.*
14. *Loc. cit.*
15. Rancière in Jacob Lund, *Artistic Re-Appropriation...*, p. 118.
16. Jacob Lund, *Artistic Re-Appropriation...*, p. 118.
17. Gene Ray, *Adorno, Brecht and Debord: Three Models for Resisting the Capitalist Art System*, "The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics", no. 44–45 (2012–2013), p. 85.



Pierre Vivant, traffic tree light sculpture



Image 1 (Drawing by Jale N. Erzen – 1985 mixed media)



Image 2 (Drawing by Jale N. Erzen – 2005, mixed media)







Cheng Xiangzhan

# Aesthetic Engagement, Ecosophy C, and Ecological Appreciation

## 1. Introduction

With the aim of healing the earth and sustain a healthy ecosystem for all life forms, not humankind alone, ecoaesthetics emerges as a critique of Enlightenment mentality and of modern aesthetics as it is embodied in it. This mentality contributes greatly to the global ecological crisis and to other problem areas, such as population, economic, political and religious ones. In my understanding of aesthetics, ecoaesthetics is defined as the theory of ecological aesthetic appreciation.<sup>1</sup>

With ecoaesthetics as my research horizon, there are at least two reasons for me to pay special attention to American philosopher Arnold Berleant's conception of aesthetic engagement and his aesthetic theory based on it, an aesthetics of engagement. The first is our shared theme, which is the critique of modern aesthetics. The second reason is more complex for it involves the crucial question of the proper manner of aesthetic appreciation. From the perspective of ecoaesthetics, the contemplation of objects by a separated perceiver, an approach that is based on the modern philosophical dualism of subject and object, is unsatisfactory and inadequate. Berleant's aesthetic engagement is a more satisfactory account of appreciation that is aesthetic and ecological. This emphasizes the ecological continuity or interrelatedness between the human appreciator and objects.

Of course, any theory can occasion critique and development. Based on Berleant's idea of aesthetic engagement, I would like to propose Ecosophy C. This can be contrasted with Ecosophy T proposed by the Norwegian, Arne Naess, and with traditional Chinese aesthetic wisdom. In contrast with these, I would like to develop my own view of ecological understanding. In order to construct a more comprehensive and reasonable ecoaesthetics, my

Ecosophy C contains eight points that are crucial in building an ecological model of aesthetic appreciation for this period of ecological crisis.

## 2. Aesthetic engagement as a model of aesthetic appreciation and its revolutionary significance

Arnold Berleant's idea of "engagement," later specified as "aesthetic engagement," started to appear in the literature in the 1970s and '80s. His 1991 book *Art and Engagement* offers a detailed discussion about the idea and challenges the entire tradition of modern aesthetics, especially its dualism of subject and object. Berleant asserts that the concept of aesthetic engagement "claims continuity rather than separation"<sup>2</sup> and proposes that this conception of aesthetics centers on appreciative "experience characterized by continuity, perceptual integration, and engagement."<sup>3</sup> With his criticism of modern aesthetics' reduction of experience to a subjective response, he emphasizes "experiential continuity" and even calls his aesthetic theory based on this idea as an "aesthetics of the continuity of experience."<sup>4</sup> In contrast with the dominant approach of contemporary aesthetics that focuses mainly on art, Berleant proposes moving "through intuition and empathy to involvement and engagement,"<sup>5</sup> it is possible to go beyond the aesthetic realm of art to investigate other kinds of experiential continuity, such as environmental experience. Indeed, Berleant has received international attention for his work in the area of environmental aesthetics. So for Berleant, the central aesthetic issue now is not the difference between art and non-art but between aesthetic and non-aesthetic. The prevalent practice of equating aesthetics with the philosophy of art is thus transcended.

In order to support his new aesthetic conception of experiential continuity and its related idea such as empathy, Berleant borrows the idea of intellectual sympathy from Henri Bergson, the idea of *Einfühlung* (empathy) from Theodor Lipps, and the idea of "the interaction of the live creature with his surroundings" from John Dewey.<sup>6</sup> In brief, Berleant's aesthetics of engagement is based on his key idea of the continuity of appreciative experience, which asserts that artist, object, appreciator, and performer are no longer understood as separate constituents but become functional aspects of the aesthetic process.

From the perspective of my ecoaesthetics, I want to raise a more fundamental question: how should we understand philosophically some key terms contained in Berleant's aesthetics of engagement, such as continuity,

empathy, and process? Is it possible for us to interpret them from the perspectives of scientific ecology, philosophical ecology, and ecosophy so as to support the ongoing project of constructing ecoaesthetics? Ecosophy C will offer an answer to that question from the perspective of traditional Chinese aesthetic wisdom.

### 3. Key points of Ecosophy C

In order to understand Ecosophy C as proposed in this paper, it is necessary to know something about Ecosophy T as proposed by the Norwegian Arne Naess. Naess is most famous for the idea of deep ecology. The opposite of the word ‘shallow,’ the word ‘deep’ expressed “the most general and basic views.”<sup>77</sup> As a branch of the field of biological research, ecology is an interdisciplinary scientific study of the living conditions of organisms in interaction with each other and with the surroundings, organic as well as inorganic. As compared with the science of ecology, the essence of deep ecology is to ask “deeper questions” and the adjective “deep” stresses the point that we ask “why” and “how,” i.e. questions related to value theory. So, ecosophy or deep ecology involves “a shift from science to wisdom.”<sup>88</sup>

Given the hard fact that *Homo sapiens* is a kind of organism, Naess raised a “deeper” question. Do all possible studies of humankind’s relations with all possible kinds of surroundings belong to ecology? This question inevitably implies a philosophical pursuit rather than scientific inquiry into the place of humanity in nature.

In response to this philosophical pursuit, Naess realized clearly the limits of ecology and proposed what he called *ecophilosophy* or *ecosophy*. In Naess’s understanding, ecosophy is combined of the prefix “eco-“ found in economy and ecology, which has a broader meaning than the immediate family, household, and community and means “earth household;” and the suffix “-sophy” found in philosophy, which denotes insight or wisdom. So ecosophy becomes “a philosophical world-view or system inspired by the conditions of life in the ecosophere.”<sup>99</sup> Given that every situation is unique and specific, Naess introduced Ecosophy T to denote his own ecosophy. The “T” referred to Tvergastein, a mountain hut where he wrote many of his books. He encouraged his audience to develop his or her own systems of guides, say, Ecosophies X, Y, or Z.

Inspired and encouraged by Naess, I propose my personal ecosophy, Ecosophy C. ‘C’ here means eight expressions with the capital ‘C.’ 1. Chinese

culture, which is my cultural background; 2. Confucianism, which I view as the cultural symbol of a global cultural ecosystem; 3. Continuity of being, the metaphysical and ontological promise of Chinese aesthetics; 4. Creating life, which is viewed as the great virtue of Heaven and Earth expressed significantly in one of the Chinese classics, *The Book of Changes*; 5. Compassion, which is mainly embodied in Zhuangzi's philosophical story of appreciating the fish's joy and means to have the faculty to share empathy with all life; 6. Cheng Hao, a philosopher in the Song Dynasty, whose aesthetic thought represents the most systematic expression of ecological appreciation in Chinese aesthetics; 7. Community, a key term in ecology, based on which Leopold developed his idea of ecological conscience; and 8. Cultural evils, a key idea proposed in Cheng Xiangzhan's aesthetic theory, an aesthetics of creating life. Within the context of this paper, the following section only discusses points 3, 5 and 7.

First let's talk about point 7, community. In today's ecological theory, 'community' is a general term applied to any grouping of populations of different organisms found living together in a particular environment. In his 1947 essay entitled "The Ecological Conscience," Leopold defined ecology as "the science of communities" and consequently defined ecological conscience as "the ethics of community life."<sup>10</sup> He asserted that what is lacking in philosophy, ethics, and religion is ecological conscience and a change in philosophy of values should be promoted. In order to develop his land ethic, Leopold put the community concept in the central place. The single premise of all ethics is that an individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His land ethic simply enlarged the "boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals or, collectively, the land" and affirmed the right of these resources to "continued existence in a natural state."

In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear that Leopold's statement is not a view of scientific ecology but an ecosophy: an ecological philosophical view about values. Based on his emphasis on the concept of community, Leopold expressed his value standard in a widely cited maxim: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."<sup>12</sup> Scientifically speaking, from the perspective of geological time or scale, say 10,000 years, the planet earth

is continuously changing dramatically. There is no integrity or stability at all. However, philosophically speaking from the perspective of human civilization, humankind *should* take preserving the integrity and stability of the earth as its value orientation. Only by doing so can humankind face the challenges of the global ecological crisis.

Compassion generally means sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others. However, with the awareness of the community concept and an ecological conscience based on it, it would be most reasonable to understand that “others” should include any individual member sharing the same community, no matter whether it is a plant or an animal. What is more, we can reinterpret the meaning of the word ‘compassion’ positively to investigate the possibility of sharing others’ joy or satisfaction and not only the negativity of their sufferings or misfortunes. There is an appealing philosophical story about the joy of fish in *Zhuangzi*, the Chinese classic of Taoism:

Travelling with Huizi over a bridge on the Hao River, Zhuangzi said, “The fish is swimming at ease. This is how the fish enjoy themselves.” Huizi said, “You are not a fish. How do you know the fish are enjoying themselves?” Zhuangzi said, “You are not me. How do you know I don’t know about the fish?”

The philosophical question here is related to what we call intersubjectivity applied here to the relation between human beings and non-human things. Is it possible for us to know a fish’s joy or not? If yes, how? Zhuangzi did not answer these questions directly. He just said that from a bridge on the Hao River, he could know the fish’s joy. The key here is how to understand the word ‘know’ as a human activity. We may “know” something scientifically, philosophically, or aesthetically. It is reasonable to think in biological terms that when a fish’s desire for survival is satisfied by its living environment, it can experience a kind of joy, satisfaction, or absence of stress. To some extent, it is a natural faculty of humans to understand or know this point. I argue that from the perspective of today’s ecological ethics, mankind should respect non-human things’ intrinsic value and their right to enjoy their lives. Briefly, the positive feeling of compassion is a kind of human ability and sensibility based on ecological ethics, which exemplifies the aesthetic intersubjectivity between human beings and non-human life.

Community as a key term in ecology shows the interconnectedness or connectivity among community members, and compassion shows that

the boundaries between things may disappear to some extent. How, then, should we understand connectivity and compassion philosophically or metaphysically? From the perspective of Chinese philosophy, we may propose the concept of “the continuity of being,” which is the title of an essay by Tu Weiming, a Harvard professor of Chinese history and philosophy. In his paper, Tu introduces Chinese visions of nature and asserts:

The Chinese belief in the continuity of being, a basic motif in Chinese ontology, has far-reaching implications in Chinese philosophy, religion, epistemology, aesthetics, and ethics.<sup>13</sup>

This belief is based on the Chinese mode of thought about cosmogony as an organismic process, that thinks, in F. W. Mote’s words, that “all of the parts of the entire cosmos belong to one organic whole and that they all interact as participants in one spontaneously self-generating life process.”<sup>14</sup> The most basic stuff that makes up the cosmos is a vital force or vital power, *ch’i* (i.e., matter-energy). This kind of metaphysical assumption is significantly different from the Cartesian dichotomy between spirit and matter. In the unified cosmos consisting of *ch’i*, all modalities of being, from a rock to heaven, are integral parts of a continuum that is often referred to as the “great transformation” (*da-hua*). Within the continuum, “the chain of being is never broken and a linkage will always be found between any given pair of things in the universe.... The continuous presence of *ch’i* in all modalities of being makes everything flow together as the unfolding of a single process.”<sup>15</sup>

Briefly, if we follow the way of thought proposed by deep ecology and always ask deeper questions, we will finally meet metaphysical questions. We may explore Berleant’s ideas, mentioned earlier, of “experiential continuity” and of “aesthetics and the continuity of experience” in this way and raise a question: what is the philosophical or metaphysical foundation of continuity? To some extent, the Chinese mode of thought about *ch’i* and the cosmos consisting of *ch’i* is very close to the worldview interpreted through today’s science of ecology and philosophical ecology, which emphasizes the connectivity and interrelatedness between community members.

#### 4. Ecological appreciation: from aesthetic engagement to ecological engagement

The strategy of this paper is to reinterpret Berleant’s theory of aesthetic engagement from the perspective of ecosophy C so as to develop an ecological model of nature appreciation: ecological engagement.



I define ecoaesthetics as the theory of ecological appreciation. The basic assumption behind this working definition of ecoaesthetics is the following statement: we can appreciate something aesthetically and ecologically. Based on Berleant's aesthetic engagement and aiming at the construction of an ecoaesthetics, I shall rewrite the above statement as follows: we can engage with something aesthetically and ecologically. So aesthetic and ecological engagement are the core of my ecoaesthetics. The following section of the paper will explain ecological engagement from the perspective of ecosophy C.

First, ecological engagement inquires into the question of "why:" Why should we appreciate nature with respect and awe and believe that everything enjoys its intrinsic value rather than have only instrumental value? The answer is that ecological engagement is based on the ontological assumption that everything within a community enjoys connectivity and continuity (the continuity between mind, body and world) with each other. Community may vary according to different geological and spatial scales, from a small pond to a mountain area, from the planetary earth to the entire universe. Scientifically speaking, the inherent tie among all things in the universe is energy (or *chi* the Chinese philosophical term), which means that the whole universe is a great process of the transformation of energy and everything within it is an intrinsic part of that process. Ecoaesthetics should rest its philosophical base on this ecological worldview. An important part of ecological literacy, which includes an enhanced respect for and deeper feeling of connectivity with the different parts of the natural world, should be cultivated by ecological education.<sup>16</sup>

Second, ecological engagement inquires the question of "how:" how are we able to appreciate nature? With the ontological assumption and worldview just described in mind, to engage with something ecologically means to be able to experience compassion for all life, human and non-human. Human beings' natural ability to have compassion for others' positive joy or negative sufferings should be explored scientifically, psychologically, and philosophically.

Third, ecological engagement inquires into the question of "what:" what should we appreciate in the natural environment? The answer to this question is that we should be aware of and appreciate the great transformational processes of the universe. This means that the perception of a landscape is not simply the awareness of scenery but of the complex and dynamic fields of energy transformation that are present. In terms of Chinese aesthetics,

it is the appreciation of nature's vitality (*shengji*) or spirit resonance (*qi-yun*). We have arrived at a new model of nature appreciation. In brief, as an ecological model of nature appreciation, ecological engagement may be called a “why-how-what” model of nature appreciation, which is the core of my ecoaesthetics.

## Endnotes

1. Cheng Xiangzhan, *On the Four Keystones of Ecological Aesthetic Appreciation in East Asian Ecocriticism: A Critical Reader*, eds. Simon C. Estok and Won-Chung Kim, New York: Macmillan, 2013, pp. 213–228.
2. Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991, p. xiii.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
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7. Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, trans. and revised by David Rothenberg, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 28.
8. George Sessions (ed.), *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*, Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1995, p. 27.
9. Arne Naess, *Ecology...*, p. 38.
10. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949, p. 340.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 224–225.
13. Tu Weiming, *The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature in Confucianism and Ecology: The Interrelation of Heaven, Earth, and Humans*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Berthrong, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 105.
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# Aesthetics and Politics

(Aleš Erjavec)



Aleš Erjavec

## Art, Aesthetics, and Politics

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Those among us who come from former socialist countries and are old enough to remember them when they were still socialist – be they the former Soviet Union, the European East, or the persevering Cuba and China – still recall well the infinite and meandering discussions about art and politics. Is art political or not? If it is, is it always political? Is it political or politicized?

*Case One:* In 1978 the Slovenian student newspaper “Tribuna” of whose editorial board I was then a member, featured the poetry and an interview with the East German dissident Wolf Biermann (the East German “Bob Dylan”). As soon as it was printed, the Biermann issue of “Tribuna” was confiscated, sent to the paper mill, and shredded. When we inquired why, the answer was: in the very same week in which we published Biermann, Conference on Security and Co-Operation in Europe was taking place in Belgrade (at that time the capital of Yugoslavia). Slovenian and Yugoslav politicians feared that the East German participants of the Belgrade conference would get the impression that Yugoslavia had published Biermann to provoke – for whatever reason – their country and its representatives at the Belgrade meeting. In this way the purported addressees of the Biermann issue of “Tribuna” were not readers of the students’ newspaper in Slovenia but the imagined representatives of East Germany.

*Case Two:* Political art exists already in the nineteenth century, much of which remains within the frame of traditional representational artistic framework and involves “content-based commitment” (as opposed to the formal “commitment” exemplified by the specific use of collage, montage, etc.). An instance of the former would be the art of an artist such as Gustave

Courbet (1819–1877), the realist painter of works such as *The Stonebreakers* (1849) who became a politician during the siege and the Commune of Paris in 1870–71 and, in his own words, a member of “four of the most important offices in Paris.” He was imprisoned during the political persecution of the Communards, only to return later to the life of an artist. His artistic activities were related to his political beliefs and were interdependent with them in a direct way, as in social and critical realism, i.e., via content. His art was “political” by its motif but not “revolutionary” in a formal artistic sense – by its style and technique – nor avant-garde in the sense that his painterly work extended beyond the confines of autonomous art. In other words, “Courbet as an exemplary artist-revolutionary thus does not exemplify the overlapping of art and revolution, but rather the rapid succession of the roles of artist and revolutionary politician.”<sup>1</sup>

*Case Three:* Expressionist writer Franz Kafka is considered to be one of the most important modernist novelists of the twentieth century. Little is known today that his work underwent a series of contradictory and mutually excluding ideological and political interpretations. Immediately after his death in 1924 appeared in “Rudé právo”, the journal of the Czech Communist Party, an obituary in which Kafka was declared to have been a sympathizer of workers and to have had an insight into their suffering. Different and opposed interpretations followed: between the two world wars Kafka was declared to have been Marxist, Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, and Existentialist writer, while after the second world war he was proclaimed to have a premonition of the inhumanity of Communism: his work was interpreted not only as criticism of Nazism (especially with his short story “In the Penal Colony”) but also as criticism of Stalinism. Due to this latter interpretation Kafka’s writings met with official denigration among French Communists who in a 1946 issue of their official party magazine *Action* on the cover page raised the question: “*Fault-il brûler Franz Kafka?*” Of course, the question whether Kafka should be burnt was a poignant one for Kafka asked his friend Max Brod to burn his works (something that Brod did not do but instead spent his life editing and publishing Kafka’s novels, short stories and parables). In the fifties Kafka was not published in Czechoslovakia (or, for that matter, elsewhere in the East bloc). Although he was published in the sixties in Soviet Union the editors of the edition tried hard to persuade the reader that reading Kafka would be a waste of time. Then in 1963 the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences organized in Liblice a symposium on the work of Franz Kafka.<sup>2</sup> Was

its purpose to set the record straight and to depoliticize his work? On the contrary: the purpose of the Liblice conference was to prepare the way for the emergence of the Czech version of “socialism with a human face” that culminated in the Prague Spring of 1968. In Liblice Kafka and his literary works thus served as proof that under socialism too alienation and reification occur. It was only later, in 1975, that Deleuze and Guattari published their book on Kafka (*Toward a Minor Literature*), that was concerned not with ideological and political issues so typical for previous interpretations and evaluations of Kafka and his *oeuvre*. It was only after the sixties that Kafka became an object of non-politicized literary studies. Was this newly acquired autonomy good or bad? Was it better or worse than the previous heteronomy? Art is never only autonomous or heteronomous but both, but to different extent.

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Is art really the highest form of creativity and is it essentially linked to emancipation? Should it be regarded from a class perspective or from a universally human one – and, either way, what does this mean? Is all art a part of the class struggle or is it a part of the relatively autonomous superstructure? Is it a form of ideology but if it is, how is it possible (as Louis Althusser claimed) that art also makes ideology visible?

From the sixties and well into the early eighties of the previous century – which is the time frame of dilemmas confronting us under circumstances described above – art and politics, as well as politics and philosophy, existed in a permanent uneasy relationship that often erupted into conflict. This happened because art, theory, and in particular philosophy were some of the rare venues wherein critical positions and questions could be enunciated or implied, all of them revealing themselves as symptoms of chaotic and disorganized relations within socialist societies, thereby allowing various conflicts or divergences to appear or at least be hinted at. While art and philosophy – and thereby aesthetics as philosophy of art – were always drifting between the always the same two seasons – from winter to spring and back – they at the same time revealed and constituted the unresolvable internal and external political limits of these politicized societies within which every segment of the social field was subsumed to politics. They formed part of the socialist superstructure that existed within the frame of political struggles, this being so even when it appeared that the

conflict between the official and the unofficial was raised on the basis of controlled and controllable facets of society – a situation made worse by the inability of socialist countries to allow for any substantial measure of criticism and self-criticism for they would shatter their fragile social and political fabric. On the other hand, this situation invested art and artists with importance they hardly possessed in other kinds or realms of society. In this respect the outstanding situation was that of transition of socialism into postsocialism that in period that in most countries lasted one or two decades. Within this period art, philosophy etc. attained freedom which was so much more precious for it existed and were created in societies in which only recently it was sanctioned and prohibited.<sup>3</sup>

Within this ideological and political universe aesthetics was of no great import: it was either subsumed under philosophy or under an abstract and well-intentioned but shallow notions of beauty, art and form.

The dominant forms of twentieth-century aesthetics that were related to politics were of course content-oriented aesthetics – whose ideal was realism in art – and formalist aesthetics – whose ideal was modernism in art. The former was defended by Marxist critics and the latter by modernist and modern theorists and critics. (Often “modernist” art and its theory were associated with Greenberg and Adorno and “modern” art with Manet or Cézanne.)

Content-oriented aesthetics was often personified by Hegel and formalist by Kant, with a similar division occurring among Marxists also in art: formalist art was bourgeois while figurative, and “typical” art was supposedly proletarian. (Such was for example Tretyakov’s “literature of fact” that was a combination of journalism and literature.)

Since aesthetics was predominantly viewed as a philosophical discipline, aimed at defining art and beauty, it was not surprising that a large segment of leftist authors doing aesthetics attempted to find an ideal balance between content and form: too little content purportedly led to undesirable formalism, while too little form led to raw art and to the defense of the motif or plot at the expense of the aesthetic and well-structured work. A special auxiliary criterion was “partiinost” or political or ideological orientation of a work.

In all such instances aesthetics represented a part of a philosophical system: its purpose was to develop an intellectual edifice that could help determine what an art work was or should be, for such aesthetics was mostly after art. Certain authors – Lucien Goldmann (the author of the



work *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, 1963), for example or the Polish phenomenologist and well-known aesthetician Roman Ingarden – not to mention anthropological Marxists (such as the Polish aesthetician Stefan Morawski) and the emergent structuralists – were praised for overcoming the division into, and competition between, content and form. Nevertheless, there existed an inherent and self-generating paradox encountered everywhere where Marxism was the official ideological and thereby the semi-official philosophical line: in all such cases Marxism remained the infinitely distant ideal, never to be reached and attained, and never to be subjected to theoretical scrutiny and empirical verification and evaluation.

Since sixties and seventies which represented the apogee and then also the beginnings of the decline of the content/form divide, the classical meaning of the syntagm “aesthetics and politics” lost its relevance, interest and importance. The same went for political ideology and for class adherence of art, culture, and aesthetics.

In United States and United Kingdom issues related to aesthetics or art and politics and ideology carried a different and a more academic meaning. Usually they were unrelated to political struggles within individual countries or philosophical orientations. In such a context appeared in 1977 a volume entitled *Aesthetics and Politics* and was edited by Fredric Jameson and containing polemical essays (mostly on Expressionism) involving Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertold Brecht and Georg Lukács.

With postmodernism issues such as art (or aesthetics, for that matter) and politics drifted into the background, such course of events being caused by the end of ideologies which seemed to include modernist ideas that gave semblance of simple myths. Also for this reason the idea about “the end of art” (as ran the title of a 1984 article by Arthur Danto) was not a suitable starting point for a discussion of art, aesthetics and politics.

In the new millenium the theme aesthetics and politics once more became relevant, perhaps most visibly due to philosophy of Jacques Rancière. This former disciple of Louis Althusser developed a new interpretation of politics and aesthetics, wherein politics was essentially related to subjectivization and aesthetics to the emergence of what Rancière called the “aesthetic regime of art” and which was to replace the previous dominant notions of modernism and postmodernism. Within Rancière’s theoretical framework art leads to emancipation – a vintage Marxist notion that we know well from the leftist philosophy of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Aesthetics furthermore preconditions the emergence of art in

singular, making the two inseparable. The other reason for the growing import of art and aesthetics, was the emergence of new forms of capitalism that effectively sidelined all oppositional thought, even though this was not done by traditional weapons.

Yet another, although indirect theory involving art and via art also aesthetics and politics was that of Claude Lefort. Lefort developed (especially in his 1978 work *Les formes de l'histoire*) the idea of totalitarianism according to which a democratic society was distinguished from a totalitarian by possessing different centers of power, with the totalitarian one possessing one such center only. Such situation turned art into a special social creation for within a totalitarian society it carried special social and political significance. But let me return to Rancière and his interpretation of politics and aesthetics.

Contrary to the traditional usage of politics which is usually limited to the microphysics of power, Rancière ascribes to politics an emancipatory role. In such context speech acquires a special function. Let me illustrate this by a viewpoint, famously elaborated by Gayatri Spivak with her question: "Can the subaltern speak?"<sup>4</sup> Her response, arising from a discussion of Indian women, comes at the end of her essay: "The subaltern cannot speak."<sup>5</sup> It is this speaking, the possession of a voice, that is not only a key issue of politics of representation, but also a key concept within the broader framework of emancipation. This brings us to Rancière: "Man, said Aristotle, is political because he possesses speech, a capacity to place the just and the unjust in common, whereas all the animal has is a voice to signal pleasure and pain. But the whole question, then, is to know who possesses speech and who merely possesses voice."<sup>6</sup> If, then, the people, namely individuals and groups or communities are successful in making and having their voice heard – this voice stretching from the socio-political to the artistic and cultural realms – then they have taken a political stance and have effected action toward others, themselves, and their place in the world as subjects. "Politics begins when those who were destined to remain in the domestic and invisible territory of work and reproduction, and prevented from doing 'anything else,' take the time that they 'have not' in order to affirm that they belong to a common world."<sup>7</sup> In this concrete case Rancière's claim concerns French workers from the nineteenth century, but it can be equally applied to the post-colony and to the postsocialist countries. While other issues of post-colonialism for example (such as orientalism, nation, identity, hybridity) find limited resonance when applied to non-colonial

countries, the issue of the “voice” overdetermines other issues that have been just mentioned.

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In the preface to *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault raises an issue on which that work is based: “between the already ‘encoded’ eye and reflexive knowledge there is a middle region which liberates order itself. . . . This middle region, then, in so far as it makes manifest the modes of being of order, can be posited as the most fundamental of all.”<sup>8</sup> What Foucault is attempting to bring to light in the epistemological field are the conditions of possibility of history as a discourse and a form of knowledge.

These thoughts of Foucault may aid us in understanding the position of Rancière, who himself states, “If the reader is fond of analogy, aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense – re-examined perhaps by Foucault – as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience.”<sup>9</sup> In Rancière’s endeavor aesthetics is what historically causes the constitution of the general notion of art, an event that in his opinion occurs towards the end of the eighteenth century. It is such aesthetic practices that make visible and “disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they ‘do’ or ‘make’ from the standpoint of what is common to the community.”<sup>10</sup> Or as Rancière phrases this thought elsewhere, “Aesthetics is not the fateful capture of art by philosophy. It is not the catastrophic overflow of art into politics. It is the originary knot that ties a sense of art to an idea of thought and an idea of the community.”<sup>11</sup> In this way Rancière establishes aesthetics as a discourse that not only creates the transcendental conditions for the emergence of a unified and general notion of art, which in his view stretches into our contemporaneity and beyond, but also connects art with community and reciprocally with politics. The latter is proximate to the notion of “the political,” for it relates to democracy and to making visible those who were previously disregarded and mute.<sup>12</sup>

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The conclusion of this very brief sketch of the more recent relations among art, aesthetics and politics would be that today these notions retain their previous import which is – this time around – dependent upon the emergent political transformations effected by the advent of neo-liberal capital-

ism, on the one hand, and by developments in theory on the other. Some kinds of contemporary art are of course also involved in this relation, only that today, contrary to art of modernism, they focus on micro issues and not on the global, totalizing and revolutionary ones.

An important contribution made by Rancière was that he interpreted aesthetics and the aesthetic beyond the narrow confines of the terms in which we today usually employ them – namely, not only within the confines of art but within the framework of the sensible. In this way art too escapes the traditional unproductive division into art vs. politics. In such a way aesthetics can be productively applied not only to art of the last century and a half but too much of “contemporary” art – a notion that would require an analysis of its own.

## Endnotes

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2. See: *Franz Kafka aus Prager Sicht*, Prague: Verlag der Tschechoslowakischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1965.
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8. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994, p. xxi.
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10. *Ibid.*
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Tyrus Miller

## On Albrecht Wellmer: Music and Modernism After Habermas

The work of Jürgen Habermas had a decisive effect on the current of Frankfurt School thought, leading to a critique and even abandonment of a number of defining elements of its first-generation programme and to an ongoing reconstruction of other elements in light of Habermas's "theory of communicative action." Here I will touch exclusively on one subset of the work of a key post-Habermasian thinker,<sup>1</sup> Albrecht Wellmer, who has published an important set of essays on aesthetics, particularly pertaining to the aesthetics of modern music.<sup>2</sup> Having taken as his starting-point Adorno's strong association, in his *Aesthetic Theory*, of art's validity with both conceptual truth and social emancipation, and having attempted to reconstruct these claims within a post-metaphysical philosophy influenced by Habermas, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wellmer offers a useful perspective for focusing a set of specific claims about art and aesthetics in a "critical" vein: critical in the philosophical sense of both establishing the range of ways in which modernist aesthetics may have ethical, political, conceptual, and existential efficacy and the limits within which it exerts its possible effects.

To address Wellmer's approach to modernist art works, I will begin with the more general frameworks of aesthetic reception that he formulates. Notably, he orients his arguments towards reception in an explicit critique of Peter Bürger (among others), who, Wellmer argues, establishes a novel constellation of reality, art, and living praxis, but does so by abolishing the notion of "aesthetic semblance" and privileges "the significance of this constellation of reality for artistic production over its significance for reception" (*PoM* 17). In other words, for Bürger the decisive issue is how artists relate their production to the institutions of art – reflexively

embodying autonomy in modernist form or breaking with autonomy in the activist modes of avant-garde art – whereas Wellmer suggests that a focus on reception may mitigate some of the either-or dilemmas Bürger poses. Accordingly (and though he does not cite the essay, Wellmer here echoes Adorno’s important late essay “Culture and Administration”<sup>3</sup>), while Bürger formulates the avant-garde break as an abolition of a culture of artistic experts, Wellmer argues that transforming the institution of art would entail a *democratization* of the communicative interchange between experts and a broader constituency with a plurality of interest and engagements with art: “I argue on the assumption that a transformation of the ‘institution of art’ cannot mean the abolition of the ‘culture of experts,’ but that it would amount rather to the establishment of a tighter network of connections between the culture of experts and the life-world on the one hand, and the culture of experts and popular art on the other” (*PoM* 31). In turn, he argues, art can play a role in a broader process of democratic emancipation: “we can defend the idea of an altered relationship between art and the life-world in which a democratic praxis would be able to draw productively on the innovative and communicative potential of art” (*PoM* 31).

In developing this view, Wellmer sets out from the everyday communicative competencies of both makers and receivers of artworks. Both artists and audience members are, in this view, socialized individuals who have histories of participating in everyday practices of communication, both oral and written (and increasingly, televisual and digital). Their everyday competencies include a range of functions, from pragmatic, instrumental uses to aesthetically, emotionally, and existentially expressive uses of language, images, performative acts, and other signs. Their multifaceted participation in everyday communication will have shaped, to a greater or lesser degree, their abilities to use discourse consciously and make deliberative judgments about the discourse of others. In the course of performing everyday communication, in particular, they will have become competent in making and evaluating discursive claims to “truth” in a number of different dimensions. These truth-dimensions include: the *factual dimension* of how a statement representing a state of affairs measures up against our experience of the state of affairs itself; the *expressive dimension* of a statement’s “truthfulness” or authenticity in relation to a speaker’s personal beliefs, feelings, and way of life; and the *dimension of moral, practical, and emotional “rightness”* of a statement with respect to a concrete situation of life, measured against a background of culturally shared or even universally

human values and norms. Moreover, not only do they gain communicative competences in performing and evaluating claims to truth in these different dimensions; even in the relatively loose contexts of everyday life, they may also have become aware of the potential for dissonance between these different dimensions of truth employed in discourse: what we know to be true factually may nevertheless, for example, be morally repugnant to us or inadequate to our personal, existential sense of who we are. Lastly, as part of their own personal and professional biographies, individuals may have succeeded in composing and integrating these different truth-dimensions into larger, more coherent wholes that are characteristic of their characters and lives. Everyday discourse, however, tends to shift sequentially between these dimensions and connect them at most in only loosely coordinated ways. It tolerates wide latitude for dissonance, bad faith, lack of awareness, and outright contradiction in the relations between these discursively embodied domains of truth.

In taking up the question of how art relates to these different dimensions of truth, Wellmer makes two specifications. First, he suggests, art does not so much literally represent truth as mobilize a *potential* for truth: “The truth content of works of art would then be the epitome of the potential effects of works of art that are *relevant* to the truth, or of their potential for *disclosing* truth” (*PoM* 24). This potential for truth in artworks is, however, related to a second specification: the claims to truth that artworks carry are related to their claims of aesthetic validity. To put it otherwise, only insofar as a work is aesthetically “right” does it realize its potential relevance to other sorts of truth; the aesthetically valid work allows us to focus on and evaluate some potential truth that previously was imperceptible, before being represented to us in a concentrated, specially framed experience of art. Wellmer goes on to suggest that insofar as art mediates its relation to truth through aesthetic validity, through its complex “rightness” as composition, it is particularly suited to reveal the interactions and interferences of the different sorts of truth comprised in everyday communication: factual, moral, and expressive dimensions. As Wellmer writes:

It transpires... that art is *involved* in questions of truth in a peculiar and complex way: not only does art open up the experience of reality, and correct and expand it; it is also the case that aesthetic “validity” (i.e. the “rightness” of a work of art) *touches on* questions of truth, truthfulness, and moral and practical correctness in an intricate fashion without being attributable to any one of the three dimensions of truth, or even to all three together. We

might therefore suppose that the ‘truth of art’ can only be defended, if at all, as a phenomenon of interference between the various dimensions of truth. (*PoM* 22–23)

Aesthetic reception attends to the intimate connection between the formal dimension of art works (or works, events, and performances that, by virtue of compositional qualities have been assimilated to art) and this reflexive work on a pluri-dimensional truth. To put this another way, aesthetic reception seeks to reveal how aesthetic validity (the “rightness” of artistic choices and structures) shapes a particular complex vision of truth – the possible interferences of factual, subjective, and moral truths in concrete human situations, and the ways in which, over time, these interferences may be negotiated. Focused in this way, this conception of the aesthetic helps us to interpret in a more rigorous light certain loosely shared aspects and background motivations of the critical, reflexive tendencies of modernist art and literature. Modernism represents an intentional practice of composing artworks that aim to reorient the communicative life of their receivers, offering them new ways of making sense not only within the microcosm of the artistic encounter, but also within the broader parameters of their everyday communication.

Wellmer’s aesthetic writings are most directly related to the *Aesthetic Theory* of Adorno, as an immanent critique and reconstruction of Adorno’s thought on reception-related and “communicative action”-oriented grounds. Adorno developed his aesthetic theory teleologically around its contemporary endpoint, to establish and justify the fragile possibility of a critical modernism in an age tending towards the abolition of art. Critical modernism, as Adorno discerned it in a few singular, communicatively resistant works by Schönberg, Picasso, Kafka, and Beckett, gave testimony to the trace of “something else” in the hour of its disappearance into the night of indifference. In his focus on the experience of art as potentially disrupting the ease with which we ascribe cognitive, moral, and personal-existential “truth” not only to the aesthetic event, but also to everyday and perhaps even specialized statements and acts, Wellmer retains Adorno’s sense of art’s special relation to truth. Moreover, it is easy to see that Adorno’s justification of difficult, complex modernist art can be well-encompassed by Wellmer’s revisionary perspective. When, for example, we puzzle over whether Beckett’s “Molloy” and “Moran” in the novel *Molloy* are versions of the same character rather than two different ones, our inability to resolve the question may unsettle the self-understood existential truth that whatever else we might know or not know, we know



who we are; Beckett's disruptions of character-identification might lead us to believe that holding onto a sense of self might not be so easy in the world we live in. Similarly, listening to a piece of atonal music, which has been emancipated from harmony as an organizing principle, we may perceive with new vividness various forms of local order that alternate throughout the longer piece: such musical means as repetition and variation of rhythmic figures, sharp alternations between high and low pitches, surprising dissemination of motifs among instruments of contrasting timbres, and the ways that dissonances are heightened or mitigated by each of these. Obviously, within the aesthetic experience of music, these various interacting forms of post-harmonic patterning call for different modes of attention and evaluation on the part of listeners. But new perceptual, affective, and cognitive intuitions originating in the experience of music need not remain encapsulated within the purely musical, but can extend by analogy to other dimensions of moral, existential, affective, and cognitive life. Indeed, Adorno himself is an extreme example of the contrary, insofar as he carried his musical training into a whole new way of writing philosophy and conceiving the nature of philosophical reflection. Martin Jay captured this translation of modernist music into philosophy well in his characterization of Adorno's negative dialectics as "atonal philosophy."<sup>4</sup>

Despite this proximity to Adorno – rendered even closer by Wellmer's intimate knowledge of modern and contemporary music, unique among the major followers of Habermas – Wellmer also diverges from Adorno on a number of key points in his interpretation of modernist art. First, since his focus is on how artworks impact listeners, viewers, and readers as agents within a plurality of communicative practices (a Habermasian perspective), rather than on the production of artworks as complex constellations of subjective and objective elements mediated by artistic form (Adorno's perspective), Wellmer abandons a key element of Adorno's theory: his prescriptive focus on "progress" in the disposition of "artistic material," which in turn leads him to dichotomous formulations such as the Schönberg/Stravinsky opposition elaborated in *Philosophy of the New Music*. Individual receivers of artworks are also social agents who live, act, think, work, and speak within a differentiated, plural set of social institutions, rules, and discourses. The question of what sort of artwork might play a critical or even emancipatory role cannot be unilaterally determined by formal-materials features, rooted in artistic production. The "progressive" effects of artworks depend on situational aspects of reception as well,

which can positively motivate a far wider range of artistic forms, registers (“high” culture to “popular” and “counter” culture), and modes (“classical,” jazz, pop, etc.) than Adorno was willing to contemplate.

This artistic pluralism – comparable to that advocated by Bürger – is most striking precisely where Wellmer moves upon Adorno’s signature artistic territory, in the field of modern classical and post-serialist “new” music. Wellmer’s recent collection of musicological writings, *Essay on Music and Language*,<sup>5</sup> offers a wide-ranging treatment of different musical examples, including a sympathetic examination of two major composers who represent opposing, influential directions in post-war “new music”: John Cage, as the anarchist advocate of non-intentionality, indeterminacy, and chance in musical composition, as well as the expansion of musical materials to the whole range of natural and human sounds; and Helmut Lachenmann, as a rigorous, militantly politicized inventor of musical methodologies that extend serial techniques to new dimensions of instrumental and vocal sound, timbre, rhythm, and text. Rather than setting up an Adorno-like dichotomy of Cage’s anarchic informality and Lachenmann’s political and formal rigor, Wellmer offers a measured assessment of their artistic projects as complementary, if antipodal paradigms of new music.

In the final chapter on *Essay on Music and Language*, entitled “Transgressive Figures in the Field of New Music,” affirms a concept of “postmodernism” that is “equivalent neither to turning away from *the* modern nor with the return of an emphatic claim for art, but rather much more with a *pluralistic* modernism.”<sup>6</sup> Wellmer not only argues for this modernist pluralism philosophically, but goes on to survey an open field of musical possibilities represented by particular composers and their works. Not accidentally, given Adorno’s exclusive opposition of Schönberg and Stravinsky, Wellmer follows the lead of Pierre Boulez in presenting them as complementary figures through whom the structural apparatus of tonality was disrupted and dismantled, with one focusing on the destruction of tonal hierarchy through serial formalization and the other on “informal” rhythmic and instrumental violence to tonal organization.<sup>7</sup> He goes on, however, to suggest other ways in which the emancipation of the musical field has proceeded – exemplifying not a dialectical logic of opposites (Schönberg / Stravinsky, progress / regression, formalization / dissolution of form), as in Adorno, but a progressive differentiation of musical experience through the enrichment of compositional technique. Thus, for example, he enumerates: the expansion of the field of sound through electronic and aleatory musics; the

exploration of microtonal elements through tremolo, glissandi, new vocal articulations, and use of non-Western and historical musical materials that reveal the contingency of classical and twelve-tone music's chromatic scale; the recourse to parts of the overtone series and other features of physical sound suppressed by tempered harmonics; the focus on gestural and tactile aspects of instrumental sound, as well as the dramatic aspects of their performance; the highlighting of spatial features of musical sound; the structuring of musical pieces as a direct intervention into the listener's perceptual faculties and bodily sensations; and the hybridization of new music with cross-overs into jazz, hiphop, gypsy music, rock and roll, and other forms of popular music. Accordingly, he incorporates into his open, non-exclusive canon of pluralistic modernism in music such highly divergent composers as John Cage, Giacinto Scelsi, Pierre Boulez, Pierre Schaeffer, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Helmut Lachenmann, György Ligeti, Hans-Werner Henze, Luigi Nono, György Kurtág, Luciano Berio, Heinz Hollinger, Mauricio Kagel, Iannis Xenakis, Cornelius Cardew, Alvin Lucier, Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Erhard Grosskopf, Georg Friedrich Haas, Hans Zenders, Hilda Paredes, Clemens Gadenstätter, Gene Coleman, Bernard Lang, Klaus Huber, and Isabel Mundry: a very diverse, multi-generational catalogue of post-war composers that could undoubtedly be extended greatly beyond Wellmer's largely German and Central European "new music" focus. The modernist pluralism represented by this list, moreover, allows Wellmer to reach back into Adorno's modernism and open up the historical past that Adorno's philosophy of music mediated to future generations of critical theorists and musicologists: not only Gustav Mahler, Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg, and Anton Webern represent "authentic" instances of musical modernism, as for Adorno, but also Claude Debussy, Igor Stravinsky, Oliver Messiaen, Edgar Varèse, Henry Cowell, Charles Ives, Béla Bartók, Ivan Wyschnegradsky, and Alois Haba. "Postmodern," Wellmer writes, "would be. . . the consciousness of an infinite plurality of musical materials, including that of extra-European traditions, as well as the various procedures at the disposition [of composers] since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>8</sup> Wellmer's "postmodern," however, does not come *after* modernism, but is rather the pluralization of modernism itself, which branches forward in a field of ever-greater differentiation as it extend into and past the later 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Moreover, in a passage in which he discusses the use of highly complex rhythmic structures and speeds and their effects on the senses and bodies of listeners, we catch a glimpse of the utopian, futuristic possibilities

that works of the historical avant-garde, from Marinetti and Khlebnikov to Schwitters and Breton, adumbrated, a total reinvention of the human sensorium. Describing the unaccustomed relations to the human body that the soundscapes of recent music establish, Wellmer evokes the utopian suggestion of a transfigured body that would be adopted to the textures and speeds of a virtual world:

Many of these rhythms race more swiftly ahead and oscillate more rapidly than would ever be possible for the body; many have a strongly gestural character, yet correspond to no known bodily or linguistic movement. While the early postwar composers presented the structures and skeletons for new, strange worlds, contemporary composers now create the flesh, muscle, and nervous systems not of traditional bodies, rather of completely new creatures that accordingly advance along an unfamiliar border of a “virtual movement.”<sup>9</sup>

Wellmer’s evocation of creatures with radically different bodily and sensory characteristics harkens back to an earlier moment of critical theory, Walter Benjamin’s discussion of the expressionist writer Paul Scheerbart’s *Lesabéndio* and his fascination with the utopian atmospheres of Scheerbart’s fictional planet. Scheerbart describes the sonorous space of the double funnel-shaped asteroid-planet, Pallas, which is designed by the author as a kind of total musical environment in which the inhabitants, with their extraterrestrial alien bodies, are continuously immersed. The planet itself is a kind of natural wind instrument, which has been adapted by the Pallasians into an enveloping musical and sound-space:

Refined music resounded out of the depths of the funnel, including strange tones that were held and sustained for long periods of time. This music emanated from the Central Hole connecting the north and south funnels. Here in the Center, where the funnel walls were steep and sometimes separated from each other by no more than half a mile, here in the very heart of the star, winds caused by the speedy descent of the cobweb-cloud at nightfall made the hole emit wonderful sounds. Because of the interior music of Pallas, which, naturally, could be heard best from the star’s southern funnel, the Pallasians had set up many large, thin pieces of skin to strengthen the sounds and to link them into a melodious sonic flow. These hides were stretched and mounted in such a way as to cause the tones brought forth by the steep cliff walls to vary in a marvelous fashion. The pieces of skin were set up so that they would be easy to move to different spots in the larger system. The moveable skins created fantastical harmonies naturally amplified by the acoustics of the funnels. Certain capacious metal instruments could even make the noises seem orchestral.<sup>10</sup>

One could imagine that this is just the sort of music that creatures whose bodies are nothing but a “rubbery tube leg with a suction-cup foot at one end,” an umbrella-shaped flexible head, and telescoping eyes would enjoy hearing. Yet turning around the perspective in light of Wellmer’s discussion of contemporary music, we might also say that such a sound environment as Scheerbart describes, not unlike that of a contemporary composition exploring the resonant properties of materials and spaces and immersing the listener in slowly pulsating rhythms, also *evokes* bodies more like those of the Palladians than the bodies with which the listeners walked into the concert hall with. Their harmony with such an environment implies that human bodies, such as we possess, would find it very, well, alien. Yet in *Lesabéndio*, as in the musical worlds created by contemporary composers, we are also asked to imagine and empathize with creaturely forms radically other than our own: to become them for a time. For the duration of the musical experience, as for the duration of our reading of Scheerbart, our bodies are aesthetically stretched and compressed, broken and reassembled, in ways that give us a sensuous intuition of new bodies, a shimmering succession of virtual bodies evoked by the dissonances and tensions between our natural bodies and the techno-compositional environments to which we have submitted ourselves. Wellmer concludes that this temporary plunge into strangeness, into apparent senselessness or nonsense that is characteristic of avant-garde art, is the occasion for the production of new thought and feeling. “Upon such new thought and feeling produced by new music,” he quotes Karlheinz Stockhausen, “we can successively construct experiences, *learning processes*” (Stockhausen, quoted in *Versuch*<sup>11</sup>). The extension, by Stockhausen and subsequently Wellmer, of the key Habermasian concept of “learning processes” to aesthetic experience—to the non-discursive sonorous intensities of new music—at once demonstrates their indebtedness to Habermas’s thought, and underscores the bold step beyond Habermas’s discourse-based, rationalistic theory they must make when challenged by a complex aesthetic phenomenon.

## Endnotes

1. For a discussion of recent work in the Frankfurt School, contextualized in relation to earlier work, see: Joel Anderson, *The Third Generation of the Frankfurt School*, online at: <http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/scholaractivists/00JoelAnderson3rdGeneration.htm>, and

- Selected Writings of German Members of the 'Third Generation' of the Frankfurt School*, at: <http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/scholaractivists/00JoelAnderson3rdGenBibliography.htm>, accessed on March 16, 2014.
2. Albrecht Wellmer, *Truth, Semblance, Reconciliation: Adorno's Aesthetic Redemption of Modernity* in Wellmer, *The Persistence of Modernity: Essays on Aesthetics, Ethics, and Postmodernism*, trans. David Midgley, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991, pp. 1–35. Other relevant sources not directly cited here include Wellmer's discussions of philosophy of language and interpretation in: *Endgames: The Irreconcilable Nature of Modernity*, trans. David Midgley, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1998, and *Wie Worte Sinn machen: Aufsätze zur Sprachphilosophie*, Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2007.
  3. Theodor W. Adorno, *Culture and Administration* in *The Culture Industry*, pp. 107–131, [http://archive.org/stream/TheodorW.AdornoCultureIndustry/Theodor%20W.%20Adorno%20-%20Culture%20Industry\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/TheodorW.AdornoCultureIndustry/Theodor%20W.%20Adorno%20-%20Culture%20Industry_djvu.txt), accessed on March 16, 2014.
  4. Martin Jay, *Adorno*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984.
  5. Albrecht Wellmer, *Versuch über Musik und Sprache*, Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2009.
  6. *Ibid.*, p. 302.
  7. Pierre Boulez, *Style or Idea? – In Praise of Amnesia and The Stravinsky-Webern Conjunction* in *Orientations: Collected Writings*, ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, trans. Martin Cooper, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986, pp. 349–359 and pp. 364–369. David Roberts calls attention to Boulez's essay in *Art and Enlightenment*, pp. 117–121.
  8. Albrecht Wellmer, *Versuch über Musik und Sprache*, p. 302.
  9. *Ibid.*, p. 310.
  10. Paul Scheerbart, *Lesabéndio*, trans. Christina Svendsen, Wakefield Press, Cambridge: MA, 2012, pp. 26–27.
  11. Albrecht Wellmer, *Versuch über Musik und Sprache*, p. 311.

Miško Šuvaković

## The Return of the Political in Contemporary Aesthetics, Philosophy, and Art

The crisis of philosophy and aesthetics certainly began during the *philosophical* century. It started when Marx highlighted the “misery of philosophy” in a world of real human misery, in the industrial society of exploitation.<sup>1</sup> It also began with Friedrich Nietzsche’s “grandiose” and immanently philosophical failure to derive yet another great totalising philosophical system of thinking about everything and for all. It was then, for the first time, that the idea of a failed philosophical project became a basis for reorganising philosophy. Finally, it also began when Dr Sigmund Freud set up the universal discourse of the subject and subjectivity in human life, a humanistic discourse that *passed* over the empirical and pseudo-empirical fields of biomedical and socio-cultural hypotheses beyond the professional security of philosophical paradigms/styles. Then, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the philosophy of Martin Heidegger was an attempt to find the essential potentiality of *yet another important step* for philosophy, there and then, in what was for him an unacceptable modernity.<sup>2</sup> That *one step for philosophy* was assumed in the conservative direction of invoking and responding to “originary” philosophical voices amidst a *nightmare* of the great Western tradition of thinking in metaphors, i.e. metaphysical figures of being, truth, and the subject. But “that one step for philosophy” was also marked with the concretely political failure of the traditionally and conservative-oriented modern philosopher with almost nihilistic misgivings regarding progress. Facing the powers and events of an all-human catastrophe, the devastating totalising *state of emergency* that Nazism produced with its anti-liberal programmes in the Third Reich,<sup>3</sup> this philosopher reconstituted his anti-modern “right to universal truth”.

Quite asymmetrically, in relation to Martin Heidegger, stood the anti-philosophical endeavour of Ludwig Wittgenstein –anti-philosophical in

terms of preserving and cherishing the tradition of autonomous Western philosophy, with Wittgenstein trying to pose, in his individually manifested everyday human drama, some basic commonsensical questions – almost “dilettantish” – in the face of the security of philosophical jargon and its abstracting of the individual’s *lived activity*. Wittgenstein’s critical and analytical *philosophy of philosophy* is ‘dilettantish’ inasmuch as he commonsensically, from platforms of everyday speech, asks questions about philosophy’s *internal affairs*, which learned philosophers, who *mature in philosophical discourses and jargons*, as Theodor W. Adorno, for instance, put it, do not ask.<sup>4</sup> Here, a “dilettante” in philosophy implies not a “self-taught” or “committed amateur philosopher”, but one who deliberately, self-reflexively, and demonstratively violates the professional ethics of philosophising by straying from the normative/canonical jargon of Western philosophy. Such a philosopher asks “impolite questions” concerning the basic meanings of words and their impact on the lived activity of philosophers and philosophy as a social practice. He diverts from the *doxa* of philosophers who do not pose those basic questions as important questions of philosophy, and instead constructs narratives or models for presenting thought within already established philosophical networks and methods. Those philosophies are quite close to the discourse of the philosophical hierarchy of power. This concerns the canonical acceptability of jargon and the conceptual atmosphere of stable thinking in defined social frameworks. These frameworks disable writing or thinking about something or anything related to philosophy outside of *jargon topics or objects* of debate. Wittgenstein’s reductionist transgressive solution was to translate philosophical terms from the discourse of philosophy into the language of the everyday use of words in speech, a task he saw as showing the fly out of the fly-bottle.<sup>5</sup> Finding a way out of conceptual and linguistic traps was the main task of Wittgenstein’s philosophising. In that sense, another great “anti-philosopher” was the French doctor, founder of theoretical psychoanalysis, Jacques Lacan, who, unlike Wittgenstein’s analytical reductionism, resorted to a “baroque” passage through all the spaces and times of philosophy, metaphorically speaking, like “an elephant in a China shop.”<sup>6</sup> This metaphor bespeaks an author who sees discomfort in the order of meaning precisely as his key intervention in the materiality of speech, which is under the impact of the order of signification, that is, the unconscious. Lacan’s luxurious “dilettantism” differs from Wittgenstein’s puritan analytical work on the “absurdities” of philosophy, but the point



is the same: to achieve something with philosophy in a way disallowed by its traditional discourses, that is, jargon frameworks. For Lacan, this meant moving the *reality of the unconscious* in any discourse, including philosophical. In Lacan's mind, philosophical discourse must face its supporting web of signification that modifies webs of signified, i.e. conceptual ideas. That means having to face the structural principle of determination that eludes the philosopher's conscious intent and will to express "this and that, there and then"; that is, a psychoanalytic theorist faces the material order of speech, including philosophical speech, which shows, in its complexity, what it omits, represses, covers, or negates.

Finally, French philosopher Jacques Derrida's intervention showed that the "central world of philosophy" as much as "the margins of philosophy" constitute the problem of philosophy.<sup>7</sup> He was entirely committed to philosophy, although his early concept of deconstructing European philosophical logo-centrism – the centrism of thinking as opposed to speaking and writing – offered some potential directions for thinking and presenting inter-textually the limits of the philosophy of transcendence. Those who have invoked Derrida and radicalised his offers and promises have either moved out of philosophy and into the *domain of the material practice of writing*, of which philosophy is only an instance, or, like others, who were never in philosophy in the first place, have embraced the possibility of performing the event of theorising and thereby pointed to the resistance of the materiality of theory to the illusory *esoteric quality* of philosophy. After Derrida, there occurred quite diverse inter-textual and multidirectional rearrangements of the relationship between philosophy and theory, from literary critic Paul De Man, artist and theorist of culture Victor Burgin,<sup>8</sup> to novelist and essayist Kathy Acker.<sup>9</sup> The extent of the crisis of philosophy was also enhanced by the feminist, feminine, gender, and queer theorisations of philosophy, more precisely, by asking that really singular question extending from Simone de Beauvoir via Hélène Cixous to Judith Butler and Joan Copjec: "Does philosophy have a gender?"<sup>10</sup> Then another, even more complex and philosophical question may be posed: "How was gender in philosophy, i.e. history of philosophy, and thereby the singularity of the identity of philosophy itself as a social practice reduced to a *universal philosopher*?" But that question, as well as similar questions, despite their attractive and seductive philosophicality, were closer to the singularity of the practice of theorisation within social, humanistic, or hybrid platforms of interpretation and textual productions about and against philosophy.

In the late 1960s, notions of *theory* and theorisation gain a special meaning and thus certainly an exclusive role with regard to knowledge (discourse, thinking, writing, behaviour), culture, and society.<sup>11</sup> *Theory* and *theorisation* denote the hybrid genres or poly-genres that developed in parallel in artistic, activist, and academic circles (France, Great Britain, USA, Eastern Europe) by means of critiquing autonomous canonical models and institutions of scientific and philosophical labour in society, culture, and art. The theoretical was posited as the textual and theoretical labour as a more literal or less literal *textual production of a critical discourse*. Writings by French structuralists from the 1960s and international post-structuralists from the early 1970s advanced the critical position that philosophy should be essentially redefined. That meant transforming philosophy as general thinking about sciences into a critical theory based on reflecting the material practice of signification whereby philosophic texts are produced. The practice of philosophy was thus interpreted as material production of specific social *texts*. In his *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Richard Rorty pointed out that modernity witnessed an unprecedented “blending” of the borders of certain autonomous scientific and theoretical disciplines.<sup>12</sup> The result was a *new kind of writing*, which was neither about evaluating aspects of literary, artistic, scientific, or cultural products, nor intellectual history, nor a philosophy of good and practical acting in culture and art, nor the interpretation of society, but all of that combined in the open and variable poly-genre of writing. Theoretical writing exceeds the boundaries between individual social and humanist sciences, pointing to forms of production, presentation, and expression in contemporary plural and global mass and media culture. As a poly-generic practice, theory asks questions regarding the self-reflexive character of writing about the nature, conditions, paths, and concepts of generating theoretical texts and their effects.<sup>13</sup> Then, questions were also posed regarding the epistemological character of the mediation of knowledge and therefore also of institutions that establish and govern meanings, sense, and values within a culture or interrelations between different cultures. Likewise important are questions regarding the critical character of the conditions and circumstances whereby a theory emerges, is exchanged, governs a certain or uncertain *scene of writing* or *scene of presenting*, and then experiences a crisis, disappears, or transforms. Also important are questions regarding deconstructing, dislocating, or decentering the inscription of theory or its effects into a certain mass, elite, or professional public opinion, as well as traces of theory in its modifications, their erasure or accumulation on the jetties<sup>14</sup>

of meaning, sense, values, and identities of culture. But there also emerge psychoanalytical questions about how the *desire for knowledge* emerges, how pleasure occurs in a theoretical text or in a process with texts (inter-textuality) in media culture.<sup>15</sup> For *something* – a thought, speech, writing, or media representation – to be theory, it must contain aspects that enable or realise an identification, description, explication, and interpretation, that is, debate. This is the open and indeterminate conception of *theory*. It is open enough to encompass quite varied procedures: identifications, descriptions, explications (readings), interpretations, and debates. What distinguishes theory from all other cultural activities, disciplines, and institutions is the demand that any kind of speaking or writing aspiring to be *theoretical* must meet, and that is to ask what *theory* is, how it functions and identifies, describes, explains, and interprets itself as theory or theorisation within quite specific cultural and social practices. Therefore, theory is not the opposite of practices, but the performance of an invariably specific material social practice that is posited in such a way that it problematizes – reflects, explains, interprets, produces – concepts, discourses, and representations of theory as a practice, from specific conditions and circumstances.

The crisis of postmodern liberal pluralism after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, that is, following the end of the Cold War and establishment of “global politics” and domination of a single superpower, that is, more importantly, of a single economic and biotechnological political order, *provoked* once more possibilities for examining “politics” and “the political” as a significant response to the apparent weakness or absence of any kind of the political in the apparently apolitical or extra-political neoliberal technological practices of organising public and private everyday life in post-modernity.<sup>16</sup> In postmodern and then globalised neoliberal society, politics has acquired the character of a techno-managerial cultural practice, moving from fundamental social, global questions to individual cultural as well as artistic activities in the domain of identity and representation in the everyday. A cynic might conclude that in globalised times, everything – meaning culture and art – is politicised, except politics itself, which is depoliticised.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, in the 1990s and 2000s, it became important to invoke and reconstruct “politics” and “the political” in relation to politics as a form of sociality, as well as a form of organisation, governance, control, and implementation. At that moment, “politics as a practice within or across general sociality” manifested a need or, even, desire for meta-theory as the organisation of the singular as opposed to the particular in

relation to universal political knowledge and action, and traditionally, the meta-theory of “politics” is philosophy.<sup>18</sup> As the meta-theory of big politics, philosophical universalism was “used” as an intervening sign for a critique of the anti-essentialism and social constructivism of “small politics” and “micro-ecologies” in culture and, certainly, art. Philosophical universalism thereby enabled asking questions about acting responsibly for every social intervention and risk of intervention. This kind of demand for another large-scale politicisation on the level of philosophy and intervention in global social processes after the Cold War occurred in very different ways, above all in philosophers, sometimes mutually impossible to compare and often confronted: Jacques Derrida and his new reading of Marx,<sup>19</sup> Chantal Mouffe and her discussion of the return of the political,<sup>20</sup> Ernesto Laclau and his theory of emancipation in the epoch of post-modernity and then globalism,<sup>21</sup> Alain Badiou and his Platonist-oriented metapolitics,<sup>22</sup> Terry Eagleton and his leftist critique of hybrid theories,<sup>23</sup> Jacques Rancière and the preservation of the traditional European Aristotelian philosophical “political”,<sup>24</sup> Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt and their critique of the current global empire,<sup>25</sup> Giorgio Agamben and his reconstruction of great philosophy by means of bio-politics,<sup>26</sup> Paolo Virno and his theorisation of labour in global or post-Fordist capitalism,<sup>27</sup> Brian Massumi and his analysis of the new media on the horizon of critical sociality, etc.<sup>28</sup>

Philosophy’s invoking of “the political”, its “return to the political” emerged not out of a structuring of reality undertaken by a party or state, but out of performing a *philosophical desire* for post-theoretical speculative philosophical constructions of the “crisis” character, functions, and plural (which also means arbitrary), effects of current socialities in capitalism, dominant but crisis-ridden. For example, the separation of politics and power, which characterises the neoliberal rise and, certainly, the global crisis of neo-liberalism, has had the effect of depoliticising “politics” and transferring the complex of the political and politics into the field of culture and art. Almost all of early-21<sup>st</sup>-century vital art<sup>29</sup> is politicised, from a “political fictionalisation of the real” (the Irwin group with their NSK global state project) to various political activisms (the Critical Art Ensemble, Slavs and Tatars, Alfredo Jaar, Tadej Pogačar, Zoran Todorović, Artur Żmijewski).

For instance, the conflict, a sort of revival of the Cold War in 2007 in 2008, between the United States and Russia is not a conflict between the liberal and the communist, that is, between capitalist and social property, but between two capitalist imperial models. It is a conflict between the

American neoliberal model of capitalism and the Russian autocratic nationalist capitalism. Therefore, the philosophical derivation of meta- and macro-politicisation marked a critical (and that means analytical) reactivation of the contradictory relations of local – minority – bodies of knowledge as opposed to global – dominant, majority – bodies of knowledge in establishing and performing “universal” historical and geographical power. Moreover, this is not about opting between the local and the global, i.e. the particular and the universal; opting like that has cost dearly, with the defeats of modern projects in totalitarian regimes (the USSR, the Third Reich, fascist Italy, the Khmer Rouge Democratic Kampuchea, the Cultural Revolution in China), as well as the defeats of postmodern conceptions, i.e. in the preservation of “weak” or “soft” power and its concomitant comprehensive plurality in ethnic wars and genocides, from the former Yugoslavia to Africa in the 1990s. This concerns deriving a philosophical understanding of how *global as universal* power is realised in relating – naturalising the universal with the particular and, to be sure, conversely, the particular with the universal. If one pays attention to questions regarding the character of today’s society, then one must ask about relations between global and local modes of material production and their fundamental refractions in individual and, certainly, global projections. Then one may ask, in philosophic-metaphysical terms, “who” or “what”, “when” or “where” constitutes the production of universal knowledge and thereby of *global as a universal* power. The relationship between the global and the universal is posited as a problematic and intriguing trap. In other words, the important philosophical question is how singularity produces universality and what it is that enables surveying and regulating that production not only behaviourally, but also epistemologically and existentially? The critical question is this: can singularity produce universality?

Interpreting the complex process of integrating hybrid and anti-essentialist theorisations into the neoliberal global system of power, some philosophers have suggested as an alternative, the potentiality of resisting global market capitalism by means of a universalistically posited philosophy. This would be a philosophical intervention stemming from:

- the collapse or disorientation of the traditional Left and its theory and
- the global domination of “right wing”, “neoliberal”, and “populist” discourses, as well as the integration of “soft” or “weak”, that is, “post-philosophic” hybrid theories into the neoliberal system of a flexible technocratic regulation of power.

In theoretical terms, such an intervention would mean a philosophic and theoretical turn from the 20<sup>th</sup>-century *linguistic turn* to the *philosophy of the event* of the early-21<sup>st</sup>-century.

## Endnotes

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Gabriela Świtek

## Architecture as Politics

“In 1950s Warsaw everybody had an idea of architecture, like in bygone days in Alaska everybody had an idea of gold-digging” – claims Leopold Tyrmand.<sup>1</sup> In the legendary Polish detective story *Zły* [*Evil*] he sketches a superb social and architectural panorama of Warsaw in the first years after the Second World War. The novelist’s irony over what it meant “to have an idea of architecture” – should be read in the political and historical context of the 1950s Poland, the time of Stalinism. For it was not just the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party who merited the epithet of the ‘First Architect of Socialist Realism’, but rather “the whole nation was building our capital” – as proclaimed a series of Polish posters designed in the 1950s. The idea of architecture was also spread through a great number of architectural exhibitions – some thirty-three shows organized in all the regions of Poland in the period 1950–1953.

Let us discuss just one example – the *1st Exhibition of Architecture of the People’s Poland* organized in 1953 in the Central Bureau for Artistic Exhibitions (nowadays Zachęta – National Gallery of Art in Warsaw). The exhibition was opened on 8<sup>th</sup> March; thus, Stalin had died three days earlier. It was visited by 50.000 people, including more than a hundred organized groups,<sup>2</sup> and opening hours were adjusted to the everyday working routines of prospective viewers, with the exhibition open until 9 p.m. The so-called high culture of the art gallery was to be experienced for free in workers’ leisure time; however, in the case of the 1953 Warsaw exhibition, there were no clear borders between high and mass culture. As Jacques Rancière argues, “an aesthetic community is not a community of aesthetes. It is a community of sense, or a *sensus communis*.”<sup>3</sup> The aim of the *1st Exhibition of Architecture of the People’s Poland* was the popularization of

the achievements of Polish socialist architecture “against the background of past epochs.”<sup>4</sup> The exhibition presented buildings already constructed or designed between January 1945 and December 1952, juxtaposed with historical objects. In line with this strategy, the exhibition catalogue opened with photographs of the Wawel Royal Castle in Cracow and of Romanesque columns in the church of Strzelno.<sup>5</sup>

The show in the Warsaw Central Bureau consisted of six sections presenting the achievements of six Polish regions: Warsaw (Mazovia), Katowice (between 7<sup>th</sup> March 1953 and 1956, Stalinogród<sup>6</sup>), Wrocław (Upper and Lower Silesia), Gdańsk, Szczecin (Pomerania), Białystok (Podlasie), Łódź, Cracow with Nowa Huta (Lesser Poland), Poznań (Greater Poland).<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 1) The seventh section, the Hall of Honour was also named “the hall of Polish-Soviet friendship” with its dominant feature being a large photograph of the model of the Palace of Culture and Science (completed in 1955) and other Warsaw projects “representative of ideological cooperation between Poland and Soviet Union.”<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 2) The concept of so-called socialism required architecture which would be socialist in content and national in form.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Gdańsk and Pomerania region were considered an appropriate source of northern Renaissance forms, while Warsaw was seen as a city of neoclassicism. Having received the regional forms as examples to be followed, architects were expected “to reject the whole era of eclecticism and cosmopolitanism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the interwar period.”<sup>10</sup>

The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the idea of socialism in Polish architecture; this problem has been well researched in European political history. In recent years, there has been a marked revival of interest in the history of architectural exhibitions; the 1953 Warsaw show serves here as an example of this research field. An exhibition of architecture is, in a sense, a mixed media representation of something that has already been built and of something that does not yet exist as an architectural and urban environment. This kind of multimodality gives us an idea of architecture in the context of an art gallery space. In the Warsaw exhibition catalogue, Roman Piotrowski (a Polish architect active in the interwar period and the Minister of Building of Cities and Housing Estates in the 1950s) emphasizes the social function of architecture exhibitions at the time of the extensive rebuilding of Poland. As he notes:

Architecture works in the most intensive way as a complete building realized in its proper environment. However, its location sometimes limits the scope of its social influence; in order to admire a building a viewer needs

to visit the place where it is located. [...] The exhibition is therefore one of the best ways to present architecture to the people.<sup>11</sup>

It might seem a paradox that in order to render “realism and the social function” of architecture, the exhibition presented twenty-five sculpture-like mock-ups, and more than thousand architectural drawings and photographs.<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 3)

In modern systems of the arts (crystallized in the aesthetics of such thinkers as, Charles Batteux, Immanuel Kant or James Fergusson) architecture has always oscillated between the status of mechanical and fine art or, to put it another way, it has always had to struggle for the right to a dignified position among the fine arts.<sup>13</sup> Nowadays we accept with ease the definition of architecture as the most social and the most political of all the arts. In other words, architecture’s artistic and aesthetic aspects seem less important than its potential to build a community. “My house is not *architecture*; it is my home” – symptomatically argues Polish artist Artur Żmijewski in his introduction to the Polish translation of Jacques Rancière’s *The Politics of Aesthetics*.<sup>14</sup> The opposition of the arts is one of the main points in Rancière’s reflection: “In the [representational] order, what was relevant was the opposition between fine arts – or liberal arts – and mechanical arts, which meant an opposition between arts designed for pleasure and glorification of gentle people and arts designed to respond to the necessities of practical life.”<sup>15</sup> In the context of exhibitions, the practical aspects of architecture seem to be limited by the modalities of representation through the medium of images and models. But, this is not to say that automatically architecture becomes a ‘fine’ art designed only for pleasure.

Most commentators of Rancière’s writings draw our attention to the importance of his aesthetics for its emphasis on the relational or participatory aspects of contemporary art. Architecture as a separate practice does not seem to be the main concern of Rancière’s *The Politics of Aesthetics*; only occasionally does he discuss, for example, the political implications of the British Art & Crafts movement and its derivatives, such as Art Deco, Werkbund, Bauhaus and Russian Constructivism.<sup>16</sup> And yet, there are at least two lessons – as Slavoj Žižek recommends in his afterword<sup>17</sup> – that can be taken from Rancière for our reflection on architecture.

Undoubtedly, the first lesson that comes from Rancière is his critique of the modern dichotomy between art for art’s sake and social reality, or of the aforementioned opposition between the fine and mechanical arts.<sup>18</sup> Rancière questions this dichotomy, for example, in his essay on design

(*Surface of Design*), where he draws a daring comparison between the symbolist poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé and the work of architect and engineer Peter Behrens. There's no such a thing as an autonomous or heteronomous art – Rancière concludes.<sup>19</sup> The “modern aesthetic revolution” abolished the hierarchy in art which used to reflect the prevailing social hierarchy. “Forms of poems” and forms of industrial (or architectural) objects are forms of life.<sup>20</sup> Crucial for our understanding of modernity is also Rancière's emphasis on the simple fact that art in the singular has only existed for two centuries.<sup>21</sup> In line with this thought, one should return to the pre-modern situation in order to see architecture outside the field of the oppositions of “mechanical” versus “liberal”, but in the realm of *mimēsis*. As Rancière notes: “*mimēsis* is not the law that brings the arts under the yoke of resemblance. It is first of all a fold in the distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in social occupations, a fold that renders the arts visible. It is not an artistic process but a regime of visibility regarding the arts.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, some contemporary philosophers and historians of architecture argue that Aristotle's celebrated definition of tragedy as *mimēsis* (representation) of *praxis* (action) outlines also the main function of architecture.<sup>23</sup> In this light, there is no point to discuss whether architecture belongs to mechanical or liberal arts. Architecture is the ‘representation of action’.

The second lesson which might be taken from Rancière (especially in the context of the 1953 Warsaw exhibition) is his reflection on the revival of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in contemporary art.<sup>24</sup> Rancière uses this notion, for example, with reference to a general confusion of the genres. As he argues:

There is the revival of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which is supposed to be the apotheosis of art as a form of life but which proves instead to be the apotheosis of strong artistic egos or a kind of hyperactive consumerism [...]. There is the idea of ‘hybridization’ of the means of art, which complements the view of our age as one of mass individualism expressed through the relentless exchange between roles and identities, reality and virtuality, life and mechanical prostheses, and so on. [...]. The third way – the best in my view – [...] invalidates the opposition between activity and passivity as well as the scheme of ‘equal transmission’ and the communitarian idea of the theater that in fact makes it an allegory of inequality.<sup>25</sup>

Following this argument, contemporary multimediality is not *Gesamtkunstwerk* in its 19<sup>th</sup>-century version, with its aesthetic program as a program of metapolitics: “multimediality only means that you combine

several media.”<sup>26</sup> Rancière only occasionally mentions the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but often returns to the German Romantic roots of this concept. Central to his reflection is an analysis of Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795) and *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism* (by Schelling, Hegel and Hölderlin) in which the “highest act of reason” is identified with an aesthetic act.<sup>27</sup> The aesthetic program of German Idealism, that is “art as the transformation of thought into the sensory experience of the community”, is, according to Rancière, basic for the writings of the young Karl Marx.<sup>28</sup> Not accidentally, Rancière also discusses aspects of Adolphe Appia’s views on total theatre – a theatre that might get out of itself and become a form of existence for society itself.<sup>29</sup> Rancière also traces the project of an ‘art which becomes a form of life’ in the programs of the Arts and Crafts, Werkbund and Bauhaus with its ideal expressed in the 1919 manifesto: “The ultimate aim of all visual arts is the complete building! Architects, painters and sculptors must learn to grasp the composite character of a building. Only then will their work be imbued with the architectonic spirit which it has lost as «salon art».”<sup>30</sup>

In the 1953 Warsaw exhibition catalogue we find excerpts from the resolution of the Polish Council of Architects (1949), which provided the foundations for socialist realism. As we read: “Polish architecture should be reborn as a great social art. [...] New social architecture, through the organic cooperation with painting and sculpture, through the synthesis of the arts will create a rich new plastic art which will oppose the barrenness of constructivism.”<sup>31</sup> What is evident in this quotation – represented in the 1953 exhibition in the form of decorative plaque (Fig. 4) – is an appropriation of the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the time of Stalinism (a problem already discussed in Boris Groys’ *The Total Art of Stalinism*).<sup>32</sup>

I use the word ‘appropriation’ following Žižek’s argument about the lesson of Rancière – that “one should be careful not to succumb to the liberal temptation of condemning all collective artistic performances as inherently «totalitarian».”<sup>33</sup> Žižek, for example, talks about stealing the ideas of collective performances (parades, mass performances in stadiums): “it was Nazism that stole them and appropriated them from the worker’s movement.”<sup>34</sup> The lesson of Rancière in relation to architecture would be therefore to identify the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (the apotheosis of art/architecture as a form of life) as different “framings of a specific sensorium.”<sup>35</sup>

The history of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is a history of appropriations, or – as I call it, borrowing a notion from music – of ‘transcriptions’ of the concept,

as when a general idea (melody) is orchestrated using different instruments at each performance, while still preserving a recognizable identity.<sup>36</sup> The most problematic (sometimes superficially labelled 'pre-Fascist' or 'totalitarian') modern transcription of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* can be found in Richard Wagner's concept of drama which was crystallized just after the Revolution of 1848 (at that time Wagner was in Dresden and befriended Mikhail Bakunin). As Carl E. Schorske aptly puts it: "Like Schiller and Hegel, Hölderlin and Marx, Wagner saw the Greek polis as a historical archetype of community, a lost paradise to be regained. [...] The Greek polis and the Greek drama rose and fell together. When the polis fell, the drama fragmented into the many arts which had composed it."<sup>37</sup> It was the failure of the 1848 Revolution that brought Wagner to the idea of aesthetic community, "the perfect reconciliation of art and life", and "free artistic fellowship."<sup>38</sup> Wagner's own failure was that his romantic dream of aesthetic community, as expressed in his essays *Die Kunst und die Revolution* and *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, turned into the community of aesthetes in Bayreuth. The line of further transcriptions (for example, from the theory of musical drama to the practice of architecture) is too long to be discussed here in detail. Let us only mention William Morris and the Arts & Crafts movement, or Adolphe Appia's essay *Living Art-Work*, published in 1919, the same year as the aforementioned Walter Gropius's *Program of the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar*.

The concluding question is, however – where in this line of *Gesamtkunstwerk* transcriptions – can we place the idea expressed in the 1953 Warsaw exhibition, the idea of "architecture that should be reborn as a great social art." Searching for social aspects in the architectural politics of the time of Stalinism does not mean that I am an advocate, either of architectural utopias or of political terror. But, in a similar way, Rancière explains his reflection on the aesthetic regime of art:

My inquiry [...] has often been suspected of proposing a return to the fairy times and fairy tales of aesthetic utopias and aesthetic community, which either have brought about the big disasters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or, at least, are out of step with the artistic practices and political issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I tried to suggest that, on the contrary, this inquiry points to the tensions and contradictions which at once sustain the dynamic of artistic creation and aesthetic efficiency and prevent it from ever fusing in one and the same community of sense. The archaeology of the aesthetic regime of art is not a matter of romantic nostalgia.<sup>39</sup>

Taking a lesson from Rancière we may also try to avoid the contemporary temptation for condemning all the collective efforts of socialist architecture as ‘totalitarian’ or ‘Stalinist’. Thinking of architecture in terms of providing everybody with an affordable home or with public transportation is today often overshadowed by the principles of the neoliberal market which promotes corporate skyscrapers and luxury apartments. Let us take a lesson from Rancière and think about the social consequences of the distribution of the sensible in the realm of architecture.

## Endnotes

1. Leopold Tyrmand, *Zły*, Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2004, p. 51. The first version of this paper was presented at the 19<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Aesthetics (Poland, Kraków, 21–27<sup>th</sup> July, 2013). A revised and extended version was published in “Serbian Architectural Journal”, No. 6, 2014, pp. 63–74.
2. See: *Odpowiadamy na pytania w sprawie Powszechnej Wystawy Architektury*, “Stolica”, No. 21 (24<sup>th</sup> May 1953); *Wystawa Architektury Polski Ludowej*, “Express Wieczorny”, No. 61 (11<sup>th</sup> March 1953).
3. See: Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, “Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods”, Vol. 2, No.1 (Summer 2008), p. 4.
4. Bohdan Garliński, *I Powszechna Wystawa Architektury Polski Ludowej*, exhibition catalogue, Warszawa: Zachęta, 1953, p. 13.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 5. See also: *Regionalizm w architekturze. Rozmowa z patronem działu historycznego prof. J. Zachwatowiczem*, “Stolica”, No. 13 (29<sup>th</sup> April 1953), p. 8.
6. Note that the name ‘Katowice’ is printed in the exhibition catalogue, while ‘Stalinogród’ is used in press reviews. See: Stefan Gawłowski, *Wystawa Architektury w «Zachęcie»*, “Słowo Powszechne”, No. 63 (14–15<sup>th</sup> March 1953).
7. See: *Regionalizm w architekturze...*, p. 15.
8. Bohdan Garliński, *I Powszechna Wystawa Architektury Polski Ludowej*, p. 14.
9. *Z rozmów o Powszechnej Wystawie Architektury*, “Stolica”, No. 11 (15<sup>th</sup> March 1953), p. 5.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Roman Piotrowski [“Wstęp”] in *I Powszechna Wystawa Architektury Polski Ludowej*, pp. 7–8.
12. *Odpowiadamy na pytania w sprawie Powszechnej Wystawy Architektury*.
13. See: *Architecture, Disciplinarity, and the Arts*, eds. A. Leach, J. Macarthur, Ghent: A&S Books, 2009; Gabriela Świttek, *Gry sztuki z architekturą. Nowoczesne powinowactwa i współczesne integracje*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2013, pp. 103–133.
14. Artur Żmijewski, *Polityczne gramatyki obrazów* in Jacques Rancière, *Estetyka jako polityka*, trans. Julian Kutyla, Paweł Mościcki, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2007, p. 13.

15. See: *Medium Specificity and Discipline Crossovers in Modern Art: An Interview with Jacques Rancière*, <http://thesip.org/2011/09/interview-with-jacques-ranciere>, accessed on April 30, 2013.
16. Jacques Rancière, *The Distribution of the Sensible* in *idem, The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, New York: Continuum, 2004, p. 15. See also: Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Paul Zakir, London: Verso, 2013, pp. 133–154.
17. Slavoj Žižek, *The Lesson of Rancière* in Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, pp. 69–79.
18. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 60.
19. Jacques Rancière, *Powierzchnia designu* in *idem, Estetyka jako polityka*, p. 113.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 52.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
23. See: Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation: The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production*, Cambridge MA–London: The MIT Press, 2004, pp. 366–367.
24. “The return of symbolism is obviously on the agenda. When I use this term, I am not referring to the spectacular forms of revival of symbolist mythology and the dream of the Gesamtkunstwerk, as in the work of Matthew Barney. [...] I am referring to the more modest, almost imperceptible way in which the collections of objects, images and signs gathered in our museums and galleries are increasingly shifting from the logic of dissensus to the logic of mystery, to a testimony of co-presence”. See: Jacques Rancière, *Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics* in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetic and Politics*, eds. B. Hinderliter, W. Kaizen, V. Maimon, J. Mansoor, S. McCormick, Durham–London: Duke University Press, 2009, p. 48.
25. Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, “Artforum”, XLV (March 2007), p. 280.
26. *Medium Specificity and Discipline Crossovers in Modern Art: An Interview with Jacques Rancière*, <http://thesip.org/2011/09/interview-with-jacques-ranciere>, accessed on April 30, 2013.
27. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 27. “I am now convinced that the highest act of reason, encompassing all ideas, is an aesthetic act, and that truth and goodness come together only in beauty – the philosopher must possess just as much aesthetic power as the poet.” See: Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Das Älteste Systemprogramm des Deutschen Idealismus*, in: *Briefe und Dokumente 1775–1809*, ed. Horst Fuhrmans, vol. I, Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1962, p. 70. The authorship of this remark is not certain (see: *ibid.*, note 34, p. 69). For the English translation and interpretation of this particular phrase see: Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981, p. 48; Gabriela Świtek, *Writing on Fragments: Philosophy, Architecture, and the Horizons of Modernity*, Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2009, pp. 48, 56.
28. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 44.
29. Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, pp. 111–132.
30. Walter Gropius, *Program of the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar* in *Programs and Manifestoes on Twentieth-Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads, trans. Michael Bullock, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1970, p. 49.



31. *O polską architekturę socjalistyczną. Wyjątki z rezolucji Krajowej Partyjnej Narady Architektów, odbytej w dniach 20 i 21 czerwca 1949 roku w Warszawie* in *I Powszechna Wystawa Architektury Polski Ludowej*, p. 2. See also: Marek Sadzewicz, "Architektura wielką sztuką społeczną", *Stolica*, No. 10 (8th March 1953), pp. 8–9.
32. Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin*, München – Wien: Carl Hanser, 1988; *idem*, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, trans. Charles Rougle, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. See also: David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011.
33. Slovoj Žižek, *The Lesson of Rancière* in Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 77.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
35. "The aesthetic revolution as I have defined it first means that the former equation of the artwork with a specific place and destination was replaced by the idea of the framing of a specific sensorium or a specific sphere of experience. This specific sensorium can be the museum – viewed as the 'remote' place where artworks are disconnected from their social or religious destination. *Medium Specificity and Discipline Crossovers in Modern Art: An Interview with Jacques Rancière*, <http://thesip.org/2011/09/interview-with-jacques-ranciere>, accessed on April, 30 2013.
36. Gabriela Świtek, *Gry sztuki z architekturą*, pp. 173–198.
37. Carl E. Schorske, *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 96.
38. Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Works*, trans. William A. Ellis, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993, p. 73.
39. Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community...*, p. 14.

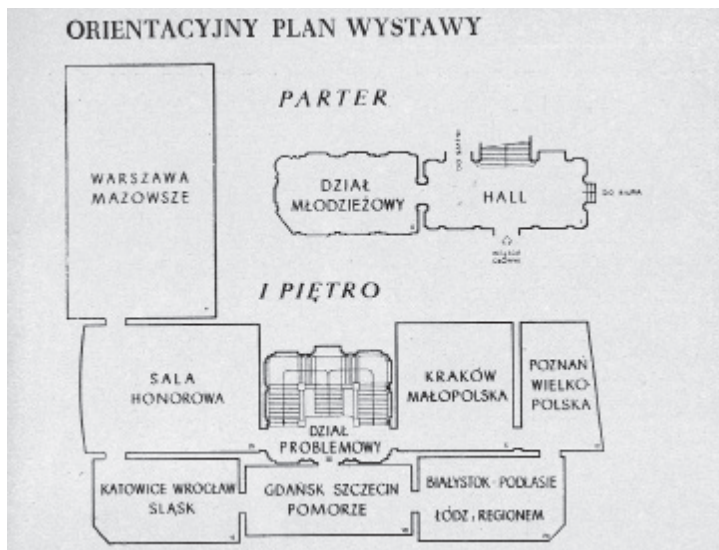


Fig. 1. *1st Exhibition of Architecture of the People's Poland, 1953* (plan with six regional sections and the Hall of Honour). Photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



Fig. 2. *1st Exhibition of Architecture of the People's Poland, 1953* (Hall of Honour). Photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



Fig. 3. *1st Exhibition of Architecture of the People's Poland, 1953.* Photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



Fig. 4. *1st Exhibition of Architecture of the People's Poland, 1953.* Photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



# Somaesthetics

(Richard Shusterman)



Richard Shusterman

## Introducing Somaesthetics: Aims and Challenges

I

I am deeply happy and honored to introduce this somaesthetics plenary panel to you today. It is especially appropriate that I am doing this in Poland, which is where (on a short visit during my Fulbright year in Berlin) I first conceived the notion and name of the discipline called somaesthetics. Interested in the aesthetics of embodiment, I realized that the terms “body aesthetics” or “aesthetics of the body” were too narrow and misleading (too much associated with commercialized stereotypes of beauty) to convey the field I envisaged, a field devoted to the manifold ways the body is essential not only to our external appearance but also to our perception, thought, and action. A new term was needed, and I decided to try out “somaesthetics” to see if it could do the job.<sup>1</sup> When the idea of somaesthetics first came to me about eighteen years ago, I hardly imagined it would develop into an international force that would merit a plenary panel at the prestigious International Congress of Aesthetics. The passage of time can bring wonderful fruits such as the enriching growth of this idea, but time can also bring degeneration, decay and death to the bodies with which somaesthetics is concerned, mine included. Will our bodies all be sufficiently fit for intercontinental travel and international lecturing eighteen years from now? I certainly hope so, but such fitness requires good fortune as well as the disciplines of somatic care.

We intellectuals in aesthetics have often neglected the body because of our passionate interest in the life of the mind and the creative arts. But the body the basic instrument of all human performance, our tool of tools, a necessity for all our perception, action, and even thought. Just as skilled builders need expert knowledge of their tools, so we need better somatic knowledge to improve our understanding and performance in the arts,

and to advance our mastery in the highest art of all – that of perfecting our humanity and living better lives. The interdisciplinary field of somaesthetics is devoted to that project, a project of meliorative self-culture whose aim is also to improve the lived culture of the communities in which we live and likewise improve the physical and social environments that shape and nourish our existence.

Roughly defined, somaesthetics concerns the critical study and cultivation of the experience and use of the living body (or soma) as site of sensory appreciation (aesthesia) and creative self-stylization. As a discipline of both theory and practice, it aims to enrich not only our abstract, discursive knowledge of the body, but also our lived somatic experience and performance. It seeks to enhance the meaning, efficacy, and grace of our movements but also the quality of the environments to which our movements contribute and from which they draw their energies and significance. Because the word “body” in our Western tradition is too narrowly associated with mere spiritless physicality, devoid of perceptive subjectivity. I prefer to use the word “soma” for somaesthetics, recalling that the term “aesthetics” originally denoted the broader field of perception rather than being confined narrowly to objects of art and beauty.

## II

The philosophical neglect of somatic cultivation is paradoxical first because such cultivation was central to the origins of philosophy and also because the body remains emblematic for expressing the essential ambiguity of human being. Though Plato tends to give Socrates an idealistic interpretation, we know from other sources (such as his student Xenophon) that Socrates in fact insisted on somatic cultivation as an essential dimension of his defining philosophical goal of care for the self (*epimeleia heautou*). Xenophon notes how Socrates chided Epigenes for not engaging in physical training, arguing that “the body is valuable for all human activities, and in all its uses it is very important that it should be as fit as possible...even in the act of thinking. Besides, it is a shame to let yourself grow old through neglect before seeing how you can develop the maximum beauty and strength of body.” Xenophon further describes how, even as an old man, Socrates continued to train himself at dance.<sup>2</sup>

In China’s great philosophical tradition cultivation of the body (*xiu shen* 修身) is an essential dimension of self-cultivation not only in Confucianism but also in Daoism, where it is typically interpreted in terms of protecting



the body (*shou shen* 守身) through training in health techniques such as special breathing and callisthenics. Ancient Indian thought similarly recognizes the soma's central role in life (including the life of the mind) by insisting on the value of yoga for both health and enlightenment.

But leaving such historical origins aside, we should realize that cultivating our humanity implies somatic cultivation because our bodies express the fundamental ambiguity of human existence. First, it expresses our double status as object and subject, as something in the world, and as a sensibility that perceives and acts in that world of objects. I both *am* a body and *have* a body. When I consult the mirror, as I must daily do when shaving, the perceiving eyes of my subject soma sees the object of my face; and they are sadly shocked by how old and tired that face appears, including those very eyes that keenly perceive my aging. The Apollo-inspired Socratic injunction to "Know thyself" so you can improve yourself includes somatic self-knowledge and critique. Ageing poses challenges for a philosopher of somaesthetics who advocates philosophy as an art of living. But good philosophy is never easy, and ageing like dying is something we all must face in the very process of living. Somaesthetic mastery, I hope, can help us face these challenges with more skill, grace, calm, and courage.

The body expresses the ambiguity of human existence as both shared species being and individual difference. Philosophers emphasize rationality or language as the distinguishing essence of human kind. But human embodiment seems equally essential. Try to imagine a human being, and you cannot help but call up the image of our bodily form. Yet, if our bodies unite us as humans, they also divide us into different genders, races, ethnicities, classes, and further into the peculiarly individuals that we are.

The commonality and difference of our bodies are deeply laden with social meaning. We appeal to our shared somatic form, experience, needs, and suffering when charitably reaching out to people of very different ethnicities and cultures. But the body (through its skin, hair, facial features and gestural behavior) is conversely the prime site for emphasizing our differences and for uncharitable racism, sexism, and ethnic prejudice.

Here in Krakow, we are not far from Auschwitz, where many of my people were ruthlessly exterminated because they belonged to the Jewish people. My father was born not far from here, near Lviv. He was genetically lucky not to look Jewish, and so he survived a number of pogroms before arriving safely to New York's Ellis Island long before the Nazis came to power. If I was similarly fortunate in my looks to be able to pass for non-Jewish, I nonetheless experi-

enced some painful racial prejudice in our more enlightened contemporary Europe. When I came to Berlin as a Fulbright professor in the mid-nineties, my American born Japanese girlfriend left her job in the New York fashion world to be with me. A former model, her beauty and striking racial difference aroused far more attention (expressed in aggressive staring) than she wanted from ordinary passersby in Berlin, whose East Asian population at that time was very small and limited largely to the Vietnamese underclass and underworld. After four uncomfortable months she decided to return to New York, where her beauty was also noticed but was not stared at with suspicion because of racial difference from the local Berlin ethnic norm. A normal body is not always normal in all places. Somaesthetics explores how our bodies and our bodily perceptions are also socially shaped.

The soma exemplifies many other crucial ambiguities of our human condition, our wavering, middle state between power and frailty, worthiness and shame, dignity and brutishness, knowledge and ignorance. We invoke the notion of humaneness to show our moral character that elevates us from mere animals, but we also use the predicate “human” to describe and excuse our flaws, failures, and lapses into base or even bestial behavior: they are human weaknesses, limits linked to the frailties of the flesh we share with common beasts. Bodily abilities also set the limits of what we can expect from ourselves and others, thus determining the range of our ethical obligations and aspirations. If paralyzed, we have no duty to leap to the rescue of a drowning child.

Besides grounding our social norms and moral values, the body is the essential medium or tool through which they are transmitted, inscribed, and preserved in society. Ethical codes are mere abstractions until they are given life through incorporation into bodily dispositions and action. Any properly realized ethical virtue depends not only on some bodily act (speech acts included) but also on having the right somatic and facial expression, indicative of having the right feelings. A stiffly grudging, angry-faced offering cannot be a true act of charity or respect, which is why Confucius insisted on the proper demeanor as essential to virtue.

Ethics implies freedom to choose and act on that choice. We cannot act without bodily means, even if these means are reduced (through the wonders of technology) to pressing a button or blinking an eye to implement our choice of action. Our most primal sense of freedom to act is the freedom to move our bodies, whether in locomotion or in simply opening the eyes to see, the mouth to breathe. But true to its essential ambiguity, the body also

clearly symbolizes our unfreedom: the bodily constraints on our action, the corporeal bulk, the physical needs and failures that weigh us down and limit our performance, the relentless degeneration of aging and death.

If we turn from ethics and action to epistemology, the body remains emblematic of human ambiguity. As both an indispensable source of perception and an insurmountable limit to it, the body epitomizes the human condition of knowledge and ignorance. Because, as a body, I am a thing among things in the world, that world of things is also present and comprehensible to me. Moreover, to see the world requires seeing it from some point of view that determines the meaning of left and right, up and down, forward and backward, inside and outside. The soma supplies that primordial point of view through its location both in the spatiotemporal field and the field of social interaction. But every viewpoint has limitations, and so does the body's, whose senses all have limits of sensory range and focus.

These limits become increasingly restrictive and frustrating as we age. Hearing typically goes before sight. If I often complained that my father was always too busy to listen to me when I was young, then I now can lament how it is even more painful today that he cannot even hear me well enough to have a proper phone conversation, despite the use of hearing aids. Soon he may not be able to hear or see me at all. But what should I expect from a centenarian? I rejoice that he can still function as well as he does, and I hope I can perform just as well for just as long.

The ever encroaching, inexorable limits of our somatic powers (that culminate with our somatic end in death) have made it very tempting for philosophers to reject the body and instead focus on the idea of an immortal soul or disembodied mind. The soma is not eternal and ideal. It is full of imperfections and blemishes, including inevitable elements of ugliness, awkwardness, and pain in experience, appearance, and action. But, realistically, we cannot live or think, create beauty or perform virtuous deeds without the soma; and so a pragmatist concludes that we should do the best we can to cultivate it in order to enhance our powers for creating beauty, increasing knowledge, and practicing virtue.

### III

Somaesthetics emerged from American pragmatist philosophy, but it has grown into an international and transdisciplinary field of research. This panel presents only a few of the many interesting directions that somaesthetics is

taking. Professor Otabe, from Tokyo, helps situate somaesthetics historically and culturally by relating it not only to older Western philosophical theories of embodied sensory perception from Aristotle through various eighteenth and nineteenth century French and German thinkers but also to contemporary Japanese theories that highlight the soma's complexity and its multiple roles in aesthetic perception and creative action. Turning from philosophical theory to artistic practice, Professor Bukdahl of Copenhagen explores the application of somaesthetics to contemporary art by examining the work of some of today's influential artists in Europe and Asia. Finally, Professor Wilkoszewska, our host from Krakow, takes somaesthetics beyond its connections with philosophical history and contemporary art practice, but also beyond its traditional humanist focus. In a wide-ranging paper she highlights the transdisciplinarity of somaesthetics by focusing on its connection with natural science and technology<sup>3</sup>. She relates somaesthetics not only to the new technologies of remaking the body that inspire theories of posthumanism but also to the evolutionary sciences through which we can explore possible traces or features of prehuman or nonhuman bodies (such as those of plants and nonhuman animals) still present in the human soma, and she suggests how understanding such affinities with nonhuman life can improve our existence in this world, a world which we share with nonhuman creatures, including the many microbes in our bodies that make our somatic life possible.

## Endnotes

1. For more on the origins of somaesthetics, see: Richard Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. The field has developed in such an interdisciplinary way that a "Journal of Somaesthetics" is being launched to serve as a forum for such multidisciplinary research. The journal can be found at <http://journals.aau.dk/index.php/JOS/>, accessed on January 15, 2013.
2. Xenophon, *Conversations of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick and Robert Waterfield, London, Penguin, 1990, pp. 171–172, 231–234.
3. Somaesthetics is increasingly being applied in the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI). In recent research in this field practical somaesthetic workshops in raising body consciousness have also been used for generating ideas. See for example: Wonjun Lee, Youn-kyung Lim, and Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Somaesthetics: Exploring its Impact on Interactive Product Design Ideation in Proceedings of DIS (Designing Interactive Systems)'14*, New York: ACM Press, 2014, pp. 1055–1064.

Tanehisa Otabe

## On an Aesthetic Consciousness of our Being: Toward a Contextualization of Shusterman's Somaesthetics

Richard Shusterman once insisted that “new names can be helpful both in stimulating new thinking and in reorganizing and reanimating older insights.”<sup>1</sup> The aim of my presentation is to contextualize by means of the history of ideas Shusterman's somaesthetics within Western as well as Japanese discourses on *sôma* and *aisthêsis* in order to reorganize and reanimate older, often forgotten insights. My presentation will be divided into three sections. The first will give a general overview of the classical theory on *sôma* and *aisthêsis* by focusing on Aristotle. In the second section I will address how this classical theory was taken up and transformed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, thereby dealing with Johann Gottfried Herder, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Konrad Fiedler. In the third section I will turn to Japanese discourses on *soma* and *aisthesis* in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, corresponding to Shusterman's interests in the “transcultural dialogue between Western and Asian approaches to aesthetic embodiment.”<sup>2</sup>

1. Aristotle is among those who most decisively influenced the Western conceptions of *soma* and *aisthesis*.

He once argued that each sense (*aisthêsis*) has its own medium and that “the flesh (*sarx*) and the tongue are related to the real organs of touch and taste, as are air and water to those of sight, hearing and smell,”<sup>3</sup> i.e., in the case of touch (*haphê*), “flesh” or “body (*sôma*)” is its medium.<sup>4</sup> This view would make it possible to treat an instrument or a tool as a prolongation of our body.<sup>5</sup> He even went so far to insist that “in respect of touch we far excel all other species in exactness of discrimination” and “those whose flesh is soft (*malakosarkoi*)” are “well-endowed by nature.”<sup>6</sup> Somatic delicacy or softness is a precondition of our intellectual capacity. Generally speaking, the sense of touch is certainly regarded as “brutish”<sup>7</sup>) and the

sense of seeing is ranked at the top in his philosophy, as we read at the beginning of *Metaphysics*: “We prefer seeing to everything else, because this, most of all the senses, makes us know and bring to light differences between things.”<sup>8</sup> At the same time, however, Aristotle insisted on the important role the sense of touch plays for a human being. Among all the senses, that of touch is not only primary, but also fundamental, in that somatic fineness is a disposition to a high intelligence.

What characterizes his theory of *aisthêsis* is that, under the name of “sensus communis (*koinê aisthêsis*),” he addressed the so-called perception of perception, or a sort of higher-order perception. According to Aristotle, thanks to the *sensus communis* that “subsists in association chiefly with the faculty of touch,” “one perceives (*aisthanesthai*) that one sees and hears” and “one discerns,” for example, “white from sweet,”<sup>9</sup> i.e. one can cross over from one sense to the other.<sup>10</sup> He argued further that we perceive not only that we perceive, but also that we think and concluded that “to perceive that we perceive or think” is “to perceive that we are” or “that we live.”<sup>11</sup> What is at issue in the *sensus communis* is, therefore, our *aesthetic* consciousness of our own being. Put in a modern terminology, the *sensus communis* guarantees the “feeling of realness” of ourselves and, therefore, also the world in which we live.<sup>12</sup>

2. The topic of the *sensus communis* was taken up by a variety of thinkers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, including Rousseau and Herder.

Herder (1744–1803), for example, argued that the human being is a “thinking *sensorium commune*,”<sup>13</sup> by which he meant that the sense of touch (*Gefühl*) is a fundamental sense from which all other senses were derived.<sup>14</sup> He was against the idea to situate the “site or seat of the soul” in a certain place in the brain called “*sensorium commune*.” For Herder, the human being is a thinking *sensorium commune*. This is why Merleau-Ponty (1908–61) who advocated the integration of the various senses into “one knowing organism” quoted with sympathy Herder’s formula cited above.<sup>15</sup> Herder elaborated on how the five senses have been integrated and underlined the fact – that is most usually ignored by the sight itself which fancies itself to be self-sufficient – that the sense of touch has guided the sense of sight: “We have actually learned how to see through force of habit and using other senses, above all by using our sense of touch (*das tastende Gefühl*).”<sup>16</sup> Based on contemporary insights into physiology, especially those of Albrecht Haller, Herder acknowledged the importance of the embodiment, by stating a motto: “I feel myself! I am!”<sup>17</sup> which mediates between the Aristotelian tradition and 20<sup>th</sup> century philo-

sophical anthropology with which Shusterman's somaesthetics shares the emphasis on the intimate union between body and mind.<sup>18</sup>

In *Emile, or On Education* (1762), Rousseau (1712–78) argued that the “common sense” “results from the well-regulated use of the other senses,”<sup>19</sup> thus emphasizing reciprocal refinement of the senses as follows: “Children, who are great imitators, all try to draw. I would want my child to cultivate this art, not precisely for the art itself but for making his eye exact and his hand flexible,” in other words, in order that “his sense [may] acquire the perspicacity and his body the good habits one gains by this exercise.”<sup>20</sup> The idea of common sense thus leads to “using the active organ (i.e. hand) and the passive organ (i.e. eye) to exercise one another reciprocally”<sup>21</sup> and thereby to cultivating “the body's good constitution which makes the mind's operations easy and sure.”<sup>22</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics, Fiedler (1841–95) explored in an original manner the idea of reciprocal cultivation of the senses. In his essay on *The Origin of Artistic Activity* (1887), he critically investigated the traditional art theory that strictly distinguishes a spiritual invention from a somatic execution. This distinction involves that “the artist who externally executes expresses only for others in a visible and lasting way what has already gained a form in his cognitive faculty that does not depend on external action, or even that the artist who is about to act artistically is compelled to do so, for no external means is able to render his spiritual forms in its pure perfection.”<sup>23</sup> By spiritual form, Fiedler meant the so-called inner Form, criticizing the position that idealizes Raphael without hands. Contrary to this traditional view, Fiedler argued that it is in the somatic activity of painting that the cognitive faculty of seeing can be elaborated: “The artist's hand develops further (*Weiterentwicklung*) what the eye does – precisely on the point where the eye has reached the end of its action.”<sup>24</sup> The artist's hand does not simply duplicate what the eye has seen; rather the hand continues the process of the seeing.

The reason why the hand should share in continuing the process of the seeing is that the inner activity of seeing is not determined clearly enough until the process is depicted on external materials by the somatic act of painting. The artist, therefore, does not have to complain, as the painter Conti in Lessing's drama *Emilia Galotti* (1772) did: “How much is lost on the long path from the eye, through the arm, into the brush!”<sup>25</sup> Fiedler said: “The artistic process proves to be a progress from the indeterminateness of the inner process to the determinateness of external expression.”<sup>26</sup> Certainly Fiedler considered the collaboration of the senses only possible

between eye and hand, but if we generalize his idea, we will find clues to the theory of the intertwining of the senses.

3. In modern Japan, inspired by Western philosophy and reinterpreting Eastern traditions, several prominent scholars have developed their original ideas concerning *soma* and *aisthesis*.

One of the characteristics of modern Japanese thinking is that Fiedler has exerted a decisive influence, which can be especially seen in Kitarô Nishida's concept "intuition as action (*kôï teki chokkan*).” In the following, I focus on the theory of body of Motomori Kimura (1895–1946), a favorite student of Nishida.<sup>27</sup> Kimura paid attention on the polysemy of the Japanese term *mi*, as follows: “The term *mi* does have the meaning of body as a natural object, but it also has the meaning of self as is expressed in the phrase ‘*mi wo omou*’ (taking care of oneself), and even that of heart as seen in the phrase ‘*mi wo tsukusu*’ (devoting one’s energies). Thus, the human body is dialectic existence as subject-object. As a subject making inroads into nature, it is an apical end of the expressive will of a subject; alternatively, as nature making inroads into subject, it is a limitation of a subject by nature.”<sup>28</sup> The peculiarity of the human body is found in its mediating between the inner and the outer, as is shown in the Japanese term *te-gokoro* (literally: hand-heart). *Te-gokoro* means the “heart that dwells in hands and works through hands.”<sup>29</sup>

Kimura defined the actions of a heart residing in a body as art, i.e., technique. Art is a kind of somatic intellect that indwells in hands, an intuitive knowledge that delicately works in accordance with objects. Kimura notes that there are many “expressions related to body, in particular, to hands (*te*)” that describe the “forms of art”: For example, concerning working ways of technique *te-ren* (wiles), *te-kuda* (trick), *te-giwa* (dexterity), *te-sabaki* (manipulation), regarding technical properties of an object as material *te-goro* (handy), *te-gowai* (stiff) and with reference to the work of art as a synthesis of working and material *te-no-konda* (elaborate), *te-garu-na* (easygoing), and *te-wo-nuita* (negligent). All these examples indicate that human beings are not only an inner existence, but also a somatic existence.<sup>30</sup> Referring to Ravaissôn’s theory in his *Of Habit* (1838), Kimura explained the process in which technique is gained as follows: “It is the will that first makes the hands move. This process being repeated over and over, the hands gradually become purposively habituated. Then we gain the heart residing in the hands.”<sup>31</sup> Technique as the “naturalized will that dwells in the body”<sup>32</sup> is realized by habitual practice. And such a body is then able to call creative acts from the subject, or rather to stimulate the subject to invent what it could not think of by its autonomous will,<sup>33</sup> which testifies the



creativity of somatic exercise for human beings. In this sense, Kimura could be regarded as a forerunner of somaesthetics.

In the 1970s, Hiroshi Ichikawa (1931–2002) also took notice of the polysemy of the Japanese word *mi*, that has not only the meaning of physical body, self and heart, as Kimura had once pointed out, although Ichikawa never mentioned Kimura, but also that of social position, as is expressed in the phrase *mi-no-hodo* (literally: the extent or grade of body, as an idiom: one's place or status),<sup>34</sup> and defined *mi* as an implex (a term adopted from Paul Valéry) that consists of three layers, namely a tropic (i.e. unconscious), an intentional and a mediated integration. As for modality, he further distinguished an actual integration from a virtual and a possible integration.<sup>35</sup> Ichikawa argued that, being void of practical implications, art can foreground a virtual and a possible integration of *mi* that would be “immediately suppressed” in our actual life<sup>36</sup> and thereby “enlarge our *aisthesis*.”<sup>37</sup>

Bin Kimura (1931–), a psychiatrist, paid attention to another aspect of *mi*, as is seen in the expression *mi-zu-kara* that means “for oneself” (literally: the body itself). He argued that it is by means of *mi* (i.e. body) that the natural spontaneity of life in general which is characterized as *ono-zu-kara* (i.e. naturally, of itself) and in which the self and others are inseparable is individualized as a self of *mi-zu-kara* and that the incompetence of individualization brings about schizophrenia.<sup>38</sup> By the way, the fact that the Japanese have applied the same Chinese character “zi” (in Japanese: “ji”) to the both words, *mi-zu-kara* (for oneself) and *ono-zu-kara* (naturally), implies, according to Kimura, that the Japanese regarded self and nature as correlated with each other.<sup>39</sup> The loss of such a correlation between self and nature is one of the symptoms of depersonalization, which Kimura described as a disorder of *sensus communis* in Aristotelian sense, reinterpreting thereby the *sensus communis* as “a sensation of practical relationship to, or rather practical participation in, the world.”<sup>40</sup>

Yujiro Nakamura (1925–) took up the idea of *sensus communis* and devoted an entire book to this subject in 1979. Calling into question the primacy of the sense of seeing confirmed by experimental psychology, Nakamura argued that a centripetal, clearly conscious integration of the senses by the sight that is most usually deemed to be self-sufficient is based (and should be based) on a centrifugal, unconscious integration of the senses by somesthesia or coenesthesia that is represented by the sense of touch.<sup>41</sup> He thus rehabilitated the sense of touch, clarifying thereby its status within our body. By the way, it is not to be forgotten that Megumi

Sakabe (1936–2009) pleaded a “philosophy of touching (*fururu*)” as a basis for understanding cultural dynamism.<sup>42</sup>

Toshio Kuwako (1951– ) who specialized in Aristotle and Zhu Xi, a neo-Confucian, recently advocated a philosophy of *aisthesis*, thereby defining *aisthesis* as a “faculty of a somatic self to perceive its spatial placement and temporal hysteresis.”<sup>43</sup> I personally am trying to trace Baumgarten’s concept of *aisthesis* to its origin in Leibniz, namely the idea of “small perceptions,” i.e. those perceptions of which we are not conscious, focusing on how we can make use of those traces that have been sedimented in ourselves in order to reorganize or regenerate our habitual selves and to correspond in a more fruitful manner to the world.<sup>44</sup>

On these attempts in modern Japan might be shed a new, systematic light if seen from a somaesthetic viewpoint.

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Else Marie Bukdahl

## The Relation between Richard Shusterman's Somaesthetics and Selected Artworks by Carsten Höller, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Pan Gongkai and SUPERFLEX

For over two decades, Richard Shusterman's wide-ranging and innovative somaesthetics has been applied to significant aspects of philosophy, politics, literature, visual art and many other fields in both culture and science. Somaesthetics is not only a specific field of study, it is also a methodic physical exercise.

That somaesthetics has proven to be such a fruitful discipline is due in part to the close relationship between theory and practice and because – says Shusterman – it “offers a way of integrating the discursive and nondiscursive, the reflective and the immediate, thought and feeling, in the quest of providing greater range, harmony, and clarity to the soma – the body-mind whose union is an ontological given but whose most satisfying unities of performance are both a personal and cultural achievement.”<sup>1</sup>

Embodied creation and perception are keywords in somaesthetics and in his aesthetics and philosophy as such. Art interpreted as experience has a very central role in his aesthetics. This concept of art has expanded “the realm of art by challenging the rigid division between art and action that is supported by definitions that define art as mimesis, poesis, or the narrow practice defined by the institutional art world.”<sup>2</sup> Shusterman has a vital focus on lived experience and he stresses that aesthetic experience is never passive. Thus, an artwork cannot be complete until the viewer has experienced and interpreted its particular qualities.<sup>3</sup>

Shusterman has always worked with what he calls “new challenges and engaging transdisciplinary projects.”<sup>4</sup>

In recent years, the visual arts have achieved increasing importance in his somaesthetic optic and this has been one of the new challenges he

has accepted. More and more prominent artists have been inspired by his aesthetics and this has resulted in more requests from artists for written contributions to their exhibition catalogues or to them contacting him in other contexts.

The prominent German installation artist Carsten Höller was one of the first artists to approach Shusterman after reading *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, which echoed his own artistic perception of the importance of corporeality in all aspects of human life. While studying the work, he discovered that there were also parallels to his own understanding of the unification of art, science and life and the embodied participation of the public in artworks.

Höller creates cross-disciplinary installations, often allowing exhibition visitors to experiment on themselves, and inviting viewers to be active participants. In 1996, Carsten Höller asked Shusterman to write the catalogue text for the provocative and interactive installation *House for Pigs and People* (1997), which he was creating with Rosemarie Trockel for *Documenta X* (1997) (fig. 1).

1. Carsten Höller and Rosemarie Trockel. *House for Pigs and People*. Installation created for Documenta X 1997, Kassel.

The famous French philosopher Jean Baudrillard described this impressive installation as follows:

Reaching up on tiptoe to see over a fence, spectators look down on a pigsty, while a large mirror opposite allows them to see themselves observing pigs. Then they walk round the shelter and park themselves behind the mirror, which turns out to be a two-way mirror through which they can once again see the pigs, but at the same time also see the spectators opposite looking at the pigs – spectators unaware, or at least pretending to be unaware, that they are being observed.<sup>5</sup>

In his catalogue essay on this work Shusterman analyzed it both in the somaesthetic perspective as well as characterizing some of the basic ideas in the aesthetic that relate to art in particular. This applies first and foremost to the destruction of "the crusty old dogma that firmly divides art from real life and praxis", but it is also a criticism of the closed world of the gallery, the so-called "white cube". It is, says Shusterman, important to emphasize that "art's highest aim is not to make a few admirable objects in a world filled with misery, but to create a better world through the work such objects can generate." These views are also visualized in an individualized manner in Höller's and Trockel's works. This takes place

in such a way that "a concretely embodied reality" is created, which – as Shusterman formulates it – demonstrates that "art can play a powerful role in changing other realities by changing our perception, attitudes and consequent actions". *House for Pigs and People* cast a critical light on the sacred concept of autonomy and the often closed world of galleries and museums, in which – as Shusterman expresses it – "the artist is boxed out from the power to enlighten and move the multitudes toward the creation of a better world."<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, Höller and Trockel are "evoking art's potential for real world improvement", on the other, they reveal "art's actual limits and impotence."<sup>7</sup> Visitors view the pigs behind the glass in much the same way as we often settle for simply viewing rather than involving ourselves with groups of people who exist on the periphery of society. "They are seen through the one-way glass of sociocultural privilege."<sup>8</sup>

Höller has used many of his later sculptures or installations as platforms for interactions with participants and visual dialogues with the surroundings. They challenge our somatic habits and contribute to the art of living by enhancing our bodily awareness, thereby approaching one of the important artistic aims of Shusterman's somaesthetics. One example is *Test Site*, which was installed in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern in 2006 (fig. 2)

2. Carsten Höller. *Test Site*. Installed in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern in 2006.

and "comprised five spiralling tubular slides that ran from the upper floors of the gallery to ground level. Sliding down, especially from the higher levels, was an experience that was both physically and psychically intense." Using peoples' experience as what Höller calls "raw material" he created a work of art that was "centred around, and dependent upon, visitor's participation."<sup>9</sup>

In *Test Site*, the glass plate separating the artwork and the viewer has disappeared. The viewer actually acts as a co-creator. Mark Windsor summarises the impact of the interactive *Test Site* on both viewers, the environment and our perception of urban planning:

"*Test Site* poses a threat to urban spatial practices because it prompts an awareness of the pacific control exerted by structured spaces by offering an alternative; one that activates the individual's imaginative capacity against the institutions that suppress it."<sup>10</sup>

Höller shatters what Shusterman calls the "false barrier between art and action, that trivializes art and robs its power for positive praxis."<sup>11</sup>

In 2012 Shusterman added curating to his practice because “the pragmatism I practice advocates experimentation as a key dimension of its philosophy of *transactional experience*.”<sup>12</sup> This became a reality when Richard Conte and Sandra Laugier from Université 1, Panthéon-Sorbonne decided that part of the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the simultaneous publication in English and French of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* should be an art exhibition to be shown in the Sorbonne’s Michael Journiac Gallery in Paris. Shusterman curated the exhibition himself and was provided with an opportunity to present works by seven artists that he says “enriched my life experience as well as my thought.”<sup>13</sup> All the artists at the exhibition in Paris presented “interactive works” or “relational installation”. The artists were the aforementioned Carsten Höller, media artist and researcher Thecla Schiporst, Orlan, who practices Carnal Art, the Chinese painter and art theorist Pan Gongkai and the Italian French installation artist Tatiana Trouvé. The Italian artist Luca Del Baldo also participated, as did the experimental French photographer Yann Toma.

He characterizes the essence of the exhibited works as follows:

Their works illustrate this ultimate pragmatist bridging of somaesthetics theory and artistic practice where my own philosophical soma (with its expressive energies and cultural shaping) becomes the substance for artistic rendering.<sup>14</sup>

The Chinese artist Pan Gongkai, who also took part in Shusterman’s exhibition in Paris, has already made a significant impact on the international art world. He has been very successful in the fields of painting, installation and video art as well as in education and administration. He is currently the president of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and vice-president of the Chinese Artists Association. He contributed to the Venice Biennale in 2011 with four other Chinese artists. Shusterman commented on these contributions in an interview with the Chinese curator Peng Feng.<sup>15</sup> Somaesthetics has had great significance for Peng Feng’s curatorial work:

“Somaesthetics has begun to have an impact not only on the analysis of visual art, but also on its practice. One prominent example is its use as a generative theoretical background for Peng Feng’s curatorial project for the Chinese Pavilion of the 2011 Venice Biennale entitled *Pervasion*.” This show of five installation pieces included “clouds with tea fragrance; pipes dripping with Chinese schnapps; fragrant porcelain pots of herb



medicine; fog of incense; and lotus-scented virtual snow." These "installations sought to emphasize that our appreciation of even visual art is always much more than visual." Shusterman stresses that they "highlight the soma's role as transmodal perceiving subjectivity by also engaging the pleasures of other bodily senses."<sup>16</sup>

Like Shusterman, Gongkai is convinced that all art is created and perceived through the body. He knows that body consciousness plays an important role in contemporary Chinese painting. This is also the case with the impressive video installation *Snow Melting into Lotus* from the Venice Biennale 2011 (fig. 3). It is a long, moving passage, which transports you

3. Pan Gongkai. *Snow Melting into Lotus*. Exhibited in the Venice Biennale 2011.

into a magical space. Both sides of a temporary corridor are covered with Chinese ink lotuses, onto which an animation of falling snow is projected. Three air conditioners help keep the temperature of the corridor much cooler than the rest of the building. The temperature never rises above 10° C. In this work, Pan Gongkai juxtaposes the traditional subject of the lotus and the traditional technique of ink painting with the use of modern computer technology to create elements of falling text in video, falling like snowflakes. On the ground beneath it are actual cut out white letters which appear to have fallen out of the work. The text is his English translation of his essay on modern Western art and art theory. Gongkai has described this project as follows:

It is an attempt to create a poetic and vacant space that fits in with traditional Chinese culture.

Shusterman showed a video of this project in the exhibition he curated in Paris at the Sorbonne's Michel Journiac Gallery in connection with the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the French translation of his book *Pragmatist Aesthetics* in 2012.<sup>17</sup>

Gongkai's ink paintings have a contemplative intensity and invite a surrender of self. They are characterized by bold renewal and reinterpretation of the ancient Chinese art form. From the simple elements of water and ink emerge artworks of intimate subtlety and overwhelming emotional power (fig. 4). Gongkai also uses the language of art to express

#### 4. Pan Gongkai. *Ink Painting*.

human values and to open up new dialogues between the local and the global. In these works, viewers encounter a visual dialogue between tradition and innovation, the local and the global. The artist has expressed himself with all his power and so personally that his work achieves general significance.

Shusterman emphasises that Gongkai is “equally accomplished as an erudite theorist and we have spent many hours in Beijing in philosophical dialogues about art, some of which have been published in Chinese art journals.”

Shusterman developed his view from a western perspective in *Pragmatist Aesthetics*. It was only when he met the Chinese philosophers and artists – Gongkai in particular – that he was introduced to the “rich sources in the classical Confucian notion of an ethics of harmony in which ethical education rests on the twin aesthetic pillars of art and ritual.” Gongkai is a specialist in Confucianism. Another key focus of Shusterman’s discussions with Gongkai concerned “the relationship between art and life, including the pragmatist idea of the ethical art of living.”<sup>18</sup> Gongkai developed this theme in an article that was published in the catalogue for the exhibition Zaoxing, which was shown in September 2010 at the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing, with Gongkai at its head. In this essay, Gongkai ties aesthetics closely with life and practice and to improving the quality of our life and society. These attempts are the heartbeat of Shusterman’s somaesthetics and are probably directly inspired by them.<sup>19</sup> Gongkai hopes that these goals will start to characterise the Chinese teaching system in the Academies and culturally and societally to a greater degree.<sup>20</sup>

Shusterman is convinced that in Gongkai’s projects “West and East coexist in active harmony and moving beauty, without an isolating separation, but also without coercive fusion.”<sup>21</sup> The same goes for the interplay between traditional techniques and contemporary technology.

In an interview by Aude Launay on Biological Aesthetics, Shusterman tells us that he admires some European artists of “relational orientation” such as the prominent Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija. He met him at an Art and Experience event in Venice (2004), organized by the Italian art critic Maurizio Bartolotti.<sup>22</sup>

Tiravanija works in the same interactive manner as Carsten Höller and the other artists that Shusterman presented in his exhibition in Paris.

Rirkrit Tiravanija has presented outstanding and very impressive installations in Thailand, Europe and particularly in his country of residence, the U.S.A.

He is renowned particularly for creating projects that are designed to be used, are socially grounded and in which the viewer is always a very active participant.

His installations often take the form of stages or rooms for sharing meals, cooking, reading and playing music. The architecture or other structures he uses always form the framework for a variety of social events.

An example of this was his installation *Fear Eats the Soul* at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in which his assistant served bowls of soup every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday throughout April 2011 (fig. 5).

5. Rirkrit Tiravanija. *Fear Eat the Soul at Gavin Brown's Enterprise*. April 2011.

He describes his interactive artistic intentions as follows:

"The situation is not about looking at art. It is about being in the space, participating in an activity. The nature of the visit has shifted to emphasize the gallery as a space for social interaction. The transfer of such activities as cooking, eating or sleeping into the realm of the exhibition space puts visitors into very intimate if unexpected contact; the displacement creates an acute awareness of the notion of public and private, the installations function like scientific experiments: the displacement becomes a tool and exposes the way scientific thought processes are constructed. The visitor becomes a participant in that experiment."<sup>23</sup>

Tiravanija's work is fundamentally about bringing people together to create a better world. His exhibitions are often developed through surprising interactions and exchanges amongst participants. He has emphasised repeatedly that "it is not what you see that is important but what takes place between people."<sup>24</sup> In his installations he successfully attempts to bridge the mind-body gap that often exists in Western art. This is precisely what Shusterman has been doing with his somaesthetic theory and practice.

Through his installations, Tiravanija always creates new relationships between people and breaks down barriers between societal groups and conventional ways of thinking. It is precisely this liberating process that is one of the main themes in Shusterman's somaesthetics and which Tiravanija interprets in many surprising and artistic ways in his installations. Another general theme in Shusterman's somaesthetics is interdisciplinarity.

This interaction and integration of the diverse forms of somatic knowledge and artistic fields was visualized in a very impressive way in Tiravanija's staging at New York's Park Avenue Armory of *Oktophonie* in March 2013. It was a performance of electronic music by the singular German composer Stockhausen (fig. 6). This surprising music is only a 70-minute excerpt of the late

6. Rirkrit Tiravanija's staging at New York's Park Avenue Armory of *Oktophonie* in March 2013.

composer's 29-hour opera *Licht*. It was intended for performance in a specially designed chamber with octophonic (8-channel) sound.

"Tiravanija conceived of a circular stage with a lunar surface to include both the audience and the performers, all-white smocks to be worn by all attendees, and a light show that approximates an eclipse."<sup>25</sup> The embodied experience that Tiravanija made possible was featured in the following review in the "New Yorker"

"A vivid presence on the international art circuit... [who] not only welcomes but depends on[a] collaborative embrace between artist and spectator."<sup>26</sup>

At the end of the nineties, Tiravanija was one of the artists that Nicolas Bourriaud had in mind when he created the new term "relational aesthetics". This was based on works such as Tiravanija's legendary exhibition at 303 Gallery in New York in 1992, in which he made Thai food for the guests of the exhibition for a whole month.

But Shusterman emphasizes, to a greater degree than Bourriaud, the importance of corporeality for all aspects of human existence. And Bourriaud has not, like Shusterman, connected this aim with the concept of artworks being capable of improving the quality of our life and the society as such. This is the reason why Shusterman's somaesthetics is able to clarify these aspects in Tiravanija's artworks and to place them in a new and promising context.

John Perreault suggests a parallel between Duchamp and Tiravanija and alludes to Tiravanija's ability to engage the public in the art space:

Why was he so late in coming to Marcel Duchamp's famous lecture called The Creative Act: "The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act."<sup>27</sup>

The three Danish artists Bjørnstjerne Christiansen, Jakob Fenger and Rasmus Nielsen formed a project group in 1993 that they called SUPERFLEX. Their projects use social processes and networking as their working material and are represented in e.g. MoMA. All three artists were educated at the Royal Danish Academy of Art. They describe their most important aim with their often site-specific projects as follows:

We are interested in using our position as artists to explore the contribution that the field of art can make to social, political and economic change. (...) It is our suggestion that some possible new ways of thinking and acting can be found through the activity of art and artist.

There are some clear parallels between the aims of SUPERFLEX and one of the keywords in Shusterman's development of pragmatism. This deals with what he calls "community" which he characterizes as "an indispensable medium for the pursuit of better beliefs, knowledge, and even for the realization of meaning through language and the arts. Pragmatists have offered cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic arguments for democracy."<sup>28</sup>

SUPERFLEX describe their projects as "tools" that invite people to take part in the creation of their experimental models which are aimed at changing the economic and cultural conditions in various societies, both in the East as well as the West. Shusterman also emphasizes the interactive and creative elements in the experience of art. In their projects, SUPERFLEX support the requirement for "free space" and make it possible for information to be free, i.e. that "citizen users should be able to retrieve and share the visual information that he or she finds most relevant for decision-making."<sup>29</sup>

SUPERFLEX realised this aim in a project that established an internet-based dialogue in the public space in Sharjah in The United Arab Emirates. This was called *Sharjah Moon Channel* (fig. 7) and was broadcast during the fifth International Biennale in Sharjah from

7. SUPERFLEX. *Moon Channel*, Sharjah, April 2001.

17–27 April 2001. SUPERFLEX calls this kind of channel a superchannel, which they describe as "a local studio used by people and communities as a discussion forum, presentation medium and a physical gathering place. It is a tool enabling the production of Internet TV directly (...). During live productions the viewer can communicate directly through a chat with the producer and with all other viewers. All productions are archived, so viewers can continue to watch and discuss them."<sup>30</sup>

The Superchannel project at the Sharjah Biennale was curated by the painter Dorte Dahlin ([www.superflex.net/tools/superchannel/users/moon.shtml](http://www.superflex.net/tools/superchannel/users/moon.shtml), accessed on June 13, 2014). It was part of a wider collaborative project between Dorte Dahlin, colleagues from the Sharjah Department of Culture and Else Marie Bukdahl, who was at the time the rector of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen.<sup>31</sup>

The projects by Carsten Höller, Pan Gongkai, Rirkrit Tiravanija and SUPERFLEX, which are interactive and relational, are based on different types of technology. They visualise – as we have seen – some basic elements in Shusterman's somaesthetics. Carsten Höller and Pan Gongkai have been directly influenced by it. It has broadened their artistic perspective. Rirkrit Tiravanija's and SUPERFLEX's project contain clear visualisations of the aims that are parallel to the aims occupying a central place in Shusterman's somaesthetics. Common to all the artists mentioned here is their focus on embodied creation and perception, the full-bodied experience, the establishment of a bridge between art, real life and praxis and the interactive dialogue with the viewer and the surroundings. Their projects also demonstrate that they – like Shusterman – aim at the creation of a better world. But Shusterman's somaesthetics has also been a valuable resource for interpreting the works of the artists discussed here and revealed some aspects which have not been clearly analyzed up till now. Particularly with regard to the role of body consciousness, the viewers active involvement in the projects and the meliorist goals. It is also these essential elements in Shusterman's conception of art that will be capable of providing a great deal of inspiration for the artists of our time.

Shusterman's somaesthetics appeals not only to an artistic elite but also to very different artists, including those who are just starting their artistic development and are encountering problems. Somaesthetics also provides great inspiration and generates new ideas for the entire spectrum of our cultural and social life.

## Endnotes

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6. Shusterman's Documental text *A House Divided* was reprinted in Carsten Höller and Rosemarie Trockel, *A House of Pigs and People*, Köln: W. König, 1997, pp. 31–32.
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15. See the conversation between Peng Feng and Richard Shusterman regarding Cai Zhisong, Liang Yuanwei, Pan Gongkai, Yang Maoyuan, Yuan Gong in *Artpress supplément Venise 2011, Pavillons nationaux*. Peng Feng has translated many of Richard Shusterman's books.
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Fig. 1. Carsten Höller and Rosemarie Trockel. *House for Pigs and People*. Installation created for Documenta X 1997, Kassel.



Fig. 2. Carsten Höller. *Test Site*. Installed in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern in 2006



Fig. 3. Pan Gongkai. *Snow Melting into Lotus*. Exhibited in the Venice Biennale 2011



Fig. 4. Pan Gongkai. *Ink Painting*



Fig. 5. Rirkrit Tiravanija. *Fear Eat the Soul* at Gavin Brown's Enterprise. April 2011



Fig. 6. Rirkrit Tiravanija's staging at New York's Park Avenue Armory of *Oktophonie* in March 2013



Fig. 7. SUPERFLEX. *Moon Channel*, Sharjah, April 2001

Krystyna Wilkoszewska

## Transdisciplinarity of Somaesthetics

According to Richard Shusterman somaesthetics is the core integrating diverse – philosophical, scientific, artistic and everyday – discourses concerning the body. In this sense, somaesthetics is of interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary character. The prefix >trans< introduces a subtle difference, namely that each problem, to be better understood, is considered not in cooperation of several disciplines (since this would be interdisciplinarity), but rather it is perceived in all its complexity since the very beginning, not being subjected to one domain of knowledge. In other words, nowadays the problematic configurations transgress the traditional divisions into disciplines.

The author of somaesthetics emphasizes its role in the transformation of the humanities that appears necessary today. Their German name *Geisteswissenschaften* reflects the fact that the humanities in Europe, while dealing with the man, treated the object of their studies as *res cogitans*, neglecting or excluding the issues of human body. In turn, in the existing division of sciences, *Naturwissenschaften* considered the body exclusively in its physical and biological aspects. The role of somaesthetics consists in including the body in the humanities as well as re-formulating the form of corporality in the natural sciences.<sup>1</sup>

This task seems to be extremely difficult: the need for transformation of the humanities in the aspect of *soma* cannot consist in introduction of the body – in the way this concept functions in the natural sciences – into the disciplines dealing with the spirit. It is so, first of all because the awareness of the body is now changing fundamentally in the natural sciences, mainly due to the new technologies, in particular biotechnology, transforming the received dichotomous relation between the natural sciences and those dealing with mind.

As in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the achievements of physics transformed significantly our world outlook, so do life sciences seem to be doing now, and among them the most effective discipline is modern biology equipped with new research possibilities provided by electronic media. Mentioning biology I have in mind its modern transmutations like biotechnology, evolutionary biology in its newest shape as well as genetic and tissue engineering.

At our congress we have relatively many papers as well as two session panels concerning biotechnology and this clearly shows how important these problems are also within the domains of the humanities, philosophy and aesthetics.

If we accept Shusterman's thesis that "the body is always being constructed in some way" and that the dominating discourses contextualize the body, the factors that undoubtedly influence the construction of our concept of the body today are, to a large extent, the discourses developed on the basis of the achievements of life sciences. They compete with, or sometimes are complementary to the vision of human body offered by the electronic media. Art is fully involved in those processes of transformation of the image of human body, and the division into the *moist media* and *dry media* that occurs within it, diversifies new discourses concerning *soma* significantly.

Somaesthetics, with its conceptions of „body consciousness" and "thinking through the body" brought about an important change in the understanding of the self. "...lessons of somatic self-conscious eventually point toward the vision of an essentially situated, relational and symbiotic self rather than traditional concept of an autonomous self grounded in an individual, monadic, indestructible, and unchanging soul."<sup>2</sup> In particular the theory of aesthetic experience, into which a corporeal and multi-sensual subject was introduced, was transformed dramatically in comparison to the modern tradition based on the concepts of distance, isolation and disinterestedness and on mere two senses, namely, sight and hearing. Numerous detailed analyses conducted by Shusterman showed in what way the body - remaining in unity with the mind - "thinks", acts and responds.

Nevertheless, while searching for the forerunners of his conceptions in the antique thought of the West and the East and criticizing the European mainstream philosophy neglecting the problems of the body, the author of somaesthetics mostly restricts his considerations to the anthropocentric perspective treating the body of a human being in reference to culture and

philosophy. He admits, however, that the disciplinary relations of somaesthetics go beyond the humanities into biological, cognitive sciences and those connected with health...

The present day research conducted both by the scientists and artists who have turned their studios into laboratories, studies in the area of biotechnology (DNA, genetic and tissue engineering) as well as of the theory of evolution incline us to consider anew the question “Who are we?”, that is the question of identity of the human being.

Eduardo Kac, a leading representative of bio-art claims that questions posed by biotechnology dissolve barriers between species and play a direct role in evolution. They create new forms of life, they modify notions of personal identity; our understanding of the phenomena that were dualistically divided between nature and culture is no longer sustainable because this kind of dichotomy seems to be too reductive.<sup>3</sup>

What does it mean that questions put by biotechnology dissolve barriers between species?

Richard Shusterman based his somaesthetics on the concept of soma – the conscious body, the thinking body. In this context – of the conscious body – we can pose the question about its memory, the question that is important in striving to define the identity of the human being. What has been preserved in the memory of our bodies from the many centuries long course of the process of evolution?

Here I would like to make a remark: in the current of the so-called post-humanism a provocative question is asked about how much human there is in a human (Donna Haraway), and it turns out that there is not much of it.<sup>4</sup> Posthumanism tends to blur the boundaries between species and it seems to aim at melting the human species in the non-personal sphere of life, in *zoe*. This trend in thinking about humans seems to me too radical. I would like to pose the question concerning the past of human body on a more moderate plane. Nevertheless, it requires making a step ahead in relation to the so-called ecological sensitivity thanks to which we have started treating animals as our “lesser brothers”.

I would like to turn, as it were, to the past of our bodies or, in other words, towards the predecessors of human body. It is not the *perspective* of the “post-human” but rather the “pre-human”. My goal is to go beyond the sphere of this which is human in order to better understand what is human. And the “non-human” sphere does not signify the divine sphere, just the opposite – it is directed at biology and the theory of evolution.

According to the metaphysics of life that is built today on the achievements of molecular biology, a man due to his body appears related to all live creatures. Lynn Margulis in *Symbolic Planet* asks: “When does a man begin? A man began – like all life on the earth – about 3.5 billion years ago. The chain of our ancestors begins with primitive bacteria, with microbes.”

What has our body memory preserved from those centuries of evolution? To what degree is a man – a vegetable, animal or human? (Aristotle: vegetative, sensitive, rational soul). Is the ‘non-human’ in a man humanized or does it rather remain alien?

As regards flora, negative metaphors recognizing vegetation or ‘being a cabbage’ as the least valuable forms of existence have been functioning in the language for centuries. Inability to move and standing still in one place are emphasized as imperfection. In Plato’s *Phaedrus* Socrates says “trees have nothing to teach me”<sup>5</sup>, and in a similar spirit, centuries later, Baudelaire claims that he is “unable to get inspired by vegetation”. Contemporary artists working with plants frequently emphasize how much can be learnt from them if we are patient enough trying to understand them.

For example, George Gessert, a French artist has been working with plants for three decades. He writes: „I cannot say that I am happier with plants than with men, but I am in a better accord with plants and, in general, I feel more relaxed among them”. (...) „Plants are literally unimaginable. Nobody could dream up a wild iris.”<sup>6</sup>

Commenting Gessert’s words, Monika Bakke writes, that plants are everywhere around us, they affect us and influence our ways of thinking and feeling. They do it in larger extent than we influence them. Usually we perceive them in the context of our physiological needs (breathing, eating), sometimes they become the objects of our aesthetic contemplation, most rarely we think about plants in the context of our common genealogy that they are our ancestors. They have the complex relations with other forms of life. And yet we do not want to learn from them. In our philosophical thought plants have been degraded.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, plants are our ancestors and, due to this common genealogy, we still retain something plant-like in ourselves. An insight into this long-forgotten sphere would probably help us to understand some processes going on in a human body better.

As regards fauna, which – in Aristotelian taxonomy – is closer to people than the plant life, we must state that this closeness or ‘bestiality’ in a human has



become a shameful and undesirable element. Therefore, since people started to conceive themselves as the only rational beings, they have done much to distance themselves from animals, thus justifying their right to dominate them.

Polish artist Grzegorz Kowalski realized a project: *People/Animals*. He asked people: would you like to embody (incorporate) yourself in an animal (in front of a camera)? The reactions of people were very varied: refusal, discomfort, disgust; shame, curiosity, trying to face a challenge; careful acceptance connected with the new kind of feelings, etc.

Our culture is understood as opposed to nature, human dignity is based on the separation of a man from nature. Denaturalization of our culture and a man is connected with contempt for human body as well as for animals. What was identified with animals, was suppressed or negated. Our philosophy emphasized the differences between human beings and animals (Cartesius, Kant). According to the evolutionary biology, the similarities between men and the other organisms are bigger and more significant than differences.

Instead of asking what we profited from this separation from nature, let us ask: what did we lose?

At this moment I would like to recall John Dewey. His book *Art and Experience* devoted to “philosophy of aesthetics” starts with two chapters dealing with a relation between a “live creature” (an organism) and its environment.

„The nature of experience is determined by the essential conditions of life. While man is other than bird and beast, he shares basic vital functions with them and has to make the same basal adjustments if he is to continue the process of living. Having the same vital needs, man derives the means by which he breathes, moves, looks and listens, the very brain with which he coordinates his senses and his movements, from his animal forbears. The organs with which he maintains himself in being are not of himself alone, but by the grace of struggles and achievements of a long line of animal ancestry.”<sup>8</sup>

It is important that Dewey indicated the results that the opposition of mind and body, matter and spirit, imposes on the experience, bringing about its reduction, shrinking, withdrawal and blunting. It is so because participation in interaction is realized with the use of sense organs and the motor system connected with them, and ignoring them or denial of their role causes that our experiences are impoverished. Senses do not unite in cooperation, „we see without feeling”, „we touch, but the contact remains tangential because it does not fuse with qualities of senses that go below the surface.” In this situ-

ation many sense perceptions get weaker or simply disappear. However, it is the body and the senses that „are the organs through which the live creature participates directly in the ongoings of the world about him.”<sup>9</sup>

Referring in merely one aspect to the question what we lost isolating ourselves from the nature, from our vegetal and animal past, I have quoted Dewey’s words because they open broader prospects to the chance of combining the humanities with the nature sciences and introduction of biological and evolutionary perspective to the domain of aesthetic studies, but also because it is in his philosophy of experience that Shusterman’s pragmatic aesthetics and somaesthetics are rooted.

As the pragmatist, Richard Shusterman puts experience in the centre of philosophy and emphasizes the role of living, sentient body in organizing the course of experience. For this reason and also because of the pragmatist meliorist approach the somatic consciousness acquires its importance.

Shusterman asks: “Are the special principles or methods of somatic introspection for improving body consciousness and then using such enhanced awareness for better cognition and sensorimotor performance?”<sup>10</sup>

It seems that the penetration of the long-forgotten spheres in human being which are of vegetal or animal nature can be helpful in the enhancing body awareness. Dewey’s philosophy of experience with its idea of the evolutionary continuity encourages to such introspection.

## Endnotes

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2. Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness. A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 8.
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6. George Gessert, *Why I Bread Plants* in Eduardo Kac (ed.), *Signs of Life...*, p. 185.
7. Monika Bakke, *Florofilia jest legalna! O międzygatunkowych sympatiach* [Florofilia is legal! On interspecies sympathies], “Czas Kultury”, 2008, No. 5, pp. 60–72.
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9. *Ibid.* p. 21.
10. Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness...*, p. xi.

# Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics

(Wolfgang Iser)



Wolfgang Welsch

## Aesthetics beyond Aesthetics

In 1995, at the end of the XIIIth International Congress of Aesthetics in Lahti, I delivered a lecture entitled “aesthetics beyond aesthetics”. It seems to have been influential because the concept of the XIXth International Congress of Aesthetics in Cracow (July, 21–27, 2013) reflects some of the ideas I developed then. This is why Krystyna Wilkoszewska, the organizer, suggested to reexamine the topic of “aesthetics beyond aesthetics” in a plenary panel. This is what we are going to do in the following.

Let me first briefly explain what the idea was then, in 1995. Afterwards I will consider how we might reformulate it today.

What I had in mind in 1995 was that the discipline of aesthetics should transcend the narrow frame of art and also include considerations on aesthetic phenomena outside of art: in science, politics, economy, design, ecology, the lifeworld, etc. Aesthetics should explore and cover the *complete* range of aesthetic phenomena, give a *full* account of aesthetics.

I was widely dissatisfied with the habitual narrowing of aesthetics’ frame at that time. Originally, with its founding father Baumgarten, aesthetics had been designed to cover the full range of aesthetic phenomena (even including, for example, predictions from the flight of birds). Soon after, however – with Kant, Hegel and others – a restriction of aesthetics to the beautiful and to art occurred. This restriction prevailed up to the present day.

What, in my view, was striking and completely disturbing, was, however, that in the meantime – paradigmatically with the avant gardes of the twentieth century – *the arts themselves* had moved in the opposite direction. They had transcended the golden cage of an autonomous art closed on itself and had taken up and pursued relations to the reality outside of art – to politics, ethics, industrialization, the lifeworld, etc.

Therefore it seemed absurd and self-contradictory that the discipline of aesthetics which purportedly wanted to be faithful to art still focused on art alone, as if art were still closed on itself. The champions of this traditional type of aesthetics had obviously missed out on art's shift to an art beyond the golden cage, to an art open to phenomena outside of art.

There were, to be sure, other arguments too for an opening up of aesthetics to aesthetic phenomena beyond art: recent epistemological insights into the role of aesthetic elements in the constitution and shaping of reality, or the increasing relevance of aesthetic styling in the lifeworld – all the phenomena labelled under the heading “aestheticization”. This alone would have justified or even imposed an opening up of aesthetics to phenomena beyond the limited sphere of the arts.

But the one and decisive argument that even traditional aestheticians would have to accept, I thought, was the alteration of art itself. Art had become *art beyond art* (i.e. art beyond autonomist art), therefore a shift of aesthetics to *aesthetics beyond aesthetics* was obligatory. Otherwise one would only pretend to speak about art while in fact ignoring it and speaking just about oneself's outdated concept of art.

What is the situation like today, almost twenty years later? The arts and artists themselves, it seems to me, have moved even more in the direction of an art beyond art. They are very sceptical about the traditional (western) concept of ‘art’ which is bound to the idea of autonomy and the production of self-sufficient works. Artists rather try to intervene in non-artistic contexts, or to sharpen our aesthetic sensibility, or to develop new aesthetic practices and strategies.

I want to point out just two possibilities. 1) Artists less create works in the traditional sense but tend to intervene in processes. For this, artists can either initiate new processes (as Joseph Beuys did, for example, with his *7000 oaks* action during Documenta VII in 1982), or they can intervene in already existing social processes (micro-invasive strategies). In such cases, art surrenders itself to processes which finally will take their own route. After a while one will no longer know or be able to recognize that art had at some moment a finger in the pie. Contemporary artists often just transform what is at hand, or produce contingent and ephemeral things that ultimately realize themselves by disappearing or becoming invisible. The felicitous phrase coined by Lucius Burckhardt with respect to design that “good design is invisible” is equally valid for such interventionist types of art.

The broader context of this shift to processes is a general transition – in epistemology, philosophy and many other strands of cultural orientation – from trying to understand the world in terms of substances to perceiving it as a bundle of processes. In everyday thinking substances still are to the fore, but in scientific and philosophical thinking, and also in our cultural self-understanding processes are gaining priority. We are performing a transition from substance to process ontology – a transition to a kind of Whiteheadian worldview. I consider this a very important change – in many, epistemic as well as practical and political regards (which I cannot explain in detail here) – I just wanted to point out this larger context of artists' turning to processes.

2) Another widespread tendency today consists in drawing inspirations from advanced science, especially from digital technologies and from the life sciences. This is again to be seen in a broader context. We are today undergoing a deep transformation of our self-understanding and our conception of how we humans relate to the non-human entities surrounding us. We are shifting from an oppositional to a more holistic worldview.

For centuries – since the Early Modern Age and fully fledged in modernity – a dualism between man and world had set the agenda. The world was seen as consisting just of matter (*res extensa*) – as being just a spatial, temporal, mechanic, and, above all, spiritless entity. (In this, the modern worldview differed considerably from earlier views to be found in Greek antiquity or in Christianity according to which, spirit was an inherent principle of the world.) While the world was now taken to be just spiritless matter, the human, on the contrary, was still considered to be essentially a spiritual (rational) being (*res cogitans*). From this resulted a fundamental difference between world and man. They were on principle heterogeneous, incongruent and incompatible.

That rationality is not something mundane, was in addition supported by the belief that rationality is an exclusive characteristic of man – that no other animal, not even the ones closest to us, possess rationality. This seemed to bear witness that rationality is not of mundane origin, for otherwise it would be completely unintelligible why rationality should not have developed in other beings around us as well.

From this constellation resulted the man-world-dualism so typical of modernity. There was no conceivable way leading from the world (pure spiritless matter) to spirit – and likewise no way leading from spirit to the world. Hence man, as a spiritual being, was thought to be unable to

recognize the world as it is but only to construct a world according to his epistemological equipment (the doctrine of Kant, Nietzsche, Sapir and others up to the present constructivism in the humanities).

During the last decades, however, we have recognized that the two pillars on which this modern position rests are untenable.

First: Man's rationality is not a supra-natural gift but has evolved quite naturally – it arose continuously from animal rationality. There exist many and impressive instances of rationality in the animal kingdom, reaching from pigeons' capacity of abstraction to chimpanzees ability to understand the intentionality of conspecifics, to recognize themselves in mirrors, and even to do problem-solving through mere deliberation. So there is *continuity* between the non-human and the human.

Second: Nature in general is not contrary to spirit. From very early stages on (already in cosmic evolution) nature is characterized by self-referentiality. This one is the great driver for the formation of galaxies or the constitution of organisms and finally also for the emergence of consciousness and thinking.<sup>1</sup> So spirit is not something alien and incongruent to the world. Rather it is inherently affine to the world. It is a product of the world's development and a manifestation of its innermost organizing principle.

This means that nature is not opposed to spirit but open to it, with spirit being an emergent of nature. Correspondingly, the human is not something supra-natural but a natural product of evolution. Even our turn to cultural evolution was a result of natural evolution, and cultural evolution still rests on and profits from the achievements of natural evolution. So there is convergence (instead of opposition) from both sides.

Hence the new agenda in thinking is to explore the fundamental commonality and continuity between the human and the non-human, and spelling out its – conceptual as well as practical – consequences. The human cannot be understood – as modernity would have it – exclusively in human terms. Rather one has to take our evolutionary provenance and animal heritage into account.

The same holds in aesthetics: Artists no longer take human exclusivity and alterity as guiding-line. They no longer follow the perspective of the human standing as a special entity in opposition to world and nature. Accordingly, they no longer try to create an autonomous world through artworks – with artworks standing opposed to the real world. They rather try to bring to view the deep commonality of humans with other things – living and non-living. This commonality is the big agenda today. And it



obviously is not just romantic fantasy but a completely realistic perspective. Every cell phone user knows that matter bears intellectual potentials. He makes quite naturally use of the similarity between silicon-based and human-based intelligence. He has long-since left behind old-modern dualism.

Let us now take a closer look at the various forms how contemporary artists proceed within this framework of thematizing the human-nonhuman-relationship.

Some, like Pierre Huyghe for example, create bio-culture-topes where it is hard to distinguish any more between human and nonhuman elements (*Untilled*, 2011–12; Documenta XIII, Kassel 2012). Others pursue projects of Artificial Life where determinants of natural evolution (like mutation, selection, variation, chance, population etc.) are transferred into algorithms that regulate the evolution of images. Natural processes serve here as models for artistic processes.

A third possibility is Bio Art. It goes beyond a mere parallelism of natural and artistic evolution (as is characteristic of Artificial Life). It rather creates – through artistic as well as scientific procedures – new real objects, i.e. not just art objects, but living things that sometimes are even able of replication and reproduction. Here we clearly have a case of an art practicing aesthetics beyond aesthetics – an aesthetics open to science, nature, life-world, technology. And I am very happy that we have one of its main representatives on this panel: Eduardo Kac. I will present him to you in a minute.

Besides artist Eduardo Kac from Chicago, I invited aesthetician Peng Feng from Beijing. Many of you know Peng Feng from previous congresses and from his writings. He is an aesthetician not of the old-fashioned type, but is very innovative and above all: he is open to the arts. He was the Chinese curator for the Venice Biennial in 2011. He has also worked as an artist, writing, for example, a musical. He deserves all kinds of interest and respect.

Inviting a contemporary artist and an aesthetician affiliated with art is, of course, a kind of programmatic gesture. I consider it important and necessary for aestheticians to have closer and more manifold contact with the practitioners of aesthetics, the artists. And I am very happy to see that this idea coincides with the view of the organizers of this congress. We have here in Cracow more artists invited and more artistic presentations during and around the congress than ever before.

Finally I want to present Eduardo Kac. I restrict myself to explaining why I consider him a perfect match for a panel on aesthetics beyond aesthetics. Let me mention just one work. It is entitled *Edunia* and was created from

2003 to 2009 (illustration 1). *Edunia* is a hybrid flowering plant which originated through the combination of the normal genome of *Petunia* with some specific genes of Eduardo Kac. Eduardo introduced genes which in himself are responsible for the redness of his blood into the genome of *Petunia* so that this gene now produces red veins in *Edunia*. And Eduardo obviously likes his relative in the plant world (illustration 2).

This is a typical example of “transgenic art” – a term Eduardo coined in 1998 (as he introduced the term “bio art” since 1997). *Edunia* thematizes the commonality and continuity between human and nonhuman I spoke of before. And it certainly represents a type of artwork that has moved beyond aesthetics and art in the traditional sense: it has linked up with science, anthropology, engineering, and it is not only an artwork but a new living being as well. Here, it seems to me, aesthetics beyond aesthetics is fully put into practice.

## Endnotes

1. Cf. on this in more detail: Wolfgang Welsch, *Homo mundanus*, Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2012, pp. 876–886.

Peng Feng

## Aesthetics and Contemporary Art: An Experiment in Venice

The incompatibility of aesthetics and contemporary art seems to become a consensus of both art world and aesthetic society. Can aesthetics and contemporary art meet each other when they go beyond their boundaries? When I, as an aesthetician, curated the China pavilion at Venice Biennale 2011, one of my intentions is to make it an arena for aesthetics and contemporary art joining hands. The aesthetics embodied in the China pavilion is beyond the aesthetics based on disinterested contemplation, and the art presented in the China pavilion is beyond the art based on representation. The works of China pavilion are for the five senses, especially the nose. Visitors can experience the fragrances of herb medicine, green tea, baijiu, lotus, and incense, which remind us the mystery concept of Five Elements in Chinese philosophy. Aesthetics and contemporary art can live in peace with each other when they undo their limits and prejudices.

### 1. The incompatibility of aesthetics and contemporary art [INCOMPATIBILITY]

The subversive strategies in contemporary art encourage it to violate any definitions of art from aesthetics. As Cashell says, “What contemporary transgressive art – more aggressively than any previous cultural practice – has actively sought to do is invalidate the principles of institutional aesthetics. To this end, the principal target of transgressive antagonism will be discovered to be the paradigmatic concept of philosophical aesthetics, namely, the so-called ‘disinterested’ mode of aesthetic contemplation.”<sup>1</sup> Cashell continues, “Disinterestedness, long considered the fundamental motif of traditional art discourse, has its foundations in the philosophical

tradition of the eighteenth century and its associated prioritisation of the category of beauty for aesthetics.”<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Modern Aesthetics and contemporary art cannot match each other [ANACHRONISM]

However, the aesthetics and art in Cashell’s case cannot match each other. There is an anachronism in Cashell’s compare of aesthetics with art. The aesthetics in Cashell’s mind is not contemporary but modern aesthetics, while the art is not modern art but contemporary one. Unfortunately, this anachronism is common in the discourse of contemporary art theory and criticism. It is generally known that only modern aesthetics is preoccupied with disinterestedness and beauty. As Stolnitz said, “We cannot understand modern aesthetic theory unless we understand the concept of ‘disinterestedness.’ If anyone belief is the common property of modern thought, it is that a certain mode of attention is indispensable to and distinctive of the perception of beautiful things.”<sup>3</sup>

Because of the obvious anachronism in the compare of modern aesthetics with contemporary art, the incompatibility of aesthetics and contemporary art should not have been a surprise. The relevant thing is not the incompatibility but the real relationship of art and aesthetics in their contemporary situations.

## 3. Contemporary aesthetics

Contemporary aesthetics is different from modern aesthetics in many aspects. Briefly speaking, modern aesthetics based on disinterested attitude and beauty is a detachment mode of aesthetics, while contemporary aesthetics is an engagement mode of aesthetics. Firstly, as engagement mode of aesthetics, contemporary aesthetics is no longer preoccupied with fine arts, but open itself to cover the everyday life. Secondly, contemporary aesthetics does not presuppose the internal sense, but accepts all five external senses as aesthetic sense. The first aspect is mainly embodied in the aestheticization of everyday life, which Wolfgang Iser gave a comprehensive analysis in his *Undoing Aesthetics*. We can see the second aspect in somaesthetics that Richard Shusterman has been advocating since later 1990s. Contemporary aesthetics is already very different from modern aesthetics. As Wolfgang Iser says,

Aesthetics has lost its character as a special discipline relating solely to art and become a broader and more general medium for the understanding of reality. This has resulted in a general significance for aesthetic thinking today and in a need for change in the structure of the discipline of aesthetics, so that it becomes an aesthetics beyond traditional aesthetics comprising the whole range of aesthesis in everyday life, science, politics, arts, ethics, and so on.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. Somaesthetics as contemporary aesthetics

Somaesthetics is a contemporary aesthetics due to its rebellion against Kantian aesthetics. Kantian aesthetics is based on the imagination of mind, and is considered to be the paradigm of the detachment mode of aesthetics. Instead, body consciousness is highly valued by somaesthetics. The term “soma,” Shusterman says,

indicates a living, feeling, sentient body rather than a mere physical body that could be devoid of life and sensation, while the “aesthetic” in somaesthetics has the dual role of emphasizing the soma’s perceptual role (whose embodied intentionality contradicts the body/mind dichotomy) and its aesthetic uses both in stylizing one’s self and in appreciating the aesthetic qualities of other selves and things.<sup>5</sup>

Even if soma is not same with body. But it is clear that soma is closer to body than mind. As both subject and object, body cannot be disinterested, detached, and distanced psychologically. Body is inescapably engaged in its surrounding. In this sense, somaesthetics as engagement mode of aesthetics belongs to contemporary aesthetics.

#### 5. Body as object

We can easily find consequences or reactions responding to somaesthetics in contemporary art. Actually, contemporary art is indulged in body too much. Not only innumerable body images and sounds can be found, but also real body can be encountered. For example, Italian artist Vanessa Beecroft’s performances involve live naked women. Richard Shusterman himself also ventures into contemporary art project. He cooperates with French artist Yann Toma to show his soma – the body with aura – by photography.

However, body as art subject in contemporary art normally be treated as object. Can body be treated as subject in contemporary art?

## 6. Body as subject

In both the cases of Beecroft's performance and Tomma's photography, what we see are only physical bodies. The so-called soma, which means a living, feeling, sentient body, seems impossible to be the object of visual art. Soma is both subject and object. Only through self-consciousness can soma be object of perception. Therefore what we can do is to create an art for soma by awaking our body consciousness. For the purpose of awaking body consciousness, art for nose seems superior to art for eyes. Although all five senses are the part of bodily perception, nose, tongue and skin are clearly more dependent on or close to body than seeing and hearing. When I was appointed to curate the China pavilion at Venice biennale 2011, I decided to make it an arena for aesthetics and contemporary art joining hands.

Based on the concept of Five Elements and Five Flavors, I invited five artists to create five installations that had to make use of the chosen materials or subjects such as *Baijiu*, herb medicine, lotus, incense, and green tea. The works should be able not only to smell but also to taste. On the lawn, artists Cai Zhisong and Yuan Gong installed the huge sculpture of clouds and the installation of fog. Both emitted the fragrance of green tea. The clouds and fogs made the virgin garden into an Arcadia.

Inside the tank farm, Liang Yuanwei, the only female participant, installed her work *I Plea: Rain*. This installation successfully manifested the flavor, color, fluidity, and mystery of *Baijiu*. "The *Baijiu* as rain," Liang says, "can wash the soul."

When visitors reach the main aisle of the pavilion, they can see the installation *Snow Melting into the Lotus* created by Pan Gongkai. Pan is both ink-water painter and conceptual artist. He has been experiencing the contradictions between the traditional and the contemporary, the Chinese and the western. According to Pan's interpretation, actually they can both co-exist and be "harmonious in difference." When visitors go through the installation, they can experience the pleasantly cool smell of lotus.

On the ground of the tank farm, visitors can see thousands of medicine pots. They belong to Yang Maoyuan's installation *All Matters Are Visible*. Nothing will be contained in the pots except the smells of herb medicine.

What pervaded in the space is Yuan Gong's installation *Empty Incense*. 24 machines produced heavy fog with smell of incense.

The works exhibited in the Chinese pavilion as a whole, I hope, can make a fantastic sensuous world. The works are not only for eyes and ears, but

also for nose, tongue and skin. All five senses can be excited and affected and so a special feeling, emotion and mood can be stirred up in the visitors. The works cannot be transmitted by any techniques. The only way for perceiving and experiencing the works is present oneself in the pavilion. What I did is extending the bound of art and making art for whole body. Unlike Beecroft and Toma, we didn't appropriate body as object of art, instead we created art for our alive bodies.

## 7. Aesthetic Turn in contemporary art?

Contemporary artworld has been dominated by conceptual art and neo-conceptual art since 1970s. The most important aspect of conceptual artwork is not skill or aesthetic property but idea or concept. The consequence of this conceptual turn or linguistic turn in contemporary art world is, as Arthur Danto and others observe, the end of art.

Contemporary conceptual art is getting into difficulties. Maybe it's time for art returning to the aesthetic. Dave Hickey predicted in 1993 that beauty would be the dominant issue of the next decade.<sup>6</sup> By the same token, Donald Kuspit asked that artists should return art to the studio and aesthetic transcendence. It does not simply return to the old master. The new art "is neither traditional nor avant-garde, but a combination of the two. It brings together the spirituality and humanism of the Old masters and the innovation and criticality of the Modern masters. It is a New Old Master."<sup>7</sup> Denis Dutton bluntly criticized contemporary conceptual art as "coming up with concepts that capture the attention of the art market." "The appreciation of contemporary conceptual art, ... depends not on immediately recognizable skill, but on how the work is situated in today's intellectual Zeitgeist... Future generations, no longer engaged by our art 'concepts' and unable to divine any special skill or emotional expression in the work, may lose interest in it as a medium for financial speculation and relegate it to the realm of historical curiosity."<sup>8</sup>

If we can distinguish art from philosophy which is dominated by concepts, in other words, if we would like to save art from reaching its end in philosophy, we should keep art in the area of aesthetic. Art with "the sensuous in all its glory," borrowed the wording from Mikel Dufrenne,<sup>9</sup> is becoming more important in this cyberage.

## Endnotes

1. Kieran Cashell, *Aftershock: The Ethics of Contemporary Transgressive Art*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009, p. 4.
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3. Jerome Stolnitz, *On the Origins of 'Aesthetic Disinterestedness'*, "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism", Vol. 20, No. 2 (1961), p. 131.
4. Wolfgang Iser, *Undoing Aesthetics*, trans. Andrew Inkpin, London: Sage, 1997, p. ix.
5. Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 1.
6. Dave Hickey, *Enter the Dragon: On the Vernacular of Beauty in The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*, Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993, p. 11.
7. Donald Kuspit, *The End of Art*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 182–183.
8. Denis Dutton, *Has Conceptual Art Jumped the Shark Tank?*, "New York Times", October 16, 2009, A 27.
9. Mikel Dufrenne, *Painting, Forever*, in *In the Presence of the Sensuous*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1990, p. 139.



Eduardo Kac

## Bio Art: *In Vivo* Aesthetics

In 1997 I introduced the concept and the phrase “bio art”, originally in relation to my artwork *Time Capsule* (1997).<sup>1</sup> This work approached the problem of wet interfaces and human hosting of digital memory through the implantation of a microchip. The work consisted of a microchip implant, seven sepia-toned photographs, a live television broadcast, a webcast, interactive telerobotic webscanning of the implant, a remote database intervention, and additional display elements, including an X-ray of the implant. While “bio art” is applicable to a large gamut of in-vivo works that employ biological media, made by myself and others, in 1998, I started to employ the more focused term “transgenic art”<sup>2</sup> to describe a new art form based on the use of genetic engineering to create unique living beings. Art that manipulates or creates life must be pursued with great care, with acknowledgment of the complex issues it raises and, above all, with a commitment to respect, nurture, and love the life created. I have been creating and exhibiting a series of transgenic artworks since 1999. I have also been creating bio art that is not transgenic. The implications of this ongoing body of work have particular aesthetic and social ramifications, crossing several disciplines and providing material for further reflection and dialogue. What follows is an overview of these works, the issues they evoke, and the debates they have elicited.

\*

For almost two decades my work has explored the boundaries between humans, animals, and robots.<sup>3</sup> Thus, transgenic art can be seen as a natural development of my previous work. In my telepresence art, developed since

1986, humans coexist with other humans and non-human animals through telerobotic bodies. In my biotelematic art, developed since 1994, biology and networking are no longer co-present but coupled so as to produce a hybrid of the living and the telematic. With transgenic art, developed since 1998, the animate and the technological can no longer be distinguished. The implications of this ongoing work have particular social ramifications, crossing several disciplines and providing material for further reflection and dialogue.

The presence of biotechnology will increasingly change from agricultural and pharmaceutical practices to a larger role in popular culture, just as the perception of the computer changed historically from an industrial device and military weapon to a communication, entertainment, and education tool. Terms formerly perceived as “technical”, such as *megabytes* and *ram*, for example, have entered the vernacular. Likewise, jargon that today may seem out of place in ordinary discourse, such as *marker* and *plasmid*, for example, will simply be incorporated into the larger verbal landscape of everyday language. This is made clear by the fact that high school students in the United States already create transgenic bacteria routinely in school labs through affordable kits. The popularization of aspects of technical discourse inevitably brings with it the risk of dissemination of a reductive and instrumental ideological view of the world. Without ever relinquishing its right to formal experimentation and subjective inventiveness, art can, art *should* contribute to the development of alternative views of the world that resist dominant ideologies. In my work I subvert contemporary technologies — not to make detached comments on social change, but to *enact* critical views, to make present in the physical world invented new entities (artworks that include transgenic organisms) which seek to open a new space for both emotional and intellectual aesthetic experience.

I have been employing the phrase “bio art” since 1997, in reference to my own works that involved biological agency (as opposed to biological objecthood), such as *Time Capsule*<sup>4</sup> and *A-positive*<sup>5</sup>, both presented in 1997. The difference between biological agency and biological objecthood is that the first involves an active principle while the second implies material self-containment. In 1998 I introduced the phrase “transgenic art” in a paper-manifesto with the same title and proposed the creation (and social integration) of a dog expressing green fluorescent protein. This protein is commonly used as a biomarker in genetic research; however, my goal was to use it primarily for its visual properties as a symbolic gesture, a social

marker. The initial public response to the paper was curiosity laced with incredulity. The proposal is perfectly viable, but it seemed that few believed that the project could or would be realized. While I struggled to find venues that could assist me in creating the aforementioned project, entitled *GFP K-9*, I too realized that canine reproductive technology was not developed enough at the time to enable me to create a dog expressing green fluorescent protein. In the meantime, I started to develop a new transgenic art work, entitled “Genesis”, which premiered at Ars Electronica ‘99.<sup>6</sup>

## *Genesis*

*Genesis* is a transgenic artwork that explores the intricate relationship between biology, belief systems, information technology, dialogical interaction, ethics, and the Internet. The key element of the work is an “artist’s gene”, a synthetic gene that was created by translating a sentence from the biblical book of *Genesis* into Morse Code, and converting the Morse Code into DNA base pairs according to a conversion principle I specially developed for this work. The sentence reads: “Let man have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” It was chosen for what it implies about the dubious notion—divinely sanctioned—of humanity’s supremacy over nature. Morse code was chosen because, as the first example of the use of radiotelegraphy, it represents the dawn of the information age – the genesis of global communication. The *Genesis* gene was incorporated into bacteria, which were shown in the gallery. Participants on the Web could turn on an ultraviolet light in the gallery, causing real, biological mutations in the bacteria. This changed the biblical sentence in the bacteria. After the show, the DNA of the bacteria was translated back into Morse code, and then back into English. The mutation that took place in the DNA had changed the original sentence from the *Bible*. The mutated sentence was posted on the *Genesis* web site. In the context of the work, the ability to change the sentence is a symbolic gesture: it means that we do not accept its meaning in the form we inherited it, and that new meanings emerge as we seek to change it.

While presenting *Genesis*, I also gave a public lecture in the context of the symposium “Life Science”, presented by Ars Electronica ‘99. My lecture focused on the *GFP K-9* proposal. To contextualize my presentation, I reviewed the long history of human-dog domestication and partnership,

and pointed out the direct and strong human influence on the evolution of the dog up to the present day. Emphasizing that there are no packs of Poodles and Chihuahuas running in the wild, and that the creation of the dog out of the wolf was a technology – a fact that we seemed to have lost conscience of – I proceeded to point out the complex relationship between dogs and humans throughout their long history together, going back at least fourteen thousand years according to archeological records. While some showed support and appreciation for the work, others reacted against the project and voiced their position. The stage was set for a very productive dialogue, which was one of my original intentions. As I see it, the debate must go beyond official policy-making and academic research to encompass the general public, including artists. *GFP K-9* was discussed in art magazines and books and science journals. Daily papers and general magazines also discussed the work in progress. While specialized publications showed greater appreciation for *GFP K-9*, the response in the general media covered the whole gamut, from forthright rejection to consideration of multiple implications to unmistakable support. The shock generated by the proposal curiously caused one critic to declare “the end of art”.<sup>7</sup> As I see it, there’s no reason to see the beginning of a new art as the end of anything.

### *GFP Bunny*

This pattern of response repeated itself, at a truly global scale, when I announced in 2000 the realization of my second transgenic work. Entitled *GFP Bunny*, the work comprises the creation of a green fluorescent rabbit (*Alba*), the public dialogue generated by the project, and the social integration of the rabbit. This work was realized with the assistance of Louis Bec and Louis-Marie Houdebine. Louis Bec worked as the producer, coordinating the activities in France. Bec and I met at Ars Electronica (September 1999) and soon afterwards he contacted Houdebine on my behalf, for the first time, to propose the project. Months later, in 2000, Alba was born, a gentle and healthy rabbit. As I stated in my paper entitled *GFP Bunny*<sup>8</sup>, “transgenic art is a new art form based on the use of genetic engineering to create unique living beings. This must be done with great care, with acknowledgment of the complex issues thus raised and, above all, with a commitment to respect, nurture, and love the life thus created.”

*GFP Bunny* attracted local media in the south of France in June 2000 when the former director of the French institute where Alba was born used

his authority to overrule the scientists who worked on the project and refused to let Alba go to Avignon and then come to my family in Chicago. The arbitrary decision was made privately by one individual (the former director of the French institute where Alba was born). He never explained his reason for the refusal, so it remains unknown to this day. Bec and I denounced this censorship through the Internet and through interviews to the press.<sup>9</sup> If the objective was to silence the media, the result backfired. *GFP Bunny* became a global media scandal after a front-page article appeared in the *Boston Globe*<sup>10</sup>, sharing headlines with articles about the 2000 Olympics and US presidential debates. Articles about Alba were published in all major countries, with wire services further spreading the news worldwide.<sup>11</sup> Alba was also on the cover of “*Le Monde*”, “*San Francisco Chronicle*” and “*L’Espresso*”, among others. “*Der Spiegel*” and “*Chicago Tribune*” dedicated full pages to *GFP Bunny*. She also appeared on the front page of the Arts section of the *New York Times*. Broadcasts by ABC TV, BBC Radio, and Radio France also took the Alba story to the whole planet. The relentless response to “*GFP Bunny*” has been equally intense and fascinating, with fruitful debate and both strong opposition and support. From October 15, 2000 to December 02, 2004, the *Alba Guestbook* collected general opinions about the work and expressions of support to bring Alba home.<sup>12</sup> Through lectures and symposia, Internet postings and email correspondence, the debate intensified and became richer, more subtle and nuanced, as I had hoped. The response to *GFP Bunny* constitutes extremely rich material, which I hope to revisit in the near future.

As part of my intercontinental custody battle to obtain *Alba*’s release, between December 3 and December 13, 2000, I staged a public campaign in Paris, which included lectures, broadcasts, public and private meetings, and the public placement of a series of seven posters. I placed individual posters in several neighborhoods, including: Le Marais, Quartier Latin, Saint Germain, Champs de Mars, Bastille, Montparnasse, and Montmartre. The posters reflect some of the readings afforded by *GFP Bunny*. They show the same image of *Alba* and I together, each topped by a different French word: Art, Médias, Science, Éthique, Religion, Nature, Famille. Between December 3 and December 13, 2000, parallel to radio (Radio France and Radio France Internationale), print (“*Le Monde*”, “*Libération*”, “*Transfert*”, “*Ça M’intéresse*”, “*Nova*”), and television (Canal+, Paris Première) interviews and debates, I posted these images on the streets in an effort to intervene in the context of French public opinion and gather support for

my cause to bring Alba home. I also engaged the public directly through a series of lectures (Sorbonne, École Normale Superior, École Superior des Beaux Arts, Forum des Images) and through face-to-face conversations on the street sparked by the public's interest. In total, I reached approximately 1.5 million people (about half of the population of Paris). This was an important step, as it allowed me to address the Parisian public directly. In 2001 I created *The Alba Flag*, a white flag with the green rabbit silhouette, and started to fly it in front of my Chicago-area house. The flag not only signals publicly the home of the green bunny, but most importantly stands as a social marker, a beacon of her absence.

Continuing my efforts to raise awareness about Alba's plight and to obtain her freedom, in 2002 I presented a solo exhibition entitled *Free Alba!*<sup>13</sup> at Julia Friedman Gallery, in Chicago (May 3–June 15, 2002). *Free Alba!* included a large body of new work comprised of large-scale color photographs, drawings, prints, Alba flags, and Alba t-shirts. Seen together for the first time were the posters from my public interventions in Paris (2000), an Alba flag flying outside the Gallery (2001), photographs that reclaim green bunny narratives circulated by global media (2001–02), drawings that reflect on our closeness to the “animal other” (2001–2002) and Alba t-shirts that extend Alba's cause beyond gallery's walls (2002). Through the leitmotif of the green bunny, this exhibition explored the poetics of life and evolution. The story of *GFP Bunny* was adapted and customized by news organizations worldwide, often generating new narratives that, both intentionally and unintentionally, reinstated or overlooked the facts. My *Free Alba!* exhibition featured photographs in which I reappropriated and recontextualized this vast coverage, exhibiting the productive tension that is generated when contemporary art enters the realm of daily news. The photographs in this series dramatize the fact that the reception of GFP Bunny was complex, taking place across cultures and in diverse locations. With her passing, I will continue to create new works through which I celebrate her life.

## The Eighth Day, a Transgenic Artwork

While in *GFP Bunny* I created a new mammal, in the transgenic work that followed, entitled *The Eighth Day*, I investigated the new ecology of fluorescent creatures that is evolving worldwide. It was shown from October 25 to November 2, 2001 at the Institute for Studies in the Arts, Arizona

State University, Tempe.<sup>14</sup> While fluorescent creatures are being developed in isolation in laboratories, seen collectively in this work for the first time they form the nucleus of a new and emerging synthetic bioluminescent ecosystem. The piece brings together living transgenic life forms and a biological robot (biobot) in an environment enclosed under a clear Plexiglas dome, thus making visible what it would be like if these creatures would in fact coexist in the world at large.

As the viewer walks into the gallery, she first sees a blue-glowing semi-sphere against a dark background. This semisphere is the 4-foot dome, aglow with its internal blue light. She also hears the recurring sounds of water washing ashore. This evokes the image of the Earth as seen from space. The water sounds both function as a metaphor for life on Earth (reinforced by the spherical blue image) and resonate with the video of moving water projected on the floor. In order to see *The Eighth Day* the viewer is invited to “walk on water”.

In the gallery, visitors are able to see the terrarium with transgenic creatures both from inside and outside the dome. As they stand outside the dome looking in, someone online sees the space from the perspective of the biobot looking out, perceiving the transgenic environment as well as faces or bodies of local viewers. An online computer in the gallery also gives local visitors an exact sense of what the experience is like remotely on the Internet.

Local viewers may temporarily believe that their gaze is the only human gaze contemplating the organisms in the dome. However, once they navigate the Web interface they realize that remote viewers can also experience the environment from a bird’s eye point of view, looking down through a camera mounted above the dome. They can pan, tilt, and zoom, seeing humans, mice, plants, fish and the biobot up close. Thus, from the point of view of the online participant, local viewers become part of the ecology of living creatures featured in the work, as if enclosed in a websphere.

*The Eighth Day* presents an expansion of biodiversity beyond wildtype life forms. As a self-contained artificial ecology it resonates with the words in the title, which add one day to the period of creation of the world as narrated in the Judeo-Christian scriptures. All of the transgenic creatures in *The Eighth Day* are created with the same gene I used previously in *GFP Bunny* to create *Alba*, a gene that allows all creatures to glow green under harmless blue light.<sup>15</sup> The transgenic creatures in *The Eighth Day* are GFP plants, GFP amoeba, GFP fish, and GFP mice. Selective breeding and mutation are two key evolutionary

forces. *The Eighth Day* literally raises the question of transgenic evolution, since all organisms in the piece are mutations of their respective wildtype species and all were selected and bred for their GFP mutations.

*The Eighth Day* also includes a biological robot. A biobot is a robot with an active biological element within its body that is responsible for aspects of its behavior. The biobot created for *The Eighth Day* has a colony of GFP amoeba called *Dyctiostelium discoideum* as its “brain cells”. These “brain cells” form a network within a bioreactor that constitutes the “brain structure” of the biobot. When amoebas divide, the biobot exhibits dynamic behavior inside the enclosed environment. Changes in the amoebal colony (the “brain cells”) of the biobot are monitored by it, and cause it to move about, throughout the exhibition. The biobot also functions as the avatar of Web participants inside the environment. Independent of the ascent and descent of the biobot, Web participants are able to control its audiovisual system with a pan-tilt actuator. The autonomous motion, which often causes the biobot to lean forward in different directions, provides Web participants with new perspectives of the environment.

The biobot’s “amoebal brain” is visible through the transparent bioreactor body. In the gallery, visitors are able to see the terrarium with transgenic creatures from outside and inside the dome, as a computer in the gallery gives local visitors an exact sense of what the experience is like on the Internet. By enabling participants to experience the environment inside the dome from the point of view of the biobot, *The Eighth Day* creates a context in which participants can reflect on the meaning of a transgenic ecology from a first-person perspective.

### **Move 36**

In *The Eighth Day*, the biobot embodies a biological component to materialize a hybrid of the living and the nonliving. Another way in which society has experienced the future abilities of machines was through Deep Blue, a computer that beat Chess world champion Gary Kasparov in 1997.<sup>16</sup> My transgenic artwork *Move 36* makes reference to Deep Blue’s dramatic winning move. The competition between Kasparov and Deep Blue can be characterized as a match between the greatest chess player who ever lived against the greatest chess player who never lived. The work – presented for the first time at the Exploratorium, in San Francisco, from February 26 to May 31, 2004 – sheds light on the limits of the human mind and the in-



creasing capabilities developed by computers and robots, inanimate beings whose actions often acquire a force comparable to subjective human agency.

According to Kasparov, Deep Blue's quintessential moment in Game Two came at *Move 36*. Rather than making a move that was expected by viewers and commentators alike – a sound move that would have afforded immediate gratification – it made a move that was subtle and conceptual and, in the long run, better. Kasparov could not believe that a machine had made such a keen move. The game, in his mind, was lost.

The work presents a Chessboard made of earth (dark squares) and white sand (light squares) in the middle of the room. There are no chess pieces on the board. Positioned exactly where Deep Blue made its *Move 36* is a plant whose genome incorporates a new gene that I created specifically for this work. The gene uses ASCII (the universal computer code for representing binary numbers as Roman characters, on- and off-line) to translate to the four bases of genetics Descartes' statement: "Cogito ergo sum" (I think therefore I am).

Through genetic modification, the leaves of the plants grow multiple plantlets. In the wild these leaves would be smooth. The *Cartesian gene* was coupled with a gene for the expression of the plantlets, so that the public can easily see with the naked eye that the *Cartesian gene* is expressed precisely where the plantlets grow.

The *Cartesian gene* was produced according to a new code I created especially for the work. In 8-bit ASCII, the letter C, for example, is: 01000011. Thus, the gene is created by the following association between genetic bases and binary digits:

A = 00

C = 01

G = 10

T = 11

The result is the following gene with 52 bases:

AATCATTCACTCAGCCCCACATTACCCCAGCACTCATTCCATCCCCATC

The creation of this gene is a critical and ironic gesture, since Descartes considered the human mind a "ghost in the machine" (for him the body was a "machine"). His rationalist philosophy gave new impetus both to the mind-body split (Cartesian Dualism) and to the mathematical foundations of current computer technology.

The presence of this *Cartesian gene* in the plant, rooted precisely where the human lost to the machine, reveals the tenuous border between humanity, inanimate objects endowed with life-like qualities, and living organisms that encode digital information. A single focused light shines in a delicate luminous cone over the plant. Silent square video projections on two opposing walls contextualize the work, evoking two chess opponents in absentia. Each video projection is composed of a grid of small squares, resembling a chessboard. Each square shows short animated loops cycling at different intervals, thus creating a complex and carefully choreographed thread of movements. The viewer's cognitive engagement with the multiple visual possibilities presented on both projected boards subtly emulates the mapping of multiple paths in a chess match.

This work explores the poetics of real life and evolution; it is a game for phantasmic players, a philosophical statement uttered by a plant. *Move 36* gives continuity to my ongoing interventions at the boundaries between the living (human, non-human animals) and the non-living (machines, networks). Checkmating traditional notions, nature is revealed as an arena for the production of ideological conflict, and the physical sciences as a locus for the creation of science fictions.

### *Specimen of Secrecy About Marvelous Discoveries*

Expanding on ecological and evolutionary issues I previously explored in transgenic works such as *The Eighth Day*, my *Specimen of Secrecy about Marvelous Discoveries* is a series of works comprised of what I call "biotopes", that is, living pieces that change during the exhibition in response to internal metabolism and environmental conditions, including temperature, relative humidity, airflow, and light levels in the exhibition space.<sup>17</sup> Each of my biotopes is literally a self-sustaining ecology comprised of thousands of very small living beings in a medium of earth, water, and other materials. I orchestrate the metabolism of this diverse microbial life in order to produce the constantly evolving living works. In embracing the mutability of unpredictable circumstances and evolving in response to human care and environmental conditions, the biotopes further develop dialogical principles that have been central to my work for over two decades.

The biotopes are a discrete ecology because within their world the microorganisms interact with and support each other (that is, the activities

of one organism enable another to grow, and vice-versa). However, they are not entirely secluded from the outside world: the aerobic organisms within the biotope absorb oxygen from outside (while the anaerobic ones comfortably migrate to regions where air cannot reach).

A complex set of relationships emerge as the work unfolds, bringing together the internal dialogical interactions among the microorganisms in the biotope and the interaction of the biotope as a discrete unit with the external world.

The biotope is what I call a “nomadic ecology”, that is, an ecological system that interacts with its surroundings as it travels around the world. Every time a biotope migrates from one location to another, the very act of transporting it causes an unpredictable redistribution of the microorganisms inside it (due to the constant physical agitation inherent in the course of a trip). Once in place, the biotope self-regulates with internal migrations, metabolic exchanges, and material settling. Extended presence in a single location might yield a different behavior, possibly resulting in regions of settlement and color concentration.

The biotope is affected by several factors, including the very presence of viewers, which can increase the temperature in the room (warm bodies) and release other microorganisms into the air (breathing, sneezing).

I consider the exhibition opening as the birth of a given biotope. Once an exhibition begins, I allow the microorganisms in suspended animation to become active again. From that point on I no longer intervene. The work becomes progressively different, changing every day, every week, every month.

When the viewer looks at a biotope, she sees what could be described as an “image”. However, since this “image” is always evolving into its next transformative state, the perceived “stillness” is more a consequence of the conditions of observation (limits of the human perception, ephemeral presence of the viewer in the gallery) than an internal material property of the biotope. Viewers looking at the biotope another day will see a different “image”. Given the cyclical nature of this “image”, each “image” seen at a given time is but a moment in the evolution of the work, an ephemeral snapshot of the biotope metabolic state, a scopic interface for human intimacy.

Each of my “biotopes” explores what I call “biological time”, which is time manifested throughout the life cycle of a being itself, *in vivo* (contrary to, say, the frozen time of painting or photography, the montaged time of film or video, or the real time of a telecommunications event).

This open process continuously transforms the image and may, depending on factors such as lighting conditions and exhibition length, result in its effacement – until the cycle begins again.

The biotope's cycle begins when I produce the self-contained body by integrating microorganisms and nutrient-rich media. In the next step, I control the amount of energy the microorganisms receive in order to keep some of them active and others in suspended animation. This results in what the viewer may momentarily perceive as a still image. However, even if the image seems “still”, the work is constantly evolving and is never physically the same. Only time-lapse video can reveal the transformation undergone by a given biotope in the course of its slow change and evolution.

To only think of a biotope in terms of microscopic living beings is extremely limiting. While it is also possible to describe a human being in terms of cells, a person is much more than an agglomerate of cells. A person is a whole, not the sum of parts. We shall not confuse our ability to describe a living entity in a given manner (e.g., as an object composed of discrete parts) with the phenomenological consideration of what it is like to be that entity, for that entity. The biotope is a whole. Its presence and overall behavior is that of a new entity that is at once an artwork and a new living being. It is with this bioambiguity that it manifests itself. It is as a whole that the biotope behaves and seeks to satisfy its needs. The biotope asks for light and, occasionally, water. In this sense, it is an artwork that asks for the participation of the viewer in the form of personal care. Like a pet, it will keep company and will produce more colors in response to the care it receives. Like a plant, it will respond to light. Like a machine, it is programmed to function according to a specific feedback principle (e.g., expose it to more heat and it will grow more). Like an object, it can be boxed and transported. Like an animal with an exoskeleton, it is multicellular, has fixed bodily structure and is singular. What is the biotope? It is its plural ontological condition that makes it unique.

### *Natural History of The Enigma*

The intimacy and personal interaction that characterize our relationship with the biotopes are also present, but take a different turn in *Natural History of the Enigma*. This series is centered on what I call a plantimal, a new life form I created and named *Edunia*, a genetically-engineered flower

that is a hybrid of myself and a petunia. The *Edunia* expresses my DNA exclusively in its red veins.

Developed between 2003 and 2008, and first exhibited from April 17 to June 21, 2009 at the Weisman Art Museum<sup>18</sup>, in Minneapolis, *Natural History of the Enigma* also encompasses a large-scale public sculpture, a print suite, photographs, and other works.

The new flower is a *Petunia* strain that I invented and produced through molecular biology. It is not found in nature. The *Edunia* has red veins on light pink petals and a gene of mine is expressed on every cell of its red veins,<sup>19</sup> i.e., my gene produces a protein in the veins only.<sup>20</sup> The gene was isolated and sequenced from my blood. The petal pink background, against which the red veins stand out, is evocative of my own pinkish white skin tone that is due precisely to the blood that flows beneath it. The result of this molecular manipulation is a bloom that creates the living image of human blood rushing through the veins of a flower.

The gene I selected is responsible for the identification of foreign bodies. In this work, it is precisely that which identifies and rejects the other that I integrate into the other, thus creating a new kind of self that is partially flower and partially human.

*Natural History of the Enigma* uses the redness of blood and the redness of the plant's veins as a marker of our shared heritage in the wider spectrum of life. By combining human and plant DNA in a new flower, in a visually dramatic way (red expression of human DNA in the flower veins), I bring forth the realization of the contiguity of life between different species.

This work seeks to instill in the public a sense of wonder about this most amazing of phenomena we call "life". The general public may have no difficulty in considering how close we truly are to apes and other non-human animals, particularly those with which it is possible to communicate directly, such as cats and dogs. However, the thought that we are also close to other life forms, including flora, will strike most as surprising.

While in the history of art one finds imaginative associations between anthropomorphic and botanical forms (as in the work of Archimboldo, for example), this parallel (between humans and plants) also belongs to the history of philosophy and to contemporary science. Advancing notions first articulated by Descartes, Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709–1751) already proposed in his book *L'Homme Plante* [Man a Plant] (1748) that "the singular analogy between the plant and animal kingdoms has led me to the discovery that the principal parts of men and plants are the same." The

preliminary sequencing of the human genome and that of a plant from the mustard family (*Arabidopsis thaliana*, in the journal “Nature”, December 14, 2000) have extended the artist’s and the philosopher’s analogies beyond their wildest dreams, into the deepest recesses of the human and plant cells. Both have revealed homologies between human and plant genetic sequences.

Thus, the key gesture of *Natural History of the Enigma* takes place at the molecular level. It is at once a physical realization (i.e., a new life created by an artist, *tout court*) and a symbolic gesture (i.e., ideas and emotions are evoked by the very existence of the flower).

I had a sample of my blood drawn and subsequently isolated a genetic sequence that is part of my immune system – the system that distinguishes self from non-self, i.e., protects against foreign molecules, disease, invaders – anything that is not me. To be more precise, I isolated a protein-coding sequence of my DNA from my Immunoglobulin (IgG) light chain (variable region).<sup>21</sup>

1. To create a *Petunia* with red veins in which my blood gene is expressed, I made a chimeric gene composed of my own DNA and a promoter to guide the red expression only in the flower’s vascular system, not in the petals or the rest of the flower. In order to make my blood-derived DNA express only in the red veins of the *Petunia*, I used Professor Neil Olszewski’s CoYMV (Commelina Yellow Mottle Virus) Promoter, which drives gene expression exclusively in plant veins. Professor Olszewski is in the Department of Plant Biology at the University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN.<sup>22</sup>

My IgG DNA is integrated into the chromosome of the *Edunia*. This means that every time that the *Edunia* is propagated through seeds my gene is present in the new flowers.

The sculpture that is part of *Natural History of the Enigma* is a three-dimensional fiberglass and metal form measuring 14’4” (height) x 20’4” (length) x 8’ 5” (width.) It contrasts the minute scale of the molecular procedure with the larger-than-life structure. Likewise, the work pairs the ephemeral quality of the living organism with the permanence of the large sculpture. The sculpture is directly connected to the flower because its form is an enlargement of unique forms found inside this invented flower. In other words, the sculpture is derived from the molecular procedure employed to create the flower.<sup>23</sup> In its hybridity, the sculpture reveals the proximity of our next of kin in the kingdom *Plantae*.

I used 3D imaging and rapid-prototyping to visualize this fusion protein as a tangible form. I created the visual choreography of the sculpture

based on the flower's molecular uniqueness. The sculpture was created with a vocabulary of organic twists and turns, helices, sheets and other three-dimensional features common to all life. The sculpture is blood red, in connection to the starting point of the work (my blood) and the venial coloration of the *Edunia*.

In anticipation of a future in which *Edunias* can be distributed socially and planted everywhere, I created a set of six lithographs entitled *Edunia Seed Packs*. Visually resonant as they are with the flower and the work's theme, these images are meant to be used in the actual seed packs to be produced in the future. In my exhibition at the Weisman Art Museum, I exhibited a limited edition of *Edunia* seed packs containing actual *Edunia* seeds.

## *Cypher*

Similar to all of the preceding works discussed here (with the exception of the biotopes), *Cypher* is transgenic. It merges sculpture, artist's book and a DIY transgenic kit. The work measures approximately 13 x 17" and is contained in a stainless steel slipcase. When removed from the case, the kit — itself also made of stainless steel — opens up in two halves, like a book. Inside, the viewer/user finds a portable minilab. The kit contains Petri dishes, agar, nutrients, streaking loops, pipettes, test tubes, synthetic DNA (encoding in its genetic sequence a poem I wrote specifically for this artwork), and a booklet containing the transformation protocol—each in its respective compartment.

The work literally comes to life when the viewer/reader/user follows the protocol in the booklet and integrates the synthetic DNA into the bacteria (the "transformation"). The bacteria (normally pale) will then glow red, showing through this transgenic visual marker that the artwork is now alive. In bacterial division, two identical clone cells are always produced. After the transformation, the poem will be fully integrated into the bacteria's cellular machinery and therefore will be present in each newly reproduced bacterium.

*Cypher* visually hybridizes sculpture and artist's book : a three-dimensional metal object (with a velvety internal coating, finished by hand using industrial techniques and complemented with glass objects) is initially handled like a book, only to reveal itself as a nomadic laboratory. The key poetic gesture in *Cypher* is to place in the hands of the viewer the decision and the power to literally give life to the artwork.

The synthetic DNA in *Cypher* encodes in its genetic sequence a poem I wrote specifically for this artwork. The code replaces alphabetic letters included in the poem with short DNA sequences of two or three bases. The poem *Cypher* is composed with a high statistical incidence of the four letters that represent the four genetic bases Adenine, Cytosine, Guanine, and Thymine (i.e., A, C, G and T). The set of remaining letters is formed by four consonants and two vowels: these additional six letters were carefully selected to form a “code within the code” that serves as semantic counterpoint to the apparently enigmatic meaning of the poem. The result of this process is that poem and code complement each other in such a way that the code is absolutely integral to the poem. Both are included in the booklet present in the kit, thus enabling the viewer to discover this relationship while following the protocol to give life to the poem. The title manifests an anagrammatic relationship between sign and referent that is, itself, also part of the work.

*Cypher* is an artwork that presents itself as an invitation; it is a call to engage with a set of procedures that merge art and poetry, biological life and technology, reading/viewing and kinesthetic participation. This sculptural object's relationship to the book is enhanced by the fact that the title of the work is engraved on the spine of the slipcase and on the “cover” (the front of the kit). The work can go on a bookshelf and be clearly identified. When opened, the viewer discovers a complete transgenic kit. The participant reads the poem by transforming *E. coli* with the provided synthetic DNA. The act of reading is procedural. In following the outlined procedure, the participant creates a new kind of life – one that is at once literal and poetic.

## Conclusion

The tangible and symbolic coexistence of the human and the transgenic, which I have developed in several of my works discussed above, shows that humans and other species are evolving in new ways. It dramatizes the need to develop new models with which to understand this change, and calls for the interrogation of difference, taking into account clones, transgenics and chimeras.

Although not all of the works discussed in this essay are transgenic, all of my bio art, from *Genesis* to *Cypher*, explores our perceptions of what is “natural” and what is “monstrous”. The common belief that transgenics are unnatural is incorrect; it is important to understand that the process of moving genes from one species to another is a part of wild life beyond



human intervention. A common example of this is “agrobacterium”<sup>24</sup>, which has the ability to transfer DNA into plant cells through the roots and integrate that DNA into the plant chromosome. Even humans have sequences in their genome that came from viruses and bacteria acquired through a long evolutionary history; we have DNA in our bodies from nonhuman organisms, thus, we are ourselves transgenic.<sup>25</sup> Before deciding that all transgenics are monstrous, humans must look within and come to terms with their own transgenic condition, their own “monstrosity”.

But bio art, rather than commenting on what it means to create life, actually creates life. These works embody the absolute freedom of creation of poetry while simultaneously emerging from the sustained inquiry upon the world brought about through philosophical rigor. They make us question not only who we are as humans, but also what that physical identity means in the context of a wide universe of living beings. Bio art suggests that idealized notions of what is “natural” must be challenged and the human role in the evolutionary history of other species (and vice versa) acknowledged, while at the same time respectfully and humbly marveling at this amazing phenomenon we call “life”.

## Endnotes

1. Patricia Decia, *Artista põe a vida em risco and Bioarte*, “Folha de São Paulo”, October 10, 1997.
2. Eduardo Kac, *Transgenic Art*, “Leonardo Electronic Almanac 6”, no. 11, 1998. Republished in *Ars Electronica '99 – Life Science*, ed. Gerfried Stocker and Christine Schopf, Vienna, New York: Springer, 1999, pp. 289–296.
3. See: Eduardo Kac, *Luz & Letra. Ensaios de arte, literatura e comunicação* [Light & Letter. Essays in art, literature and communication], Rio de Janeiro: Editora Contra Capa, 2004; Eduardo Kac, *Telepresence and Bio Art – Networking Humans, Rabbits and Robots*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.
4. Robert Atkins, *State of the (On-Line) Art*, “Art in America”, April 1999, pp. 89–95; Mario Cesar Carvalho, *Artista implanta hoje chip no corpo*, “Folha de São Paulo”, *Cotidiano*, 11 November 1997, p. 3; *Art at the Biological Frontier in Reframing Consciousness: Art, Mind and Technology*, ed. Roy Ascott, Exeter: Intellect, 1999, pp. 90–94; Arlindo Machado, *A Microchip inside the Body*, “Performance Research 4”, no. 2 (*On Line* special issue, London, 1999), pp. 8–12; Christiane Paul, *Time Capsule*, “Intelligent Agent 2”, no. 2, 1998, pp. 4–13; Julia Scheeres, *New Body Art: Chip Implants*, “Wired News”, March 11, 2002; Steve Tomasula, *Time Capsule: Self-Capsule*, “CIRCA” [Ireland], no. 89, Autumn 1999, pp. 23–25.
5. Gisele Beiguelman, *Artista discute o pós-humano*, “Folha de São Paulo”, October 10, 1997; Eduardo Kac, *A-positive* in *ISEA '97 – The Eighth International Symposium on*

- Electronic Art*, September 22–27, 1997 (Chicago: The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1997), p. 62; Eduardo Kac, *A-positive: Art at the Biobotic Frontier* in *Flyer* distributed on the occasion of ISEA '97; Eduardo Kac, *Art at the Biologic Frontier in Reframing Consciousness*, ed. Roy Ascott, Exeter: Intellect, 1999, pp. 90–94; Arlindo Machado, *Expanded Bodies and Minds in Eduardo Kac: Teleporting An Unknown State*, eds. Peter Tomaz Dobrila and Aleksandra Kostic, Maribor, Slovenia: KIBLA, 1998, pp. 39–63; Matthew Mirapaul, *An Electronic Artist and His Body of Work*, “The New York Times”, October 02, 1997; Simone Osthoff, *From Stable Object to Participating Subject: Content, Meaning, and Social Context at ISEA97*, “New Art Examiner”, February 1998, pp. 18–23.
6. Eduardo Kac, *Genesis* in *Ars Electronica '99 - Life Science*, ed. Gerfried Stocker and Christine Schopf, Vienna, New York: Springer, 1999, pp. 310–313. Also: <<http://www.ekac.org/geninfo.html>>. *Genesis* was carried out with the assistance of Dr. Charles Strom, formerly Director of Medical Genetics, Illinois Masonic Medical Center, Chicago. Dr. Strom is now Medical Director, Biochemical and Molecular Genetics Laboratories Nichols Institute / Quest Diagnostics, San Juan Capistrano, CA. Original DNA music for *Genesis* was composed by Peter Gena.
  7. Charles Mudede, *The End of Art*, “The Stranger” [Seattle] 9, no. 15, Dec. 30, 1999 – Jan. 05, 2000.
  8. Eduardo Kac, *GFP Bunny* in *Eduardo Kac: Telepresence, Biotelematics, and Transgenic Art*, eds. Peter Tomaz Dobrila and Aleksandra Kostic, Maribor, Slovenia: KIBLA, 2000, pp. 101–131. Also: <http://www.ekac.org/gfpbunny.html>, accessed on April 15, 2013.
  9. I had proposed to live for one week with Alba in the Grenier à Sel, in Avignon, where Louis Bec directed the art festival *Avignon Numérique*. In an email broadcast in Europe on June 16, 2000, Bec wrote: “Contre notre volonté, le programme concernant «Artransgénique», qui devait se dérouler du 19 au 25 juin, se trouve modifié. Une décision injustifiable nous prive de la présence de Bunny GFP, le lapin transgénique fluorescent que nous comptions présenter aux Avignonnais et à l'ensemble des personnes intéressées par les évolutions actuelles des pratiques artistiques. Malgré cette censure déguisée, l'artiste Eduardo Kac, auteur de ce projet, sera parmi nous et présentera sa démarche ainsi que l'ensemble de ses travaux. Un débat public permettra d'ouvrir une large réflexion sur les transformations du vivant opérées par les biotechnologies, tant dans les domaines artistiques et juridiques, qu'éthiques et économiques. Nous nous élevons de toute évidence contre le fait qu'il soit interdit aux citoyens d'avoir accès aux développements scientifiques et culturels qui les concernent si directement.”
  10. Gareth Cross, *Cross hare: hop and glow*, “Boston Globe”, September 17, 2000, A01. The article states: “Kac and Alba remain apart while Kac tries to persuade the French government laboratory, called the National Institute of Agronomic Research, to grant him custody of the bunny. The scientist who created her for Kac, Louis-Marie Houdebine, said he doesn't know when, or if, Alba will be allowed to join Kac, but said that she is healthy, and even noted that she has a “particularly mellow and sweet disposition.”
  11. For a bibliography on transgenic art, see: <http://www.ekac.org/transartbiblio.html>, accessed on April 14, 2013.

12. [http://www.ekac.org/bunnybook.2000\\_2004.html](http://www.ekac.org/bunnybook.2000_2004.html), accessed on April 13, 2013.
13. Lisa Stein, *New Kac Show Takes a Look at Ethics, Rabbit*, “Chicago Tribune”, May 10, 2002, p. 21.
14. I developed *The Eighth Day* through a two-year residency at the Institute of Studies in the Arts, Arizona State University, Tempe. The exhibition dates: October 25 to November 2, 2001. Exhibition location: Computer Commons Gallery, Arizona State University, Tempe (with the support of the Institute of Studies in the Arts). Documentation can be found at: <<http://www.ekac.org/8thday.html>>. See: *The Eighth Day: The Transgenic Art of Eduardo Kac*, eds. Sheilah Britton and Dan Collins, New York: ASU / Distributed by DAP, 2003.
15. In 2008, the scientists who developed GFP into a harmless and useful scientific tool received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. One of the recipient scientists featured *GFP Bunny* in his Nobel lecture, also published in the 2008 Nobel Prize book. See: Martin Chalfie, *GFP: Lighting Up Life* in *The Nobel Prizes 2008*, Stockholm: Nobel Foundation, 2009, p. 162.
16. See: Elena Giulia Rossi, *Eduardo Kac: Move 36*, Paris: Filigranes Éditions, 2005.
17. *Specimen of Secrecy About Marvelous Discoveries* premiered at the Singapore Biennale (4 September–12 November 2006).
18. The exhibition was comprised of the actual Edunias, the complete *Edunia Seed Pack* set of six lithographs, and a limited edition of Edunia seed packs with actual Edunia seeds.
19. The gene of mine I used is an IgG fragment. Immunoglobulin G (IgG) is a kind of protein that function as an antibody. IgG is found in blood and other bodily fluids, and is used by the immune system to identify and neutralize foreign antigens. An antigen is a toxin or other foreign substance that provokes an immune response in the body, such as viruses, bacteria and allergens). In „Natural History of the Enigma”, the fusion protein, produced exclusively in the red veins, is a fusion of my IgG fragment with GUS (an enzyme that allowed me to confirm the vascular expression of the gene).
20. In actuality, genes do not “produce” proteins. As Richard Lewontin clearly explains: “A DNA sequence does not specify protein, but only the amino acid sequence. The protein is one of a number of minimum free-energy foldings of the same amino acid chain, and the cellular milieu together with the translation process influences which of these foldings occurs.” See: Richard C. Lewontin, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, “Science” 291, no. 16, February 2001, p. 1264.
21. For her assistance in drawing my blood, isolating my IgG and cloning it, I owe a debt of gratitude to Bonita L. Baskin, who was, at the time I carried out this work, the CEO of Apptec Laboratory Services, St. Paul, MN. The blood was drawn for “Natural History of the Enigma” on May 13th, 2004 in the premises of Apptec Laboratory Services.
22. With the assistance of Professor Neil Olszewski, I obtained positive confirmation that my IgG protein was produced only in the edunia veins by detecting the activity of the enzyme GUS (beta glucuronidase), which is fused to the IgG sequence. The detection was achieved through a staining technique. This was further confirmed through PCR.
23. The sculpture’s form is an invented protein composed of human and plant parts. The human part is a fragment of my Immunoglobulin (IgG) light chain (variable region). The plant component is from the *Petunia’s ANTHOCYANIN1 (AN1)*, responsible

- for red pigmentation in the flower. More precisely, AN1 is a transcription factor that controls genes encoding the enzymes that produce the red pigments.
24. This natural ability has made a genetically engineered version of the agrobacterium a favorite tool of molecular biology. See: Luis Herrera-Estrella, *Transfer and Expression of Foreign Genes in Plants*, PhD thesis (Laboratory of Genetics, Gent University, Belgium, 1983); Paul J.J. Hooykaas and Rob A. Shilperoort, *Agrobacterium and plant genetic engineering*, "Plant Molecular Biology" 19, 1992, pp. 15–38; John R. Zupan and Patricia C. Zambryski, *Transfer of T-DNA from Agrobacterium to the plant cell*, "Plant Physiology" 107, 1995, pp. 1041–1047.
  25. See: Terence A. Brown, *Genomes*, Oxford, UK: Bios Scientific Publishers, 1999, p. 138; David Baltimore, *Our genome unveiled*, "Nature" 409, no. 15, February 2001, pp. 814–816. In private email correspondence (28 January 2002), and as a follow up to our previous conversation on the topic, Dr. Jens Reich, Division of Genomic Informatics of the Max Delbruck Center in Berlin-Buch, stated: "The explanation for these massive [viral] inserts into our genome (which, incidentally, looks like a garbage bin anyway) is usually that these elements were acquired into germ cells by retrovirus infection and subsequent dispersion over the genome some 10 to 40 millions ago (as we still were early apes)." The HGP also suggests that humans have hundreds of bacterial genes in the genome. See: *Initial sequencing and analysis of the human genome*, "International Human Genome Sequencing Consortium", vol. 409, no. 6822, February 15, 2001, p. 860. Of the 223 genes coding for proteins that are also present in bacteria and in vertebrates, 113 cases are believed to be confirmed. See p. 903 of the same issue. In the same correspondence mentioned above, Dr. Reich concluded: "It appears that it is not man, but all vertebrates who are transgenic in the sense that they acquired a gene from a microorganism."



# Panel Sessions



# Aesthetics and Politics of Biotechnological Art

(Polona Tratnik)





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Maria Antonia González Valerio

## Being (in) Mediations

The topic of the death of art is such a constant in writings on contemporary aesthetics that is worth considering it because the relationship between art and time and history is at stake there, and/or because from that horizon I would like to pose the question about the mediation among art and biomedica.

Pointing at a moment such as the “death of art” would imply that art is researched after its history, i.e. it would implicitly be acknowledged that it has not always been what it is today and therefore it would be necessary to think about it regarding its differences. Yet this statement isn’t followed necessarily nor is it as obvious as it might seem, since acknowledging the evident historical transformation of arts at empirical level – as today there are not the same artistic manifestations as the ones from the nineteenth century – does not mean that art’s mode of being is under discussion. What is at stake then is whether art or its modes of being are essentially transformed after history or whether it remains the same with differences that occur at another level, different than the one implicated with its mode of being.

In my view, there are at least three positions that can be considered after what was previously said. First, the so-called analytic aesthetics which while speaking about the death of art, as in the well-known case of Arthur Danto, it discusses transformations related to art’s contents and (re) presentation modes rather than its modes of being; in consequence, they still talk about things like “definition of art” (either closed or open, in any case they imply a historical continuity even if they consider variations and even if they hold “historic” or narrativistic positions<sup>1</sup>). Second, Martin Heidegger’s paradigmatic case, who – when thinking the artwork’s mode of being, conceived from the conflict between world and earth and the occurrence of truth, and in frank discussion with aesthetic Kantianism

and Hegelianism – does not seem to fundamentally include history, since the ontological would describe modes of being that happen “always” or that belong to a transcendental field.<sup>2</sup>

Third, the recovery and incorporation of the Hegelian system of aesthetics in some contemporary French authors, such as Jacques Rancière<sup>3</sup> and Jean Luc Nancy<sup>4</sup>, who expect to address the everlasting question of current aesthetics – ‘what is art?’ – by saying what art has been through or in its historical transformations, which are essential and do not describe trends, content or ways to (re)present. In that sense, these transformations do not occur necessarily according to a chronological order, but different times can coexist simultaneously, since in any case we are not talking about the dating of different schools, trends, authors or works in art history, but rather about periods or occasions of art; ways of being of the being of art.

Both Heidegger’s perspective and the latter’s – that of the French – are not aesthetic in the sense of dealing with a “philosophy of art”. Therefore, they can think art in its mode of being and according to modes in which the being happens. However, Hegel, Rancière and Nancy agree in some things when reflecting upon art from time and from history: there are three moments and then what comes next. There is a way to understand art’s mode of being in which history and time are critical, that is, the question ‘what is art?’ must be faced from epochality –and the question “what is” is said with the full strength of a Platonic *ti esti* (Greek).

But what art can be, if in its very mode of being temporality goes in such an essential way? What can be that which is only to the extent that it ceases to be what it is and becomes another? The contradiction in these questions is obvious: it is what it is because it no longer is. This is a Hegelian contradiction, in the sense of the dialectic.

Widely known, discussed and criticized is Hegel’s definition of art as “sensible expression of the idea (das sinnliche Scheinen der Idee)”. It is precisely this way of considering art’s mode of being after the mode of being of what it is which allows making that necessary connection between art and time, art and reality.

What I want to emphasize with this is that the core would be in the relationship established between that thing called “art” and let’s say the “real” (just to give it a concept).

The real does not occur without mediations, it does not occur outside categories and these assertions are convincing in the Hegelian system and constitute one of the great disappearance moments of what Nietzsche

called “the true world (die wahre Welt)”. There is no *arché* (Greek), there is no origin, and there is no in-itself to which nothing can refer.<sup>5</sup>

The world of masks is in front of us (no immediacy, everything is mediated, everything is “determined by other”). I bring these considerations to note that art is mediation without reference (hence the disquisitions on art’s representational nature are out of place.

Mediation should be thought according to epochalities. This means that differences, which are differences of differences, happen on this mode of being of the real, its mediated being – there is nothing beyond and besides mediation. How many mediations, in how many modes, through how many devices? Time must get into these thoughts. What mediates has not always been the same. But art, whatever we call such, has been a great mediator, and in that sense, a founder of mediations that happen in a particular way.

From there, I would say that this aesthetic ontology is not about thinking neither the means, the media nor the representation, since the core issue is not discussing that, but the modes of being of mediations.

Much of twentieth-century aesthetics has been wandering about whether art’s representational nature has ended (the end of art). By representation they understand either figuration (Danto<sup>6</sup>), presenting what was previously presented (Derrida<sup>7</sup>) or that the work is different from what it represents (by its medium, its materials, the way in which it executes the mimesis, as in Tratnik<sup>8</sup>). There is indeed a strong imprint to deprive art from its representational nature and say that it is not the representation but rather is, for example, performative, executive, that brings about something that was not and thus is from then on. It is not what comes next, in ontological and epistemic terms, but what presents and performs.

Within this discussion, art working with bio-media has a special place since for many it is not representational at all, there is nothing to represent even in material terms (there where mimesis is understood also from the media through which art represents), because the thing itself is there: it is not painting of the tree, but the tree “itself”. Has the representational nature of art given way to the event’s performative presentation that executes a possibility of being?

Here we can indeed tell stories about art... when and how it represented and with what, when it stopped being the imitation of nature or figurative or illustrative of the great moments in history or literature, which have been the media...

But it should be noted as well that the insistence that art working with bio-media is not representational depends on a tactic that can become

rather sensationalist, as Suzanne Anker has previously stated.<sup>9</sup> Some say, on the contrary, that it is about operating with living organisms or tissues, but not with configurations: it is about making art *in vivo*. Yet I drag here considerations by Ingeborg Reichle<sup>10</sup> on this regard, who lucidly shows that the subject of art in the age of science and technology not only goes through the manipulation of living organisms, but also through the appropriation and reinterpretation we do of new sciences and technologies with and through images. Therefore, it would be naive to think that the effect on the world occurs mainly and almost exclusively in material terms – e.g., making rabbits –, leaving aside the powerful effect of images, which shape reality in a strong ontological sense.

Thus said, the transformation of our world due to technoscience also involves – substantially – images and figurations, which are evidently built on both the sciences and the arts. It would be naive, very naive, to think that science images – say the DNA sequence strips or brain scans – are the clear manifestation of reality and then later appear the artistic figurations (artistic depictions). In any case, we would have to argue that the image is subject of a hermeneutics, here specifically of bio-hermeneutics, rather than bio-semiotics (the hermeneutic dimension of biofacts has been already pointed out by Nicole Karafyllis<sup>11</sup>).

With that I get to the second point. Discussion of art's media linked to representation. Much has been said as well about art and “new media” in relation with art's death or end. They talk about technology, about analog media and digital placing the current art elsewhere, about immediacy being sought after the use of technology and its realistic interfaces, about photography displacing painting in its spatial representation of reality, about the mathematical perspective of computers, etc.

The media of mediations have modified considering to different techniques and objectives. We face not only the so-called “new media” in the digital and cybernetic age, but also the typical means of representation, the ones thought and rethought by philosophy since ever – namely, the senses (particularly sight and hearing) – are today technically modified, prosthetically increased.

If we said that the natural senses are one thing and their technological extension artificiality, we would be in a rather confusing way of thinking.

What lies ahead is mediations of mediations and from there we have configured today the map of our world in a very radical way. The senses are mediations, we would say, with what there is – though we already

know that it is not without mediations and is not either different than the mediations-. Therefore, it has been so important for philosophy to clarify about its fidelity when it was thought that there was something unmediated, something immediate. Plato and Descartes are good examples of this.

But what happens when this mediation combines with another one and this produces knowledge –the kind they say is true – and produces machines with which we operate technically on the world? The power of display devices – from magnifying glasses to microscopes to telescopes to the screens of our daily existence– is impressive in its capability to configure and extend our experience.

We can think from some examples that allow us to see these mediations. The naked eye cannot see bacteria. Eye mediation is not enough, nevertheless they are absolutely real in our lives and through prosthetically increased eyes we do so many things in relation to the existence of bacteria – from washing our hands to public health policies–; that double mediation, i.e. the microscope's, is more effective in this than simple mediation, i.e. the naked eye. But the bacteria are also mediation, outcome and determination of many processes in which one becomes the other.

The next example is the genome. Saying that there is a fundamental change after the description of the DNA helical structure (1953, Watson and Crick) and that from there different possibilities have been operated for the living has nothing to do with the fact that today it is genetically manipulated and intervened. Some point out that this has always been done, for example, in agriculture and stockbreeding (no one would state that corn or dogs are “natural”, but rather bio-facts). The breaking point is not there, but in the display devices that allow “seeing” or pretending to see the DNA structure, i.e. they make clear and visible what is – which is also a mediation, a process, an outcome. In that moment we have mediation of mediation of mediation and our world's map changes very significantly.

It is about seeing with naked eye or walking around with the prosthetics of eyes. It has to do with combining – and conjuring – experiences that do not juxtapose but coexist in simultaneity of planes. The image represented in my mind is not more real than the photograph's than the microscope's than the DNA sequence image. The genome map is not more unreal than synthetic organs than my own death's anticipation. The reality parameter does not depend on the mediation degree.

And then art makes all this explode by showing the mediation of biotechnology and display devices as mediation. I mention only for clarity's sake Suzanne

Anker's work, which clearly emphasizes the power of images and their transformations, for example, in *Zoosemiotics*; and Paul Vanouse's, who has insisted on display devices and how they create our space-time, e.g. in *Fingerprints*.

We should at the same time see knowledge and its various models as mediation, whether they are empirical, scientific, humanistic... What kind of science, with what model, with what paradigm, positive... or complex, mechanic or quantum...? Knowledge is a mediation.

We should also consider art as mediation. It is not about saying whether or not art is representational, or on what terms or if it is performative or what... This long discussion dismisses art's mode of being as a matter of thought. It is not about elucidating the transformations of artistic manifestations after the media's change... That also avoids art's mode of being as a matter of thought. It's about focusing on mediation and its mode of being, as a mode of being of what is.

Therefore, the statement: Mediations of mediations. There is no in itself. No origin. No units (either discrete or continuous), mainly because there is no immediacy. The question about being also interrogates about mediation. And from this perspective we can think about the fourth moment of art. In Hegel it is art's destruction. For those who follow is of course this we have today. It is the moment when art knows it is mediation and acts as mediation. To clarify the argument, the moments should be mentioned. There is the antiquity where art is not art because there is no division between what is represented and what is: the bison in the cave is pure event. There is the classical period where there is consciousness of representation and a system for mimesis is created. There is modernity where art is born as such and as such also dies, art as what is separate, as what is aesthetic, as an entity with certain specificity and difference – or so is intended when founded as “aesthetic” (and then it realizes its artifice and rejoices playing with it and makes art for art's sake and manifestos and complexities in its structure, in its manifestation, in its concept requiring much knowledge and much thought, the same in the literature than on visual arts; art has such self-awareness and of its artifice that it is entangled and bites its tail). In the separation it becomes market art, in the execution it wants to stop being separated and “aesthetic” (one should recall Hans-Georg Gadamer's critique of aesthetic consciousness<sup>12</sup>), wants to go back to where it ever was.

But knowing about the artifice is not the same as knowing about and recognizing itself as mediation. Acknowledging the mediation is recognizing oneself along with other mediations and operating with and from them. It is

not a fight for disciplinary difference, about art, or philosophy, or science. It is about crosses between mediations, between models, metaphors, devices, senses, configurations and how many other modes of being of mediation.

Therefore, the interesting thing is not discussing what is the definition of art, what are the necessary and sufficient conditions making “x” an artwork, or deciding whether they are performances or representations, or whether new media and bio-media locate (dislocate) art to the point of needing new aesthetics and theories for so many innovations.

If art becomes aware or rather whether if it operates as mediation from mediation, then the disquisitions about its specificity and its being separated are, as I said, out of place: there is no separation, but operations-executions-effectuations of different modes of being of mediation.

It is not the same claiming to act on matter as such – operating the world technically – than claiming to act on the model which is neither one or the other, that is, it is not the same acting or operating at the mask’s or *interpretandum-interpretans* level, language’s level (mediation has received all these names in the past century)... and this is no rough nominalist repetition of speculative idealism. Rather it is hoisting this question: how do we cleave the sensible when it is no longer the other of the intelligible?

With no transcendent shape, without Platonic *eidōs* (Greek) out of this world, there is no copy, no reference, and no last and final parameter of mediation. All mediation is operable, alterable, by other mediation. Hence, the debate about nature and artificiality appears today so eagerly. Biotechnology and the production of genetically modified organisms, plus the technical intervention of virtually the entire planet, seem to bring to the fore the debate about whether there is “nature” and how to think about life (now that there is synthetic biology producing “living things” and cybernetics making “artificial intelligence”).

If art has come to intervene in this sphere and so vehemently, again it is not due to representation and bio-media, but with its taking over mediation as mediation that produces other units and effectuations. Due to this the living appears prosthetically modified, genetically manipulated. There are no natural or absolute units. Mediation is constantly generating what is there. And this is no apology for biotechnology, which – in any case – is not questioned from its engineering capabilities, but from how art makes it conscious as mediation.

Thus, when art works with life as matter, even though it might seem to replicate the sense of the laboratory, of the scientific experiment, the aesthetics

of DNA synthesizers and sequences, though it might look like it is built as a replica or that it pretends to be a small science world, or that it is nothing more than the greater speaker, with a non-specialized audience, of the scope – and disasters – of science; even when all of this seems to be, we must look through the eyes of mediation: life appears as being mediated, inter-related and inserted in a panorama of complexity. It cannot be understood as a primary and isolated unit. It cannot be understood as a determination of a gene-centric paradigm, even when the first works of bio art, stuck in to a certain extent uncritical fascination with biotechnology, repeated the gene-centric paradigm and played with the imaginary dream that the formation of the organism depended on and was determined by genes to a very high degree. Even so, life turned up to be in the middle. Bio art inserts matter in the networks of mediations, in the relations, in the complexities. There nothing remains as it is. Rather, it clarifies the limit whence something becomes what it is. We mean limit as mediation, as an opening in which something is configured. Art as a limit and mediation transforms matter, in this case, the living, and shows it in scales and distinctions, in so many and so specific differentiations, that allows us to see that which we would (always) be missing.

To instantiate this possibility of life appearing in the middle and being transformed from the multiple mediations in which it is taken, I will mention the case of transgenic maize in Mexico and the way in which art working with biomedicine has entered the debate. In my perspective, a biofact as maize, which is the outcome of thousands of years of domestication and selection, and crucial to the determination of a culture, makes transparent the very idea of mediation, since it incarnates so many process of mediations, from biological, to cultural, to agricultural ones among others. Pointing out that maize is not a “natural” entity, and assuming its characteristics as something produced and constructed, does not mean in any case that the degrees of mediation can be annulled to simply state that all maize is a biofact and that the transgenic one is just a slight transformation of that entity already altered and manipulated.

Art has the potency to put forward the different layers of mediation through devices that clarify, as I said before, the limit, that is, the opening in which something is configured.

The issue of maize had been previously dealt with in Mexico with a very strong political mark by visual and plastic artists that repudiate transgenic maize and that have mobilized all over our Republic to denounce the practices of transnational corporations and political parties.



For us, as the first art collective in Mexico producing transgenic and biotechnological art,<sup>13</sup> the problem required a “revisit” of the different discourses implied in the debate. The first resolution we took was to reproduce this debate. For the exhibition “Sin origen/Sin semilla” (Without origin/Seedless)<sup>14</sup> at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) we set a video installation of switching interviews called *Cross-Pollination*, in which the opinions of the parties included in the debate were to be heard. The title of the videos and the constant changing of images in the monitors allude the promiscuous mode in which maize reproduces, and also facilitates the contamination among varieties (including the transgenic ones). The idea was to continue this process of informative (discursive and genetic) contamination and to include the spectators and their opinions about GMOs.

This video installation accompanies the piece *They will be ashes, but will make sense (Slightly toxic)* which settles in the museum an easy protocol to prove whether maize samples had presence of transgenic genes resistant to glyphosate (RoundUP herbicide of Monsanto) or not. This toxic substance was spread in maize’s plantlets coming from several zones of Mexico: the samples with presence of transgenes would survive, and the native or improved (mutant) ones not. The contamination was finally proved by ELISA tests.<sup>15</sup>

We had a performance every week at the MUAC museum, sprinkling the seeds with glyphosate. The installation was design with furniture containing the plant pots, striving towards an aesthetic that was not exactly laboratory-like, but also not completely like a garden or a greenhouse. One could actually go plowing about through the piece as if it were a “milpa”,<sup>16</sup> and in order to go through the entrance one had to cross a sign on the floor where one could read “slightly toxic”, the letters of which were drawn with the ashes of the burnt plants.

*They will be ashes* deliberates about GMO crops, and the primary intention was to post a question about the artificiality grads in maize (which has no wild variety unlike other grains), and to underline that the technification process means also the parallel production of artificial (toxic) media, meaning agrochemicals.

The third piece *Polymer “milpa”* was a 3D printer mounted on a tractor that printed seeds out of a biopolymer PLA moving in a radial space. In a slow, seemingly fragile movement the injectors pushed PLA out in seed shapes that fell onto the earth. The biopolymer cartridge was spinning and

through the four giant speakers one could hear audio from Monsanto's stock exchange that had been recorded for three months. The seeds became plastic monuments to recall the acting power of biotechnology.

The three installations decentered the debate about GMOs and their risks by including the question about the discourses that produce truth, the possibilities of thinking about technology from the point of view of social, political and epistemic conditions, and also by situating the reflection on technologies in non-neutral spaces: for producing new bioartifacts technics should intervene several layers of mediation, history, epistemic horizons, previous technics, economical conflicts and even repurpose the material conditions of the media of growth.

Through these installations the idea of art is revisited, it is not a question whether artworks are representational or not, whether they are aesthetic or not, or if they already belong to the era of the end of art. The way in which they cross among disciplines and produce a discourse, an effect, an atmosphere to thresh corn in its many manifestations, show that when art is conscious of its mode of being as mediation it can throw light to the form in which reality is constructed as mediation of mediation of mediation. This, in turn, allows us to have a position in the debate that goes much farther than the simplified extremes of natural and artificial. Maize through these installations becomes a network, a complexity, and a mode in which life appears in the middle.

## Endnotes

1. See: María Antonia González Valerio, *Mind the Gap. Hermeneutics and Analytic Aesthetics on Narrativity and Historicity in the Artwork*, "Monitor ZSA", Vol. X, No. 5–6, 2009 / No. 31–32 – titled *Art: Resistance, Subversion, Madness*, Slovenia: University of Primorska.
2. See: Martin Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art in Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008. Regarding the aesthetic-ontology relation see Teresa Oñate, *Estudio preliminar. Heidegger, hó Skoteinós (el obscuro). La ontología estética del Espacion –Tiempo tras la Kehre* in T. Oñate et al, *El segundo Heidegger: Ecología, Arte, Teología*. Madrid: Dykinson, 2012.
3. See: Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, London: Continuum Publishing Group, 2004.
4. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Vestiges of Art in The Muses*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.
5. See: Georg W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, "Existence", Remark II, p. 124 [21.143]

6. See: Arthur Danto, *Hegel's End of Art Thesis* 1999, <http://www.rae.com.pt/Danto%20hegel%20end%20art.pdf>, accessed June 12, 2013.
7. See: Jacques Derrida, *The Double Session in Dissemination*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
8. See: Polona Tratnik, *Hacer la presencia. Fotografía, arte y (bio)tecnología*, México: Herder, 2014.
9. See: Suzanne Anker, *Cultural Imaginaries and Laboratories of the Real: Representing the Genetic Sciences in Handbook of Genetics and Society. Mapping the new genomic era*, Paul Atkinson et al (eds.), London and New York: Routledge, 2009.
10. See: Ingeborg Reichle, *Art in the Age of Technoscience: Genetic Engineering, Robotics, and Artificial Life in Contemporary Art*, Wien: Springer, 2009.
11. See: Nicole C. Karafyllis (ed.), *Biofakte. Versuch Über Den Menschen Zwischen Artefakt Und Lebewesen*, Paderborn: Mentis, 2003.
12. See: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Critique of the Abstraction Inherent in Aesthetic Consciousness in Truth and Method*, 2nd, Rev. ed. London: Continuum, 2004.
13. BIOS Ex machinA is conformed by: Marcela Armas, Axel Barceló, Arcángel Constantini, Deborah Dorotinsky, María Antonia González Valerio, Marco Antonio Lara, Jorge Enrique Linares, Sebastián Lomelí, Juan Carlos Martínez, Rosaura Martínez, Lena Ortega y Luisa Valender.
14. The information about the exhibition is to be found in here: <http://www.artemasciencia.com/exposinorigen/index.php?lang=en>, accessed on March 16, 2014.
15. The installation *They will be ashes* was shown in 2012–2013 at the MUAC Museum in Mexico City, then in Portugal at Cultivamos Cultura and Belgium in the museum Verbeke, as part of the exhibition Sul Sol in 2013, and then in 2014 in MACO Museum in Oaxaca in the exhibition Bioartifacts: Slowly Threshing Corn.
16. Spanish term for a crop-growing system used throughout Mesoamerica.

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Miško Šuvaković

## Spectacularisation. The Philosophy of Contemporary Transitional Art and Form of Life

This text is about understanding philosophically and theoretically the conditions of thinking and acting in different registers of art, science, technology, and politics in contemporary transitional cultures. In the context of *abstract knowledge*, the central problem of the following discussion will be to articulate the understanding and presenting of thinking and acting immanent to multiplicity of life.<sup>1</sup> I will show that contemporary technology, science, every day life and politics are **spectacularised** and brought to bodily-individual and collective-social visibility by means of art. It is about art endowed with the specific functions of cultural spectacularisation. In the case of these productions, spectacularisation denotes those art practices by which the biotechnological, bioscientific, and biopolitical practices of contemporary culture become visible in relation to forms of life. The visibility of their mutual relations suggests three different regimes that should be examined and interpreted:

- the regime of sensory recognition, i.e. the regime of preparing ‘forms of life’ for sensory perception, followed by cognitive processing,
- the regime of presenting and representing the visibility of forms of life by means of media and post-media in the information channels of culture and art, and
- the regime of impacting the spectator’s individual or collective *body*, whereby the impact of the visible emerges as an event that results in that body’s attraction and affectation.

BioArt and, more wider, BioPolitical Art denotes those contemporary art practices that interventionally present the potentialities and actualities of real or fictionally conceived life, by means of their choice of subjects or media. BioPolitical Art emerges from the re-articulations of science,

technology, behaviour, politics, and art in contemporary culture. Those re-articulations are associated with presenting, representing, and performing most diverse forms of life, i.e. conditions of living matter in social contexts.<sup>2</sup>

## Form of Life

Form of life is a basic concept in biology, biopolitical philosophy, as well as contemporary BioArt and Radical Body Art and Critical Performances.

The usage of the concepts of “life” and “form of life” is indebted to analyses and discussions of the differences and contradictions between the undisplayable-silent presence in nature, the undisplayable-silent life of nature, and the displayable-sayable life of society, i.e. culture and art.

In its broadest sense, biopolitical thinking begins as a critique of poststructuralism’s ‘textocentrism’, by pointing to those existences and phenomena that are beyond the field of intentionality and symbolisation. It shows that there is *something* beyond text as a referent, as a rupture, as that which falls out or that which emerges as a becoming, that is, as that which is an object, situation, or an event. There is *something* that is wild, potent, and immanent, and at the same time fragile, vulnerable, and extremely short-lived – all of this might certainly apply to the life of a bacterium, a cell, a plane tree, a grain, a butterfly, an elephant, or a human. Here is how Gilles Deleuze defined life:

We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life. A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is complete power, complete bliss.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, according to Giorgio Agamben, the *Ancient Greeks* had no generic term for what we mean by the word *life*.<sup>4</sup> They used two semantically and morphologically different terms: *zoé*, which signified the very fact of the living together of all living things (animals, people, and gods) and *bios*, which signified the form or specific way of life of a particular individual or group. Over the centuries, this distinction gradually disappeared from the vocabulary of modern languages; in those places where it still survives, as in *biology* or *zoology*, it no longer denotes a significant difference whatsoever. One single term – “life” – is used in such a way that its ambiguity grows in proportion to the sacralisation of its referent. “Alive” signifies a mere common assumption that is almost always possible to isolate in any one of numerous distinct forms of life.

*Form of life*, however, refers to life that can never be separated from its form, life in which it is impossible to isolate such a thing as *mere* or *bare* life. This is where a fundamental difference emerges between cultural-studies theorisations of ‘life’ and the philosophical interpretations of life that biopolitical philosophy has provoked. Cultural studies have advanced the post-poststructuralist assertion that there is no such thing as *bare life*, but that, rather, life invariably exists through its presentations and representations by textual *agents* within closed systems of culture. Cultural studies posit life as a text, or ‘non-bare life’. On the other hand, the philosophy of biopolitics posits the claim of an analytic-critical separation of “natural” from “human”, which means intellectual from political life.<sup>5</sup> Life appears as an event that triggers variable consequences in the world.

Viewed from yet another angle, that of the philosophy of biology, form of life is not only the event of life itself, but also an event and discourse that have their own history, which is projected onto the event of life in constructing and deriving concrete and abstract knowledge of life. In that sense, for the science that goes under the name of biology, life is a heterogeneous set that includes both the linguistic and the non-linguistic, that is, non-intentional events and discourses of living matter. The concept of life is determined by life as such, i.e. life as the external reference of that discourse. But the concept of life includes the abstract knowledge of life as well. Also, the concept of life includes institutional classifications and divisions of the knowledge of life, as well as surveillance/control of life. Life is a philosophical proposition as well as a legal category. On the other hand, form of life is invariably endowed with its concrete strategic function, which situates it in a human relation, with all the contradictions and conflicts that human relations as such bring. Biology is therefore determined by intersections between relations of power and knowledge in the complex process of human alienation, which means that amid all these contradictions humans must become machines in order to be able to produce the human in themselves. Only humans produced as such, who appear to have abandoned their “zoé” (biological existence), are those who construct the concept of life as abstract knowledge in relation to the wild, potent, and immanent, and yet fragile, vulnerable, and extremely short-lived duration of organisms. That moving between zoé and bios, that is, from bios, which makes zoé possible as knowledge in the field of power, is an essential marker of every “form of life”.

## Spectacularisation

Contemporary relations between art, politics, technology, behaviour and science may be identified as a field of obsessions and phantasms about representing the “truth of the world/life”, or, alternatively, as a field of obsessions and phantasms about performing the “regulation of world/life.”<sup>6</sup> The concepts of this representing and performing should be understood as practices of exemplifying generically the conditions of the truth and potentiality of forms of life. By means of this representing and performing, the invisible and abstract world of the “knowledge of life”, which politics, science and technology posit before events and situations of life, becomes visible. It is not that art thereby becomes politics, science or technology, but rather that through art, science and technology become visible with all of their effects and consequences in the real, living world. The function of art is to **spectacularise** the complex field of relations between science, politics, and technology with regards to forms of life.

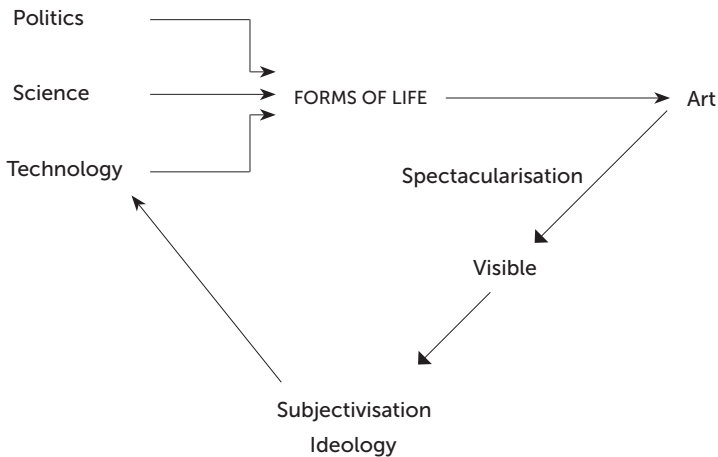
“Spectacularisation” stems from “spectacle”. Guy Debord claimed that spectacle was *capital* accumulated to the point when it became an image.<sup>7</sup> If one accepts his assertion as the formula of the spectacle, then one may say that the spectacle is *an X* accumulated to the point when it becomes an image. In other words, one might say that through art, different forms of life are accumulated to the point when they become images. Spectacularisation is identified as a recreating<sup>8</sup> of the conditions of sensory/bodily experience in relation to forms of life:

Spectacle is not primarily concerned with a *looking at* images but rather with the construction of conditions that individuate, immobilize, and separate subjects, even within a world in which mobility and circulation are ubiquitous.<sup>9</sup>

Spectacularisation may thus be understood as performing subjectification by means of the visible in relation to forms of life. With regards to forms of life and living matter, subjectification is the regime of relations between that which is seen and that which may be said, between knowledge and action, activity and passivity. Subjectification is determined not only by nature, but also by history – for example, Walter Benjamin offered an explanation of that essentially socio-historical character of subjection and spectacularisation:

During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the above, one might construct a scheme of forms of life brought to visibility by means of art, thereby establishing references to politics, science, and technology. Such a scheme might look like this:



The spectacularisation of relations between politics, science, and technology through art appears in the historical endurance of differences, from tradition, to modernity and postmodernity, through transition and globalism. These are the differences between bodily skill (the ancient tradition), the working of the machine as an extension of, and replacement for, the human body (the modern tradition), transformations of the human body's functions by means of machines (the condition of postmodernity), and, finally, transformations of machines into complex productive, post-productive, and tactical networks of the electronic, techno-biological, and electronic-biological conditions/processes of material exchange (the age of transition and globalisation). These are entirely different ontologies of human labour and its history.



Traditional ontology refers to objectification based on a bodily act that posits an object (a chair, a house, a ship, a sword, a statue, a spoon) into the world of humans. The key notion of traditional ontology is the bodily positing (*Ge-Stell*) of a made object into the world of humans.<sup>11</sup> An object is made by hands and posited into the world of objects among people. This is about longing for an object endowed with a rational structure, which reveals 'rational' planning on the part of its creator. The creator is a master craftsman. The work is an authentic piece that bears its creator's bodily imprint. Therefore is technology so much more than a mere tool:

Technology is a way of revealing. [...] It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth.<sup>12</sup>

By means of exposure, technology is linked to science. But that link may only be seen through the mediation of politics and art, by means of spectacularisation as an event.

Modern ontology, that of the early Industrial Age, speaks of the machine as an extension of the human body *qua* its introduction into the world. By means of machines, humans penetrate the world in order to transform it. Then, modern ontology, that of the advanced Industrial Age, speaks of the machine and machines that replace the human body in production. The extended body and then also the displaced body are two features of modernity. The extended body is *that* which intervenes in the world/life by transforming and thereby appropriating it. Appropriating the world/life indicates a situation where the natural world/life ceases to be the only coherent world. The world/life of humans is no longer an event of nature only, but also a modification of nature and life. An **added value** and **potentiality** emerge that were not identified in nature before and that are not identified as nature now. Technology achieves the mass production of pieces. The produced piece emerges through a mechanical reproduction of an exemplary model. The modern machine evolves from a mechanical extension of the human body to an 'abstract machine' (a cognitive machine, a digital device, or a cybernetic system) that is meant to replace the human body/bodies in freeing humans and multiplying their work potential. The machine is a tool, a means, and, at the end of modernity, an *artificial partner* in the production and distribution of goods and information. Modern technology is viewed as applied science, whereby the truth established by science is introduced into the pragmatics achieved by technology. Art spectacularises the relation between the true and the pragmatic regarding the modification of forms of life.

The postmodern machine seeks to take over the human body's functions – from manual through cognitive labour. Cognitive labour becomes dominant over manual and mechanical labour. This constitutes a de-articulation of the anthropology of human productive labour. No longer is labour an anthropological category – the *death* of the subject and author was announced a long time ago. The road led from Barthes's idea of *the death of the author* and an active *role for the reader* to the domination of the consumer.<sup>13</sup> The direct labour of humans is transformed into work effect, which emerges from the dynamic relations of programmed machines that create 'copies without originals.' The anthropology of human labour becomes a techno-theory of machine labour and then later also of cognitive labour. The product is no longer a mass-produced piece by itself, but the plurality of mass-produced pieces in the informational field of communication (production, exchange, and consumption), which in virtual and physical spaces realises an autonomous world in relation to nature and human experience based on a direct, "innocent" experience. The production of an autonomous informational world as opposed to the world of experience shows that the postmodern product has the status of a produced fiction. Fiction becomes constituent of postmodern social relations. Postmodern technology is established as a plural field, which generates consumers' response to fictional and cognitive products. First and foremost, art spectacularises that field of consumption, as well as modes of fictionalising the "human condition".

Globalisation spectacularises politics, science, technology, and art as post-media or tactical media. Life is posited as "complexity" and "complicity", which takes the human condition into transition, whereby local situations are brought into global regimes of visible knowledge. Globalisation is viewed as the most advanced form, i.e. the ultimate structure of the singularisation, standardisation, and homogenisation of cultures for the sake of a fully developed, totalising market capitalism, i.e. politics and ideology of neoliberalism. This global optimistic project's basic features are based on reordering and re-substituting the "liberal" concept of society into the concept of plurality and non-confrontation among "global" or "world" societies and their cultures. The concept of "reordering" is posited as an essential and profound change of power relations on a global level, which views human relations in "humanity" not through the lens of "political criteria" or their *ideological realisations*, but as the global market's self-regulating relations derived through the executive formats of economic and cultural policy. The global financial crisis has questioned the liberal

ideal of a global economic self-regulation. The global crisis has brought economic self-regulation back into the field of social contradictions and conflicts at the end of the opening decade of the twenty-first century.

When one crosses from the field of the “politics of seeing”, i.e. spectacularisation into the field of discussing specific formations in the history of art, one may establish the following descriptive model:

- in the *avant-gardes* (ranging from futurism to surrealism through constructivism), spectacularisation was projected by means of utopian ideas about realising the revolutionary-new in the industrial society – it concerned progress, speed, and turning from individual to mass consumption,
- in the *neo-avant-gardes* (neo-constructivism, kinetic art, eco-art, robotics in art), spectacularisation was realised by deriving a concrete utopia of a synthesis between science and art, by means of laboratory research conducted by artists and groups of artists modelled after scientific research teams,
- the spectacularisation of *postmodern* culture, the one between high and popular culture, was performed by means of a totalising and eclectic mass consumer culture (nomadic pop, mimesis of mimesis, neo-expressionism, neo-conceptualism) in relation to the ideological suggestions of depoliticising politics with regard to the postmodern meta-languages of power – science, technology, politics, and art are shown as cultural categories of consumption, and
- the spectacularisation of transition and globalism is based on an economically motivated expansion of the scientific and technological infrastructures into the field of ‘abstract knowledge’ as a source of the production of affective situations in the field of art and culture (BioArt, internet art, cyber-art, digital art).

Translation: Žarko Cvejić

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Polona Tratnik

## The Quest for Survival: Art with Biotechnology

In the biotech century we have been facing a tremendous development of the field since the middle of the twentieth century. Biotechnology as the knowledge-power has been perceived as revolutionary field, promising that the man is soon to become the “master of the evolution”. Since the computer paradigm signifying the swing of genomics art has found its mission in reflecting and discussing this segment of reality. Humankind has been aiming to gain the ultimate power with biotechnology. The art projects reveal this striving and link it to another, rather modest yet utmost ambitious goal: the quest for survival.

Generally, these projects are structurally very complex, transdisciplinary and logistically demanding. Conceptually they are often not meant to be naïve, non-reflexive playing with life. The artists have developed rich conceptual challenges and technological platforms in order to discuss complex but very relevant actual issues, such as those of biopower, anthropocentrism, survival of the species, biological adaptation to extreme environmental conditions, genetically modified food products and possible cannibalism as means of survival tactics, etc. These aspects present extreme aesthetic and political confrontation of public with the levers of the need to foster the development of biotechnology.

### 1. Biotechnology and Biopower

Michel Foucault was analysing the enthronement of biopower during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was supporting the affirmative politics of life and over life: “Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate domination was death, but with living being, and the mastery

it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body.”<sup>1</sup> The political technologies that ensued, investing the body, health, modes of subsistence and habitation, living conditions, the whole space of existence only proliferated since then.

Foucault was aware that medicine is significant for bio-power, since bio-power “is continuous, scientific, and it is the power to make live.”<sup>2</sup> The “power is decreasingly the power to take life, and increasingly the right to intervene to make live.”<sup>3</sup> He recognized medicine as a biopolitical strategy: “for capitalist society it is the biopolitical that is important before everything else; the biological, the somatic, the corporeal. The body is a biopolitical reality; medicine is a biopolitical strategy.”<sup>4</sup>

Today biotechnology has become a significant supporting technology of medicine. Biotechnology has got growing importance for power over life and body; it is a political technology investing in the body, improving its qualities, prolonging youth, taking care of health and reproduction. In such sense it preserves or protects life by helping to improve health, enriching the quality of life and enabling active aging. There is power over life and body in contemporaneity that is far exceeding the extensions and the technological possibilities of power from the biological modernity.

## 2. The paradigm of auto-regenerative body

Regenerative medicine manipulates with body’s own cells for composition or regeneration of tissues or other bodily parts, with special, increasingly stronger interest for stem cells. Primarily, tissue engineering emerged as a response to transplantation problems, mainly in association with the response of the immune system, which meant the rejection of allogenic tissue. Tissue engineering is a technology of in vitro tissue manipulation, which nowadays mainly uses stem cells in artificially created support systems that are set up for the execution of specific biological functions, particularly for the repair or replacement of parts of the tissue (like skin, cartilage, bone). Engineering and cell cultivation in the laboratory for the purpose of transplantation is called regenerative medicine. Today, the expression “advanced therapy” is well-established in the EU medical legislation which divides advanced therapies into gene therapy, somatic cell therapy and tissue engineering. Advanced therapy uses principles of self-regeneration in tissue injury as well as in treatment of cancer.

Eugene Thacker, one of the first humanists to discuss tissue engineering, points to the new comprehension of the body introduced with it: “Tissue engineering is able to produce a vision of the regenerative body, a body always potentially in excess of itself.”<sup>5</sup> According to Thacker, because of the idea of regeneration the economy of body parts (transplantations, xeno-transplantations) has been replaced by the economy of auto-regeneration (regeneration of tissues from one’s own cells), which is cyclic and proliferative (productive of a great number of cells with their division).<sup>6</sup>

Thacker is introducing the concept of regenerative body with reference to the function of proliferation. This is the immanent function of many types of cells, such as skin, cartilage, bone and muscle cells. Tissue engineering as a branch of biotechnology has relied exactly on these functions, which are already present in the body, but of which one can make good use of with in vitro manipulation and then application back to the body. That is how regenerative medicine gained the regenerative effect. In the next phase tissue engineering additionally relied on the even nobler functions brought about with stem cells. With its potentiality to become a particular cell, whereat the decision about differentiation depends on the need, stem cell shifts the notion of regeneration to another, higher level. It is particularly stem cell which executes auto-regeneration of a tissue that is taking place in the body. The function of auto-regeneration has not only been acknowledged, but has been intensified with support of technology, in such a manner suggesting great medical achievements, resulting in optimization and prolongation of life.

Ultimately the idea of regeneration of the body is generating a utopian vision of immortal active life and body enabled with a reinforced constant process of vitalization victoriously defeating the natural process of mortification.

In my artistic practice, particularly with the projects *Hair* and *Initiation*, I am enlightening the prospects of auto-regenerative body, as well as the biopolitical aspects related to the interventions of regenerative medicine.

### 3. Maja Smrekar – radical survival strategy: self-exploitation

Questions upon the politics of life and the body are being addressed by Maja Smrekar. Her thinking is put into the context of a likely scenario in which humanity is facing a global food deficit. This survival plan utilizes man’s potential to produce molecules for nutritional purposes. The author

has created the genetically modified micro-organism *MaSm Saccharomyces cerevisiae* by adding her own enzyme to yeast. By performing its original survival function – the fermentation process – the generated metabolic system of lactose (milk sugar) produces lactic acid. In this way the project provides the production of one of the most widely used additives in the modern food industry – lactic acid. In the context of utilitarian society, Maja Smrekar does not merely propose the exploitation of human material – moreover, the artist makes it obvious. After all, we are witnesses to the exploitation of our own body every time we give a medical sample of biological material, which will be used for research purposes after the necessary health screening has been conducted (except where the individual expressly opposes this, if he even has the option to do so). In a society where everything is subject to privatization and commercialization, the question of ownership and integrated exploitation of one's own body presents itself as a novelty. This leads us to questions of power over life.

Maja Smrekar discusses the contemporary power over life and the objective of the human species to “survive” as a species, to help itself in the course of life processes, where nutrition play the key role. The type of survival Maja Smrekar addresses is actually an “auto-survival” strategy, an autonomous survival. Human species is helping itself, feeding itself with itself, in a literal sense.

We live in an era when the issue of survival, particularly in our anthropocentric world, is getting an increased importance. We are impatient about the research of space which we expect to soon deliver good news that we are finally enabled to migrate to another planet and colonize it, in such a manner saving ourselves and our species before the risks of greater environmental changes or dangers from the space which we are not able to survive in the design we currently have. We want to get out of here also because the world has become small – it has been explored, cultivated, utilized, crowded and restricted.

The fostering of life and the planning of survival, which are being reflected in Maja Smrekar's work, do not only lead to the expansion of the notion of the human being, but also to the humanization of other living species. Maja Smrekar humanizes the “other” (as the other to the human) living world in order to manage the survival of the human species. She demonstrates that the world we live in is completely subjected to the human power over life.



#### 4. Robertina Šebjanič and Špela Petrič – human survival plan = transspecies

In the context of the fear of the environmental changes, taking place on our planet or the different conditions we would meet if we would migrate to another planet, human species is looking for solutions to improve its form of existence in order to be able to survive as a species.

Robertina Šebjanič and Špela Petrič, an artist and a biologist by basic education, are suggesting precisely this – a subversive creation of a transspecies of the human and algae, *humalgae*, which would provide humans with better conditions of survival on Earth in circumstances that may be difficult to predict. However, despite the proposed genetic hybridization, man would still retain the human form, phenotype. The project proposes to ‘improve’ the human being, which means a plan for an extreme survival strategy. In the scenario that the human species is most afraid of, single-celled organisms or multicellular organisms without significant differentiation of cells, like bacteria and archaea, will have greater survival ability and adapt more easily to major environmental changes. For his proper survival plan, the partner species of man should therefore be able to quickly adapt and possibly exist in a dormant state that can be reactivated, for instance in endospore or cyst form, which will be capable of withstanding extreme environmental conditions. The authors propose a reproductive cycle in which a diploid body of algae uses mitosis to produce a homospore, intended to become a fully formed human being. Through meiosis, which takes place in the human genitals, haploid gametes are produced. After fertilization, the zygote becomes a cyst. This will preserve the semi-dormant state which can be reactivated in a complex life cycle, from which it can develop into algae under desired conditions. As the authors note, the biggest challenge is to ensure the biological environment that would support human development. For this purpose it would be possible to make a uterus from the parental algae, which would share nutrients with humans.

Robertina Šebjanič and Špela Petrič understand that this concept represents a stepping away from ethical principles, which makes their project radical. Nevertheless, with the current programme of genetic engineering and synthetic biology – both deal with genetic programming – we are homing in on the concept of modifying the human genome. Here the management policy of this programme is focused precisely on improving

the qualities that will lead to greater resistance to disease and other death threats, which ultimately means the prolongation of the life of the individual, thereby also the prolongation of the active period of the population, and not least, the improvement of survival abilities in an environment that endangers the species. The project thus touches upon the necessities of the human species to survive as a species. At this point the *humalga* plan meets the plan to send man into space, which actually represents the colonization of new environments. With the expansion of humans into space, the question of the qualities of this migratory species re-poses themselves. The human being is a unique species within the *bios* dimension, which means the management of life. *Bios*, the politics of life, here encounters *technē* – cunningness of the mind to cheat nature and make it subordinate to itself for its own benefit. How should we then in contemporary times understand what it means to be human? It is precisely with *technē* that man interferes in his own ‘nature’, and not with his knowledge – technology, which has been called biotechnology. The aspiration to improve the qualities of the human species is present precisely in the essence of what we consider as our identity, as the human identity: it is part of our culture. The term biotechnology expresses exactly that – *technē bios* – the controlling and designing of life, ultimate engineering.

The Renaissance started its programme to gain understanding of man, which has not seen its end up till today, yet ever new dimensions of this same research continue to open up. But something has become apparent in all this: man strives for knowledge, by mapping and organizing it, so that we can use it to manipulate, function actively, exercise our dominion over the world. Subjugation, invasiveness, exploitation and optimization of the conquered are inherent to the tendency itself to discover, explore, gain knowledge, to understand. Knowledge exists for *technē*. But in all the vanity of the human species about its extraordinariness, all its unsurpassable skills and intellectual prowess, even divinity, as confirmed by the Greek – and later the Renaissance, followed by the modern – tradition of thought, it nevertheless seems at the end that we are merely one of the species striving for its own survival, in which we do not stand as much chance as many other species.

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Jos de Mul

## The (Bio)Technological Sublime

If the concept of the sublime had previously been used to articulate the inadequacy that the human subject felt upon trying to represent Nature, the postmodern condition – in which Nature itself has been effaced – has produced a sense of the sublime in which humans find themselves up against their own creations.

*Dale Chapman*

### Introduction

Since its emergence as a specific discipline within philosophy in the middle of the eighteenth century,<sup>1</sup> the history of aesthetics shows two remarkable tendencies, reflecting specific developments within (post)modern art and culture as a whole. On the one hand, the development of aesthetics is characterized by an impressive differentiation and multiplication of aesthetic categories. Whereas early aesthetics was predominantly focused on the category of beauty, since the beginning of the nineteenth century until now a wide range of new aesthetic concepts have emerged, such as the sublime, the ironic, the comic, the absurd, and the banal. Without doubt this development reflects developments in modern art itself, which has restlessly expanded the domain of aesthetic experience and expression. The fine arts became the no-longer-fine-arts.

The second tendency has also to do with another type of expansion which characterizes modern aesthetics. At least since the Romantic Movement there is a tendency to comprehend aesthetic experience as a, and sometimes even *the* fundamental type of human experience. Here again, the history of modern art has played a crucial role in this development. Following the revolutionary spirit of the early-romantic movements, the artistic avant-gardes of the twentieth century aimed at a fundamental “aesthetization” of the world and at a transformation of human life into a work of art<sup>2</sup>. In this way the no-longer-fine-arts ultimately became no-longer-artistic-arts. This implies for aesthetics that everything becomes an object for aesthetic interpretation. The domain of aesthetics is no longer restricted to the aesthetic dimension of nature (“natural beauty”)

and specific cultural artifacts (“artistic beauty”), but covers the world and human life as a whole.

In this contribution I want to investigate a phenomenon that is located at the crossroad of these two tendencies: the technological sublime. Although the category of the sublime has a long history, it became a dominant concept in nineteenth and twentieth-century aesthetics. In (post)modern culture however, we witness a fundamental transformation of the experience of the sublime. Although originally the concept of the sublime predominantly referred to a specific rhetoric effect, in the nineteenth century the sublime became strongly connected with the artistic representation of overwhelming phenomena in nature. I will argue that in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the sublime increasingly becomes entangled with the experience of technology. At first, we seem to witness here a return of the sublime from nature to technology, even though the point of departure was an alpha-technology (rhetoric), whereas the return concerns the domain of beta-technologies, such as nuclear physics and information technology. In the age of biotechnologies (such as genetic modification and synthetic biology), however, the sublime seems to regain a natural dimension. Mediated by biotechnologies nature becomes a “second” or “next nature”: “With our attempts to cultivate nature, humankind causes the rising of a next nature, which is wild and unpredictable as ever. Wild systems, genetic surprises, autonomous machinery and splendidly beautiful black flowers. Nature changes along with us.”<sup>3</sup> As such, next nature provides a specific, so far unknown experience of the sublime: the technological sublime.

Before investigating the technological sublime in more detail, I will give a concise overview of the history of the concept of the sublime. This will enable us to demarcate both the continuity and discontinuity of the technological sublime.

## The classical sublime

When we call a landscape or a piece of art “sublime,” we express the fact that it evokes particular beauty or excellence. Note that the “sublime” is not only an aesthetic characterization; a moral action of high standing or an unparalleled goal in a soccer game may also be called “sublime.” Roughly speaking, the sublime is something that exceeds the ordinary. This aspect of its meaning is expressed aptly in the German word for the sublime: *das Erhabene* (the “exalted”). In the latter term we also hear echoes of the

religious connotation of the concept. The sublime confronts us with that which exceeds our very understanding.

As already noticed, the notion of the sublime goes back a long way. The word 'sublime' first appears in Middle English in the 14th century. It was probably derived from the Middle French "sublimier", which has its root in the Medieval Latin *sublimare* (to refine) and, further back in time, in the Latin *sublimis* (high up in the air). Used more figuratively as an adjective, it means "lofty" or "grand."<sup>4</sup> One of the oldest essays on the sublime dates back to the beginning of our calendar. It is a manuscript in Greek entitled *Περ ψους* (*On the Sublime*), long ascribed to Longinus, though probably incorrectly so. In this treatise, the author does not provide a definition for 'the sublime,' and some classicists even doubt whether 'the sublime' is even the correct translation of the Greek word used – *ψους*.<sup>5</sup> Using a number of quotes from classical literature, the author discusses fortunate and less fortunate examples of the artistic evocation of the sublime. For one, the sublime must address grand and important subjects and be associated with powerful emotions. For (pseudo)Longinus, the sublime landscape even touches upon the divine. Nature "has implanted in our souls an unconquerable passion for all that is great and for all that is more divine than ourselves."<sup>6</sup>

## The early-modern sublime

Longinus' essay was hardly noticed by his contemporaries and, in the centuries that followed, we rarely find references to this text. The essay was printed for the first time as late as 1554 in Basel. But only after the French translation by Boileau (1674) and the English translation by Smith (1739) did the text begin its victory march through European cultural history. From the Baroque period onward, which culminated in Romanticism, the sublime grew to become *the* central aesthetic concept, at which time it was often associated with the experience of nature. In the eighteenth century, for example, we find it predominantly in the descriptions of nature of a number of British authors, portrayals of their impressions collected on Grand Tours through Europe and the Alps (a common practice in those days among young people from prosperous families). These authors use the term to render the often fear-inducing immensity of the mountain landscape in words. The landscape gives them, as John Dennis already puts it in his 1639 *Miscellanies*, "a pleasure mingled with Horrors."<sup>7</sup>

Basically, in early modernity the sublime refers to the wild, unbounded grandeur of nature, which is thus contrasted starkly with the more harmonious experience of beauty. In *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), Edmund Burke defines the sublime as a “delightful terror.”<sup>8</sup> That the forces of nature may nevertheless leave the viewer in a state of ecstasy is connected with the fact that the viewer observes these forces from a safe distance.

## The romantic sublime

In German Romanticism, however, the sublime loses its innocent character. The work of Immanuel Kant has been of particular critical importance in this respect. In his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (*Critique of Judgment*, 1790), Kant, following Burke, makes an explicit distinction between the beautiful (*das Schöne*) and the sublime (*das Erhabene*). Beautiful are those things that give us a pleasant feeling. They fill us with desire because they seem to confirm our hope that we are living in a harmonious and purposeful world. A beautiful sunrise, for instance, gives us the impression that life is not that bad, really. The sublime, on the other hand, is connected with experiences that upset our hopes for harmony. It is evoked by things that surpass our understanding and our imagination due to their unbounded, excessive, or chaotic character.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the sublime cannot be expressed in a (necessarily limited) sensuous form:

For the sublime, in the strict sense of the word, cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas of reason, which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible, may be excited and called into the mind by that very inadequacy itself which does admit of sensuous presentation. Thus the broad ocean agitated by storms cannot be called sublime. Its aspect is horrible, and one must have stored one’s mind in advance with a rich stock of ideas, if such an intuition is to raise it to the pitch of a feeling which is itself sublime-sublime because the mind has been incited to abandon sensibility and employ itself upon ideas involving higher finality.<sup>10</sup>

Kant makes a further distinction between the mathematical sublime and the dynamic sublime. The first, the mathematical sublime, is evoked by that which is immeasurable and colossal, and pertains to the idea of infinitude. When we view the immensity of a mountain landscape or look up at the vast night sky, we are overcome by a realization of our insignificance and finitude. Kant associates the second, the dynamic sublime,

with the superior forces of nature. The examples he uses include volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and turbulent oceans. Again, these phenomena are not sublime as such, but they might evoke the sublime in us. Just as in the case of the mathematical sublime, we experience our insignificance and finitude, but in these cases this understanding is supplemented by the realization that we could be destroyed by the devastating power of these forces of nature. Kant calls the dynamic sublime “*ungeheuer*”, which we could translate as “enormous” or “monstruous”: it evokes both awe and fear. It induces a “negative lust”<sup>11</sup> in which attraction and repulsion melt into one ambiguous experience.

Since the sublime, in spite of its moral connotations, remains primarily an aesthetic category in Kant’s work, he maintains the idea that “safe distance” characterizes the experience of the sublime. When viewing a painting of a turbulent storm at sea, one can contemplate the superior force of nature while remaining comfortably assured that one is safely in a museum and not at the stormy sea depicted! Friedrich Schiller, in contrast, takes things one step further and “liberates” the sublime from the safe cocoon of aesthetic experience. The political terror under Jacobin rule following the French Revolution had deeply impressed him and shaped his view of the sublime, as elaborated in a series of essays.

In order to accomplish this liberation, Schiller rephrases Kant’s distinction between the mathematical sublime and the dynamic sublime. In a 1793 text called *Vom Erhabenen* (Of the Sublime), Schiller argues that the mathematical sublime ought to be labeled the theoretical sublime. The immeasurable magnitude of the high mountains and the night sky evoke in us a purely *reflexive* observation of infinitude. When nature shows itself to be a destructive force, on the other hand, we *experience* a practical sublime, which affects us directly in our instinct for self-preservation. Still, in Schiller’s view, we need to make yet another distinction. When we view life-threatening forces from a safe distance – for instance, by observing a storm at sea from a safe place on land – we might experience the grandeur of the storm, but not its sublime character. An experience can only be truly sublime when our lives are actually endangered by the superior forces of nature.

And yet, for Schiller, even that is not enough. Human beings have an understandable urge to shield themselves both physically and morally from the superior forces of nature. Dutchmen who protect their country by building dykes attempts to gain “physical certainty” over the violence



of a westerly gale; those who believe their soul will live on in heaven after death protect themselves by means of “moral certainty.” Whoever truly manages to conquer his fear of the sea, or of death, shows his grandness, but loses the experience of the sublime. According to Schiller, truly sublime is he who collapses in a glorious battle against the superior powers of nature or military violence: “One can show oneself to be great in times of good fortune, but one only can be sublime in times of bad fortune” (“Groß kann man sich im Glück, erhaben nur im Unglück zeigen.”<sup>12</sup>) Schiller’s work transforms the sublime from an ambiguous aesthetic category into a no less ambiguous category of life.

## The technological sublime

History doesn’t stop, however. Over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the main site for the ambiguous experience of the sublime has gradually shifted *from nature to technology*. Our current period is viewed as the age of secularization. God is retreating from nature and nature is gradually becoming “disenchanted” (*entzaubert*) in the process. Nature no longer implants in us, as was the case in Longinus’s time, “an unconquerable passion for all that is great and for all that is more divine than ourselves,” but invites technical action and control. Divine rule has become the work of man. The power of divine nature has been transferred to the power of human technology. In a sense, the sublime now returns to what it was in Longinus’s work: a form of human *technè*. However, these days it no longer falls into the category of the alpha-technologies, such as rhetoric, but rather, we find ourselves on the brink of the age of sublime beta-technologies. Modern man is less and less willing to be overpowered by nature; instead, he vigorously takes technological command of nature.

Today the human impact on our planet can hardly be underestimated. Climate change, population explosion, genetic manipulation, digital networks, plastics islands floating in the oceans. Untouched old nature is almost nowhere to be found. “We were here,” is written all over. We are living in a time of rainbow tulips, palm-shaped islands, hurricane control and engineered microbes. An age in which the “made” and the “born” are fusing.<sup>13</sup>

As David Nye has documented in great detail in his book, *American Technological Sublime* (1994), modern Americans initially embraced the technological sublime with as much enthusiasm as they had embraced

the natural sublime. The admiration of the natural sublime, as it might be experienced in the Grand Canyon, was replaced by the sublime of the factory, the sublime of the skyscraper and the metropolis, the sublime of aviation and auto-mobility, and the sublime of war machinery. Talking about the electrical sublime he claims that

the electrified landscape's meaning lays precisely in the fact that it seemed to go beyond any known codification, becoming unutterable and ungraspable in its extent and complexity. [...] The city as a whole seemed a jumble of layers, angles, and impossible proportions; it had become a vibrating, indeterminate text that tantalized the eyes and yielded to no definitive reading.<sup>14</sup>

Of all the technologies the computer in particular discloses a whole new range of sublime experiences. In order to understand the nature of the sublimity of information and communication technologies, we should first of all realize that the crucial element of every computer program is some sort of *database*. In a basic sense, the word “database” may refer to any collection of items that is ordered in one way or another, be it a bookshelf with a collection of alphabetically ordered books or a card index box with a series of cards with names, addresses and telephone numbers. In computing, too, a database is a structured collection of data records. However, in this case the records are stored in computer memory, so that a software program can consult it to answer queries. With the help of the four basic operations of the database – the *ABCD of computing: Add, Browse, Change, and Destroy* – in principle all possible combinations of data can be created. Database ontology is dynamic because the growing number of elements is constantly combined, decombined, and recombined.<sup>15</sup>

Database applications virtually span the entire range of computer software, ranging from mainframe databases for administrative purposes and multimedia encyclopedias on the internet, to search engines, wikis and other Web 2.0 applications. In a world in which the computer has become the dominant technology, everything – genes, books, organizations – becomes a relational database. Databases transform everything into a collection of (re)combinatory elements. In this sense databases have become the dominant “cultural form” of our age.<sup>16</sup> Computers are “ontological machines” that shape both our world and our worldview. As such, the database also transforms the sublime, as well as our experience of the sublime (cf. 2007).

## Theoretical and practical sublimity in the computer age

Keeping Kant's distinction between the mathematical and the dynamical sublime in mind, we might also distinguish between mathematical and dynamical sublimity in computer technologies. The *mathematical sublime* in computing manifests itself as a combinatorial explosion. As Borges has shown in *The Library of Babel* (1941), the number of possible combinations of a finite number of elements – in his story, the twenty-five orthographic symbols of the alphabet – is mind-boggling.<sup>17</sup> The "protagonist" in Borges' story is a Library, consisting of a huge collection of books, each book contains four hundred ten pages; each page, forty lines, each line, eighty black letters. This means that each book contains 1,312,000 symbols. The narrator tells us that the Library is "total" (perfect, complete and whole), because the bookshelves contain all possible combinations of the twenty-five available symbols. This makes the number of books in the library hyper-astronomical, as it contains no less than  $25^{1,312,000}$  books. The number of atoms in the universe (estimated by physicists to be roughly  $10^{80}$ ) is negligible compared to the unimaginable number of possible (re)combinations in Borges' "Database of Babel." Already the collection consisting of one single book, together with all of the copies of this book showing one to twelve misprints, is bigger than the number of atoms in the universe.<sup>18</sup>

Not only the number of books mathematical sublime, but also the contents of the books, as they contain "all that is able to be expressed, in every language". The narrator gives us a fascinating insight in the contents of those books:

*All*-the detailed history of the future, the autobiographies of the archangels, the faithful catalog of the Library, thousands and thousands of false catalogs, the proof of the falsity of those catalogs, a proof of the falsity of the true catalog, the gnostic gospel of Basilides, the commentary upon the gospel, the commentary on the commentary on that gospel, the true story of your death, the translation of every book into every language, the interpolations of every book into all the books, the treatise Bede could have written (but did not) on the mythology of the Saxon people, the lost books of Tacitus.<sup>19</sup>

In the case of Borges' *Library of Babel*, we can still comfort ourselves with the idea that this story is part of his *Collected Fictions*. After all, the Library of Babel is only a product of artistic imagination. However, in the domain of biotechnologies we confront databases that are even more astonishing, both in magnitude and in scope. If we take into account that

the human genome alone consists of roughly three billion nucleotides, written in a four-letter language; we realize that the number of possible (re)combinations ( $4^{3,000,000,000}$ ) of the human genome is even more sublime than the number of books in Borges' Library.

Besides the magnitude of combinations, the database containing the human gene pool differs from many other databases in yet another respect. Although dazzling because of the unimaginable numbers of combinations, the information age version of the mathematical sublime is, to use Schiller's distinction, still only *theoretical*. However, the impact of databases is not restricted to the world of computing. Databases often function as material metaphors. This happens when they evoke acts in the material world.<sup>20</sup> Examples of this are databases implemented in industrial robots, enabling mass customization (e.g. "build to order" cars). But this is also true for biotechnological databases used for genetic engineering. Here we enter the domain of the *practical* dimension of the technological sublime. By actively recombining the elements of the database in the real world, by genetic manipulation or synthetic biology – building organisms from scratch using "biobricks", for example – we unleash awesome powers and, in so doing, transform the dynamic sublime in a fundamental way.<sup>21</sup>

In our (post)modern world it is no longer the superior forces of nature that calls forth the experience of the sublime, but rather, the superior forces of technology. With the transfer of power from divine nature to human technology, the ambiguous experience of the sublime also nests in the latter. In the era of converging technologies – information technology, biotechnology, nanotechnology and the neurosciences – it is technology itself that gains an *ungeheuer* character in its battle with nature. Without doubt these technologies have increased our power over nature enormously. However, this does not mean that we have become gods in the sense that we have gained control over our own destiny. Rather, our relation with nature is changing:

Where technology and nature are traditionally seen as opposed to each other, they now appear to merge or even trade places. While old nature, in the sense of trees, plants, animals, atoms, or climate, is increasingly controlled and governed by man – it is turned into a cultural category –, our technological environment becomes so complex and uncontrollable, that we start to relate to it as a nature of its own.<sup>22</sup>

While technology is an expression of the grandeur of the human intellect, we also increasingly experience it as a force that controls and threatens us.

Technologies such as atomic power station and genetic modification, to mention just two paradigmatic examples, are Janus-faced: they reflect, at once, our hope for the benefits they may bring as well as our fear of their uncontrollable, destructive potentials.

At first sight it seems that in these cases technology completely controls and conquers nature.<sup>23</sup> However, in the fast growing domain of the biotechnologies (which will probably become as important in the twenty-first century as the physical sciences were in the twentieth century), we witness a remarkable revenge of nature *within* technology. After all, technologies like genetic modification and synthetic biology create entities that are no longer passive, manipulatable innate elements, but have, and will increasingly have, their “own agenda”.

## Next nature

In fact, in this domain of ‘next nature’ we witness the vanishing of the very opposition of nature and technology. A striking example of this development is *GFP Bunny*, created by the Brazilian artist Eduard Kac in 2000 (see illustration 1 and 2). Kac commissioned the ‘transgenic’ bunny from a French lab, where scientists injected green fluorescent protein (GFP) of a Pacific jellyfish into the egg of an Albino rabbit. This is how the artist describes his experiment:

My transgenic artwork *GFP Bunny* comprises the creation of a green fluorescent rabbit, the public dialogue generated by the project, and the social integration of the rabbit. [...] *GFP Bunny* was realized in 2000 and first presented publicly in Avignon, France. Transgenic art, I proposed elsewhere, is a new art form based on the use of genetic engineering to transfer natural or synthetic genes to an organism, to create unique living beings. This must be done with great care, with acknowledgment of the complex issues thus raised and, above all, with a commitment to respect, nurture, and love the life thus created.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of Kac’s emphasis on “great care”, his experiment has led to heated debates about the tolerability of such works of art. However, besides ethical objections Kac’s *GFP Bunny* raises the question whether this “work” can be called a work of art at all. Perhaps it rather belongs to the domain of nature or to the domain of technology. But probably it belongs to all three domains at once: art, nature, *and* technology. With regard to “next nature” we can no longer distinguish sharply between these three domains.

Although in a different manner than envisioned by the historical avant-gardes, Kac's *Alba fluo rabbit* seems to realize their dream to transform life itself into a work of art.

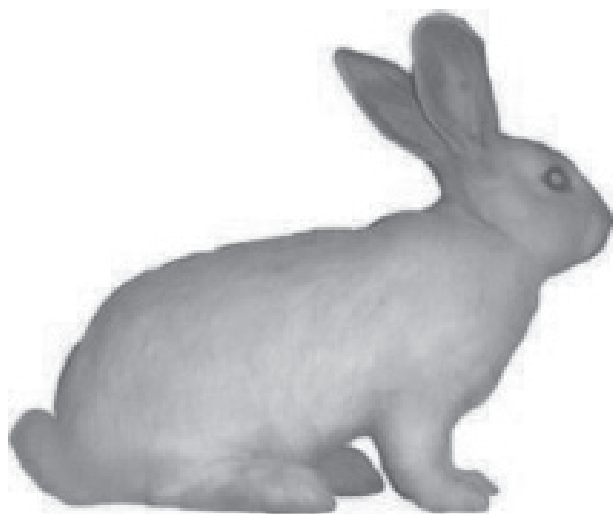
## Conclusion

According to David Nye, this explains why enthusiasm for the technological sublime has transformed into fear in the course of the twentieth century. This is also why it is often said, in relation to aforementioned sublime technologies, that we “shouldn't play God.” At the same time, twenty-first century man has been denied the choice to *not* be technological. The biotope in which we used to live has been transformed, in this (post)modern age, into a technotope. We have created technological environments and structures beyond which we cannot survive. The idea that we could return to nature and natural religion is an unworldly illusion. In fact, because of its Janus-faced powers, “living technology” itself has become the sublime god of our (post)modern age. Assessments regarding the fundamental transformation from the natural to the technological sublime may vary; however, no one can deny that technology is a no less inexhaustible god.

## Endnotes

1. The term “aesthetics” was introduced by Alexander Baumgarten in his two-volume (1750 and 1758) publication *Ästhetica* (Alexander G. Baumgarten, *Aesthetica*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1961). The term, for Baumgarten, referred to both the science of sensory knowledge, in accordance with etymology of the Greek verb  $\alpha\theta\ \nu\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$  (to perceive), and the study of the fine arts. Especially since Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) and the development of aesthetics as an independent philosophical discipline dealing with beauty and art, have become dominant.
2. Jos De Mul, *Romantic Desire in (Post)modern Art and Philosophy*, The SUNY series in postmodern culture, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999, p. 8f.
3. <http://www.nextnature.net/about/>, accessed on March 15, 2014. NextNature.net is a project of the Next Nature Institute (supported by the Mondrian Foundation, Eindhoven University of Technology and Fonds BKvB). This Institute, in which designers, artists, philosophers, and scientists collaborate, aims at exploring and understanding our changing relation with nature “by visualizing and researching the implications of the up-and-coming next nature on our everyday lives”. In the past five years I had the privilege to participate in several projects of the Institute, which inspired the present exploration of the technological sublime.

4. Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines the noun "sublime" as follows: "1: to cause to pass directly from the solid to the vapor state and condense back to solid form; 2 [French sublimer, from Latin sublimare] a (1): to elevate or exalt especially in dignity or honor (2): to render finer (as in purity or excellence) b: to convert (something inferior) into something of higher worth". Used as an adjective it refers to things that are "1a: lofty, grand, or exalted in thought, expression, or manner b: of outstanding spiritual, intellectual, or moral worth c : tending to inspire awe usually because of elevated quality (as of beauty, nobility, or grandeur) or transcendent excellence; 2a archaic: high in place, b obsolete: lofty of mien: HAUGHTY, c capitalized: SUPREME – used in a style of address d: COMPLETE, UTTER <sublime ignorance>. **synonyms** see SPLENDID" (Merriam Webster, Collegiate Dictionary, (2000), Version 2.5.).
5. However, the doubt about the correctness of the translation does not seem to be justified. Just like the Latin *sublimis* the Greek *ψov* refers to "high", "summit", "loftiness", "dignity".
6. Longinus, *On the Sublime in Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. by T.S. Dorsch, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965, p. 146.
7. John Dennis, *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose*, in *Critical Works*, Vol. II., ed. Edward Niles Hooker, Baltimore: ASIN, 1939–1943, p. 350.
8. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful: and Other Pre-revolutionary Writings*, Penguin Classics, London/New York: Penguin Books, 1998, pp. 101–102.
9. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, vol. X, *Theorie-Werkausgabe*, Frankfurt: wSuhrkamp, 1968, B74B.
10. *Ibid.*, B77.
11. *Ibid.*, B876.
12. Friedrich Schiller, *Vom Erhabenen in Sämtliche Werke*, München: Hanser, Band 5, 1962, p. 5, 502.
13. Koen Van Mensvoort, *Access Next Nature*, available from nextnature.net, accessed on March 15, 2015.
14. David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994, p. 196.
15. Jos De Mul, *The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Recombination in Digital Material: Anchoring New Media in Daily Life and Technology*, eds. by Joost Raessens, Mirko Schäfer, Marianne van den Boomen, Ann-Sophie Lehmann and Sybille Lammes, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009.
16. Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002, p. 219.
17. Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones*, New York: Grove Press, 1962.
18. cf. William Goldbloom Bloch, *The Unimaginable Mathematics of Broges' Library of Babel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
19. Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones*, New York: Grove Press, 1962, p. 115.
20. cf. N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002.
21. cf. ETC Group, *Extreme Genetic Engineering: An Introduction to Synthetic Biology*, Toronto: Action Group on Erosion, Technology, and Concentration, 2007.
22. Koen Van Mensvoort, *Access Next Nature*, available from nextnature.net, accessed on March 15, 2015.
23. Martin Heidegger, *Die Technik und die Kehre*, Pfullingen: Neske, 1962.
24. Eduardo Kac, *GFP Bunny 2000*, Available from <http://www.ekac.org/gfpbunny.html#gfpbunnyanchor>, accessed on July 13, 2000.



Eduardo Kac, *GPF Bunny*, Mixed media, 2000



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Melentie Pandilovski

## Toxicity at the Equidistance of Biotechnology and Biopolitics

The idea of *Toxicity*, in its theoretical and practical results, entrenches itself into the standard phenomenological understanding of the co-constitution of society and technology. The cultural deciphering of the toxic social terrain resonates with current socio-economic global transformations. The topic of toxicity reconstructs not only the current environmental situation, but also sociopolitical contexts by looking into modes of contemporary cultural and technological production, the extraction of minerals, toxic waste, local and international policies, community-based responses and processes of production, consumption and disposal.

We are continually subjected to processes whose full impact is hard to comprehend; the phenomenological approach allows us to reveal these processes. For the phenomenologist, technology is a condition of society. For Heidegger, technology is not just an artifact but already emerges from a prior technological attitude towards the world. He claimed that, “[w]hen we are seeking the essence of ‘tree,’ we have to become aware that that which pervades every tree, as tree, is not itself a tree that can be encountered among all other trees. ... Likewise, the essence of technology is by no means anything technological.”<sup>1</sup> Another important point made by Heidegger is the distinction between Object (*Gegenstand*) and Thing (*Dinge*). This is not merely word play but a paradigm shift in which the integrity of Aristotelian substance is broken down, as *das Dinge* has encoded in it the possibility of gathering together the contents of the universe. This position results in a profound change, as basically Aristotle’s belief that relations among objects leaves the essences of those objects unchanged can no longer be applied. The relations between Things becomes crucial; Things have different features according to where they are situated and the context in

which they are placed. Heidegger identifies Plato's articulation of *technē* as the foundation upon which contemporary technology builds. According to Heidegger, technology is the extreme danger that "threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth". Yet, on the other hand, technology also holds within it a saving power in order to recapture the essence of science; according to Heidegger, the essential unfolding of technology "harbours in itself what we least suspect, the possible arising of the saving power". This creates for us the paradoxical situation where *technē* represents the beginning and the end, an overwhelming threat to human existence as well as its salvation.<sup>2</sup>

In some respects, Heidegger's position on art resembles McLuhan's as they both believe in art's saving power. Heidegger called for the "second beginning of thinking" and the meeting of the world in historical time-space; this space can only be built by art. McLuhan claimed that it is the artist, rather than the scientist, who has the insight to perceive these relationships and foresee trends, as it is "inherent in the artist's creative inspiration... [to be] subliminally sniffing environmental change" (McLuhan [c] 237). After all, he claimed that "art at its most significant is a Distant Early warning System that can always be relied on to tell the old culture what is beginning to happen to it." "The artist," according to McLuhan, "has had the power – and courage – of the seer to read the language of the outer world and relate it to the inner world. ... It's always been the artist who perceives the alterations in man caused by a new medium, who recognizes that the future is present, and uses the work to prepare the ground for it" ([c] 237). To summarize: "[t]he artist is the person who invents the means to bridge between biological inheritance and the environments created by technological innovation" (McLuhan [b] 98).

The Heideggerian *Dinge* (Thing) contains within itself the possibility of gathering together the contents of the universe, *toxins* included. Relations between Things become crucial, acquiring different features depending on the contexts of where and how they are situated. The discourses of biotechnology are evolving, showing us that their latest theoretical and practical developments have a potential to cause a tectonic shift in our society and culture, wherein we experience the world at the intersection of the engineered and the biological. *Toxicity* appears precisely at this intersection, and its biopolitical modes must be understood. Marshall McLuhan noted that the creation of the technological world has created a neural exoskeleton<sup>3</sup>.

I maintain that this skeleton has become tainted by *Toxicity* in numerous ways, from the bioenvironmental to the info-financial.

The extended role of biopolitics today focuses on the crucial question of how biotechnology shapes life and comes to assume a central role in society. Biotechnology, through its complexity, radically reconstructs the relations between politics and nature, allowing for a reassessment of how we look at life today. Under biotechnological pressures, the regulation of life cannot continue under the premises of what had been previously taken for granted. The dualities of power and right, sovereignty and law, do not leave biopolitics for a minute. Additionally, biotechnology generates its own internal conflicts (e.g. Monsanto vs. Dupont in regard to GMO seed patenting.) We become witnesses of a process in which the state control of the biological is increasingly being ceded to biotech companies. In Michel Foucault's words: "For capitalist society it is the biological that is important before everything else; the biological, the somatic, the corporeal. The body is a biopolitical reality, medicine is a biopolitical strategy."<sup>4</sup>

Life, politics and economics intersect at such speeds in the globally connected society that a novel biopolitical model is emerging, which alter this society's operational functions. I refer here to the social and political functions of the Biotech Revolution. The technological and psychosomatic constitute the two poles in this emerging biopolitical discourse. At the centre of this discourse is the notion that *life* can now be molded as we see fit, enabled by biotechnology. Biopolitics is therefore able to control life by taking it out of the *natural domain*, reshuffling it at will and subsequently using it in a functional or structural form, thereby *freeing life* from nature. This intertwining of nature and technology makes the schematic of biopolitics increasingly complex. The question of articulating *sovereignty* no longer depends on the suppression of life; our understanding of life and death has altered. Biopower, embedded in biopolitics, now concerns itself with the mere reshuffling of biological units of data. We have moved a step closer to the fulfillment of Foucault's prophecy about the extension of biopower: "the excess of biopower appears when it becomes technologically and politically possible for man not only to manage life but also to make it proliferate, to create living matter, to build the monster, and ultimately to build viruses that cannot be controlled and that are universally destructive. This formidable extension of biopower, unlike what I was saying about atomic power, will put it beyond human sovereignty."<sup>5</sup> Thus, we have effectively banned experiments with plutonium, but we continue to be quite liberal with the experimentation, research and use of biotechnology.

In order to contemplate fully the notions of life, flesh and the body, we must now surpass the Heideggerian dichotomy between existence and life. We are witnesses and participants in the creation of the Biopolitical Apparatus in all of its paraphernalia. And when we speak about this Apparatus, we should remind ourselves of Vilém Flusser's<sup>6</sup> remark that apparatuses are based on technical and political programs that are highly ideological and always biased. There is no value-free technology<sup>7</sup>. And indeed, we can see that biopolitical conflicts are accelerating in both the real and virtual worlds among governments, NGOs and corporations over genetic-technological practices, stem cell research, bioethics and bio-patenting. Public engagement in biotechnology can be seen in the increasing interest in DNA profiling, personal genomics, bio-data gathering and, most recently, genetic social networking. One of the possible outcomes of this arrangement is the creation of a genetically based value system. Another outcome may be the development of appealing forms of neo-eugenics and the creation of new utopian communities. Biology has a long history of being politicized, but we must admit that the biotechnological changes in the past two decades are indeed profound. *Historically, all technological revolutions have resulted in an alteration of the political, social and economic spectrums of society. We find ourselves as a society facing radical changes in power relationships in the local and international domains.* This biopolitical shift registers at the economic (bio-capitalism) and cultural (bio-culture, bio-art) levels. This shift, generated by the Biotech Revolution, configures the biological as political and economic. *The biological as political* includes notions of human rights, the changing and increasingly toxified environment and bioterrorism. *The biological as economic* sees bio-capitalism as the latest stage of capital's development, but also discloses a certain negation of profit-oriented values and the necessity of growth, thereby holding an ambivalent ethical position regarding capitalist production values.

As contemporary biopolitical discourses intersect in the re-contextualization of the relations between state apparatuses, scientific protocols and cultural systems, the consequences of the Biotech Revolution become apparent in the political and economic spectrum. These relations coalesce in the construction of a global Biopolitical Apparatus, encompassing new vectors of power with regard to social, political, economic and administrative mechanisms, as well as knowledge structures which have the capacity to create, maintain or destroy contemporary society. Biotechnology thus

enables a certain neo-politicization by putting into motion control mechanisms based on a coding system, altering the dynamics between state and individual and resulting in an increasingly programmable and disciplined society. This up and coming Biotech era has the potential of inaugurating a very different constellation of political visions and social visions just as the Industrial era did. The current debate over cloning human embryos and stem cell research marks the beginning of the new biopolitics.

Félix Guattari taxonomizes the apparatuses of subjectification in three ways: as *pathways of power*, *pathways of knowledge* and *pathways of self-transformation*.<sup>8</sup> The relations between these three pathways determines how society is established and whether the Biotech Revolution will create the conditions for *new existential territories* for humanity, rather than replicate and continue present alienation systems. I am of the opinion that in order for the pathways of self-transformation to influence the pathways of knowledge and power, we will have to embrace collectively the idea of *biopolitical and biotechnological responsibility*, which will assist us in further developing the governmentality of *bio-society* according to the theoretical and practical pathways of self-transformation.

The overall implications of technology are exemplified in the everyday relations that technology establishes. The disclosure of the world through technology also is a disguise of these relations, relations that can, however, be unconcealed. In *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger noted that the essential unfolding of technology harbours within itself what is least expected, the possible rise of a saving power. Where does this saving power of technology reside? Will salvation be found in art and activism, that is, strategies of resistance?<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the Biotech Age will allow us to witness what Heidegger called “the second beginning of thinking,” the meeting of the world in historical time-space, and perhaps this space can be built only by art.

At the same time, artistic and cultural research into biotechnology has questioned established philosophical systems, ethical beliefs and cultural practices by proposing new ways of looking at life and society, as artists, critics and theorists navigate the maze of the global Biopolitical Apparatus. How art and technology interrelate, how this interrelation changes in the cultural, sociopolitical and ecological landscape and how biotechnology infiltrates into everyday life are important research areas. Artistic responses have included examining biopolitical conflicts in the real and virtual worlds; pollution; corporeality and somatic biopolitics; energy control,

fuel material and alternative energy sources; the inheritance and program-mability of life; the causes and consequences of environmental changes; environmental sustainability; micro and macro-ecologies; life, empathy and questions of ownership; GM products; death and appearance; and the ethical implications of working with biological media in an art context.

Practical strategies of resistance such as these need to address structures of knowledge in order to achieve broader ethical and philosophical concerns concerning biotechnology; they must also look into what Heidegger would have called the Biotechnological *Gestell* (Enframing) of everyday life and address the changes that Toxicity causes in the cultural, sociopolitical and ecological landscape. Of course, those concerned with Toxicity must be aware that this Enframing has infiltrated deeply into the system, aided by lobby groups mediating between the biotech cartels and various governments. Any potential resistance must engage in a robust imposition into mass media channels and make periodic feedback analysis to assess its progress. Phenomenology's meta-social function is necessary for this. In particular, an analysis of the *natural attitude* must be implemented. The phenomenological investigation of the biotechnological must look into the elements of reflexive interplay between the biotech programmers' standards (content development) and the lifeworlds of actual people – the interplay in which new identities are forged. After all, Heidegger tells us that Enframing is *destining* from which the *essence of all history is determined*. Enframing is the essence of modern technology because, for Heidegger, technology is rooted in *tēchne*: it is a means for sourcing true forms and ideas that exist prior to their phenomenal appearance. Heidegger's concept of Enframing can be deciphered today by using Eugene Thacker's triumvirate of *encoding*, *recoding* and *decoding*, as today the dissemination of biological data through information networks either on demand or out of necessity creates a new situation in which the biological is seen as a digitally packaged commodity.<sup>10</sup>

In conclusion, in order to track the changes brought about by the Biotech Revolution, we must utilize both phenomenology and biopolitics. Phenomenologically speaking, the social order and reality of interactions between institutions and individuals are constructions. Society is a fragile construction. It is consciousness that determines the actions of all entities. There is no alternative but creativity in this process, and therefore human beings must act as creative agents in the construction of their social worlds. It is necessary to assert meaning in a process, which would otherwise seem chaotic.

As far as biopolitics is concerned, the biotechnological changes that our civilization is witnessing are profound, and as all technological revolutions throughout history have resulted in significant changes in the political, social and economic levels of society, so we find ourselves collectively facing radical alterations in local and international power relations. Thus, we are in a different situation than the one predicted by Foucault, as biopolitics today begins to realize that biotechnology potentially allows for a further emancipation of the human being in terms of its self-understanding, its own genetic make-up, all of its flaws and virtues. The constant advances in biotechnology, and we can note the Human Genome Project as a sign of this advancement, signify a shift in the balance of power in favour of a society that can select and design desirable life-forms in advance.

Thacker reminds us that biotechnology takes place on a global level, be it in terms of exchanging biological information, controlling epidemics, deterring biological attacks or standardizing intellectual property laws. Importantly, the Biopolitical Apparatus suggests novel blueprints of power allocation in the domain of the governance over life. Thus, any interpretation of biopolitics, in light of these new developments, must take into account how biopolitical discourses have changed in terms of *the biological as political* and the *biological as economic*. This necessitates the articulation of *Biotechnological Responsibility* and the development of *Modes of Governmentality for Bio-Society*. This future bio-society could take upon itself a variety of roles including the role of *hegemon*, and might develop new modes for *governance*, *economic domination* and *the repositioning of our relationship towards nature*. However, alongside the potentially negative consequences of the Biopolitical Apparatus, we must also consider a more humane role, indicated by Giorgio Agamben in his *What is an Apparatus?*,<sup>11</sup> wherein we learn that at the heart of friendship, philosophy and politics lies the same experience: the shared sensation of being.

## Endnotes

1. What Heidegger means by this point is that the isolation of a particular “understanding of being” makes technology possible.
2. Heidegger defined the essence of modern technology as *Gestell* (Enframing). According to Heidegger, enframing refers to the urging of humans to reveal *alētheia* (truth) as ever present. Enframing is the essence of modern technology, because modern technology

- is rooted in *technē*: it is a means for sourcing true forms and ideas that exist prior to the figures we perceive. Thus, for Heidegger, enframing is “destining,” from which “the essence of all history ... is determined” (24).
3. Marshall McLuhan claims that his main theme is the extension of the nervous system in the electric age, and thus, the complete break with five thousand years of mechanical technology. *Letter to Robert Fulford* (1964), *Letters of Marshall McLuhan* (1987), p. 300. The theme of extending all parts of our bodies and senses by technology as we are haunted by the need for an outer consensus of technology and experience that would raise our communal lives to the level of a world-wide consensus is also recurrent in Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (first published in 1964).
  4. Michel Foucault 1994a: pp. 209–210.
  5. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 254.
  6. It is worth noting that Vilém Flusser is a phenomenologist, concentrating on the connection between human beings and technology, as well as the realm of mental processes. Flusser was very much concerned with the ways our minds function and how they have functioned throughout history. He based much on his belief that the discovery of writing has moulded our brains’ operations in a certain way of linear thinking. What I find most intriguing about Flusser is that his writings essentially theorize on the epochal shift that humanity is undergoing in the form of a pendulum swing – from what he termed “linear thinking” (based on writing) toward a new form of multidimensional, visual thinking embodied in photography and digital culture.
  7. Villem Flusser, *Writings*, ed. Andreas Ströhl, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, [http://monoskop.org/images/a/a7/Flusser\\_Vilem\\_Writings.pdf](http://monoskop.org/images/a/a7/Flusser_Vilem_Writings.pdf), accessed on March 16, 2014.
  8. Felix Guattari, “Schizoanalytic Cartographies Continuum,” 2013 (English translation).
  9. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977, pp. 3–35.
  10. Eugene Thacker, *The Global Genome – Bio-technology, Politics, and Culture*, Massachusetts: MIT Press/Leonardo Books, 2006.
  11. Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos’è un dispositivo?* (2006), trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella in *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays* (2009).



# Cyberaesthetics – The Phenomena of Electronic Art

(Sidey Myoo)



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Sidey Myoo

## The Aesthetics of Electronic Worlds

The idea of immateriality was critical to defining cyberspace as an imaginary place. Because it has been considered immaterial, it would be free from the constraints of the physical world. Therefore, it would be possible to create new places and new identities. It would be feasible to lose one's material body and still travel around the world as a body of information.

Adriana de Souza e Silva, *The Invisible Imaginary: Museum*

Spaces, Hybrid Reality and Nanotechnology

### 1. Value as ontological difference: the physical vs. the electronic world

My aim is to draw attention to the values, principally aesthetic, which arise from the ontological difference between the physical and the electronic. This ontological difference can, in itself, be said to have value since it lays the foundation for creating different or even new values, especially in the electronic sphere. First of all, therefore, a brief explanation of this ontological difference and how it affects value is necessary.

A distinction should be made between phenomena occurring in the physical world, usually referred to as 'real', and those occurring in the electronic sphere, which I refer to as electronic reality, and which can also be regarded as real. Any conscious and real human activity (as opposed to simulation, for example) in the form of an intentional act performed in electronic reality – in this case, the creation of a person or an electronic world – carries with it the same obligations as activity in the physical world. This real human engagement can, for example, comprise uploading specific content to create one's own image or space. This must be understood in terms of the ontology of the Web since such phenomena involve the person to an ever greater degree; they expand to a multiplicity of forms, which become increasingly attractive and meaningful, acquiring an aesthetic dimension. One can understand electronic reality in terms of the

aesthetic values connected with beauty, fantasy, imagination, strangeness, and, frequently, 'otherness' in relation to forms found in the physical world.

I therefore posit that online phenomena should be seen not as unreal, but as electronic forms of existence, real states of being created in the electronic world, as a human world transformed, and, finally, as the person him/herself.

## 2. The creative process in electronic reality

What I mean by the aesthetics of electronic reality principally refers to electronic worlds created using 3D graphics together with two processes occurring within them: the creation of a self and the creation of a world. In addition, a number of other components of electronic reality unconnected with electronic worlds created using 3D graphics, such as the aesthetic dimension of social media sites and the visual features of a personal websites, will also be analyzed to some extent.

The basis for these two processes is not only philosophical but also psychological and cultural. The psychological aspect derives from the need to create one's own image and a place on the Web which can be shared with others, but also an environment that provides private, personal space. The cultural basis is connected with the fact that today an electronic presence is a necessity, which is expressed in the colloquial maxim: *If you're not on Google, you don't exist*. The whole point of creation and self-creation is to show oneself as a different, more interesting person in a way that would normally be impossible in the physical world. The potential of the electronic environment is released by the individual's desire for creative engagement, a desire to change or expand oneself and to create a small part of the electronic world.

The ability of developing technologies to satisfy human needs makes it a reasonable supposition that we are in the early stages of a process that will lead to the creation of electronic space as an alternative sphere of existence suffused with human presence. Whether by choice or necessity, people are increasingly communicating with each other by means of an avatar in a graphic 3D environment or a user profile on a social media site. The origins of electronic reality are intimately bound up with technology, and it is also technology that offers the individual new opportunities in electronic reality: the possibility of assuming different forms and modes of existence.

For the past three decades, I have been fascinated with the construction of identity and how it affects culture: the symbiotic relationship between the real and the virtual, and how identity reacts and shifts when processed through manipulated time.<sup>1</sup>

I wish to focus on such phenomena as the experience of the new, which allows one to observe changes both in one's own identity and in the electronic environment around oneself. It can be seen as a sort of game that one plays, principally with oneself, in which one draws out and presents to others certain meaningful content which lies within oneself but remains concealed in the physical world. An example of this is Facebook, where personal stories occasionally appear presenting a picture somewhat at variance with what is known about an individual in the physical world. Some profiles on Facebook reflect how a person would like to see themselves and their relationships with others, and how they would like to be perceived, both in terms of physical appearance and personal qualities. Despite the plethora of websites where such phenomena arise, it is my view that the most appropriate environment for creation and self-creation is an electronic 3D world such as Second Life, where I have been active since 2007.

### 3. The person as avatar: who would you like to be here?

Those entering an electronic 3D world normally do so in the form of an avatar, capable of constant transformation. The creation of an avatar involves self-creation, which in turn might prompt the asking of certain questions as one observes this new representation of oneself and the relationships formed by means of it. This is a new kind of experience, a place in which you can choose your own identity.

Self-creation can release the desire for physicalization: the creation of an avatar as the fulfillment of how one would ideally wish to look according to one's own aesthetic canon. This might involve gender-switching, which, while fundamentally a question of physical appearance, may also reveal a need for embodiment in a different gender as part of the communicative process. Another possibility offered by self-creation is to take on a fantasy form, either as a communicative statement or simply for fun. Below are just a few examples of forms used by acquaintances and students at Academia Electronica-Institute of Philosophy UJ, in Second Life.

Aspects such as appearance, an interest in alternative forms of communication, and the desire for various kinds of participation may result in

fairly deep engagement in the electronic world because they contain values which can become so important that one makes the choice to function in an electronic community and an electronic world. If this form of being brings satisfaction, we will want to choose it and be continually involved in it, and it will constantly occupy our thoughts.

One might also compare oneself in both realities and transfer experiences from the electronic to the physical world: for example, outward appearance in the electronic world can have a positive effect on a person in the physical world. This is an aesthetic-social approach to oneself; changing one's appearance in the form of an avatar can change the attitude of others. The transformation of a person's appearance in the electronic world is a very particular phenomenon in that once a person undergoes this experience, they can expect an immediate evaluation from the online community, which may lead to further modifications. This process of change may lead to constant experimentation with one's appearance based on the evaluation of others as well as one's own feelings. The electronic world makes it possible for changes to be instant, momentary or experimental, but they can also initiate other processes which, where possible, extend to the physical world. In several cases, I have observed how the kind of transformation a person undergoes as a result of their involvement in Second Life can also cause a transformation of their "biological avatar" – usually for the better.

There you discover the trendy inhabitants (actors, singers, models, producers) who look like some new race, a result of successful mutation: unbelievably beautiful skin and faces; fixed smiles; and bodies whose perfect shapes surely can't be the result of human evolution.<sup>2</sup>

Now would be an opportune moment to explain what we mean by a person's aesthetic dimension: how they manage their appearance through the often profound creation of an avatar. Even if their self-creation in the electronic world initially amounts to little more than a game, it is quite possible that a person will begin to derive pleasure from showing others their electronic form, joining a community of other electronic figures, being perceived in this way over a period of time, and forming relationships. They could also become so bonded to and identified with their avatar that losing it could impair their perception of reality as generally understood.

The spectral body in the virtual realm is kinesthetically linked as well to the felt body. That is why a virtual persona can be violated and why there is a relation between cyberdeath and psychic annihilation.<sup>3</sup>

Another aspect is the flow of time. One can form a certain attachment to the electronic world because of the possibilities it offers to manipulate one's appearance, for example, to look younger than one's years. The usual practice in the electronic world is not to discuss such matters as who you are or where you come from in the physical world: *life in electronic reality is lived without reference to the physical world*. I am reminded of the case of a Californian man of advanced years who in Second Life was a young man in his early twenties. There he owned a house, sold objects he made himself, and had a girlfriend. In our conversations he often remarked that thanks to his electronic manifestation and the ideal space he had created for himself, life had become so much better. His experiences took place among friends in an atmosphere of love; life there was good, at times even better than in the physical world. Age had ceased to have any meaning since the convention in Second Life is that you are your avatar. For this man, time in the electronic world had, in effect, stopped, or even been reversed; in the physical world, however, biological processes were taking their course. One day, he appeared to have logged into Second Life, but it turned out to be his sister. He had passed away the previous night, having given her his password so that she could inform us in the event of his death. The time he had spent as an avatar in his ideal world had made him very happy in his final years – and isn't that what matters?

#### 4. The immaterial world – where would you like to spend your time?

The ontological difference between the electronic and physical world mentioned earlier means that one can experience pleasure spending time in one's favorite place in the electronic world. What makes graphic 3D creation different from, say, creating a personal website or a profile on a social media site is the possibility of creating (within technological limits) a complete environment, a world to live in.

In this sense, a WWW website is two-dimensional. Even if it allows some scope for creativity through interactivity, one could not create an environment but merely something like a motif: a photograph, a clip of music, some graphics or a piece of text. This type of expression generally

results from the user's interest in certain content, making it a kind of *passive exposure*, but not a place, somewhere where one can be constantly logged in. Moreover, this kind of information does not require the participation of the person themselves; it is, rather, an objectified representation of the person.

A social media site is more appropriate for daily, extended participation (sometimes lasting several hours), enabling the user to upload their own content, but it is still not a place, merely an interactive profile; not an all-encompassing environment, but intriguing nonetheless for its variability and potential for acquiring a massive contact base. One might wish to follow other users, view pages or be continuously active oneself, reporting one's experiences in the physical world or imaginatively describing how life could be. Although social media sites can be very enticing with a high degree of immersion, they are mainly about communication, regardless of the content. I call this kind of participation *active exposure*, in which one is enveloped by a plethora of information in various forms.

The situation changes entirely with an avatar, which, through its appearance, behavior and speech, represents a person in their interactions with others and with the electronic world. Here one operates in a complete world, encounters personal places and communicates with one's intimates. Having entered it, one moves and immerses oneself in the created world of electronic space. This is *engaged participation*, which is no longer about uploading content, but being a person; it is about total online involvement with one's own created persona and the environment in which it exists. *Engaged participation* is not about receiving information on the surface of the screen, but spending time in electronic space, to which the screen is the gateway.

Finally, by "user-created," we mean that everything within Second Life is given form and substance by its Residents. And this is where the SL avatar is unique, for in most online worlds, reality is part and parcel a conception of the company that created it.<sup>4</sup>

The most important element in a 3D electronic world is the avatar/person. The space here is predominantly personal space, which, in the absence of its owner (the avatar) is empty. Here the focus is on the person themselves, not just information about the person or merely being in a personal or shared place, often with no specific end.

It should be added that the creative process in a 3D environment can give rise to new values that do not exist in the physical world, something I



have witnessed several times in different places when wandering through Second Life. This is particularly true of places set up as works of art, which one can stroll through. I have in mind a place in Second Life called *Immersiva*, created by Bryn Oh.<sup>5</sup> It is an island in Second Life, a place created as one enormous work of electronic art. This exquisitely created space, in which one can be teleported to different surroundings in different climates, makes it possible to experience this work of electronic art in all its variety, in terms of structure, traditional concepts of art appreciation (for example, atmospheric or romantic visual effect), or the use of graphic animation and color. It is also of significance that the forms emerging from electronic matter could not exist in the physical world.

It should also be noted that these items created in the electronic world are generally of considerable value, particularly to their creators; I am not referring to financial value, but the value derived from creating something oneself and the feeling of satisfaction and pride this engenders. Anyone possessing property such as a garden, building or animal (bot) will want to show it to others. I was once involved in a situation in Second Life concerning the removal of an area of land which contained items created by a number of people. These items were of such value to them that they petitioned the Second Life administrators to temporarily reinstate the land to allow them to recover their creations, which the administrators agreed to.

## 5. The interface as the gateway to another world – do you like your computer?

It always amazes me that people transfer so much of their activity to the Internet, even in matters important to their professional and personal lives. Why do we spend so many hours clicking a mouse? My view is that regardless of the possibilities that the Internet offers, there is a need for new experiences and some relief from the monotony of life, and the Internet offers solutions not previously available. In the physical world, the effort most people put into their everyday activities is disproportionately large compared with time spent on relaxation, entertainment and their emotional lives. Occupation and culture inform the logistics of life to such an extent that the default premise is to regard any activity outside work or in some way beyond the norm as being difficult to comprehend or make part of our lives; life becomes predictable, at times automatic, and difficult to change, perhaps because we do not know what or how to change. At this point, the

Internet becomes a part of our lives, and with it an interest in other people and places. Searching and self-expression become pleasurable, not least for their sheer novelty; add to this the ease of access to places created in electronic reality and the fact that no special effort is required, merely the straightforward use of a computer. Moreover, what happens on the Web usually fulfills a genuine need, and emotions expressed and encountered there can be very real.

Returning to the ontological difference between electronic and physical reality, I would argue that it releases powers of creation and self-creation in the individual. Mediation into the electronic world is not like taking one's seat in an auditorium to watch a performance or a film, but, rather, having the opportunity to exist in electronic space, and, if one so desires, in a way different from in the physical world. I have frequently observed expressive avatars in Second Life, looked at profiles on Facebook or taken part in forums for PC gamers. I have no doubt that in most cases the content involved was different from what these people experienced in the physical world; in this way, they were creating part of their everyday life.

Similarly, the user of a virtual world tries to click on whatever is in front of him; if the objects do not respond, he is disappointed. In the virtual universe, Descartes' maxim can be rewritten as follows: "I can be clicked on, therefore I exist".<sup>6</sup>

Never before have people been able to enrich their lives in the way modern technology allows. It could even be said that the possibilities of creation and self-creation available today are a kind of therapy to counteract the flow of time, enabling changes which can bring new opportunities. What matters is not that in creating a self and a place in the electronic world we function on the same principles as in the physical world, but that we see the experience as real and having value. It is a way of comparing and creating values and making changes and re-evaluations through which we understand the otherness and multifarious forms of the electronic world.

If new technologies continue to offer increased scope for creation and self-creation in the electronic world, our online activity may become more significant to us than what we do in the physical world; for some, perhaps, it already has.

## Endnotes

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Alice in Wonderland



Robot



Dragon



Architecture in Second Life (Academia Electronica-  
Institute of Philosophy UJ)

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Piotr Zawojski

## The Question Concerning Cyberaesthetics. One World – Hybrid Reality\*

Referring to Sidey Myoo's motto – "There is one human and there are two worlds"<sup>1</sup> – I would like to suggest a different perception of hybrid reality in which our doubled or multiplied "self" in a natural way experiences "multiple realities".

Cyberaesthetics is not only an aesthetic phenomenon with the prefix: "cyber". Separating a phenomenon of cyberculture sphere from phenomena of new media sphere is a mistake. Therefore I try to think about cyberculture and cyberaesthetics in terms of their mutual relations with the world of new media. This is integrative and not oppositional thinking. Cyberaesthetics is an attempt at describing the way in which new media shape and co-create cyberculture. And the latter is expressed in new media art (cyberart). Cyberart still needs to be defined. Or, perhaps, if not defined, it needs to be constantly re-defined – and this should set the route to prolegomena which are the foundation for cyberaesthetics. Only dialogue may enable this process. This is why we participate in the dialogue – or precisely – polylogue panel. Taking into account references to the "philosophy of dialogue" is crucial. Dialogue on the web is the basis for the philosophy of dialogue, of "interfaceology", which is an interpretation of "interfacing".

Web aesthetics (and cyberaesthetics) must be an aesthetics of a multiplied dialogue in cyberspace. Of course, the web should be understood in the whole complex dimension in which this notion can be understood. From the technological, through the human (anthropological) perspective, to the cultural and philosophical aspect of networking. Web aesthetics and

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aesthetics on the web, the web as a metaphor, but also as a real structure, the web as a challenge and as a space to be managed – these are the issues which require attention.

Being netizens – who extensively colonize (and are colonized by) the hybrid, yet, at the same time, integral doubled (or rather multidimensional) reality – we are responsible for developing a formal language to describe art in the era of bio-techno-logical systems. So, let's create a "web aesthetics" as a contemporary version of aesthetics being the first domain of knowledge providing insight into our ontological and epistemological entanglements in the world of web practices.

## Art in cyberspace

What is the place of art in cyberspace and cyberculture? Writing about "the work of art in the age of digital reproduction"<sup>2</sup> Charles Alexander Moffat states that works of art will not be experienced in galleries because instead spectators will admire artists' performance – both: the ancient and the contemporary ones – in cybergalleries. There is no convincing reason for such thinking, yet, on the other hand, there is no doubt that cyberspace has become a place where a huge number of images (or rather their digital reproductions) is collected, and for many spectators it is the only possible way to experience classical paintings, sculptures, photographs and also video films, documentations of installations, performances or concerts.

Placing Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* on the web by the HAL9000 company<sup>3</sup> might assume the proportions of a symbol. The photograph of the fresco located in the church of Santa Maria della Grazie in Milano was taken with the resolution of 16 billion pixels and with the help of contemporary most advanced photographic equipment by Nikon and the cutting edge optics relying on the technique of panoramic photography. In order to achieve an excellent quality of the digital image, 1677 photographs were taken and subsequently turned into one digitalized image. Spectators may enlarge the image on their computer screens by using the zoom feature – which means that they are able to see even the tiniest elements of the fresco, something they would have never been able to see standing in front of the work in the della Grazie church.

It would be absurd to claim that watching da Vinci's masterpiece in cyberspace is the same thing as watching the original. However, the digital replica of *The Last Supper* may be an ideal addendum and extension of the

physical existence of the work of art. This slightly anecdotic event can be a perfect introduction to the reflexions upon the very complex stories of traditional art facing new situations resulting from digital breakthrough in culture, but it can also encourage various (re)interpretations of the state of the art in the age of digital media.

As a result of cultural transformations a number of new forms of electronic art and cyberart have been created, simultaneously, digital tools have enabled the earlier unknown, because technologically impossible, methods of representation, promotion, distribution and they have given the opportunity to develop completely new research methods, for example, for the analysis of the structure of images. The digital copy of *The Last Supper* will not substitute the original, although it presents researchers and common spectators with totally new possibilities of monitor perception. Thus, new perspectives of viewing the history of the traditional (let's say, pre-digital) art with the use of "digital glasses" have emerged and they are different from the ones we have known so far.

### (New) Media art in cyberculture

Media art seems to be one of the key issues of cyberculture – both in terms of new technocultural tendencies being manifested in society defined by using new computer technologies (not only, though) and in terms of playing a special role in the process of (self)defining of a new cultural paradigm. Cyberculture finds art to be a perfect medium in which fundamental characteristics of culture of the age of information and communication are revealed.

It has been brought to our attention by Ryszard W. Kluszczyński:

If information society find their expression in cyberculture, then multimedia art is its most perfect articulation. Digital – interactive, web, global, immersed in the space of socio-cultural practices – art ideally represents, expresses and also analyses the nature of cyberculture, being both – constructive and critical towards it. It serves as a laboratory where research experiments are carried out not only on new technologies but also – and perhaps most of all – on new social relations created or supported by the technologies.<sup>4</sup>

Before we begin to discuss digital aesthetics, we should probably move back to the most basic questions: what digital art is and how it differs from



analogue art, because if we acknowledge that the digital does exist, then, obviously, the analogue paradigm should be, in a dialectical way, placed at the opposite pole.

It is worth remembering that the very “digital art enables analogue processes occurring in nature being represented digitally.”<sup>5</sup> The words come from Peter Weibel’s manifesto published as a supplement to the catalogue of Ars Electronica Festival in 1984 – as the author himself claims the term “digital art”<sup>6</sup> was used in the text for the first time. The very term is highly ambiguous, all the more that it has undergone a specific form of evolution: from the commonly used at the turn of the 60s and 70s term computer art, through multimedia, hypermedia art, to digital art and cyberart.

At the same time, the term new media art has been quite commonly used and the term digital media art – less frequently. Christiane Paul, taking into account those terminological ambiguities, writes: “The notion of “digital art” is used to such diverse objects and artistic practices that it is impossible to define it by a homogenous set of aesthetic terms.”<sup>7</sup> A little further Paul explains the reasons for such definitional problems: “Defining and categorizations might be helpful in identifying basic attributes of a given medium. Yet, at the same time, they pose a threat of constructing pre-definitional limitations in explaining and understanding of works of art, especially when they are constantly developed as it is in the case of digital art.”<sup>8</sup>

## Digitalisation

One more aspect emerging from the discussions on digital media art should be added to the above doubts – a fundamental issue of the basic distinction between the art which uses digital technology as a specific tool for creating traditional (analogue) artistic objects such as photography, sculpture or music, and the art which uses digital technology as an immanent feature of a medium, that is the art which is created, stored and presented in a digital format. And, moreover, which uses possibilities of interaction, co-participation and co-creation.

I ask myself the next question: about the role of an aesthetician in defining and recognizing digital art – ergo, while giving consideration to the object of my reflections which is still *in statu nascendi*. I try, simultaneously, to take into account the specificity of the aesthetic reflection whose subjects are the activities and objects realized by means of digital technologies. The

state of being formed has a double meaning here: firstly - an “object” of digital art is in the state of permanent formation, it never really undergoes “coagulation”, and secondly – broadly defined digital art is in the process of being born, constituted, in the process of searching its own territory – as it would be a simplification to locate it solely in cyberspace.

Contrary to appearances, the subject of digital aesthetics within the cybercultural discourse is not so obvious. I use the phrase “contrary to appearances” because one may say that the situation is very clear in this case: everything that has a binary digital record as its ontological basis that was positively verified by an aesthetician or a theoretician – as including artistic and aesthetic values – is digital art. However, it seems that the obviousness of such a statement is an undue and highly unjustified simplification.

Digital media art is an art which makes an interface a basic category not only in the sense of a “medium” enabling contact between the user and (most often) the virtual work of art, yet also one of the fundamental categories of a new, media oriented aesthetics. The case of database which has become one of the most important issues of media aesthetics is similar. An ideal proof of the significant role of a database as a research problem can be found in a joint publication (edited by Victoria Vesna) which, in a sense, proclaims a new scientific discipline – “database aesthetics.”<sup>9</sup>

Besides, it has its continuation on the web where one may find additional publications and, most of all, various artistic (although not only) projects using databases as a fundamental constitutive element and, at the same time, exploring the issues of the need to constantly develop methods of selection and material organization in the age of information flood of data.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, it is the Internet which is a special sphere and medium predestined to use database strategies. As Victoria Vesna, an artist and theoretician, and an editor of the above mentioned publication, writes: “Artists using Internet as a medium are particularly interested in creating new kind of aesthetics which encompasses not only aspects of visual representation, but also invisible aspects of organization, searching for information and navigating them.”<sup>11</sup>

## Aesthetic computing

An important subdiscipline of aesthetic studies has emerged recently. It is treated as a kind of centre of various trends and explorations within digital media aesthetics. It is “aesthetic computing”. Although it may

seem that “aesthetic computing” is a phenomenon strictly connected with the digital breakthrough and with the emergence of the world wide web which redefined the whole range of phenomena resulting from the expansion of technoculture based on the domination of a metamedium – the computer – one has to be aware of the fact that those processes began in the late 60s.

Since 2002 workshops devoted to the aesthetic computing problematics initiated by Paul Fishwick, Christa Sommerer and Roger Malina have been organized in German Dagstuhl (near Wadern in Germany). Dagstuhl is an academic institution where Leibniz Center for Informatics is located. Early computer art, while studying the possibilities of hardware, software and cybernetics, brought about the transgression of boundaries between cognitive and material aesthetics. The participants of the above mentioned meeting and later research and publishing defined aesthetic computing in a brief manifesto. They referred to artistic practice and theoretical concepts deriving from the area of new media art research. Generally speaking, they emphasized the question of “applying theory and artistic practice to aesthetic computing.”<sup>12</sup>

Writing the preface to the joint publication on the issues, which was the outcome of the above described initiative, Paul Fishwick tries to outline a program for the future in the form of three fundamental questions faced by aesthetics attempting to apply traditional categories and new aesthetic notions to digital art.

1. Firstly, a question of expanding traditional definitions of aesthetics to include the context of issues connected with digitality.
2. Secondly, the question of the role of values, subjectivity and emotions in mathematics and computer science as the elements which enable sustaining the balance between the form and function – needs to be addressed.
3. Thirdly, we need to answer the question on how effective social structures – where artists, designers, mathematicians and computer scientists could co-work directly or by means of web – can be created.<sup>13</sup>

Paul Fishwick has been working on methodological and theoretical basis of an aesthetically oriented research on phenomena included in the sphere of art as the result of using computer technologies, but also of activities transgressing art which, however, can be analysed from the perspective of “broadened aesthetics”.

Programming is the example of such an activity. Using various programming languages programmers apply their own “handwriting” while creating algorithmic structures which have aesthetic potential themselves. Simultaneously, the aesthetic dimension of programming is revealed at the level of the effects of specific procedures application and it can be easily observed, for example, when we watch two- or three-dimensional data visualizations. Moreover, instead of programming art we should frequently refer to art of programs whose visual architecture may enchant us with their beauty. And I am not talking only about fractals, although evoking them in such a context should be obvious.

Thus aesthetic computing seems to be the area of inter- and transdisciplinary confluence of different research procedures, disciplines, particular issues and attempts at a global perception of cyberart functioning in cyberculture. To be more specific, to globally perceive a certain type of cyberart which is based, in the creative process, on algorithmic patterns; Cyberart uses the achievements of programming languages applies mathematical and computer procedures as systems of tools facilitating creation, or conditioning it. Also as tools which constitute basic equipment of artists who cooperate in different areas with representatives of numerous scientific, computer and cognitive disciplines.

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Antoni Porczak

## Art between Cockpit and the Passenger. Breaking of the Gutenberg Era Customs

The experience of art (mainly owing to new technologies) undergoes transformation from pro-scenic contemplation of untouchable works for recipients and created by artists to interactive artefacts, transformed *ad hoc* by the perceiving entity during the *operational perception*. The media interactivity is not an invention of artists, but it has become the experience of the everyday life of the human being in the media terms. I intend to show the technical aspect of the changing perception owing to the use of gadgets and technical devices in day-to-day life and social consequences of the use of interactive environment on the basis of the experience of art. The *cave* type interactive installation, which is characteristic of the arts, and the cockpit of the commonly used technical device, which is a modern car, will be mainly compared in this context. What changes in the perception owing to the operations of the entity who uses technical devices and communication systems as: GPS, radio, telephone in the hybrid (real and media) space, understood and practiced as common environment? The driver and the passenger (the inter-actor and the viewer) are not the only two ways of travelling, but also participation in culture. The passenger of culture consumes ready artefacts created by others as products in the construction of which he/she does not participate, but the inter-actor (the driver) acts just the opposite way, he/she transforms other works into his/her own ones, and navigates, enters into a dialogue with technical devices, sometimes he/she creates new sets of stimuli. The difference between *the conceptual and the contemplative* perception and *the operational* perception, existing in the arts, is also the difference in the ways of participation in culture, and creating different models of understanding of the human. For centuries, mankind has deemed imitation

and admiration for other products or gestures as necessary features of the development of the species.

In the beginning there was not the Word, in the beginning of the way of the development of the *Homo sapiens* there was the action, at first the individual one, and then the collective one, which was directed at the common objective, as it required interpersonal collaboration. Only then, the communication acceleration, leading to the emergence of the sound language in small groups, and then the tribal one, and with the course of time to forms of writing, at first the pictorial writing, and then the one based on letters, did occur. The record / registration of reality/ of the picture is a very late invention which has not been properly mastered by societies, and which is, to a great extent, inhibited by Gutenberg's invention of printing, which builds the conviction that verbal and/or writing communication is the exclusive and the most important and scientifically approved. The written language, which is taught as early as in the kindergarten, dominates the brain areas, responsible for other media and ways of communication, but which is less efficient in describing modern reality than the element which can transfer the image and the sound within a second in the complex time and space conditions, while *the written language* needs dozens of pages of the text. Its linearity complicates the actual order of events, which take place in a specific time and space, and reading of which with comprehension exceeds the possibility of focusing attention and coordinating the described components. You can see this by comparing a manual of a technical device, accessible only in the written language, and an audio-visual presentation. The lack of competence to understand technical images by modern people, who are accustomed to the mono-culture of the text, induces stress in the *writing-reading* users, who speak about the flood of images, /which they are unable to *read*, as this skill is not taught at school, not to mention the transformation skills/, but they cannot see the flood of words, the oceans of verbosity, the waste paper in libraries and meanings detached from signs. In science only the text matters, as universities teach writing, and not imaging, doing research, inventing. So, what you cannot describe verbally, does not matter in science, only printing sheets, publications, quotations are important. All that is based on the thinking in accordance with the Gutenberg culture.

The reality has been reduced to words, but images and sounds which have not been verbally described in science are not recognised, although they play at least the same role in our civilisation. The multimedia com-

munication is understood as a subordinate appendix to the dominating word, though the word itself is deficient in describing the reality, slow and incomprehensible at the times of multi-media and contextually placed communication meanings. You may be consoled by the communication revolution arising from the bottom-up, as everyday and common technical devices accumulate the experience to use the multi-media tools. Modern communication technologies may break the Gutenberg era customs, which may be seen in new generations of people *communicating in another way*. There is a difference between the verbal description and imaging which is in parallel to the concepts of *to know* and *can do something*. Most researchers have extensive knowledge, but cannot use the image and sound media. So, there is not only university based aesthetics, dealing only with words, quotations and mixes of historical texts, and separated from current artistic practice and often from empirical studies, but also the users' aesthetics, characteristic of new multimedia technologies, affecting the recipient's all senses, and changing his/her perception in general, not only the perception of artworks. The content and the cognitive structures of both of those experiences are much more different than the technological art whose artworks are intangible and are created and made present by the mediation of machines affecting *seeing and/or hearing*. Technical devices which are used in day-to-day practice seem to have greater influence on human perception than philosophical arguments. In a sense, it was always the same. Research activity /in particular in humanities/ is a reflection of the ability of the human mind to extremely complicate the descriptions of its relations with its external environment.

The artwork (artefact) needs social recognition which is necessary for changing it in the work of art in the process of perception. Today, we mainly value it according to the competencies of the perceiving entity, his/her experience and imagination, which are just formed by the means of technical mediation. The range of widespread *operating* experiences which are acquired by people using technical mobile devices, their interfaces and applications, is immense. Also, you cannot omit their consequences in artistic practice and the perception of art. A good example of this multi-sensory technological environment may be the cockpit of the modern car which is a place of forming and developing basic skills and competencies of the *operating perception* of the users. Those experiences which are transferred into the area of the arts /in terms of both creation and perception of artefacts/ change them in accordance with the new paradigm of the media



age. Both direct experience and its mediation are not so important for the human brain, because they are new links and new resources /in computer technology terms/. The artificial *natural environment* of the human has become a widely practised way of his/her existence in the world. It also seems to teach *automatically* to coordinate the body action and technical devices. The hybrid /i.e. real and media/ world is experienced as more comfortable environment than its natural equivalent. Being and action have become more and more mediated, tactile and telematic. From this point of view, previous art is recognised as an art form of high culture which is pro-scenic in its dispositives, and it is most frequently manifested as the antithesis of the life environment in the technical area. Contemplation and the festive nature as the old perceptual context of art and specific topography of its appearance undergo atrophy and they become the phenomena of the past under the pressure of new technical means of expression, communication and perception.

## Interactive Installation and Cockpit

In art perception the interactive installation is not only an aesthetic experience of the appearance of the artefact, but mainly a cognitive action which is analogous to the role of the cockpit of the modern car in everyday life. The interactive installation is the non-proscenic artefact, in which mainly *operating actions* of the interactor matter, so, it is a close analogy to the *cockpit of the day-to-day life*. The driver and the passenger in the front seat of the car occupy seemingly equivalent places, but they are technically armed in a different way and adopted functionally to the different behaviours of their users. The driver of a car (whose counterpart in the arts is the interactor) while driving receives a variety of stimuli (coming from various sources), he/she reacts to them using many devices in order to ensure safe, sensible and attractive journey. He/she uses GPS, radio, telephone, and he/she keeps track of indicators of the devices of the car. He/she operates the devices, changes the direction and speed of driving, and operates in the hybrid (real and media) space, understood and practiced as one environment. The passenger sitting next to him/her may freely contemplate the attractions of the landscape during the journey, as it is not the passenger who drives the vehicle, so he/she does not need to coordinate the data from the real and media worlds in order to move in the environment, because he/she *relies on* somebody else.

A person participating in culture is in a similar situation. He/she may be an active operating entity (a driver) or a passenger. The passenger of previous culture consumes other works as ready made products, in the constructing of which he/she does not participate, playing only the role of the observer, recipient, consumer. The interactor does just the opposite. He/she transforms other works into his/her own ones, navigates, enters into a dialogue with technical devices, and even creates new sets of stimuli and makes them accessible to others so that they can deal with them in a similar way.

The difference between the *conceptual and contemplative* perception and the *operating* perception in the arts is equivalent to the difference in the ways of participation in culture, which results in forming different types of the human being. Although the same entity may "change" from the passenger's seat to the driver's one, he/she has to master the techniques of real and multi-media "driving" and methods of coordination of all factors of the heterogeneous environment beforehand. He/she has to familiarise with the techniques which are necessary for the *operating perception*, in which contemplation is not a usual perceptive behaviour, but it occurs rather post-perceptively as a reflection on the actions previously made.

So, how does the perception of art change owing to the use of gadgets and technical devices in everyday life? What could be the social consequences of the use of interactive environments as a result of such an experience? Contemplation and action are various activities in the perceptual process of the entity. During the contemplation the body and the reason are seemingly separated, the reason is fed by the body which plays the role of the energy and stimuli provider and which assures calmness (stillness) for better efficiency of thinking. During this stillness the accumulation of associations at the time of perception, provoked by the stimuli of the artefact finished by the artist, follows. The body and the reason are linked with the action, so, they are intertwined and create new contexts, which are interpreted for next actions. The operating action /understood as an *operation* on technical devices and interfaces, it also involves kinesthetics and the sense of touch besides seeing and hearing/ is the multi-sensory process of the body action coordinated by the brain. Both cerebral hemispheres are responsible for two different groups of skills and activities, e.g. verbal and image actions. Their work is coordinated, but one of them usually prevails.

The multi-media communication and multi-sensory perception are new civilization challenges of the post-verbal reality. However, linear / functional in some texts/ discourses do not have to dominate the entire

communication process, as the verbal communication is neither exclusive, nor the universal communication medium. In the cockpit of the car non-verbal information prevails, as it is the *ineffective* medium, so, it is less useful for quick operations which are made instantly. The word is slow and contemplative, and it requires accords /associations/ at first with the user's *database* of the biological memory, invoking experience, imagination /transformation into the image/, and only then the reaction, resulting in the operation, does follow. Written words require decoding signs, sequencing in the linear order, and linking them with meaning created by the contexts, which last long. Audio-visual communication is quick, it contains more information, and its context is generally clear. The image and the sound are *complete*, in the meaning of its real predecessor /the analogue of the reality in which we have seen and heard the unmediated speaker at the same time/. The operations of processing of the image and sound should be a concrete and fundamental object of teaching, but the present culture in a way inhibits the development of the human, because of dividing his/her abilities to communicate with the world into specific media, and at the same time ignoring multi-media competencies. Clearly, I do not recommend to teach fine arts or music to the same extent as writing, but rather how to sensibly and effectively use various media in the multi-media and multi-sensory communication and *operating perception*.

Aesthetics has maintained its old paradigm of the written language as it reflects on images, sounds, touch and kinaesthetics with the use of words. It does not make them present at the same perception time while a scientific text is transferred. Although it seems to me that there are no rational reasons for which other media than words could be deemed non-scientific and condemned to be an appendix to the verbal discourse, hundreds of researchers stammer their speeches in the English version of their mother tongues, referring to images and sounds. It happens so though the audiovisual text allows the recipient to understand more quickly and precisely which version of the aesthetic reality is invoked. If an event is a complex action occurring at the same time, what should its verbal description look like? What should be described at first, later, and in the end? How to coordinate described actions occurring in the course of time? Postmodern criticism of linear writing was nonetheless led in the linear media of the word and printing. So, I am forced to follow this pattern in this text, as other media are deemed irrational, and publishing instructions for contributors require only written texts. The aesthetic discourse does

not usually use other media than texts. It sometimes relies on images and sound, referring the reader to the sources, but generally, it uses other texts as if they referred not to the visual or sound works of art, but only to the authors of texts on a given topic. Texts swarm with quotations whose relation to the artwork is meaningless, and at most subordinated, as writing and reading matter more, because of the conviction that the verbal text guarantees rational standard. If multi-media publications were allowed in the rational discourse, aesthetics as the research activity could obtain the tools for the multi-sensory examination and publishing. They could be used to present, show and analyse /not excluding the verbal discourse/ in the same context of images and sounds. The conviction that the verbal discourse is the most efficient tool used in order to describe phenomena in their philosophical aspect has its historical roots. The accessibility of imaging techniques in the past was economically limited, because images and sounds required complex and specialized methods of production. The traditional printing house could be an example of the difference between the company reproducing pictures in large quantities with the use of expensive and specialized machines and individualized methods of computer-aided production, reproduction and networked transmission of images and sounds.

The electronic interactive art could serve as an example of how far we departed from analogue technologies, and thinking in terms of tangibility, place, temporality and philosophical context of understanding communication and creativity. Even though sometime in the past a new style or trend in art or vanguard movement appeared, nonetheless the communication system, the existence basis of the work or perceptual dispositive remained the same. Nowadays, we see the changes of functions of all those elements without detailed considerations in the area of the psychology of reception or mediated experience. The development of aesthetics is not only the result of more and more complicated thinking about art, but principally because of the change of the perceptual paradigm from the pro-scenic to the non-proscenic /installation/, based on *operating perception*, also occurring in the process of transformation of the artefact. The use of the image and sound media, so natural for the young generation, and the possibility of transforming them individually /not only interpreting/ have aroused deeper interest /also in artists/ in the multimedia, multi-sensory and operating techniques. Thus, the museum ban *do not touch* allows to have a sense of more active participation in creative practices /not only

artistic ones/ in large numbers of users of the social communication media which are understood in this way. I think that future creative action shall not consist in more complicated *staring* at other works, but transforming other works into artists' own ones. Clearly, we could encounter counter-arguments against technological logic, invoking artistic mythology, the elitism of high culture, which are insignificant to the power of development of communication technologies influencing everyday life practices. The reader of this text could think that this point of view is a misunderstanding or everyday life practices cannot play a decisive role, and that art and aesthetics are much more than simply users' operations, but the Facebook user who transforms images and sounds, texts, and uses other works, could create his/her own media message and reality. If he/she stimulates other users to perform creative acts by his/her activities, he/she plays a similar artistic role to such an extent which is recognized by the community of his/her addresses. The *operating perception* as the action preceding the emergence of the object of perception is both the author's act for the creator of the artefact and its user. The object of perception emerges as a result of the interactor's action, and it is not possible for him/her to perceive it totally, the author of the interactive artefact is not familiar with it, as he/she only prepares the stimuli and procedures to use them. Previous author's narration is replaced by interaction and navigation implemented by the user /interactor/ during the *operating perception* of the author's artefact. The artefact of the interactive installation, though organised by the author /artist/, is implemented by users. It appears as one of many possible variations of using the resources for the addresses.

If the painting is the organisation of sensations in a constant form, possible to be seen in totality at the same time, the interactive installation is the organization of sensations in the *expanded form* /inaccessible to the senses in totality/, requiring selecting and transforming the recourses into users' own stimuli. The interactor travels around the installation as the technological environment /not the same, but analogous to the journey/ in the cockpit of the modern car. If the pro-scenic art was assigned for developing interpretative imagination of the recipient, the main issue for the artists of interactive media was the skill of the interactor to transform other artefacts into the object of his/her perception. Apparently, they are different artistic objectives, and communication competencies of the users which require different aesthetic tools.



# Aesthetic Practice in the Life of East Asia

(Takao Aoki)





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Takao Aoki

## On the Concept of *Geidoh* in East Asian Aesthetic Tradition of Practice

Contemporary studies of East Asian aesthetics have tended to confine their analyses within the borders of modern nation states, and write of Japanese aesthetics, Chinese aesthetics, Korean aesthetics, etc. From a longer and larger point of view, however, we may see points of consistency throughout East Asia. Identifying these common features, while contrasting their local variations, can serve to elucidate the uses of various aesthetic concepts and its history and theory.<sup>1</sup>

In the present paper I would like to look at the concept of *Geidoh*, an idea with deep roots in Asian tradition of practice. I will give a brief outline of its history, its sources in medieval Japan and classical China, and then show some of its manifestations in early modern Japan. This will contrast the concept with the idea of fine arts, as it was imported from the West.

Chinese characters, chopsticks, a rice-based diet, ancestor worship, and other common elements characterize East Asian culture and help to form its civilization. They contribute to what we might call an East Asian life style. In addition, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism have played important roles in mixing Asia-wide elements with indigenous cultures. Culture and civilization have a deep relationship with language. In East Asia, a shared use of Chinese characters tends to influence our view of the world.<sup>2</sup> The concepts behind these characters shape Asian understanding of the world, nature, society, and several arts.

For example, we can look at the Chinese characters pronounced *geijutsu* in Japanese, and usually translated as “art.” [藝術] The first Chinese character, 藝, has a relationship with gardening and planting and, metaphorically, with the idea of cultivation in general. This reflects a cultural tendency or view

of plants which informs our understanding and interpretation of the world. Two representative family names in Japanese are Suzuki [鈴木] and Satoh [佐藤]. Both names include elements related to plants: Suzuki contains the character for tree [木], and Satoh contains the character for vines or wisteria [藤]. My name, Aoki [青木], also means blue or green tree. The Chinese and Korean name pronounced Lin is written with the character for forest [林], as is the Japanese name Hayashi [林]. The character for plum blossoms, 李, is the most popular name in East Asia, pronounced Lee in Korean and Li Chinese. The popularity of these and many similar names throughout East Asia demonstrates something of the inclination here for plants.<sup>3</sup>

Nowadays, although the character 藝 has largely lost its association with gardens, some variant of the characters 藝術 is used in several Asian countries to refer to the fine arts. Though the characters originated in China, each country has altered or simplified how it is written. China writes the word for fine arts as 艺术 or 艺术. The same is written as 芸術 in Japan<sup>4</sup> and as 藝術 in Taiwan. Korea writes it [藝術]. Seventy years ago – that is, before the end of World War II – the changes had not yet been introduced. Most of East Asia still used the traditional characters 藝術, a combination which first appeared in the historical text *The Book of the Later Han*, 後漢書, in China, c. 432 CE.

Although the combination of these two characters carried several senses for a long time, around the turn of the twentieth century Japanese intellectuals began to use the term to refer to the fine arts in a modern sense – the general concept of arts ranging from literature, poetry, and drama to painting, sculpture, and music. This use of the term arose from its being called into service as the translation for a Western concept.

## Traditional *Geijutsu* as Learning with Cultivation

Throughout East Asia in recent years, the Chinese characters 藝術, pronounced *geijutsu* in Japanese, have commonly been used to translate the European concept “fine art.” The word has evolved, however. It was used from the end of the eighteenth century to translate a variety of Western ideas. Among them, it is especially important to remark that in 1870 it was used to translate the Latin term *artes liberales*, which had been imported via Holland. Philosopher Nishi Amane (西 周; 1829–1897) who had studied in Holland, used the term in this way. Before him, Watanabe Kazan (渡辺 崋山; 1793–1841) used *geijutsu* before 1840 somewhat differently, to label

basic subjects for education. These uses illustrate that at the first stage of translation, *geijutsu* didn't yet refer to works of art or cultural products, but the practice of *cultura mentis* and *corpus*, that is the cultivation of the mind and body through education and the mastery of skills.<sup>5</sup>

Before being applied in such a way, *geijutsu* referred primarily to an overlapping of six arts which the warrior class of the Edo Period (1603–1867) were expected to cultivate as part of a Chinese-style aristocratic education. We will return to this usage of the word in our discussion of scholar Haga Yaichi (芳賀矢一; 1867–1972). Here, I'd like to explain the cultural status of skill and technique in Confucian axiology. Confucianism places a very high value on the idea of the *michi* or *doh* or, usually known in the West by its Chinese pronunciation *tao* [道]. The Confucian view of the *tao* is different from that of Taoism, and includes several arts. One is education as above mentioned. Another is understood as practical skill or technique. *Michi* or *tao* [道] is the final aim and *gei* [藝] is instrumental in reaching the *michi* or *tao*.

During Japan's Meiji Restoration, the Japanese government promoted a doctrine of "civilization and enlightenment" [*bunmei-kaika*, 文明開化], hurrying the adoption of European views. Presented with a new European model and standard of civilization after centuries of adapting Chinese values, Japan was faced with a cultural crisis.

There is a famous slogan of modernization proposed around 1853 by Sakuma Shozan (佐久間象山, 1811–1864): "Learn morals from the East; learn technology and arts from the West [東洋道德西洋藝術]. In this phrase, the term *geijutsu* [藝術] refers to Western technologies and arts, whereas morals, written with the characters 道德, means the cardinal virtues and morals of Confucianism [儒教] which supported life and society. Though Chinese culture and sciences had been given the leading role during the preceding Edo Period, and for centuries before, especially by Japanese followers of Confucianism, the Meiji Restoration saw the administration drastically change the model of civilization and start to imitate European sciences and institutions. Japan tried to "escape from Asia and become a member of the advanced Western community," [*datsua-nyuoh*, 脱亜入歐]. "While keeping traditional Japanese spirit and morals, they should learn the technological treasures of Western civilization." This is a basic stance called *wakon-yohsai* [和魂洋才], used to introduce Western cultures.<sup>6</sup>

During the late nineteenth century, the term *geijutsu* was used by some to translate the term Liberal Arts, but other people continued to use it with

its old meaning from the Edo Period, as the basic subjects for the samurai or warrior class. Later the focus of its meaning gradually transformed to that of the modern concept of fine arts or beautiful arts. At the beginning of the Meiji Restoration, in the 1860s, another term, *bijutsu* [美術], was introduced to refer to cultural practices which were thought to enhance the standard of the nation's civilization. This term consists of the characters for beauty 美 and method or technique 術. In this case, "beauty" is not a character of works of art, but a cultural refinement which serves to make people more beautifully edified – that is, more civilized. Imperialistic dynamics of the time considered refinement or westernization to be necessary for Japan, to make herself similar to western states. In addition, *bijutsu* began to be used as a general concept whose boundaries ranged from literature, poetry, painting, sculpture, music, dance, theater and so on. Gradually, its focus narrowed to the fine arts. In this way, around the turn of twentieth century, there appeared the concept of the way of arts, that is *geidoh*, in contrast to such imported concepts or translated words as *bijutsu* (fine arts)<sup>7</sup> and *geijutsu* (the general concept of fine arts). As both of those terms are derived from Europe, *geidoh* had to be seen as having traditional origins. In the process of modernization, Japan had to face the conflict of these two perspectives on the arts.<sup>8</sup>

## A Hierarchy or Politics of Cultures

At the beginning of the Showa era (1926–1989), German philosopher Karl Löwith (1897–1973),<sup>9</sup> after teaching at a Japanese university, described his impressions of the sociological knowledge of the country. In Japan, he explained, professional scholars learned at university only to receive the opinions of Western Europe, causing an unconsidered flight from earlier traditions of Japanese everyday knowledge and life. He introduced the metaphor of the two-story house to describe how he saw Japanese scholars living in relation to Western ideas. Like the majority of Japanese people, the scholar enjoys living on the ground floor of a traditional Japanese residence. On the other hand, he studies hard to accept a knowledge of Western life and a few of the improvements it brought, but has little interest in the harmony of the two floors. Some intellectuals and artists, however, felt keenly the split and paradox of attempting to continue native traditions while Westernizing society. The need to live on both floors of the house, adopting Western views of the arts while also loving and having faith in

one's native culture, led some (e.g. Soseki Natsume) to such distress that they felt at the point of suicide. The ideological conflict of choosing to maintain traditional Japan in the context of rapid Westernization is an example to keep in mind. The writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke shows a representative and typical case of this conflict and agony among elite with intellectual conscience.

### The Case of Writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke<sup>10</sup>

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (芥川 龍之介; 1892–1927) is among the most famous writers of the Taisho Period [大正], which lasted from 1912 to 1926. He is representative of those intellectuals who believed in cultural modernization, and argued for it in new artistic creation. To employ Lōwith's metaphor, we might say Akutagawa moved his artistic life to the second floor of the house, and turned away from his country's native and aesthetic traditions. He explained his modernist views in his essay "Arts and Others" 「藝術その他」 published in 1919:

What artists strive for most is to make works of art which are perfect. Otherwise, it would be meaningless for them to make a great endeavor to sacrifice themselves for the arts. Can it be compared to attending a sermon which brings us merely "sentimental appreciation"? Only by serving the end of the arts, which is their perfect expression, should the works of art to which we artists dedicate ourselves to complete, give birth to "a perfect artistic impression".

All artists should practice and improve their skills and techniques, even if they have already developed these to high levels... As I am inclined to indulge in the charm of beauty, I am aware of being caught in the aesthetic trap. If I am satisfied with the aesthetic tradition of *furyu* 風流 (*fengliu* in Chinese), then I might lose the narrow way of being a true artist. [藝術その他, 1919]

We can see here Akutagawa's commitment to perfection, uniqueness, progress, and innovation. The passage quoted from him below emphasizes the same points, and makes clear as well his dislike of the aesthetic tradition of *furyu*, or the artistic mannerism of the literati painters [文人], called *wenren* in Chinese or *bunjin* in Japanese. He does not hide his dissatisfaction with this tradition, associated with painting plum blossoms. For him, the adherence to the *furyu* and literati tradition blocks an artist from modernity with its indulgence in aesthetic pleasure, rather than aesthetic uniqueness.

Plum flowers as depicted in *The Tale of Ise* [伊勢物語] or in ukiyo-e paintings by Harunobu [春信] are meant to evoke elegant feelings. However, the sight of plum trees in works of art never fails to remind me of the aesthetic tradition of the literati, and the ethos that came with them from China. Plums can arouse a series of such associated images, including cranes, crescent moons, etc., that is the aesthetic taste of *fenryu*, often associated with Lin Bu [林逋] (967–1028). It is natural that modern artists turn away from such images, since plums have been represented with so many designs and ideas that they can find few ways to show originality or uniqueness in their depiction. However the true reason why modern artists look coldly upon plums is thus: the plum is the symbol of the old literati attitude of mannerism, and the self-satisfied attitude that comes from neglecting the importance and progressiveness of creativity. [*Against Plum Blossoms* 「梅花に対する感情」1924]

Akutagawa despises this tradition symbolized by plum blossoms, which he knows so well. For him, the aesthetic attitude of the literati is that of mere hobbyists, who paint only for personal pleasure.

We can find here an opposition between modern artistic attitudes and the traditional aesthetic ethos of the literati artists. The tradition of literati may be included in the range of *geidoh*, but it is not the prototype, because the tradition of the literati suggests the erudition of a man with elite social status, especially in China. In Japan, this tacit aspect is not necessary.

## Historico-cultural background of Invention of *Geidoh*

Generally speaking,<sup>11</sup> the literati had passed through the Confucian civil service examinations [科挙] of old China. Once the literati who had attempted to rise within the political system saw their hopes for their careers blocked, they gave up for a while the chance of political activity to turn to lives of pleasure in country homes, enjoying various arts, and communing with nature. They particularly passed the time with poetry, painting, and music, communicating only with like-minded friends surrounded by the beauties of nature. They can also be described as *inja* in Japanese [隠者], *yinzhe* in Chinese – a term meaning “hidden person” or “recluse.” Among well-known literati we may name Lin Bu, and the so-called “7 Sages in the Bamboo” *Zhúlín Qī Xián* [竹林七賢]. Such characters are personifications of a Taoistic ideal of a life of *furyu* [風流], living in harmony with nature, away from the capital. Their aesthetic lives focus on two points: solitary

pleasures [自娛]<sup>12</sup> and a kind of pure lifestyle in communication only with friends and nature [清遊], standing aloof from the crowd.<sup>13</sup>

Similar literature concerning the aesthetic lives of such hermits began appearing in Japan in the Middle Ages, after the appearance of *The Pillow Book* and *The Tale of Genji*. These included the well-known *Ten Foot Square Hut* and *Essays in Idleness*, but many lesser-known Buddhist monks followed a similar course. They showed great respect for the Chinese and Japanese classics, while disdaining politics. In Japan, literary hermits tended to describe their experiences through the values of Buddhism, as well as in the Taoism and Confucianism of their Chinese forebears.

## Buddhistic Sources in the Medieval Era

When the term *geidoh* [藝道] was coined just before or during World War II, it referred to an ideal model of aesthetic practice from the Middle Ages, as exemplified by Shunzei [俊成] (1114 –1204), Zeami [世阿弥] (1363? –1443?), and Shinkei [心敬] (1406 –1475).

In all countries, the Middle Ages are an age of religion. In Japan's medieval period thought was dominated by Buddhism, and proper religious exercise was called the Buddha Way [仏道]. Medieval times are often referred to as “dark ages,” indicating that they are times of irrationalism and religion, in contrast to more enlightened times, in which the power of reason guides us. Seen from this perspective, our normal way of looking at the world is one of darkness. From our typical, secular views, we must walk step by step toward the supreme enlightenment of awakening. Monks can walk this road every day through Buddhist practices. Other Buddhists, not living as monks, may follow a similar path by doing their own work, as artists, for example, spiritualize their practice.

A serious devotion to creating perfect aesthetic works came to be considered a kind of religious endeavor in the pursuit of supreme truth, that is enlightenment or religious Tao. In such a view, the way of art is interpreted as a semi-religious activity, modeled on Buddhism's methods and artistic exercise was considered to be a way to aesthetic Nirvana. This is how, much later, *geidoh* came to be seen as a respectable path, serious in its aims.

To make a work of art or literature perfect or attractive, an artist must dedicate everything to gain a kind of divine protection. In other words, artists try to form a poetic virtue from which they hope for a divine aesthetic visit from God. They try to form good artistic habits through long and hard

training, which may be the work of an entire lifetime. Cultivating virtue in an aesthetic sense in this way could be conflated with the idea of forming moral virtue – a contrast with the ideas of those who, like Baudelaire, see aesthetic and moral virtue as unrelated. Though we can find examples of aestheticist or decadent ideas in Japan, it was more typical in the Edo Period to see virtue and aesthetics as going hand in hand.

### On the Transformation of *Geidoh* from medieval Buddhism to the Confucianism of the Edo Era

In the Edo Period, the warrior class was expected to rule society with a refinement brought on by studying several arts or skills [*geijutsu*] which were compared to (or considered equivalent to) the six arts [六藝] of the ancient Chinese scholar-gentlemen, the class known as the *shì dàfū* [士大夫]. Once Confucianism was adopted as the state religion, however, *geijutsu* was viewed as a useful tool in developing edifying public values. *Geijutsu* became useful for public education that supports the state. The playful and unproductive hermits were less admired. As a result *yugei* [遊芸], private pleasures or “playful arts,” began to be recognized as a separate category during the Edo Period. Among *yugei*, the tea ceremony and Noh drama, with literature in general, could be placed in the category of uplifting *geijutsu*. If we look for similarities between the categories of playful *yugei* and more edifying *geijutsu*, we can see that practitioners in both schools laid their emphasis on the way of life they employed, and not just its material products. The later concept of *geidoh* grew from this way of thinking. In addition, we must mention Basho who lived in the early Edo Era and maintained the old tradition of Buddhism *geidoh*. In his travel essay “*Oi no Kobumi*,” he names four artists as those he particularly admires: poet Saigyō, painter Sesshū, tea master Rikyū and poet Sōgi. These four are chosen because they dedicated their lives to the road of aesthetic truth or *fuga* [風雅]. Basho sets himself at the end of this artistic genealogy of *fuga*, his ideal of artistic practice.



## A Historical Rough Sketch of Modern *Geidoh*: On the Way of the Arts as a Path to the End of Life; the Tao.

### The Invention of *geidoh* as a counter to the imported modern concept of fine arts from Europe

The analysis advanced by Eric Hobsbawm in his book *The Invention of Tradition* has been used to criticize the political background of some distinguished traditions of culture.<sup>14</sup> Invention, he claims, may be not only a forgery of history, but the attempt to produce community through the use of illusion. Even if a tradition is created in a particular nationalistic or socio-historic context, however, we may still evaluate it on its own merits. The Japanese concept of *geidoh* may be approached in this way. *Geidoh* does have aspects of invented tradition, of the kind that Hobsbawm criticized, but also shows a deep self-understanding of Japanese society and tradition. The invention of this particular tradition is not something to despise.

*Geidoh* was invigorated by nationalist movements at least twice. During World War II, many Japanese philosophers and historians, including Shinichi Hisamatsu, Shumei Ookawa, and Nobuyoshi Sida boasted of the superiority of the Japanese way of the arts. That is, they favorably compared traditional Japanese *geidoh*, especially in its medieval version, to modern concepts of the arts invented in the West. This exaltation of Japanese culture was of course inspired by the contemporary pressure of and confrontation with the West. In this socio-political context, *geidoh* was employed to further the political goals of the age.

In this presentation, however, I will look at an earlier model of this concept. After victories with China in 1894 and Russia in 1905, the Japanese people were awakened to a sense of nationalism. People in other countries, as well, began to show interest in the character of this small country. In this context, Tenshin Okakura's *The Awakening of Japan* (1904) and *Book of Tea* (1906), and Inazo Nitobe's *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (1900) were read abroad, while in Japan arguments flourished concerning the true character of the Japanese. Among the authors who worked on this topic was Yaichi Haga (芳賀 矢一; 1867–1927), who held a literature post at Tokyo Imperial University. He wrote many books, but he approached the topic as an essayist rather than as a researcher. Despite little knowledge of Western aesthetics, he formulated a clear view of *geidoh*. He wrote:

Determination and patience are necessary in studying [學] and learning [習]. Our ancestors considered this their ideal. We recognize the significance of this when we see that all forms of arts [藝術] used the word *doh* [道 – in English, “path” or “way”]. As in Shinto [神道], *doh* is what people follow. It has a moral nuance and is thus different from mere skill [技]. Skill in using swords [劍術], in archery [弓術], or in horsemanship [馬術], are only skills. If we hope to gain a higher principle from them, they must become *kendoh* [劍道], that is the way of swords, or the way of the Samurai [弓馬之道], that is the way of archery and horsemanship. In the past, people learning Japanese poems and poetics believed that if they mastered Japanese literature, they could go to paradise [極楽] at once. [...] Similarly, calligraphy is called the way of writing [書道]; such minor arts as tea making or aroma are called *Sado* [茶道] (the way of tea) and *Kōdō* [香道] (the way of aromatic arts). Music was originally highly respected as a way, as were *ikebana* [活花], flower arrangement, *kemari* [蹴鞠] the game of kickball, and *tousen* [投扇], fan casting. Mastering these skills superficially can’t be regarded as gaining the true sense, though one may advance a certain extent. The true performer will be graced with the brightness of spirituality after serious endeavors of full attention and passion. Our ancestors believed that the ardent pursuit, with all energy and real mastery of these arts, will allow the mind, spirit, and body to merge in the Way of Skill that is *Doh* [道].<sup>15</sup>

We can hear the living echoes of several historical traditions in Haga’s text.

## East Asian Aesthetics Emphasize Respect for Practice

Haga Yaichi listed various fields which could not be considered arts according to the modernized view of the time. The skills and arts he mentions may be divided into two parts, with *waka* [和歌], a Japanese style of poetry, as their dividing line. One part consists of the knowledge and skills necessary for the warrior, and the other part constitutes the education and entertainment of a courtier in an older tradition. Haga integrates various artistic practices of the Edo Period into a new concept of traditional art, in response to westernization. The following are the characteristics of his artistic views:

1. Traditional arts are open ways for many people to learn, not closed ways limited to professionals.
2. They are active creative practices of enthusiasm and attention, rather than the appreciation of listed canonical works.

3. Traditional artistic practice puts more emphasis on cultivating inner aspects of the self, rather than the production of objects.

Haga's traditional artistic views were formulated in the late Meiji Period. At that time the European view of art and artists was becoming very popular in Japan, and the word *bijutsu* [美術] (literally: "beauty method") limited its field to optical arts, that is painting, sculpture and so on. In contrast to *bijutsu*, *geijutsu* referred to fine arts in general. A small dictionary of new words<sup>16</sup> published in 1913 defines *geijutsu* [藝術] as *aato* (arts) in English, to state that the word connotes the special arts and crafts which have beauty as their sole purpose, instead of skills which are put to practical use. That is, the term denotes music, poetry, and similar arts as well as sculpture and painting.

When the older term *geijutsu* took on a more modern sense of fine arts, students studying in Japan around 1910, especially those from China, heard the term in its updated meanings and replanted it into their own countries. In this way, changing uses of the term *geijutsu*, blended with modern, more Western concepts, spread through East Asia, including colonized Taiwan and Korea.

## The Significance of Invention in the Traditional Arts

In Haga's view, traditional Japanese art was comprised of the poetic arts of elegance [風雅之道],<sup>17</sup> arts for aristocratic courtiers, arts directly related to Buddhism, arts for the warrior class, and common people's entertainment. We may well say that Haga "invented" the new concept of traditional arts, which transcends the categorical differences of Edo culture. When he united all arts in the face of modernization to produce the new category of Traditional Arts, he emphasized the importance of the morality and ethics acquired through learning these arts, and ignored cultural demarcations based on the criteria of Confucianism.

Perhaps Haga's efforts can be seen as the awakening of Japan's artistic views. Seen in this way, Haga's combination of incompatible parts of culture from before the Edo era is a renewal of traditional artistic views. I cannot simply deem this to be wholly imaginary. Of course, we must always take a careful attitude towards patriotic views among the Japanese. Still, we can esteem Haga for his ability to look at history from a new point of view, summarize certain of its major trends, and create a feasible view of the arts. The views he introduced still guide Japanese approaches to traditional

arts, later called *geidoh* or *naraigoto* (“learned things” including learning such high cultural practices as the tea ceremony, painting, and so on). As the comparison of skill and Tao, Haga’s view is rooted in ancient Chinese aesthetics, in spite of his opinion that this view of arts has original roots in the depth of Japanese culture.

We can hear not only the echo of Buddhism but also the contrast of East Asia’s basic concepts, skill and Tao, in an anecdote from Zhuangzi’s Chinese classic *Fundamentals for Nourishing Life*. This book tells of an exchange between Wen Hui and a cook, which illustrates the difference in the two approaches to learning. The anecdote emphasizes that the Chinese word Tao, the great way of the world, is the same as the Japanese word *doh* [道], or truth in a context of wisdom, and a path through the ordinary world.

“Ah! Very good!” Wen Hui said to the cook, “How did you achieve such perfection in your skill?” The cook put down his knife and replied, “What I love is the Tao, which is more advanced than skills.”

「文惠君曰：「善哉！技蓋至此乎？」庖丁釋刀對曰：「臣之所好者，道也。進乎技矣。」（『莊子』內篇「養生論」）

Here, in a Chinese classic, skill and Tao are connected and contrasted with each other directly. This is a part of the cultural and philosophical background of the invention of *geidoh* before Yaichi Haga’s time.

Here I would like to make at least two points by comparing Western traditional thinking about art or praxis with different ideas from China and Japan.

Most of the skills mentioned here are not forms of “making arts,” but rather kinds of performing arts. Here I consider martial arts, cooking, or the tea ceremony to be performing arts.

## Aesthetic Practice and the Cultivation of *Geidoh*

Any kind of act or deed may be seen to have a double aspect when viewed aesthetically. That is, an aesthetic act works on both a subject and an object.

We can say that an artist can make his or her work with his or her own skill and heart. But what does he or she really experience in the act of making? The act of making performs at least two functions for the artist: a mimetic function and a self-cultivating one.

First, making something means “to give form to a thing.” Through mimesis, an artist can represent an image on a canvas imitating an object. Here is a mimetic relation between an image on the canvas and the real thing.

Secondly, making something entails nurturing the artist's mind. In this sense making implies some relationship between the artist and his or her faculty. When an artist makes something, this practice develops the nature of the agent through the practice of his or her aesthetic faculty and heart.

Artistic practice, whether it is an ordinary exercise or a performance on the stage, necessarily cultivates human nature. It elevates aesthetic virtue and works to make the human being more complete. This is the self-cultivating aspect of art-making. From this point of view, any kind of artistic activity, whether it is making or performing, can have the function of cultivating the human nature of the agent through the accumulation of artistic skills. In sum, the process of making not only develops our artistic ability but also nurtures our personality.

Western tradition, for example as in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, may discriminate two basic contrasting deeds: *theoria* and *praxis*. And within *praxis*, we can discriminate both moral *praxis* and *poiesis*.

Aristotle examines *episteme*, *phronesis*, and *techne*. For us, it is important not only to discriminate moral practice from productive practice, but also to see two types of productive practice: object making, such as sculpture or architecture which create new and lasting things, and performance of a pre-existing work. A performer like a singer, musician (but not a composer), or a dancer does not create a material work which will endure in time, as a bronze sculptor might.

In short, *poiesis* can be either making or performing. Within these practical activities, we can find a cultivating dimension. For example, representing something on a canvas cultivates our abilities to see and to depict. This cultivating principle spreads over all kinds of practice beyond the purely aesthetic. In Japan, the goal of self-cultivation is emphasized, so any kind of practice can be understood as a "way of skill," or a path that guides us to the supreme way of the Tao. In fact, many people in Japan believe that their job, whatever it is, can lead to a Tao Way through the passionate exercise of a skill in everyday life. And the everyday practice or exercise is also called a *michi* or way. These everyday exercises have such names as *shugyoh* [修行], *keiko* [稽古], or *shudo* [修道, 習道], whose field ranges from religious deeds and moral behavior to eating, cleaning, and the everyday behavior that we read of described in Zen Buddhism. So we may speak of a Tao of golf, of confectionary, of merchants – even a Tao of ramen. And these are not usually categorized into aesthetic arts in the older sense. We can actually enumerate these limitlessly. In the Edo era,

there was a book entitled the *Shikidoh-ohkagami* (1678) which has been translated as *The Great Mirror of the Arts of Love*. In this book author Kizan Fujimoto (1626–1704) described what he called a way of living which he called *shikidoh*. The book is essentially a guide book or manual to the arts of eros, especially those practiced in the licensed gay quarters. And though the word *shikidoh* literally means “the way of color,” in fact its focus on the deep and wide range of loving and sexual relationships between couples of various types implies a significant philosophical meaning. From the gay quarters of the Edo era, there appeared the famous aesthetic, ethical, and religious idea of *iki* which Shuzou Kuki (1888–1941) later reinterpreted in his famous book *The Structure of ‘Iki’* (1930). This concept does not focus on sexual techniques but on manners or ritualistic ways of communication. Through this training in love, people in those days could expect to cultivate the mind and enhance refined behavior that, among themselves, they considered the ideal. They introduced a system of gradual elevation through the practice of erotic arts which was much like the stages of Buddhist training. So we may see that many aspects of life could be elevated from mere skills to paths of cultivation and refinement.

It’s due to a similar goal that the cook Pao Ding advances from a mere skill to a unification with the Tao attained through long hours of practice. Working as a butcher was hardly a position with high social status, but through the excellence of his performance even the Emperor learns a lesson in the Tao. This story discriminates between skill and the supreme Tao or Way and stresses the pleasure and freedom that result of attaining the latter.

In the Chinese way of discourse to describe the relationship between skill and Tao, hard training is little emphasized. Chinese stories often include legendary wizards who are capable of performing miracles with a single word. This is a different view from Japanese thinkers who see the artistic process as ‘ardent pursuit,’ as Haga did, to attain supreme performance. This model of training had several cultural sources: Buddhistic training, which we have explained, and Confucianist learning which we will turn to now.

The first stanza of the *Analects* of Confucius insists on the importance of this self-cultivation and the pleasure resulting from learning. Even the Chinese character for learning contains a similar message. The character 習 is constructed of two parts. The top, 羽, is the character for wings, and 白 means white, but in this case indicates youth or immaturity. Academically speaking, this is not a philological explanation, but an invented philosophical story – the flapping wings of the aspiring learner.

If East Asian education in the arts and skills is, then, the desire of the young bird to acquire a Tao-like path of refinement, we may be justified in contrasting this to Western arts education, which tends to focus on the systematic knowledge of making, rather than the ability and virtue of their maker.<sup>18</sup>

## Mimetic-Learning [學] and Self-Cultivation [習] in the *Analects* of Confucius<sup>19</sup>

“To learn, and then, in its due season, put what you have learned into practice – isn’t that still a great pleasure?”  
Confucius (BC 551–479)

「子曰學而時習之、不亦說乎」(『論語,「學而」)<sup>18</sup>

In education, learning [學習] is of course important. Although *gaku* [學], which focuses on imitating a model, plays an important role in education, *narai* [習] plays a more important role in East Asian education, at least in Japan. By analyzing what is implied by the character 習 – *narai* in Japanese or *shu* in Chinese – we can understand one of the most important aspects of our traditional education.

Let us illustrate one aspect of *narai* by citing a famous phrase from well-known haiku poet Basho (芭蕉; 1644–94). For him, a pine tree and a bamboo are teachers whom disciple poets should imitate humbly.

“Of what a pine tree is, learn from the pine; of what bamboo is, learn from bamboo.”

Translator Dennis Hirota has here rendered the verb form of *narai* as “learn.” Here, learning means that it is by entering into things and experiencing the manifestations of their particularity that haiku are made. The mimetic aspects of *narai* [習] are profoundly described. When this ontological encounter between Basho and the pine tree happens, the pine tree is a master and Basho his servant and friend.

However, Confucius said, “By nature, men are nearly alike; by practice [習], they be wide apart.” [『論語,「陽貨;「子曰性相近也習相遠也」] Why do they become wide apart? The proverb goes “Practice makes perfect.” Here we can refer once again to the exercise of skill [術, 技] by the cook

Pao Ding. In that episode, through long exercise of skill, Pao Ding reached the perfect, in other words, came into contact with the Tao. So the skill or practice carries a man a great distance.

Although they employ the same term, 道, there is a great difference between ancient Taoism and Japanese *geidoh*. However, this mostly arises from differences in the habitus among Taoism, Confucianism and Japanese thought.

In the ancient Chinese classic *Shujing*, [『書經』「太甲上」] we have the phrase “Habit is a second nature” [習興性成]. And in the *Shoubou Genzou* [『正法眼藏』,「現成公案」] by thirteenth century Buddhist master Dogen (道元; 1200–53), we read that “To study [習] the Buddha-way is to study the self, to study the self is to forget the self, to forget the self is to be actualized by myriad dharmas.” Practice leads to self-nurturing by which habitus becomes a key to reach the Tao. In sum, in addition to the mimetic function, *narai* [習] has self-nurturing functions [養] which through repetitive performance or practice [踐] not only promote an inner transformation [化] but also produce personal pleasure [自娛 or 自樂].

## Conclusion

Nowadays we should take into consideration these two elements when we rehabilitate the view of *geidoh* in a contemporary context. To conclude, we may draw some general distinctions between Western aesthetics and those of the East, and between Chinese practice of the Tao and Japanese artistic “ways.”

In general we may say that arts in Europe aim at making a representation of an object (an inner idea or outer thing), while in East Asia they aim at the encounter with a *michi* or Tao by the enhanced artistic virtue formed through practice. The proof of quality in a Western artist will be the development of his skill and the eternal beauty of his production. Japanese *geidoh*, in contrast, places less emphasis on works, and more on developing a way of life that puts the practitioner skillfully into nature or the Tao. No matter which “way” the Japanese practitioner devotes himself to, whether painting or flower arrangement or archery, the path converges on a similar goal, reached through ardent love and serious practice.

Chinese culture emphasizes the pleasures of the artistic life, and the joys it affords. It also gives more importance than Japanese culture to a mastery of life that is sometimes depicted as attaining the status of a supernatural Taoist immortal. The prototype of Japanese aesthetics, on the other hand,



focuses on the process of training, and the refinement this brings. Following the path is as important as reaching the goal.

Portions of this essay appeared in earlier my publications, mentioned in the footnotes.

## Endnotes

1. Dr. Chen Chen-Ju has addressed similar topics in her paper *Regional Development, Social Group Development and the Complexity of Cultural Transmission in the Formation of the Eastern Asian Arts and Ideologies of Arts: An Example of Multiple Contexts in the Theory of Poetry, Politics, Rites and Music* (詩書禮樂論) in "Journal of Comparative Aesthetics", Comparative Society for Aesthetics, Hiroshima, 2012.
2. Recent studies connecting Chinese characters or Chinese writing styles with nationalism or regionalism in East Asia have become popular in Japan. Some examples in journals include the special issue of the journal *Kotoba to Shakai* (ことばと社会) titled *Kangi Bunkaken no Moji Nationalism* (漢字文化圏の文字ナショナリズム), Sangensha, 2001, 2002. Also, the special edition of *Bungaku* (文学) titled *Higashi Ajia-Kanjibunkaken wo yominaosu*, vol. 6 -6, 2005, 11/12, Iwanamishoten.
3. Tomonobu Imamichi examines the Asian botanical view of the world in his book *Toyo no Bigaku* (東洋の美学), TBS Britannica, 1980.
4. Since World War II, China has used simplified Chinese characters. Korea no longer includes Chinese characters in its education curriculum. Japan uses the Chinese character 芸, instead of 藝. These were originally different letters, even having opposite meanings. One is mowing, the other is planting and breeding.
5. On this point, please refer to my report in *Kakenhi (Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research)*, 12610056, titled *Elucidation of Aesthetics in the Edo Era* (江戸の美学の解明), 2004.
6. The basic stance of 和魂洋才 "While keeping traditional spirit and morals, Japanese should learn the technological treasures of Western civilization" can be found in China, expressed as "中体西用論," and in Korea as "東道西器." These mottos advocate keeping traditional morals and views of world. In Japan however, the slogan of [*datsua-nyuoh*, 脱亜入歐]. "escape from Asia and become a member of the advanced Western community," was also advocated. Please see my paper: *Cultural Division of Arts through Modernization in Japan* in *Papers of The First International Conference of Eastern Aesthetics*, 2000年.
7. The word pronounced *bijutsu* in *Japanese* [美術] is also found in Chinese classics with a meaning different from the modern one.
8. In Japan, as in other colonized countries, public education adopted western subjects as authentic culture. Traditional subjects or arts like Japanese music, painting, etc. were excluded from the public curriculum and taught in private cultural schools. On this point, see my paper *Futatsu no gei no michi* in the journal "Nihon no Bigaku", 27, 1998, Perikansha.
9. See his essay: *On Nihilism* (Nihilismu ni tsuite) in the journal "Shiso", 1940, November.

10. This section uses my papers: *Geidoh as an Educational Concept on Cultivation through Artistic Practice*, 2000 and *Kindai Nihon niokeru Geijutsukan no Henyou in Chi no Kongen wo Tou*, Baifukan, 2008.
11. Exactly, it has exceptions. In fact, 7 sages in the Bamboo lived in the six dynasties when the Confucian civil service examinations were not institutionalized.
12. While personal pleasure “ziyuzile” (自娛) is a positive characteristic of wenren’s artistic activity which is represented by Tao Yangming 陶淵明’s retired life, in Japan, an emotion accompanied with their artistic activity of geidoh is far more serious and complicated. Because the aesthetic pleasure they could enjoy surrounded with beautiful nature always remind them of their sinful flesh, from a view point of Buddhism.
13. Aesthetic hermits in Korea and China, with some exceptions, came mostly from Confucian or Taoist traditions. In Japan, in the process of implanting hermit culture, has a same situation with China or Korea, however, some of the more well-known figures of the developed tradition were Buddhists, such as Kenko, the author of *Essays in Idleness*. See my paper: *Nihon no Chusei niokeru Inja no bigaku in Report of the 8th Conference of the Japanese Korean Society for Aesthetics*, 2000.
14. On the cultural transformations during modernization from the Edo to the Meiji Period, see: *Bakumatsu meijiki no kokumin kokka keisei to bunka henyo*, ed. by Nagao Nishikawa and Hideharu Matsumiya, Shinyosha, 1995.
15. My translation from *On the National Character of the Japanese People* in *Nihonjin* 1912. This section uses my papers, *Geidoh as an Educational Concept on Cultivation through Artistic Practice*, 2000 and *Kindai Nihon niokeru Geijutsukan no Henyou in Chi no Kongen wo Tou*, Baifukan, 2008.
16. *Bungaku Shingo Shojiten*, the item was written by Choko Ikuta, Shinchosha, 1913.
17. The way of fuga [風雅] suggests the influence on Haga from Basho. Basho also uses the word zoka [造化] which shows his knowledge of and influence from Chinese philosophy, especially Chuanze. See David Landis Bahnhill: *Zoka: The Creative in Basho’s view of Nature and Art* in *Matsuo Bashō’s Poetic Spaces: Exploring Haikai Intersections*, ed. Eleanor Kerkham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
18. Here I refer to my earlier essay: *On the Meaning of Aesthetic Practice – “Wooden Chicken” and the Culture Industry in the age of Aesthetic Democracy in Geidoh Shiso no Gendaitteki Igi nitsuite-Nihontekitenkai wo Shoten toshite*. Report of Kakenhi 15320023, 2008.
19. This refers to my earlier essay: *Geidoh as an Educational Concept – On Cultivation through Artistic Practice* in *中西交流對話中的審美與藝術教育*, 2003, 山東大學出版, including an English version, Qingtao, 2000.
20. Here I use an old translation by James Legge (1815–1897): *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 1, reprinted by SMC Publish Inc., 1991.

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Joosik Min

## Aesthetic Practice in the Life of East Asia: Fengliu or Elegant Life

Almost in East Asian countries, especially in Korea, we can easily encounter a scenic pavilion, named in “nujeong” (樓亭), looks like a picture, in any place where the beautiful scenery is unfolded. Many of them are located at the side of valley with clean water or at the top of precipitous cliff. This scenic pavilion in Korea is the place where cultivated men have discharged their intellectual activity and leisure entertainment. Gathering in the scenic pavilion, they have shared poetical sentiments, enjoyed entertainments, discoursed on administrative issues, pursued learning, and taught the youth of their native village.

Many precede intellectuals have delighted in beautiful scenery, escaping the vulgar reality of life. They have found spiritual pleasures in it and learned principles of nature from it. They have considered the scenic pavilion as a part of nature, located apart from village and situated without fences. The elegance of life and the thinking of adapting to nature in Korean culture are derived from this way of life. The so-called literati culture and landscape culture are closely linked with this beautiful scenic pavilion. The scenic pavilion played various roles in reality of human life, such as appreciation of nature, pursuit of study, human communication and relaxation. The scenic pavilion, as a space for “poongryu” (風流, fengliu in Chinese, furyu in Japanese) or elegant life, has an important humanistic meaning.

The scenic pavilion or nujeong is a good cultural heritage representing the Korean thoughts on art and life. Therefore, someone indicated that it is the essence of Korean traditional landscape architecture. The scenic pavilion assembles natural objects in a certain place so as to make beautiful scenery. It draws nature closer to its breast. It takes mountaintop and hillside on the back, and holds river and ravine in its arms. It is built in a scenic spot

where both the right and left sides and both the upper and lower sides are in harmony. Therefore, the scenic pavilion makes both the inner view and the outer view more abundant visually. The space of the scenic pavilion has played a role to cultivate individual personality and aesthetic sentiments. It has a humanistic significance for the hermit scholars, who are practicing self-education and life-long education, to realize the perfection of the self.

## 1. East Asian Nujeong Culture

Everyone feels the allurements to go to see beautiful sceneries. When we are tired and stuffy of ordinary life, we want to take a view of natural landscape. On this account, our predecessors took pleasure in visiting a nujeong (樓亭) or scenic pavilion and appreciating the wonderful sceneries spread out around it. The scenic pavilion constitutes a beautiful landscape accompanying the oneness with natural environment. The walls of scenic pavilion architecture are opened and simply composed of pillars. Thereupon, its inner space and outer space become one, and in this space we naturally become open-minded.

Nujeong is an artificial building within beautiful nature. It is a necessary space especially for literati's elegant life and culture. Sitting in the scenic pavilion, literati has enjoyed the beautiful scenery around and associated with each other through writing poetry and prose. The prefecture with many scenic pavilions is properly famous for its natural beauty and poetic or literary culture. Jeong Inji (鄭麟趾, 1396–1478), a literati-governor in the early period of Joseon (朝鮮, 1392–1897) dynasty, said in his account of a journey to Gwanjeongnu (觀政樓) at Hampyeong (咸平) as following. “We can judge the right or wrong of the reign of a state and the growth and decline of a county as well by its nujeong.”<sup>1</sup>

If that is the case, we need to know who had played the leading role in nujeong culture. They are retired scholars or learned men. Nujeong is the place where cultivated men have discharged their intellectual activity and leisure entertainment. Gathering in nujeong, they have shared poetical sentiments, enjoyed entertainments, discoursed on administrative issues, pursued learning and taught the youth of their native village.

To illuminate the formation and development or the circumstance of nujeong culture would be helpful for our understanding the history of Korean traditional culture. Even the naming of nujeong has a lot of implications of East Asian thoughts.

In case of Hamheojeong (涵虛亭), the Chinese character “ham” (涵) means ‘get wet’ or “contain”, and “heo” (虛) has a similar concept of ‘emptiness’ in Buddhism or ‘nothingness’ in Taoism. Once Chuang Tzu (莊子) said, “When our mind is empty, the ultimate way comes together of its own accord into our heart.”<sup>2</sup> It means that if we get rid of earthly desires and thoughts from our mind, Tao(道) will fill up the vacant space.

## 2. Spatial Meaning of Nujeong

The term of “nujeong” (樓亭) indicates both “nu” (樓, lou in Chinese) and “jeon” (亭, ting in Chinese), at times called “jeongnu” (亭樓). It is not easy to differentiate “nu” and “jeong”. The one is usually a two-storied building with high and broad floor, which shows the dignity of high official culture. The other one is comparatively small in scale and simple in form, which shows the naivety of the culture of common intellectuals. Both of them are tile-roofed pavilions, mainly located outside house for the purpose of relaxation and excursion in broader sense. Generally, there are not any rooms and walls in nujeong. There are simply floors and several pillars so that one could take a view at a distance.

We can conjecture that nujeong has been built since human being began to construct their dwelling houses. According to Chinese history *Shiji* (史記), the Emperor Huangdi (黃帝) had built “five castles and twelve pavilions” for the man-gods because that they want to live in the high scenic pavilion. In Korean history, we can find the first document on nujeong in the fifth century.

Especially from the sixteenth century Confucian scholars erected a lot of nujeong with specific meaning. It was popular to build nujeong all around the country. The sphere of influence to make nujeong was established in this period. It was not any more the space simply for reciting poems and drinking liquor than the place to realize their lofty ideals and sincere academic inquiry. It was for them a place to contemplate nature and meditate on human affairs. The architectural style of nujeong was built up by the intellectual’s spiritual temperance and moderation of Confucian virtue.

There are two kinds of nujeong, namely the nueong in garden and the nujeong in nature.<sup>3</sup>[1] The one is located inside of the artificial garden of palace, governmental office and private house. It has played a role for leisure so often, as an attached building. The other one is located in a scenic spot outside, borrowing beautiful landscape of nature. This type of nujeong is

situated on the hills even alone where one can enjoy the natural sentiments, or on the riverside where vivid pine trees stand in line unchangeably during four seasons.

Further, we can divide four types of nujeong in accordance with the geographical location. Firstly, river or valley side type. We can take a view of landscape performed by valley water, white sandy riverside, and the moon reflected in water. Secondly, pond side type. It makes harmony with the surrounding nature, located in the middle or the side of pond or lake. Thirdly, the mountaintop type. It is located in the high place such as hills and ridge of mountain harmonizing with the surrounding forests. Fourthly, the inside house type. It mainly appeared in villa or cottage rather than in general dwelling house. It brings about a good outlook of abundant rural landscape.

Among these, the first type is most popular in Korea. In valley side region, trees are thick, and the rocks are clean. On this account the hermitlike intellectuals loves the place a lot. Korean literati considered the flowing water not simply as a kind of natural beauty but as a body containing the ultimate substance Tao. The valley was not simply topographical site but recognized as a spiritual world. They liked to build a nujeong alongside the valley and river, and speculated on the basic problems of human being and the principles of nature by contemplating the water there.

If we go to the beautiful places, we can always encounter with nujeong. However, Korean nujeong doesn't stand out barely or strikingly. It is located gently and quietly in accordance with the surrounding environment. It becomes one with rocks, trees and water. There is a nujeong called as Shikyeong-jeong (息影亭) in Damyang (潭陽) povince. The name was originated "cheo-um- shik-yeong" (處陰息影) which means "If we are placed in the shade, our shadows disappear. If we come to a stop quietly, our footprint doesn't remain."<sup>4</sup> This passage pronounces the valuable teaching of human virtue.

### 3. Cultural Role of Nujeong

The origins of nujeong's name are different and various. We can divide the sources of name in several kinds. Firstly, there is a lot of name related with surrounding nature. For example, it borrows from the name of rock on which the nujeong is built. And it comes from the name of river, pond, lake, river and sea around it. Yeongwol-lu (迎月樓) means welcoming the

first moon in the night, and Yeolwoon-jeong (悅雲亭) means pleasing the dancing clouds. Further, it comes from the name of animals and plants, for example imaginary symbolic animals like phoenix and dragon and turtle, crane, common gull, and the Four Gentleman, which compares to Confucianist “goonja” (君子, junzi in Chinese) or “gentlemen”, namely the plum blossoms, the orchid, the chrysanthemum and the bamboo, and the pine tree and the lotus. Besides, there are names from the comprehensive taste for great nature, not for confined to specific individual things in nature, for example Chuigyeong-ru (聚景樓) or Assembling Sceneries Pavilion.

Secondly, there are many names come from pen name of noted persons. Descendants named the nujeong after the pen name of their forefather. If circumstances require, the name of nujeong become the pen name of the erector such as Song-gang-jeong (松江亭) and Myeonang-jeong (俛仰亭). Thirdly, it comes from the Chinese phrases or ancient sayings. For example, Doksoo-jong (獨守亭) from Li Bai’s (李白) poem reciting the lofty virtue of a hermit intellectual.

There are a lot of wooden tablets in nujeong. We can differentiate them in two kinds. The one outside is a signboard indicating its name in the upper front, and the other ones inside are documentary writing boards on its history and the boards of poetry which is reciting beautiful sceneries and human feelings. They were written in various styles by the famous calligraphers of those times.

Nujeong has become a central facility for the landscape of garden and nature in Joseon dynasty. Although it was simple and naïve in form, it played an important role as the place to improve one’s leisure. According to *Sejong Shillok Jiriji* (世宗實錄地理志), there were slightly 60 nujeong in the year of 1454, but its number has increased greatly to 553 in *Shinjyng Dongguk Yeojisyngram* (新增東國輿地勝覽) which was written in the year of 1530. This shows that it was very popular to make nujeong at that time. Regionally it was concentrated in southern province linked with summering, amusement, poetical circle and appreciation of landscape. Nujeong has various cultural functions for a long time. The most important one is the role of mediator to make the beholder united with true self through sensual interchange with surrounding nature.

#### 4. Nujeong and Poongryu or Elegant Life

Summarizing the various function of nujeong, its core meaning is the space for “poongryu” (風流) or “elegant life”. The major constituent ele-

ments of the concept of poongryu are individuality, nature, arts and play. Nujeong plays a good vehicle encouraging these elements. Thus it is easily interlinked with composition of poem, song and music, and drinking. A scholar and poet of Goryeo dynasty Lee Gyubo (李奎報), a lover of nujeong, mentioned as following.

“High spot and opened space alone cannot fulfill the condition of scenic pavilion jeong (亭). The value of jeong is not confined to the architecture. It can be completed by accompanying with a lute-player, a singer, a poetic talent, a monk, and a chess player. The proper taste of jeong demands to match well these guests with the host together with.”<sup>5</sup>

In this sense, nujeong is called a valuable place that is central to poongryu culture.

Poongryu is a free and unrestrained spirit like a stream of wind. Its freedom can be displayed not only in the attitude on the politics and society, but also in the realm of the literature and the tastes. Furthermore it can be displayed in the relation with the opposite sex and in the way of life. In short, the free life of human being provided with the free surroundings and high dignity is no other than poongryu. Poongryu is the core concept of East Asian aesthetics.

The main contents of poongryu are enumerated as the discovery of beauty of the individuality, the returning to the pastoral nature in order to liberate one's own inner nature, the respect for the artistic beauty which represents the artist's individual spirits, and the play or enjoyment of the nobility. Poongryu has the intent to enhance the ordinary life to the aesthetic state or the world of art. Therefore the full content of poongryu is nothing but the aesthetic way of life.

We could make various gesture in nujeong, namely to eat and drink, repose and play, teach and learn, talk with, sing a song and recite a poem etc. We usually strive to be free from the ordinary life in the space of nujeong. The men of poongryu had enjoyed a nap in nujeong, when a breeze passes through at high-noon and the surroundings become calm like underwater. They were steeped in the correspondence with the bright moonlight leaning to its railings. Sometimes they talked with each other drinking liquor, and indulged in subtle and profound world of literature when the convivial mood proceeds to the poetical inspiration.

Nujeong is a good place for reading, escaped from vulgar customs. A great scholar of the late Joseon dynasty Song Siyeol (宋時烈, 1607–1689) once borrowed a vacant jeong from his friend and read books gently alone to be awakened spiritually. “When I was in crowded places, I have heard



everyday only the quarrel on right or wrong of political affairs and ascent and descent of the official position. In those circumstances, I could not read any book to pass away my life idly.”<sup>6</sup> Nujeong was for him a place of seclusion and a hermitage.

Intellectuals who knew poongryu were fond of drinking. Drinking is comparable to the behavior and livelihood of great poets like Tao Qian (陶潛), Du Fu (杜甫), and Li Bai (李白), and then the poetic inspiration was correlated easily with the liquor that is a kind of companions of poongryu. Nujeong became a remarkable place for poongryu where many people enjoy and entertain altogether.

Men of influence of the province sometimes held a party and a fraternity in nujeong with a certain justification for the provincial inhabitants. Through this convivial meeting, their mind becomes pleasant, and then the discretion and sympathy with others grow up. As above mentioned, nujeong was a refined meeting place sharing the beautiful nature, a hermit place to satisfy the reading and retired life, and a productive place to cultivate the artistic culture like poetry.

## 5. Aesthetic Significance of Nujeong Culture

Everyone feels the temptation to search for the beautiful nature which is showing the vivid change of four seasons. Moreover, when one is tired or stuffy in ordinary life, one intends to visit the opened natural environment. That is why our ancestors were estranged from vulgar society and visit to nujeong in order to appreciate natural landscape. Nujeong is a good cultural heritage representing the Korean thoughts on art and life. Therefore, someone indicated that nujeong is the essence of Korean traditional landscape architecture.

Nujeong makes beautiful scenery, not opposing to nature but becoming oneness with nature. We recognize that in its space the inside and the outside become oneness, because the wall sides of nujeong are opened, composed of pillars alone. This kind of spatial structure is most exceedingly suitable for enjoying beautiful sceneries, for example, a cool breeze and a bright moon. In this place, we can easily have opened minds.

Nujeong assembles natural objects in a certain place so as to make beautiful scenery. It draws nature closer to its breast. It takes mountaintop and hillside on the back and holds river and ravine in its arms. Nujeong is built in a scenic spot where both the right and left sides and both the

upper and lower sides are in harmony. Therefore, nujeong makes both the inner view and the outer view more abundant visually.

However, it is more important than these formal elements that how much the nu or jeonghas poetry or poetical heritage. Admirable nujeong with a long history takes pride in its pillars permeated with prose and poetry. Accordingly, anyone who is ignorant of poetry doesn't know the elegance of nujeong. Without poetry, the color of nujeong justly fades. Nujeong is a specific place with poetical culture. Its dignity becomes greater by reciting poems. The pleasure in nujeong consist both in the landscape unfolded in front of us and in finding the poetic state originated from it.

Song Soon (宋純, 1493–1583), a lyric poet of Joseon dynasty, recited in his *Myeonangjeong Ode* (俛仰亭歌) as following.

I have erected a scenic pavilion beside a broad and flat rock,  
plowing into the grove of pine trees and bamboos.  
Just like a blue crane stretching radiantly two wings,  
taking to the air far away.<sup>7</sup>

The poet recites the beauty of nature and the pleasurable taste amusing it. We can read the state of mind of the poet who would like to attain spiritual enlightenment through appreciating the nature and projecting his idea into it. The main function of nujeong has been basically the appreciation of the beautiful landscape immersing with its pleasurable taste.

The space of nujeong has played a role to cultivate individual personality and aesthetic sentiments. It has a humanistic significance for the hermit scholars, who are practicing self-education and life-long education, to realize perfection of self. They utilized the place for enlarging their knowledge and deepening their discernment, and debating the state of political affairs to search for vision of the future, in the quiet and beautiful environment after their retirement from official life. And they utilized the place for purification of mind and turning spare time to good account, such as reciting poems and practicing calligraphy.

Now, we need a new paradigm of education grounded on the idea of recovery of humanity and harmonious life. An alternative plan could be self-cultivation and self-education which improve and build up oneself through introspection. Nujeong could be a good vehicle which can furnish such an environment and condition.

Nujeong must be, still now for us, a valuable place where we can recover our sensibility and ensure a genuine “perspective of life,”<sup>8</sup> [2] in the midst of looking up the sky and the cloud, facing the sunbeam and the shade,

feeling the wind and the water, and lifting one's eyes to the moon and the stars. Nujeog is an ideal space for our physical and spiritual repose and leisure in our healthy livelihood.

## 6. Poongryu as a Basic Concept of East Asian Aesthetics

Generally the name of aesthetics is considered as a branch of philosophy which has been shaped and developed in the European countries, and its main subjects have been beauty, fine arts and sensual cognition. However, there is no guarantee that the concepts of beauty and fine arts for Western people are necessary in accord with those for Eastern people. Moreover the concepts of beauty and fine arts in the West were not fixed, and they were changed continuously in history.

Therefore when we East Asian people study our own traditional aesthetics today, it is more fruitful not so much to pay attention to the translated words of beauty or fine arts used in the Western language as to find out our own concepts equivalent to the Western concepts in the role. We cannot assert that the words such as beauty and fine arts are the main concepts in East Asian aesthetics. At least in Korean traditional thoughts the values and phenomena of beauty and fine arts were not dealt with in their own way, but regarded and treated of as relating strongly to other values and phenomena. Especially they were linked together morals or ethics, and still more sometimes subordinated to them according to circumstances.

In this viewpoint I would like to notice of poongryu as a methodological concept of East Asian aesthetics which comprise three main aspects of aesthetic study such as beauty, fine arts and sensual cognition. In Eastern thoughts the concept of poongryu is able to integrate the various aspects of aesthetic problems. It has been to be conscious of in the historical development in East Asian classical aesthetics incessantly. In this reason, poongryu is to be called the basic concept founding East Asian aesthetics.

Poongryu (or fengliu in Chinese and furyu in Japanese) means 'the stream of wind' in the literal sense of the word. It implies to give full play to one's free-spirited and extravagant mind with full scope. Once when Confucius asked to his pupils about their hope in the future, Zi-lu replied to rescue the country from danger as a politician, Ran You to raise the wealth of the people as an economic person and Gong-Xi Hua to become a government official. Only Zeng Xi didn't reply. Then the Master asked

again to him. Zeng Xi said, at the end of spring, when the making of the Spring Clothes has been completed, to go with five or six newly-capped youths and six or seven uncapped boys, perform the lustration in the river I, take the air at the Rain Dance altars, and then go home singing. The Master heaved a deep sigh and said, I am with Zeng Xi. Poongryu is such Zeng Xi's mind as breaking off relations with the trivialities of ordinary life.

This free and extravagant spirit can be displayed not only in the attitude on politics and society but also in the realm of literature and taste. Furthermore it can be displayed in the relation with the opposite sex and in the way of life. In short, the life of a freeman sharing in the benefit of the unrestrainedness of environment and the loftiness of personality is to be called poongryu. To enjoy a hermit's life and to be excellent in "quintan" (清談) or the clean discourse are good examples of fengliu. The disposition of the clean discourse became "xuanxue" (玄學) or the profound philosophy by combining with the Buddhism, and then the profound philosophy developed to be the Zen-Buddhistic philosophy (禪) so that it made a tradition of poongryu in the side of mind. Poongryu has the tendency to enhance the ordinary life to the aesthetic state or the world of art. Therefore, the full content of poongryu is nothing but the aesthetic way of life.

## 7. Transition of the Concept of Poongryu

The implications of poongryu have been modified variously with the change of times. The original meaning in China implied simply a custom handed down from the preceding King. In *Han* period (BC. 206–AD. 220) the meaning was changed to be a laudable and beautiful custom in policy and education. And then it has been used to judge the merit of a person, to qualify the attitude of life and to designate the doctrine of artistic beauty. And next on the one hand it implied the beauty of natural scenery and human appearance, and on the other hand it signified the aesthetic life with taste.

The concept of poongryu as a kind of expression of aesthetic consciousness was widespread in the period of *Wei Jin* (AD. 3–4 C.). It is natural that poongryu should come into being from the influence of Taoism which was a foothold of that period. Many Taoists primarily have elucidated the aesthetic way of life. We can find an example in the famous chapter *Let Fancy Roam* in *Chuang Tzu*. Poongryu came to be nearer to the aesthetic

idea as an artistic and tasteful life, which was supported, formed and developed by the luxurious life of clan. In this way the concept of poongryu was breeding as an aesthetic idea in *Jin* period.

The purport of poongryu became almost same as that of the word *ya* (雅) or elegance which is opposite to *su* (俗) or vulgarism. In the sixth century in China the meaning of *fengliu* changed again to be voluptuous beauty. We can find many examples in the poems of *Yu Tai Xin Yong Ji* which was one of the best anthologies compiled in those days.

The meaning of the word *fengliu* has changed variously. In the Chinese dictionary *Pei Wen Yun Fu* (佩文韻府) the most of the usages of *fengliu* appeared in Chinese classical writings are enumerated. The usages are rearranged in seven kinds in a modern dictionary *Ci Yuan* (辭源). They are as follows: First, the remnants of beautiful custom. Second, the physical appearance or the attitude of a man. Third, grace or dignity. Fourth, the brilliance of beautiful scenery. Fifth, go against etiquette, to make one's own style and to express something different from ordinary people. Sixth, the unusual spiritual ability. Seventh, to call at the place where prostitute girls live in.

If we reexamine above contents, we can find that the first usage denotes the flowing of the beautiful customs made by preceding King. It means the tradition of morals and customs which aim at the realization of moral and political culture based on 'the Way of King'. In short we interpret it as good customs among the people or as the beautiful customs of the world. The second and third usages signify the individually preeminent character or dignity, and further signify the visible appearance in which the character and the dignity were manifested externally. Consequently it means the attitude of life which shows human merits in a broad sense. In some cases we can regard it as grace of work of art in general because it designates the style or norm of music. The fourth usage signifies the existence of the aesthetic qualities which can be discovered in the attributes of natural things. For example the aesthetic quality of elegance in the long drooping branches of a willow tree is the case. The fifth and the sixth usage mean the spiritual state which is super-mundane, extraordinary, lofty and graceful. It is the aspect of cultured elegance free from the trammels of ordinary life. It signifies the greatness of not only moral mentality but also artistic and literary cultivation. In short it is a refined and graceful literati taste. The seventh is a transferred meaning in particular which imply the amorousness.

The general usages of poongryu are mentioned above. The basic meaning supporting those usages, in brief, signifies the existence of spiritual value.

The content was mainly political and educational at first, gradually spread to the sphere of moral and aesthetic value, and eventually to the site of customs, individuals, natural things and works of art all over the world.

## 8. Conclusion

Recently a Japanese writer Fujiwara Shigekazu wrote a book on poongryu or furyu. He tried to suggest poongryu as a model of ecological life while he was inquiring into the structure of poongryu.<sup>9</sup> According to him, the factors supporting the structure of poongryu are as follows: unrestrained posture, play, surplus, open mind and body, and detachment. And in the bottom of these factors nature is permeated deeply. Consequently poongryu is come-and-go to boundaries at one's pleasure unrestrained by both the subject and the object. It is a borderless reconciliation not being involved in the distinction between the subject and the object. It is a correspondence with all things in nature through the mind of playfulness. It is a way of living i.e. a free detachment which always is used to contact with the things and leave its direction to wind, opening the mind and body to all things.

It is just the time that we have to make a new life model or life manners grounded on the ethics covering the whole ecosystem which consists of all living creatures. At this time I hope that the manners of poongryu, which might be called the poetics of correspondence with all things in ecosystem, will be resuscitated quietly. I think the ecological implication of poongryu is very important in present time. I expect the idea of poongryu will play an important role as a model of ecological life and still more as a model of way of life which is able to cultivate our personality grounded on the true subjectivity of human existence.

## Endnotes

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Chen-Chu Chen

# Examining the Art Practices and Self-cultivation in Traditional East Asia: Zhu Xi and Ogyū Sorai on the Confucian Rites and Music

## 1. Introduction

In pre-modern East Asia, the word of “art” did not have the same meaning as that of today; art in the present day refers to visual and performing arts, while art in ancient time even included skills such as archery and fortune-telling. In fact, when people practiced arts, such as music or poetry, they recognized their actions from different perspectives and give them different significances from ours. The Confucian rites and music (禮樂, Li-Yue) was adopted widely in China, Korean, Japan, Vietnam and so on. Often considered together with poetry (詩, shi) and history (書, shu), they were used to describe the ideas and practices of art. Rites, music, poetry and history seem so heterogeneous that it may be difficult to see them as inherently and closely related to one another. But in Confucianism they are indeed closely linked with each other. Analyzing the relations between these topics is a productive way to examine the view of art in pre-modern East Asia. But so far only a handful of researchers focus on this issue.<sup>1</sup>

This essay compares the philosophy of rites and music of Zhu Xi(朱熹, 1130–1200) and Ogyū Sorai(荻生徂徠, 1666–1728). As two of the most influential philosophers in China and Japan, their views were of fundamental importance to the idea of art in pre-modern East Asia. Comparing their theories about rites and music helps us grasp some common characteristics of how people recognized arts and artistic activities in the past. In the following, I first describe the basic features of the Confucian rites and music in the context of major East Asian philosophical traditions. Then I offer a comprehensive overview of Zhu Xi’s and Ogyū Sorai’s philosophies. With these larger contexts established, I discuss the differences and similarities



between the two philosophers' views on the arts to illustrate a distinct conception of art and its significance in traditional East Asia.

## 2. The Basic Characteristics of the Rites and Music

What are the characteristics of the rites and music? They can be illustrated by some comparisons.

The question of what the contents and forms of arts are and ought to be depends on how people think of the essence of arts. While Western European art emphasizes making a point and sees autonomy as one of its core beliefs, most (traditional) East Asian arts, in contrast, focus on self-cultivation. The latter's audience pay more attention to the practitioners than their artworks. What really matters is the process of self-cultivation itself as well as the methods adopted by the practitioner in the process.

Most of the ideas of East Asian arts were influenced by Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism.

Buddhism values the achievement of the discovery and the elimination of all suffering.<sup>2</sup> Daily walking, standing, sitting, and lying down are all parts of an important process for this achievement. Some practices of arts, such as poetry writing, tea ceremony, music making (like *shakuhachi* 尺八, a Japanese bamboo flute) are also considered as ways of attaining this achievement. The practice of arts is a part of everyday life. People believe it would help attain the enlightenment.<sup>3</sup>

In Taoism (Daojia , the philosophy based on the texts of the *Daodejing* (道德經) and the *Zhuangzi* (莊子) ), the core is *Tao* (道), which means "the Way." Wing-tsit Chan explains that:

Whereas in other schools Tao means a system or moral truth, in this it is the One, which is natural, eternal, spontaneous, nameless, and indescribable. It is at once the beginning of all things and the way in which all things pursue their course. When this Tao is possessed by individual things, it becomes its character or virtue [de]. As the way of life, it denotes simplicity, spontaneity, tranquility, weakness, and most important of all, non-action (wu-wei). By the latter is not meant literally "inactivity" but rather "taking no action that is contrary to nature" – in other words, letting Nature take its course.<sup>4</sup>

In Taoism, all individuals have and can find immanent Tao in themselves.<sup>5</sup> People are required to become "wu-wei" (無爲) or "weiwu wei" (為無爲). It means actions without actions, or just to follow the flow of the universe without any individual will, because the universe works harmoniously ac-

ording to its own way and people must place themselves in harmony in the natural universe.<sup>6</sup> Under these beliefs, the idea of “the great note is rarefied in sound (大音希聲)”<sup>7</sup> has become the aesthetic standard and the innocence and the individual nature of practitioners have become the goal of creation.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to Buddhism and Taoism, Confucianism emphasizes social relations. In Confucianism, the nature of an individual is examined in the context of social relations. Ruler and the ruled, son and father, younger brother and older one, wife and husband, and between friends are five fundamental social relationships. Confucianism firmly believes that the maintenance of these five social relationships makes the country prosperous and harmonious. Therefore, the goal of education is to assist each individual with realizing the harmony of the five social relationships. Rites, music, Poetry, history or Liu-yi (六藝, the six subjects of ancient Chinese education: rites, music, archery (射), chariot riding(御), calligraphy or literacy (書), and arithmetic(數)) are elements of the education established to help individuals achieve this goal.

From the perspective of creativity and individual development, the above-mentioned artistic ideas of Confucianism are not attractive. However, it can not be denied that social relationships are important parts of individual development. Confucian ideas of art may provide a different perspective to rethink the relationship between the arts and social life. What is the ideal individual who can fulfill the ideal social relations? What should the contents and significance of the arts be in order to help each person to become such an ideal individual? In fact, through responding to the above-mentioned questions Confucian philosophers had renewed and revised the contents and significance of the Confucian rites and music to respond to the challenges and changes of their times. The practice and philosophy of rites and music therefore have different meanings in various historical periods and regions.

### 3. Zhu Xi on the Role of Poetry, Rites and Music

Zhu Xi was an important Song Dynasty scholar who is considered the most important exponent of Neo-Confucianism. His teachings and writings have greatly influenced philosophers of Korea and Japan as well. Here I begin with outlining Zhu's metaphysics, and then discuss the types of poetry, rites and music Zhu created for someone who wants to become an ideal individual.

Zhu's metaphysics is that everything contains *li* (sometimes translated as rational principle or law; 理) and *qi* (sometimes translated as vital force; 氣). *Li* is the principle of everything. It represents what and why things should be.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it is intrinsic in the individual mind.<sup>10</sup> When a person realizes *li*, he/she becomes tranquil rather than anxious (思慮紛擾).<sup>11</sup> He/she also becomes conscious and insightful (虛明洞徹, 寂然不動).<sup>12</sup> *Li* elevates an individual to the state of "following the *Tao* calmly without deliberation" (不待思勉而從容中道).<sup>13</sup> When an individual attains this state, he/she becomes omniscient. "Because of the inherent *li*, each individual can be aware of everything's *li* through their mind (以其理之同, 故以一人之心, 而於天下萬物之理無不能知).<sup>14</sup> In addition, because of the comprehension of *li*, each individual spontaneously acts in perfect accordance with morality. For Zhu, the practice of morality is the foundation for achieving ideal social relations. Efforts of individuals contribute to the prosperity of the state and peaceful lives.<sup>15</sup>

The practice of morality is, without a doubt, the core principle in Zhu's metaphysics but it does not mean that Zhu advocates ignoring or repressing individual's feelings or will. The realization of ideal social relations depends on voluntary willingness and acts of individuals. It is assumed that each individual has the natural willingness and capacity to pursue morality. Yet, *qi* takes an individual away from *li*. *Qi* is also a part of everything. It creates features and differences in everything. Nonetheless, it obscures our perfect moral nature.<sup>16</sup> In order to clean our *qi*, Zhu turns his attention to human beings' desires. The task of poetry, rites and music is to restrain excessive or inappropriate desires.

Different from the influential ancient philosophy of music contained in *the Record of Music* (樂記) and *the Discourse of Music* (樂論篇), which only emphasize the function of rites and music in maintaining the social hierarchy, Zhu adds poetry to the rites and music and believes that it would create a new form of personalized education. As mentioned before, for Zhu, the realization of *li* depends on voluntary willingness and acts of each individual. Therefore, Zhu suggests three aspects of study which represent the three stages of learning for the inspiration of such willingness and acts by which excessive and unsatisfied desires can be controlled.

The first stage is the study of poetry. More specifically, it is the study of *the Classic of Poetry* (詩經; or *Book of Odes*, the first anthology of Chinese poetry). Zhu insists that *the Classic of Poetry* was edited by sages and reflects desires of individuals.<sup>17</sup> For Zhu, the composition of poetry is defined as below:

Where there is desire, contemplation would ensue. Where there is contemplation, discourse would follow. Where there is discourse, yet words are inadequate and exclamations deficient, natural sounds and rhythm would ceaselessly resonate. This why poetry is composed.

(夫既有欲矣，則不能無思。既有思矣，則不能無言。既有言矣，則言之所不能盡、而發於咨嗟詠嘆之餘者，必有自然之音響節奏而不能已焉。此詩之所以作也。)<sup>18</sup>

Human desires inevitably bring forth their satisfaction or dissatisfaction, which in turns arouse people's feelings, such as happiness, anger, grief or joy. Naturally, people would want to express these feelings with language. But sometimes language is not enough to express these feelings properly. Therefore, with suitable sounds and rhythm, poetry is created to express such feelings. Studying poetry helps one understand various desires and feelings so that the good and the evil of human desires can be understood, and his/her conscience can therefore be stimulated.<sup>19</sup>

The second stage is the study of rites. In Zhu's opinion, the individual cannot live without the desire because of human's bodily nature: Because human beings are formed with flesh and blood, the pursuit of satisfaction of the five senses cannot be avoided.

(人有是身，則耳目口體之間，不能無私欲之累。)<sup>20</sup>

People naturally seek physical satisfaction, so rites are used to restrain oneself when the pursuit of physical satisfaction becomes excessive and inappropriate. However, rites do not mean mandatory conventions. Rites should always be in accord with *li*, the universal principles of nature, and are formed with various etiquette and ritual:

Rites are the etiquette and ritual of *li*, and the rules of human lives.

(禮者，天理之節文，人事之儀則也。)<sup>21</sup>

Through etiquette and ritual inspirations an individual would voluntarily behave himself/herself in accordance with *li*.<sup>22</sup>

The final stage is the study of music. Zhu stresses the importance of feelings in order to achieve *li* and believes the study of music can motivate people to practice *li* actively. Zhu has two viewpoints on feelings. First, every act of an individual responds to specific feelings. He emphasizes that an individual should express his/her real feelings, whether these feelings are positive or not. Zhu insists that "everything cannot go without feelings, like pleasure, anger, sadness and joy. When these feelings are directed in its

own way, then *li* is realized” (世間何事不係在喜怒哀樂上。...中略...即這喜怒中節處，便是實理流行)。<sup>23</sup> Second, Zhu insists that a positive attitude is useful to encourage people to practice *li*. He says:

If an individual practices *li* with joy, tiredness would not ensue and progress would be made.

(若是中心樂為善，自無厭倦之意，而有日進之益。)<sup>24</sup>

More importantly for this essay's purpose, Zhu maintains that the ideal music has the power to develop the said positive attitude and thereby encourage people to practice *li*.<sup>25</sup>

Music cultivates the moral virtue of people, making them tranquil without disharmony and unhappiness. This is the function of music at the final stage.

(涵養德性，無斯須不和不樂，直恁地和平，便是『成於樂』之功。)<sup>26</sup>

People can practice *li* naturally through music. For Zhu, the study of poetry, rites and music is joyful:

The sage created the study of poetry, rites and music, which makes students happy and willingly continue to seek *li*.

(聖人做出這一件物事來，使學者聞之，自然歡喜，情願上這一條路去。)<sup>27</sup>

To sum up, Zhu's philosophy of poetry, rites and music is based on his understanding of human desires. By studying poetry, rites and music, people become fully aware of their desires and learn how to control them. As a result, *li* is eventually realized. For Zhu, the core of poetry, rites and music is to help people realize *li*.

#### 4. The Poetry, History(書, *shu*), Rites and Music in Ogyū Sorai's Thought

The philosophy of poetry and music of Ogyū Sorai, who was one of the great philosophers in Edo Japan (1603–1867), had a profound influence on the development and ideology of arts for the upper class of his time. His philosophy of poetry inspired the refinement of Edo poetry.<sup>28</sup> His philosophy of music also inspired the reform of *gagaku* (雅樂, ancient Japanese imperial court music and dances) and paved the way for the development of *Minshingaku* (明清樂, the Chinese Folk songs from the Ming-Qing period) in Japan.<sup>29</sup> Sorai claimed his philosophy is based on ancient Chinese Confucianism and is heavily influenced by its rites and music. He argued that unlike his con-

temporaries, only his philosophy is faithful to the ancient rites and music. However, a careful comparison between Sorai's philosophy and *the Record of Music* (樂記) or *the Discourse of Music* (樂論篇) clearly shows that his ideas are different from those in the ancient texts.<sup>30</sup> Sorai's philosophy of the rites and music is based on his political ideology as well as metaphysics, which were formed in response to the economic and political crisis under the Tokugawa Bakufu (徳川幕府, the Edo period).<sup>31</sup>

Most studies agree that Sorai developed his own philosophy of rites and music by criticizing the School of Zhu Xi,<sup>32</sup> but his critique was only ostensible. Sorai's main concern was the social system of Japan and the self-cultivation of samurai, the ruling class of the Edo period. He maintained that samurais' study of the School of Zhu Xi overemphasized the aggressiveness of warriors and forgot their duty was to rule the country.<sup>33</sup> Sorai euphemistically voices his concern as follows:

The ruling class (samurai) has their own customs. The customs are considered as the *Tao* (道), the way of life and ruling country. Based on the *Tao*, the ruling class values bravery, loyalty, faith, honor and does not treasure their lives. ... This is the wrong influence of studying Cheng and Zhu Neo-Confucianism.

(この方の士大夫、おのづから一種の風習ありて、その道と以為へり。大氏、勇を尚び信義を尚び、名を重んじ生を軽んず。... 学者、程朱の学に従事して、多く誤る所ある者も、またこれに縁るが故のみ。)<sup>34</sup>

How to rule the country is the core issue of Sorai's thoughts on rites and music. He emphasizes the importance of uniting and utilization of the power of people, regardless of their classes. He says that "The *Tao* of the sage and Confucius is the way of ruling the country well. The Ruling of a country cannot just rely on one person; it needs power from each individual." (それ先王・孔子の道は、天下を安んずるの道なり。天下を安んずるは、一人の能くなす所に非ず。必ず衆力を得て以てこれを成す。)<sup>35</sup>

Based on this idea, Sorai defines the ideal ruling class and the purpose of self-cultivation through rites and music as follows:

The ruler is one who can combine the power of the millions. The *Tao* of the saint<sup>36</sup> is the way of assisting the ruler to develop his innate ability of loving for people.

(故に能く億万人を合する者は君なり。能く億万人を合して、その親愛生養の性を遂げしむる者は、先王の道なり。)<sup>34</sup>

In Sorai's opinion, the study of history is the core of self-cultivation. The specified textbook is *the Book of Documents* (書經, *Shūjīng*, one of the Five Classics and a compilation of speeches of major figures and records of events in ancient China), which teaches political principles to the future ruler. *The Book* is difficult to understand, so the study of poetry, rites and music is to help the ruler to understand the *Book of Documents*.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, Sorai adopts a special classification to explain the role and content of the study of poetry, history, rites and music. Sometimes his "rites" denote both rite *and* music. And the word *Gi* (義) means the study of poetry and history.<sup>36</sup> Sorai says:

Use rites to control the mind. Use *Gi* to deal with everything. Use rites to keep routines. Use *Gi* to respond to changes.

(礼は以て心を制し、義は以て事を制す。礼は以て常を守り、義は以て変に応ず。)<sup>37</sup>

What is *Gi*? Sorai's explanation of *Gi* is as follows:

Things are greatly different. Each has its own way.... Therefore *Gi* is established to lead everything to go its own way.

(千差万別、おのおの宜しき所あり。...故に立てて以て義となす所の者は、千差万別にて、おのおのその宜しきに合す。)<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, one can say that the study of history and poetry is to help the ruler make everything go its own way. While studying history provides the ruler with political principles, studying poetry helps the ruler understand the feelings of others because poetry records the feelings of human beings.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, since the poetry is written with succinct and beautiful words, it helps the ruler express himself appropriately. Understanding the feelings of others and making appropriate expressions would help the ruler establish proper relationship with the ruled.<sup>40</sup> Through these two studies, the ruler learns how to deal with everything and respond to changes, then let everything go its own way.

What does it mean to use rites to control the mind and to keep routines? The definition of rites and music of Sorai is as follows:

Rites and music are the norms of ethics of the ruling class. The ethics makes the rulers behaves as rulers.

(礼楽なる者は徳の則なり。徳なる者は己を立つる所以なり。)<sup>41</sup>

Sorai's rites are established to help the ruler appropriately govern its people. Adopting appropriate etiquette is to respect the ruled, and the ruled would be encouraged to voice themselves and show their loyalty to the ruler.<sup>42</sup> He believes that when the ruler employs the solemn etiquette to govern, people would become solemn as well.

The study of music is established to help the ruler understand the opinions of the ruled. Sorai's music is a form of ensemble in which all players play the same melody with different pitches. Student-musicians learn to maintain their own pitches, but at the same time they must listen to other student-musicians' pitches to make the music. The ruler is thereby trained in the ensemble to listen to others' opinions.<sup>43</sup> Through rites and music the ruler is well prepared to control his mind and then govern the country.

In sum, the study of history provides political principles for rulers. The study of poetry helps rulers understand feelings of the people. The study of rites and music shape rulers' conducts and trains them to respect and accept opinions of others. For Sorai, the purpose of this comprehensive learning process, and of the arts in particular, is to "assist the ruler to develop their innate ability to love others." And through this process, the ruler would become an ideal ruler, who "can unite the power of the millions."

## 5. Conclusion

This brief discussion of the ideas of Zhu Xi and Ogyū Sorai shows that their central concern is the conditions under which the realization of ideal politics is possible. It is also the paramount theme in their philosophies with regards to the arts. But the audience to whom they speak is not the same. Zhu's words are uttered, in principle, to all people. Sorai, on the other hand, addresses only the rulers. While Zhu tries to establish a universal and general learning process through which one can realize politics based on *li*, Sorai focuses on how to cultivate ideal rulers' class. Therefore, poetry, rites and music have different content and significance in their respective philosophies and political thoughts. For Zhu, studying poetry, rites and music is a process helping people to be aware of their desires and learn how to control them. It is a relatively inward and individual-oriented exercise. For Sorai, studying history, poetry, rites and music is to equip the ruling class with political principles, the ability to understanding feelings of others, and the willingness to listen to and respect the opinions of others; the arts therefore have a more explicit and direct political purpose.



But their ideas also share the same fundamental point of departure in theorizing the function of rites and music. That is, the arts ideally are means to achieve something else. This gives us an important and illuminating approach to the idea of art in pre-modern East Asia. Both Zhu and Sorai discuss art, in the form of poetry and music, not from the aesthetic value of artworks and the autonomy of art, but in terms of morality, politics and learning. For them, poetry and music cannot be separated with rites, and they are mainly useful and meaningful for self-cultivation. Through the learning of the arts, an individual understands diverse feelings of people and learns how to establish proper relationships with others. This view may be very different from the idea of art of the present day, but it influenced how the educated members of East Asia in the past viewed and evaluated the arts and artistic activities.

## Endnotes

1. When it comes to the Confucian ritual and music theories, scholars usually focus only on certain ancient literature; for example, the *Record of Music* (樂記), compiled between the first and second century BC and the 19th chapter of the *Book of Rites* (禮記), or the *Discourse of Music* (樂論篇, a chapter of *Xunzi* 荀子, ca. 312–230 BC). This lack of broader attention is caused by some prejudices. First, Confucianism is often regarded as pillars of “the traditional” which represents “conservative” as well as feudal. Another reason is the influences of European arts. Certain values of European arts, such as personality, creativity, genius, have influenced the evaluation of traditional arts of East Asia by helping to establish and reinforce a new form of performances and many aesthetic concepts. Gradually the arts of Confucianism lost its original forms and ideas, and eventually, its authenticity.
2. On the relationship between the enlightenment and the cessation of all suffering, see Sueki Fumihiko (末木文美士), *Shisou toshitenno bukkyou nyuumon* (思想としての仏教入門), Tokyo: Transview, 2006.
3. See: Kumakura Isao (熊倉功夫), ed., *Zen to nougaku · cha* 《禅と能楽・茶》, Tokyo: Perikansha, 1997.
4. Chan Wing-tsit, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 136.
5. Michael LaFargue, *Tao and Method: A Reasoned Approach to the Tao Te Chin*, New York: SUNY Press, 1994, p. 283.
6. Darrell J. Fasching, Dell deChant, David M. Lantigua, *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach to Global Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2011, p. 35.
7. Lau Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D.C. Lau, London: Penguin, 1963, p. 16.
8. See: *Uniformity Theory of Zhuangzi* (《齊物論》《莊子》).

9. Zhu Xi (朱熹), *Daxue huowen* (大學或問) in *Zhuzi quanji* (朱子全集), ed. Zhu jieren, Yan zuozhi, and Liu yongxiang, Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 2002, Vol. 6, p. 512. All translations of Zhu xi and Ogyū Sorai in this essay are mine.
10. Zhu Xi(朱熹), *Zhuzi yulei* (朱子語類), Peking: Zhonghua, 1994, p. 82.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 2779.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
13. Zhu Xi (朱熹), *Zhongyong zhanju* (中庸章句) in *Zhuzi quanji* (朱子全集), ed. Zhu jieren, Yan zuozhi, and Liu yongxiang, Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 2002, Vol. 6, p. 48.
14. Zhu Xi, *Daxue huowen*, p. 527.
15. Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei*, p. 356.
16. The content and function of *Qi*, see: Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei*, pp. 65–66, 78.
17. The editing of the sage, see: Zhu Xi (朱熹), *Huian xiasheng zhuwengong wenji* (晦庵先生朱文公文集) in *Zhuzi quanji* (朱子全集), ed. Zhu jieren, Yan zuozhi, and Liu yongxiang, Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 2002, Vol. 24, p. 3650.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 3650.
19. See: Zhu Xi (朱熹), *Lunyu itzhu* (論語集注) in *Zhuzi quanji* (朱子全集), ed. Zhu jieren, Yan zuozhi, and Liu yongxiang, Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 2002, Vol. 6, p. 133. Zhu Xi (朱熹), *Lun yu huowen* (論語或問) in *Zhuzi quanji* (朱子全集) ed. Zhu jieren, Yan zuozhi, and Liu yongxiang, Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 2002, Vol. 6, p. 762.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 798.
21. Zhu Xi, *Lunyu itzhu*, p. 72.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 72, Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei*, p. 517.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 1518.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 571.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 934.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 932.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 931.
28. *Ibid.*, Takashi (揖斐高), *Edo shik ron* (江戸詩歌論), Tokyo: Kyuuko, 1998.
29. Chen Chen-chu陳貞竹, *Ogyū Sorai niokeru chuu koku shiron to kin gaku no juyou to sono igi* (荻生徂徠における中国詩論と琴楽の受容とその意義), *Dai 5 kai touhou bigakukai. dai 16 kai nikkai bigaku kenkyuukai goudou kokusai kenkyuukai houkokusho* (第5回東方美学會・第16回日韓美学研究会合同国際研究会報告書), 2012.
30. Chen Chen-ch (陳貞竹), *Ogyū Sorai niokeru reigakuron no tenkai- Zhu Xi reigakuron no juyou to henyou omegutte* (荻生徂徠における礼楽論の展開—朱熹礼楽論の受容と変容をめぐって), *touyou ongaku kenkyuu*(東洋音楽研究)77(2012).
31. See Ogyū Sorai (荻生徂徠), *Seidan* (政談), Tokyo: Iwanami, 1987.
32. Maruyama Masao (丸山真男), *nippon seiji shisou shi kenkyuu* (日本政治思想史研究), Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1952. Tajiri yuichirou (田尻祐一郎), *Sorai gaku no reigakukan* (徂徠学の礼楽観), "Nippon shisoushi kenkyuu" (日本思想史研究) 11 (1979). Chang su mei (暢素梅), *Kenen gakuha to ongaku* (護園学派と音楽), „Nippon shisoushi gaku” (日本思想史学) 37 (2005).
33. In fact, parts of Sorai's philosophy of rites and music came from that of Zhu Xi (Chen Chen-chu, *Ogyū Sorai niokeru reigakuron no tenkai*).

34. Ogyū Sorai (荻生徂徠), *Kenen zuihitsu* (護園隨筆) in *Ogyū Sorai zenshuu* (荻生徂徠全集), ed. Nishida Taichirou, Tokyo: Misuzu, 1978, Vol. 17, pp. 84–85.
35. Ogyū Sorai (荻生徂徠), *Bentou* (辨道) in *Nihon shisou taikai 36 Ogyū Sorai* (日本思想大系三六 荻生徂徠), ed. Yoshikawa Koujirou, Tokyo: Iwanami, 1973, p. 24.
36. For Ogyū Sorai, *The Tao of the Sage Equals the Rites and Music* (Ogyū Sorai, *Bentou*, p. 13).
37. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
38. Ogyū Sorai (荻生徂徠), *Rongo chou* (論語徴1) in *Ogyū Sorai zenshuu* (荻生徂徠全集), ed. Ogawa Tamaki, Tokyo: Misuzu, 1977, Vol. 3, p. 660.
39. “The poetry and the history are the warehouse of significance” 詩書は義の府なり  
gyū Sorai (荻生徂徠), *Benmei* (辨名) in *Nihon shisou taikai 36 Ogyū Sorai* (日本思想大系三六 荻生徂徠), ed. Yoshikawa Koujirou, Tokyo: Iwanami, 1973, p. 75.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 75–76.
42. Ogyū Sorai, *Bentou*, p. 22, 31.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.
44. Ogyū Sorai, *Benmei*, p. 164.
45. Ogyū Sorai, *Rongo chou*, pp. 477–480.
46. Tajiri yuuichirou, *Sorai gaku no reigakukan*, pp. 21–23.
47. Chen Chen-chu (陳貞竹), *Ogyū Sorai niokeru Kogaku no fukugenron nitsuite no ichi shiron-gakuritsuron. gakuseiron. kingaku oyobi edo ongaku bunka hihan no kentou otooshite* (荻生徂徠における古楽の復元論についての一試論—楽律論・楽制論・琴学及び江戸音楽文化批判の検討を通して), “Geijutsu kenkyuu” (藝術研究), 21–22 (2009).



# City, Ruins and Landscape

(Yuko Nakama)



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Raffaele Milani

## The Idea of Grace and the Ideal City

In the Christian world and in its artistic representation, theological grace lived alongside sublime grace, just as we can find the *eros* of the pagan tradition together with the agape of the new feeling of life. Sensitivity and emotion, can attain the highest point as well as the lowest, but the descent can now reveal itself as an ascent; high and low are sometimes interchangeable. We can briefly explain, in historic evolution, the reasons which connect the theme of grace to its representation. In the New Testament, the word *Charis* means salvation donated by God to mankind through Jesus Christ with free and loving dedication. The word grace appears in Paul and Luke. Paul especially expresses what grace means in relation to the coming of Christ. On several occasions, in the offset of his letters, he wishes “grace and peace from God, our father, and from Jesus Christ. However he uses the concept of grace, especially with reference to redemption and vocation to apostolate mission. God has operated justification “gratuitously” and “for his grace”, Paul wants to highlight that God’s saving action on Christ’s redemption action has taken place for free consecration to love without mankind having done anything to deserve it. In short, grace is the love of God who operates freedom through Jesus Christ, his son. It refers to the whole of the divine action, but especially to the fact that mankind finds a vital communion with God himself. In mankind his intervention operates a change for salvation.

In order to understand how theological grace is also a sublime grace and vice versa, we focus on the relationship between *eros* and *agape* in a comparison between ancient Greek, Roman, pagan and Christian culture. This is the only way to understand the relationship between the morality of the Ancients and that of their successors. Already in 1930, Anders

Nygren produced a reflection which is still important: in *caritas* the human being should elevate him/herself to the Creator in order to recognise in him his *summum et incommutabile bonum*.<sup>1</sup> However, the opposite is also true: the more the created human being parts from the Creator, the more difficult the ascent of *caritas* is. A question comes to mind. Does the human being have the strength to reach up to God or is the human being, as creature, doomed to desiring only the created things which surround him/her? In the struggle between *caritas* and *cupiditas* is it not the latter which prevails? Can the human being feel a *caritas* similar to that which the commandment of love requires from him/her? Paul reserve the term “*gratia*” uniquely to divine intervention, without which such instruments on their own would not suffice. Indeed, “the fruit that does not come from the root of *caritas* is not good”. It is necessary for will to be freely conquered by the supernatural good. This interpretation says that, from the Fall onwards, there is in the human being a tendency towards the lower world and that, for this reason, the human being lacks the possibility to aspire to eternity. The human being does not have *caritas* in him/herself: it must reach him/her via a special act of divine grace, it must be instilled in him/her from outside. In this instilling (*infusio caritatis*) of love, some people have decided to find demonstration of the fact that Augustine had a magical and natural idea of grace.

How did Augustine imagine this instilling of love? In his/her quality of creature, the human being is forced to look for good outside him/herself, in the upper or lower world. The upper world can offer an eternal and infinite good, but one which is difficult to obtain; while the lower world offers the advantage of being immediately reachable: the competition between the two worlds is clearly unequal. The lower world assaults the human being and binds him/her with the pleasure it awakens in him/her. Compared to it, states Nygren, divine good appears to be so remote and unreal that it can only weakly attract human soul. The eternal, to act on the human being with similar strength, must approach him/her, getting so close that its power of attraction becomes bigger and irresistible compared to that of temporal properties. This is what happened precisely in Incarnation. It created a bridge on the abyss that separated the human being from the Creator. From that moment, God, our *bonum* eterno, is no more far away. He descended in Christ in the secular world, so close to us that each fugacious *bonum* must necessarily fade. It is therefore the revelation of God in Christ the force that attracts us.



*Gratia* is the key word of the Augustinian interpretation of Christianity. For Augustine, everything in our life depends on the grace of God. This holds for both the natural and the Christian life. Taking this perspective, everything comes from God, nothing from ourselves: “Before being man you were dust, before being dust, you were nothing”. We exist by virtue of the grace of God and by his grace we have been justified: a gift which has been made gratuitously without the need of any acquired merit. Our good actions are not our own, they are actions of God who acts in us. Even faith, just like good actions, is due to grace. It is said: “if God had not loved sinners, he would have not descended from the sky to earth”. This is the point in which Augustine takes the greatest distance from the Hellenistic conception which his doctrine of *caritas*. The question for us is: by doing this has Augustine not shattered the scheme of *eros* reaching a conception which is totally dominated by *Agape*? Doesn't the preaching of grace hold in itself the announcement that divine love is spontaneous and “without reason”? This doctrine of *caritas* reveals another aspect which requires our attention and which deeply modifies the first impression. Without grace there can be no access to God. Without grace it is not enough to inflate air in the wings of *caritas* in order to reach God. Grace “comes before” our every action just like the means “comes before” the end. The aim is and remains the ascent of *caritas* to God. What has been said about Augustine's ascendant way to salvation still holds valid; grace is part of the ascendant scheme as a means one cannot do without for the ascent itself. What laws and free will were not able to accomplish because of our will bound to terrestrial objects, is accomplished by the grace of God given that it approaches the human being with the eternal and supernatural *bonum* awakening in him/her nostalgia of heaven. Grace does not abolish laws, it abides by what it requires. On the contrary of law, it does not force to good, actually, as Nygren says, makes good a pleasure. Grace does not exclude free will either; it gives it a new object, hence also a new direction improving it.

Augustine does not appear to be escaping the theory of *Eros* when, speaking about grace and about Incarnation, he stresses so much the divine Advent. Here as well, communion with God is essentially conceived according to the ascending scheme. Faith and Incarnation are nothing but the means necessary to ascent: the aim of the descent of Christ is our ascent. God became man so that we would become gods.<sup>2</sup> The fact that only to a little extent the idea of grace can be used as a counterbalance to the theory of *eros*, is demonstrated by the fact that Augustine, given that

grace identifies with the *infusio caritatis*, defines it in full consistency using the image of the ladder with which we can ascend to life thus opening up for ourselves the path to the heavenly home.

The continual objection of Augustine to the Neo-Platonists is that of not knowing Incarnation and not making any room for grace in their conception. It is clear, claims Nygren, that he wanted to introduce the Christian concept of agape. This does not trigger his complete refusal of Neoplatonic soteriology. We could say that, also as a Christian he seems to follow the salvation path of eros: he introduces it in his doctrine as *caritas* and he elaborates it together with the conception of grace. *Caritas*, which in its love towards heaven essentially bears the mark of the “celestial eros”, is the only real way towards God. However, till it is subject to law, it remains unproductive, for us it cannot be used. A “dynamic factor” shall intervene which wins our heaviness and every natural obstacle to the ascent. This takes place when God instils *caritas* in our heart. Grace is the engine that moves celestial eros, the force that allows for the ascent to succeed. This, once again, explains the weaving of the themes of love between ancient and modern times, between pagan and Christian ethics.

Taking *caritas* and *cupiditas* into consideration, Augustine, writing *De Civitate Dei*, as a reaction to the accusations of the polytheists and, in defence of Christianity and Christians, specifies some issues connected to the forms of community and of habitat in a frame-work of salvation. He illustrates the plane of two cities in an ideal projection. What makes us examine, still nowadays, Augustine who was, so close to Neo-Platonism and sensitive to Cicero of *Hortensius*, so cultivated in the high cultural rhetoric of the figures of order, of music, of beauty, so well versed in theological disputes, between Manichaeism, Arianism, Pelagianism, donatism? What makes us examine, still nowadays, a man who lived in such a tormented historical moment, marked the dissolution of the Empire also due to the Barbarian Invasions? What attracts us in this piece of work is the form of the city, as he conceived and observed it on the whole, and by form we intend the idea in which interiorly human beings and things unite in an art of living for a common improvement in God. The divine city that binds human beings in a Christian love, and the eternal city, governed by evil, are seen in their progressive evolution which leads them to mix in history according to a design of Christian grace capable of holding in itself also the great ethical tradition of a master of paganism such as Seneca (*De Beneficiis*). It is good practiced through Christian love that

redeems the entire community from the point of view of its total justification. The city of Augustine is basically a social project for the future. The ascent to the heavenly city is redemption for humanity not only with an eye to Universal Judgement: the ascent is the complete fulfilment of the descent to create a human world following the example of the incarnation itself which ascends precisely because it despises itself: it is horrified by the pride and arrogance of power as well as by corruption. The time of conscience dissolves into divine Providence. It is the city of the future, as ideal city, Christian, we could also say comprising non Christians because it is universal in the spirit of *caritas*, absolute shelter of conflict. Even here, Augustine may have drawn inspiration from the Greek culture and civilisation for the relationship between *polis* and *charis*, in an obviously Christian translation. In a time of social and religious hybridism, in an attempt to include non Christians, we could refer to the segment where John (14.2) remembers Jesus when he affirms, with reference to Paradise: "God has several houses". In this vision, peoples, cultures, races are not excluded, they are rather included in the Christian line of grace in order for them to move towards the heavenly city (place of the Paradise).

Christian Meier, years ago, portrayed the values that made up Greek society. Grace was an aristocratic project. He explains, how, in front of the popular council and assembly, the prestige of the individual came from how he introduced him/herself, from the power of persuasion, from *peitho*, which was connected to grace, a quality that was recognised as an ideal political virtue. In the seventh and sixth century B.C., *Charis* seems to have had a new function in a new way, Meier says<sup>3</sup> especially in connection to the religious festivals which contributed to increasing cohesion among participants, citizens. The strength was, in that world, providing for some solidarity. Festivals, sacrifices, choirs and dances, often, of antique origins were progressively created in an attempt to promote ostentation of luxury and of wasting to the benefit of the community, right to the extent of comprising donations for the poor. Actually it is possible to think of a relationship between grace in this sense as benefit, and democracy. At the same time, in such occasions it was important to communicate an atmosphere which was not based on something imperfect, obscure and ugly, but rather something nice, pleasant and virtuous. Grace was an added form, a quality desired to oppose good and equilibrium to the crude, rough, violent reality of human beings and things. An example: in the *Athena* of the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus it is perhaps possible to recognise the sublime

and aristocratic spirit, so common in ancient Greece. The goddess often repeats she can use the weapons of her father, thunderbolts, but she also says she does not want to use them; renouncing violence expresses another power, another quality in which Athena makes this virtuous feeling shine with elegance and equilibrium. Also the connection between politics and grace, the conciliatory character that the aspect of *Peitho* acquires: Persuasion that often appears next to Grace, is part of the topicality of the Oresteia, funding manifesto of democracy, as Meier defines it.

In Augustine the idea of the Greek *polis* is radically transformed. Even if there are still the above-mentioned reasons of grace and its relationship with politics, his city is the Roman one which, as Cacciari reminds us, puts under *civitas* the various ethnical, religious, linguistic components in a continual dynamism. What keeps citizens together is not origins, like in Athens, but the means, the fact of belonging to a regulatory model. We can add a further observation, as integration: on the one side there is *civitas*, the city in its institutions; on the other side there is the *urbs*, as a huge material artefact. *Civitas* and *urbs* are not separated because they have a common and visible nature. The walls, the houses, the streets, the public buildings make clear that kind of image and perception according to which we are at the same time citizens and people. Both build walls: conscience can become, we could say with a modern term, responsibility. They belong to each other in a moral and material space of belonging. *Civitas* aims at giving a physical form to its identity organising itself in the *urbs*, visible text and form of single individuals united in communities. *Urbs* places itself everywhere (*orbis*) and for all free human beings, citizens. The City of God is the spiritual project that becomes part of the universal quest for happiness which characterises humanity. In the nineteenth book of the *City of God*, Augustine values the superposition of values of the city on earth (power, riches, passion) and of the heavenly city. The secular and the sacred dimensions, Babylon and Jerusalem are different; however both cities have shared objectives because they are characterised by a common inspiration: justice and peace. It is a prospect of hope (a purification process) which unites, not yet separates Christians from non Christians, as we have explained earlier recalling and comparing the qualities of the ethics of Paganism.

What was the image of city that Augustine had before his eyes? What did Milan, Rome and other cities look like at his time? What was the contribution of urban transformation from the point of view of the Christian

temples? From what suggestions among people, practices and rituals can this document of civilisation and culture such as *The City of God* be born?

The model that Augustine had in front of him was that of a big rapidly changing city with mausoleums and new religious and civil buildings. The pagan influence was being altered, it was becoming increasingly marginal, especially with the decree from Theodosius of 392, while basilicas were distributed close to the entrance gates of the city according to a kind of planning and with a progressive expansion of volumes developing complex Episcopal groups and re-using pre-existing architectural structures, public and private, with annexation of other buildings. Augustine was experiencing a christianisation of space and could observe in the actions of the bishop an expression of civil power.

Among the mosaics that date back to the end of the fourth century, let's take one as an iconographic reference: the mosaic on the apsis of the *Basilica of Santa Pudenziana* (390 circa). We can recognise the form of Christian city. It could as well be Rome with mausoleums and a varied composition of public and private buildings, but also – because of the central position of the cross (Golgotha?), Jerusalem, the one which was reorganised years before by Constantine with major works. We observe in the mosaic, Christ on the throne surrounded by the Apostles and two women (Pudenziana and Prassede?). Above are the four living of the Apocalypse: the angel, the ox, the lion, the eagle. Very interesting is the porticoed *exedra*, a place where people meet and converse particularly fitting for this new symbolism. This image of people conversing, behind the profile of the city, seems to be particularly fitting for our purposes because it shows what the overall Roman city at the time could look like. But especially because it creates a new design of relationships in the regal majesty of conversing, dialoguing, coaching. The *exedra* indicates precisely the act of placing oneself outside the door of a house with a chair in order to be with and about other people. A poor socialisation act, habitual, becomes the sign of the Christian meeting according to the indications of faith, hope, love. The home is the city and the city is the home. It is as if the entire city was made of an immense network of *domus ecclesiae*. We could say, with Augustine, that this house of God has greater glory than the first, it belongs to the New Alliance and follows the words of the Prophet (Aggeus): "I will give peace in this place."<sup>4</sup> This scene in front of the porticoed *exedra* shows the spirit of the heavenly city by emblematically comparing two paths or possibilities which concretely, historically and empirically act even mingling. On the

one side the city of the gods, earthly, on the other the heavenly city. Both, however, as Augustine specifies, use the temporalities and are hit by evils with different faith, hope, love, right up to the Final Judgement where they split up and each one reaches its own end which has no end: condemnation on the one hand and glory on the other.

But the end is not a sunset, because this eschatological vision can be intended as an overcoming of evil in the course of history itself.

Augustine outlines a metaphysics of the means and of the end casting light on the perception of a life as deprivation of good: a not being. The love for oneself taken to the extent of despising God mingles with the love of God taken to the extent of despising oneself: two sides of the same coin. It is a hope under way, not only hope for an improvement of humanity with the aim of a refiguration of relentless condemnation to hell. Because grace could redeem the eternal city in a time of conscience which is also a time of history; it is here that we will notice how “God is all in us”. The ideal city is the city purified from violence, from hatred and from vices, city of waiting and of the living light, a city that sanctifies itself in the immense pain of a fratricide (Cain and Abel, Romulus and Remus) as a hideous foundation ritual. We seize, here and now, as in the dilated present of the conscience, the hint and the teaching, from reflection,<sup>5</sup> as Augustine says the city of the elected, it is true, is in heaven, but it procures in the world the citizens with whom it walks together till the time of its reign comes.

## Endnotes

1. Anders Nygren, *Eros e Agape. La nozione cristiana dell'amore e le sue trasformazioni*, trad. it. di N. Gay, Bologna: EDB, 1990, pp. 527–542.
2. Agostino, *Ordine, musica, bellezza*, a cura di Maria Bettetini, Milano: Rusconi, 1992, Sermon CCCXLIV.
3. Christian Meier, *Politica e grazia*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989, p. 41.
4. Agostino, *La città di Dio*, (Libri I–X), trad. Domenico Gentili, Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1995, Book 18, Chapter 48.
5. *Ibid.*, Book 15, Chapter 2.

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Zoltán Somhegyi

## The Aesthetic Attraction of Decay. From the Nature of Ruins to the Ruins of Nature

...Frost in the plaster, all the ceilings gape,  
Torn and collapsed and eaten up by age...<sup>1</sup>

It has not only been an anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet of the early Middle Ages, but all of us who have often experienced that certain ruins are aesthetically attractive, both perceived directly on the spot, or indirectly, represented in artworks. In my paper I would like to examine some aspects of the reasons of this attraction. Why do we like ruins, why are we attracted to these ruined sites? And, as a sub-question: why is simple rubble not pleasant for the viewer? For answering these questions, I will examine the role of Nature in the ruination process, its three elements or criteria, and then at the end propose an answer for the distinction between ruins and rubble.

I am particularly interested in these questions also because of the strange character of ruins. In fact, this attraction might be considered quite a paradox, since “normally” it is exactly the perfectness, harmonious completeness, entirety and integrity what we admire in works that we observe from an aesthetic perspective. But ruins seem to be exactly the opposite: they are “ruined”, i.e. a formerly complete piece of art (architecture) became or gradually becomes incomplete, loses pieces and elements and Nature starts to overtake the sight.

Still, we find ruins fascinating and aesthetically attractive. Isn't it paradoxical, that we are so delighted to see something dying, destroyed and/or still in the phase of being destroyed, when in other cases we look for the complete and harmonious? And what makes the question even more complicated is that we instinctively differentiate between ruins and rubble, considering the first as aesthetically pleasant, while the latter as unattractive and sad. We admire, represent and conserve the first, and clean up the latter. So, how is and why is this automatic distinction, that again brings

us back to the general question of what do we like in ruins? Why are we attracted to them?

It is not by chance that I mentioned Nature above, as it is strongly connected to all aspects of ruins. It seems right to start the examination of ruins with Nature, since Nature is obviously the key actor and factor of the ruination process. Buildings are originally constructed “against” Nature, i.e. as shelters to protect men from natural elements, and this difference between natural and artificial starts to gradually dissolve in the case of ruins as Nature starts to take over buildings, steadily occupying them piece by piece, assimilating even its colours to her. Thus Nature accompanies the life of the ruin in all its stages, from the time when it is not yet a ruin, but a building standing against Nature, until when it is not a ruin anymore, since Nature overtook it so completely. And of course, this also explains well the preference of “putting” ruins explicitly in Nature, thus emphasizing the importance of Nature in this interaction; we can both think of the artificial ruins in landscape gardens and of the practice of picturesque landscape paintings with ruins as main motif, especially in the 18th century, or even the *capriccio* as a genre.

Ruins’ nature is their strong connection with Nature. It is Nature that ruins a building, making it unused and unusual. Nature therefore is the key actor in the ruination process, and encompasses the main elements of this process. On elements of the ruination process I understand the concepts that define a “real” ruin’s existence. We might as well call them as “criteria” for the becoming of a real ruin. I identify three such elements or criteria: functionlessness, absence and time.

## 1. Functionlessness

A ruin is defined by the loss of the function of the original building. Robert Ginsberg goes even further when he writes in his book on the aesthetics of ruins that: “The ruin liberates function from its subservience to purpose. (...) The ruin is the temple of the non-useful.”<sup>2</sup> Functionlessness is therefore a decisive criterion in ruination, or, to put it in another way: until a building fulfills its original function, or can be used in a slightly modified function, it cannot be a “real” ruin, only a building that needs to be restored, reconstructed or modernized. The function of the building may change or get modified, further functions can be added to the previous ones, but until the building has a function, i. e. until it can be used in any practical way,



it cannot be considered a ruin. Naturally, it is not a real function – and thus the building can be a ruin – if it is only “used” as temporary or even permanent settlement of wanderers, beggars and real or fake hermits, that was again a popular and widespread topic in 18th century painting, or we can even remember Goethe’s highly sensitive rendering when describing his night visit of the Colosseum on 2 February 1787: “Peculiarly beautiful at such a time is the Coliseum. At night it is always closed; a hermit dwells in a little shrine within its range, and beggars of all kinds nestle beneath its crumbling arches: the latter had lit a fire on the arena, and a gentle wind bore down the smoke to the ground, so that the lower portion of the ruins was quite hid by it, while above the vast walls stood out in deeper darkness before the eye.”<sup>3</sup>

“Real” ruins need to be functionless, not lastly because we consider them artworks – even if artworks created by Nature – and we expect an artwork not to have a function.

## 2. Absence

Absence is a second criterion that is also extremely important in understanding the process of ruination. Ruins have missing pieces nevertheless they don’t confront the viewer simply with this absence, but also with the birth and formation of this absence, i.e. with the way of becoming incomplete. It is about the slow disappearance – thus can we connect absence to our third ruin-criterion: time, to be discussed soon. During the slow destroying of the construction, absence is continuously growing. Naturally this connects back to functionlessness too, as the conservation and regular reparation of a building still in use guarantees that the activity in it can be done in a secure and pleasant ambience. On the other hand a construction that is not in use anymore lacks technical and aesthetic upkeep too, thus allowing absence to “shape” the building.

In fact, strange may it seem, but we can almost say that roles have changed: an artwork, a ruin is formed and constructed, but not in the classical sense of construction, through putting pieces together, but just the contrary, since here the absence is what is growing, not the material or “body” of the artwork. As the Italian archeologist and art historian Salvatore Settis formulated it in his 2004 book entitled *Future of the “classic”*: „According to the western tradition, ruins indicate in the same time an absence and a presence: they show, or, better to say they are the

intersection between visible and invisible.”<sup>4</sup> It is a constant negative formation, so the ruin receives its actual form not by what is visible, but what is invisible. It might make us remember of the distinction between the possible ways of creating a three-dimensional artwork, i.e. a sculpture is either made through modeling or carving. We can add pieces of clay or plaster to create a work, or we can carve it out from a piece of marble or wood. In this sense carving might seem analogous to ruination, but we shall not forget the main difference at the end result: at the final sculptural work we don’t “miss” the pieces taken from the original block, while in the case of a ruin we continuously sense the missing elements. Ruin is therefore defined by the missing elements – were they not missing, we would not call the building a ruin. We sense and miss the void that defines the ruins, and thus ruins are constantly formed by Nature through the ever-growing absence.

However, we need to take into consideration a very important distinction: even if a ruin seems to make us face the absence, or the process of absence, at the end it is not simply about the passing, but exactly contrary: about the remaining. It loudly affirms that there is still something. A ruin is something remaining, a remnant. Even if it was originally entire, and in use, and now incomplete and functionless, but still partially it has survived. At first the lack of integrity might appear, but this can be transmitted only through the still-existing, the still-remaining, that reports on the original. Exactly that’s why we can distinguish between not-yet-ruin and not-anymore-ruin. The first is the above-mentioned situation, when a building is not a ruin yet, just in bad condition so that needs some restoration to maintain its original or new function and to guarantee the secure use. The latter case, not-anymore-ruin also often occurs, when the building or building complex or even entire cities disappear so much, that we can hardly or not at all imagine the original grandeur of it – in this case the vision counteracts our fantasy’s intention to complete the ruins and to get impressed by its authentic splendour. Therefore we can say that a ruin has its own life that is between not-yet-ruin and not-anymore-ruin. During its life it constantly disintegrates, nevertheless observing the ruin it seems that its main affirmation is not decay but remaining. When we admire the ruin, we concentrate on the remaining, since this is what leads us to the original, and this remnant is what is constantly formed by absence.

### 3. Time

As of our third criterion, obvious it may seem, though not as simple as it looks first: ruins must be old. If we remain at the classical appearance of ruins, i.e. slow disappearance of the elements of a building, then it requires time. In this way we can also affirm that it is time that offers the “time frame” for Nature for the tranquil work. Time provides the frame for Nature to shape – through the ever-growing absence – a building that has lost its function into a ruin. Crumble, drying, weathering, erosion through wind, rain or snow is an extremely slow process, but in these we can admire the unintentional anti-construction of Nature that nevertheless results in an aesthetically attractive artwork. We can almost call Nature herself as a kind of artist here, that creates a new work exactly by overcoming (a classical) artwork. Departing from Georg Simmel’s famous essay on the topic (1907), we can affirm that in the case of ruins it becomes spectacularly evident how Nature surmounts human creation. As Simmel formulated it: “... for now the decay appears as nature’s revenge for the spirit’s having violated it by making a form in its own image. (...) Nature has transformed the work of art into material for her own expression as she had previously served as material for art”.<sup>5</sup> Natural elements form (or ruin) a building into a ruin, like an artist, but an important difference must be affirmed: here we have a never-ending process that only has a “temporary end-result”. It is really temporary, as we saw above how a ruin’s life stretches between not-yet-ruin and not-anymore-ruin. An artist stops at a certain point, while Nature continues until arriving to the final point of not-anymore-ruin. Only until this final point can we enjoy ruins aesthetically. Of course, we can stop or slow down the time of the ruination process – the art of Nature – by conserving a ruin, and this human activity in this case might be interpreted as taking up the battle again: constructing and conserving against Nature’s will. If we want to have a ruin preserved, we need constant maintenance and conservation; otherwise it becomes Nature’s playground again.

Another aspect of ruins’ connection with time: they always have a peculiar kind of momentariness. They constantly change, even if this transformation is not perceptible for us in the short time of a quick visit. But if we revisit the ruin after a certain period, we might notice a new crack, a missing brick, a freshly half-broken column or another fallen tower. The new appearance of the ruin naturally offers new aesthetic experience and quite often may also require a new interpretation. Also this aspect makes

the parallel even closer between artworks and ruins. Artworks too need to be reinterpretable and they should tell us new and more at their review.

We can see well that in all these aspects the amount of time becomes decisive. Converting a building into a picturesque ruin needs a lot of time, much more than a human's life, since it takes imperceptibly slow steps. Therefore, we admire the sublime amount of time that has passed, that is picturesquely manifested at ruins, and that so much more surmounts our own given time.

In this way, we can say that the ruins' attractiveness is very much based on the fact that here we can "aesthetically" encounter not only the power of Nature but also the passing of time. Through observing ruins we can admire the power of Nature in time and it becomes much more efficiently sensible than by simply "knowing" the date of the (original) building. A simple number of centuries doesn't make us so astonished as the visionary vision of decay.

Obviously, here we come very close to the concept of sublime, so much discussed and analysed particularly in the 18th century that is at the same time the flourishing period of ruin-examinations, -excavations, -depictions and even of the building of fake ruins. Sublime, as a category describing the reasons of appeal given through a phenomenon that surmounts human limits helps us understanding why we can get aesthetic pleasure when visiting and observing ruins, the decayed results of Nature's power manifested through time, a power that is so uncontrollable for human force. Apart from the concept of sublime, picturesque is also a key concept connected with ruins. One of its most important theoreticians, William Gilpin in the 18th century intended to place it on the palette of aesthetic categories somewhere between beautiful and sublime.<sup>6</sup> A main characteristic of picturesque is that it does not generate such an intense emotional response in the viewer as sublime, i.e. it is not so strongly connected with an educative or moral function, it strives much more for a pure aesthetic pleasure, a simple joy of the view, that's why the name of the concept comes from the objective materialization of the view: picture. So, while on the one hand sublime helps us describing the effect caused by the observation of the otherwise insensible amount of time, mediated by the ruins, on the other hand picturesque explains the popularity of ruins as a genre, particularly from the 18th century on. Especially if we consider that ruins are often associated with nostalgia and melancholy, and at the same time with the wish of regaining the original, at least through the imagination. As Jean

Starobinski put it: “The poetics of the ruin is always a meditation on the invasion of oblivion. (...) The melancholy of the ruin lies in the fact that it has become a monument of the lost meaning.”<sup>7</sup> Of course, this lost meaning gives immense space for imagination and poetics, that sometimes can result in even counter-scientific attitudes by refusing archeology’s and other disciplines’ necessity in the research and reconstruction of ruins. Exactly this feature is so notable in the romantic approach, as we can read in the highly informative book of Carolyn Springer, analyzing the relationship of archeological excavations and politics in 18-19th century Italy. “Byron’s bias is anti-archaeological; like Keats interrogating the Grecian urn, he implies that what is gained for erudition is lost to the imagination.”<sup>8</sup> – she writes, and we can completely agree with English romantic poets’ point of view, creative poetical fantasy can take much more inspiration from something that is less researched scientifically, and more space is left for interpretation.

Thus, paradoxical it may seem, a real ruin is a very complex structure. Not only was it complex while the building was complete and in use, but even in its decay it remains complex, or becomes even more complex, through the void “added” to it. The artistic work of Nature, the slow anti-construction makes it attractively visible how time has passed over human creation, and our aesthetic interest and pleasure very much depends on this almost touchable perception of the incomprehensible amount of time. And exactly this helps us answering our sub-question mentioned above: why rubble is not attractive? Just because of the lack of time in their decay: rubble, either results of human aggression (war), or natural catastrophes (earthquakes) can always be considered as “sudden”, related to the centuries and millennia of “natural” ruins. So, even if at the beginning it might seem quite difficult to formally differentiate between ruins and rubble, as in both cases we have buildings that are not in use anymore, here the time-factor becomes the decisive one. This is what Marc Augé put very briefly but extremely clearly in his 2003 book titled *Le temps en ruines*: “Future history will not create ruins any more. It will not have time for it.”<sup>9</sup> And not only picturesque and sublime ruins will be hard to find in the future: since artificial is more and more surmounting natural, we cannot even be sure if in future there will be Nature at all, only her debris, without the aesthetic attraction.

## Endnotes

1. *The Ruin*. A poem of an anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet from the Middle Ages, trans. Richard Hamer, quoted in Anthony Thwaite, *The Ruins of Time. Antiquarian and Archeological Poems*, London: Eland, 2006, pp. 10–11.
2. Robert Ginsberg, *The Aesthetics of Ruins*, Amsterdam –New York: Rodopi, 2004, pp. 33, 45.
3. *Goethe's travels in Italy, together with his second residence in Roma and Fragments on Italy*, trans. Alexander James William Morrison and Charles Nisbet, London: George Bell and Sons, 1885, p. 159.
4. Salvatore Settis, *Futuro del "classico"*, Torino: Einaudi, 2004, p. 85. (quoted in my translation from the Italian edition).
5. Georg Simmel, *The Ruin*, trans. David Kettler in Kurt H. Wolff (ed.), *Georg Simmel 1858–1918. A Collection of Essays with Translations and Bibliography*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1959, pp. 259, 262.
6. See more on the history of the concept and Gilpin's interpretation in: Raffaele Milani, *Il Pittresco. L'evoluzione del Gusto tra classico e romantico*, Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1996, and Mark Roskill, *The Languages of Landscape*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.
7. Jean Starobinski, *L'invenzione della libertà. 1700–1789*, trans. Manuela Busino-Maschietto, Milano: Abscondita, 2008 (orig. 1964), p. 155 (quoted in my translation from the Italian edition).
8. Carolyn Springer, *The Marble Wilderness. Ruins and Representation in Italian Romanticism 1775–1850*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 6.
9. Marc Augé, *Rovine e macerie. Il senso del tempo*, trans. Aldo Serafini, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2004 (orig. 2003), p. 137 (quoted in my translation from the Italian edition).

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Yuko Nakama

## Aesthetics and Landscape: Crystallization of Nature Images

Historically, sensing nature formed a fundamental character of Japanese culture that was evident in traditional paintings and poems. Seeing, hearing or even smelling the fragrance of nature was deeply related to Japanese aesthetics.

It is well known that Japanese traditional landscape paintings have three major characteristics: the multiplication of visual points, cut off or fragmented feature, and fine details.<sup>1</sup> If we take a look at *Summer and Autumn Grasses* (1821, fig. 1) by Sakai Hoitsu, a painter of the Edo Rinpa group, as an example, these three features are apparent. The sudden rain has made the grasses and flowers bow with the weight of the water drops and has created a small stream of water in the background. The space is composed as to emphasize the fragmental character of these motifs. Besides its delicate descriptions, two ways of vision are notable: a horizontal view of grasses, and a bird's-eye view of the stream. Observers physically feel nature as if they were amid the painted space by freely moving their eyes. A fragmental piece, *Maple Tree* (1593, fig.2) of Hasegawa Tohaku forces us to take a closer look and experience the tactile sensations. The colorful flowers look as if they project out from the screen to reach us.

In my view, the three characteristics I pointed out are, more precisely, devices for depicting the 'atmosphere'. In Hoitsu's painting we even feel the humid air after the rain and the scent of the flowers. This characteristic is also emphasized in a painting by Hoitsu's disciple Suzuki Kiitsu with the strength of the color of the morning glory (fig. 3). Here the application of pigments was controlled to differentiate the reflection of light to make the brightness of the colors articulate the essence of the flower.

Haruo Shirane wrote an interesting paper titled "Matsuo-Basho and the Poetics of Scent"<sup>2</sup>. Shirane discusses Basho's haikus and how his phrases

suggest the ways in which a flower's fragrance is carried by the wind. An example is his famous haiku from 1694: "Chrysanthemum scent – in old Nara the ancient statues of Buddha"

The Buddha statues in the temples of the old capital of Nara have no metonymic connection to the scent of chrysanthemums – the statues are not surrounded by flowers – and yet the overtones of the two parts fuse: both possess an antique and elegant atmosphere. The fragrance of the chrysanthemums and the ancient Buddha statues are not related by literary association but by non-canonical connotation. Here a space opens up, and this space is unlimited, filled with fragrance. In traditional Japan, atmosphere is remarkably significant for appreciating the aesthetics of nature. It is pointed out that the perspective of the totality of atmosphere has also been seen in the setting of Buddha statues since the latter Heian period – in the consideration given not only to the statues themselves but also to the beauty of the spaces where they are placed, especially of the moonlight and its reflection on the water.<sup>3</sup>

The depiction or description of landscapes or nature reflects by how we have faced them culturally within historical perspectives. Let us compare the same motifs of waterfalls in the second half of the eighteenth century in Europe and Japan.

Maruyama Okyo's hanging scroll *Green Maple and Waterfall* (1787, fig. 4) articulates the force of water falling directly onto a pool and splashing as it hits stone. It conveys an atmosphere of light and mist, dispersed in the whole space, and a sense of coolness and the sounds of water beating the basin beyond the scroll frame. It reveals the characteristics of Japanese traditional paintings, which are unique in perception and perspective.

In European landscapes of the same century, there are remarkable differences in both perspective and context. A waterfall painting from 1790 by Jakob Philipp Hackert (fig. 5) has turned from the ideal landscape of Claude Lorrain or Nicolas Poussin of the previous generation to a landscape without classical connotations, i.e. an objective description. The waterfall was painted under the influence of the popular *vedute* paintings or *Vedutism* of the century.

One of the leading European painters of the time, Joseph Vernet depicts a tourist of the traditional "Grand Tour" gazing up at a waterfall in *Landscape with Waterfall and Figures* (1768, fig. 6). The scale of waterfall evokes the notion of the *sublime*, which had been articulated by Edmund Burke and enthusiastically received in the second half of the eighteenth century. It was



Burke's theory that Denis Diderot referred to in introducing a stormy sea landscape by Vernet at the Paris Salon of 1767. According to the sublime notion, such landscape does not merely portray physical sensation of a man engulfed by extraordinary natural environment, but the threatening view is to make people aware of their existence as subject vis-à-vis nature.

Subsequent to Burke's theory, Immanuel Kant's transcendental analysis defined the sublime as an opposition to 'beauty', which originates from pleasure whereas the sublime originates from pain. Vacuity, darkness, solitude, silence, and infinity were considered its sources. *The Great Fall of the Reichenbach, in the Valley of Hasle, Switzerland* (exhibited 1804, fig. 7) by English painter, J.M.W. Turner reflects, so to speak, the spirit of the age of the sublime.

In the German romantic period of the first half of the nineteenth century, the sublime sea landscape in Caspar David Friedrich's *The Sea of Ice* (1824, fig. 8), an image landscape of the North Pole with a shipwreck, was also connected with a cultural identity characterized by the intense nationalistic movements. The coldness of the iceberg symbolized the failure of the unification of Germany after the Congress of Vienna in 1815.<sup>4</sup> However, it is not so well known that the first version of *The Sea of Ice*, entitled *Shipwreck at the seashore of Greenland*, was painted a year earlier. The patron who ordered this landscape painting was one of the establishers of the Saxon Art Union, who wished to have the 'sublime' northern landscapes as counterparts of the 'beauty' of southern landscape. It was a popular trend of the time to refer to the binary concept of Kant's aesthetics.

A southern landscape, *Hermit offering Hospitality to a Pilgrim* was painted by Martin von Rohden in 1818 (fig. 9). Both of these paintings by Friedrich and Rohden are now lost, but an earlier sepia version of the latter survived. Rohden was one of the *Deutschrömer*, namely the German painters, admiring Italian landscapes, lived and painted there, especially in Rome. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johann Winckelmann and other classicists greatly influenced German longings for Italy.

By giving a meal to the pilgrim, the hermit offers a product of nature that nourishes the human, suggesting the ideal relationship between humans and nature. The hermit himself could be a personification of intermediary existence of culture (religion) and nature. In a related oil painting (*Hermit*, 1834), the rich and various plants as fern, pumpkins, dark-red oleanders, then an orange tree in sunshine, symbolize the comfortable climate of the Roma Campagna. An influential German art theorist of the time, Carl

Ludwig Fernow, wrote the following in *On landscape painting in Roman Studies* in 1809: “What nature under the favorable influence of mild sky produces, or what our fantasy creates to make the land as a happy living place, these elements are put together here with delightful richness and diversity. Therefore only in Italy the landscape paintings could go beyond the imitation of reality and be elevated to the ideal.”<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to this southern landscape by Rohden, Friedrich chose the landscape of the polar sea devoid of any signs of life after struggling to determine the theme of the landscape.<sup>6</sup> In my view, it is because in sublime phenomena, nature is revealed to us as something that transcends our existence. Wolfgang Welsch argued, “Beauty versus the sublime is a probe to pursue and to understand the history of aesthetics as a whole.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, according to Theodor Adorno, “With the eclipse of formal beauty it seemed as though the sublime was the only idea of traditional aesthetics to survive and to live on in modern art.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, we can point out that the crystal northern landscape and the mild southern landscapes of the nineteenth-century Germany are antipodes of different attitude toward nature, critical of or longing for nature in both symbolized and literal meanings.

In the case of the sublime landscape, it could be said that it is a matter of conflict between man and nature in relationship of subject vs. object, which differs from the traditional Japanese attitudes towards nature. On the other hand the landscape paintings of Rohden show similarity to those of traditional Japan in their affection for nature. However, the hermit of Rohden played, as we saw, a role as mediator to nature, in which we could see the premise of his landscape paintings. The close-up perception, or the emphasis on sensitivity seen in the nineteenth-century paintings of Hoitsu or Kiitsu, reveals, as depiction of atmosphere, distinct differences between the two cultures

The contemporary Japanese artists, however, face the age of technology and the global changes in the natural environment which surpass cultures. Miyanaga Aiko’s, *The Beginning of Landscape* (2011–12, fig. 10) is composed, enormously, of 120,000 trimmed fragrant olive leaves gathered and sewn to make a huge curtain installed as an ever-continuing river. The artist describes her own artwork as follows: “Map-like veins give form to the time elapsed. – Tens of thousands of maps are woven into the layered pattern of the world, spreading out like lace. As wind breathes into the transparent neighboring landscapes, the smell of large invisible trees will reach you. Intimate landscapes, always connected to our small unnoticed breath, expand endlessly.”<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the purpose of the work is closely related to ‘the art of scent’ of Japanese traditional painting or haiku. However, the leaves have undergone a chemical change as they were soaked in sodium hydroxide and transformed into a transparent, golden, netlike pattern. Despite its beauty with its overwhelming yellow color, our impression focuses on its skeleton-like surface. Crystallized chemical leaves devoid of life on the one hand mystify and eternalize the living element; on the other hand, they emphasize their organic character as we observe the veins of the leaves as if through a magnified lens. *The Beginning of Landscape*, therefore, could perhaps be summarized as follows: technology-intervened mystification of the natural landscape or a magnification of its organic composition.

Nature’s beauty and fragrance, thus Japanese aesthetics of ‘atmosphere’, are crystallized and preserved in this installation work as a specimen. The preservation of organic substance has become more significant, as the artist continuously sewed the pieces of leaves before and after the Great East Japan earthquake and nuclear disaster in 2011.

The German artist, Mariele Neudecker engages with the notion of contemporary sublime (*Think of one thing [Heaven, the Sky]*, 2008, fig. 11). Her ideas grew out of a process of collecting images and concepts related to predominantly Northern European romantic ideas especially those of Carl David Friedrich (*Morning Mist in the Mountains*, 1808, fig. 12). The work is composed of mixed media, including a chemical solution to produce mist around a mountain made of fiberglass, which slowly but constantly changes its flow. The artist describes her works as “quite a sensuous, physical thing that I want the viewer to experience.”<sup>10</sup> She continues: “The use of technology in the work enables and destroys records of fiction and fact – in return science and technology become vehicles for the Sublime.”<sup>11</sup> The three-dimensional installation offers the experience of a new perception and physicality toward the sublime. However, Neudecker’s constructed reality exists only within a glass vitrine as if preserved in stasis, just like Miyanaga’s specimen of the memory of fragrance.

Paul Klee wrote in his diary of 1915, “In the great pit of forms lie broken fragments to some of which we still cling. They provide abstraction with its material. *A junkyard of unauthentic elements for the creation of impure crystals*. That is how it is today. But then: the whole crystal cluster once bled. *I thought I was dying war and death. But how can I die, I whom am crystal? I crystal.*”<sup>12</sup>

Klee considered crystal as a purified form of abstraction as in *Crystal Gradation* (fig. 13), and even saw it as his metaphor. His idea of impure crystal

derives partly from early romanticism based on the ideas, for example, of Novalis or Friedrich Schlegel. Schlegel once interpreted the Gothic cathedral as crystal, emphasizing that spirituality has overcome mass materiality.<sup>13</sup> In Klee's idea, however, in contrast to pure crystal, impure crystal existed as broken fragments or as a junkyard that symbolized the destruction of society and even himself. *Destruction and Hope* in 1916 (fig. 14), created a year after the diary was written, reflects his oscillation between pure and impure crystal notions. Miyanaga commented just after the catastrophe in 2011 as follows, "Without our realizing it, the lush landscapes that we have taken for granted are disappearing. We all need to confront the landscapes that will emerge after this."<sup>13</sup> As Klee's antipodal view of crystal implies, we are now desperately struggling to find our new relationship with nature.

## Endnotes

1. Cf. Shuji Takashina, *Japanese Figurative Tradition and Contemporary Art*, Contemporary Art Museum Previous Event, 1999 Report, ed., Meruro Washida, Miyoko Ohmori, Kanazawa, 2001, pp. 9–16.
2. Haruo Shirane, Matsuo Bashō and The Poetics of Scent, "Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies", Vol. 52, No. 1, Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1992.
3. Akira Mukasa, *Heiankoki Kyutei Kiken no Biishiki to Butsuzokan*, "Byodoin to Jyochō", *Nihon Bijyutu Zenshu*, vol. 6, Tokyo, 1994, pp. 181–187.
4. Cf. Jens Christian Jensen, *Caspar David Friedrich: Leben und Werk*, Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 1999, p. 189.
5. Carl Ludwig Fernow, *Römische Studien*, Zweiter Teil, Zürich bei H. Gessner, 1806, p. 48f.
6. Cf. Yuko Nakama, *Caspar David Friedrich und die Romantische Tradition: Moderne des Sehens und Denkens*, Berlin: Reimer, 2011, pp. 134–148.
7. Wolfgang Iser, *Ästhetisches Denken*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1990/2003, p.138.
8. Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 7, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 293f.
9. Miyanaga Aiko, *NAKASORA the Reason for Eternity*, Osaka: The National Museum of Osaka, 2012, p. 57.
10. *Interview with Mariele Neudecker Camberwell*, 9th of January 1999, <http://www.safebet.org.uk/intervws/mariele2.htm>, accessed on April 14, 2014.
11. <http://the-artists.org/artist/Mariele-Neudecker/>, accessed on April 14, 2014.
12. Paul Klee, *Tagesbücher 1898–1918*, Felix Klee (ed.), Köln: Verlag DuMont, 1957, p. 323; *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, English translation from the German, authorized by Felix Klee, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1964, p. 313.
13. Artist's statement on March 28, 2011, MIZUMA ART GALLERY, <http://mizuma-art.co.jp/exhibition/1301319419.php>, accessed on April 14, 2014.



Fig. 1 Sakai Hoitsu, *Summer and Autumn Grasses*, 1821. Color on paper with silver leaf 164.5 x 181.8 cm Tokyo National Museum

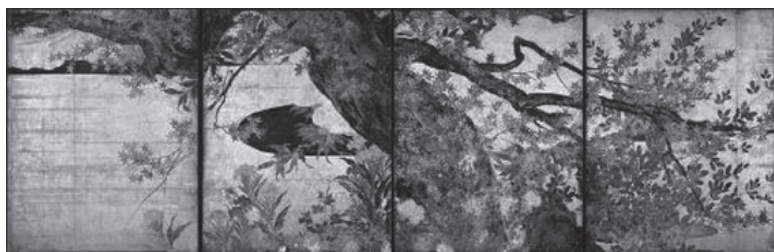


Fig. 2 Hasegawa Tohaku, *Maples*, 1593, Color on gold leaf, 4 panels, each 172.5 x 139.5 cm, Chishaku-in Temple, Kyoto

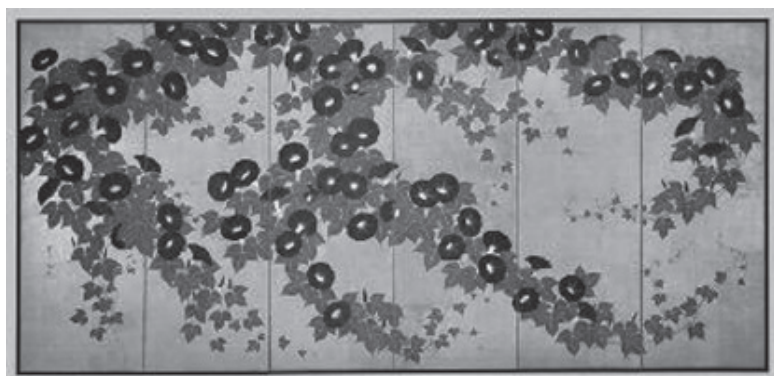


Fig. 3 Suzuki Kiitsu, *Morning Glories*, Edo period, 19th century, Ink, color and gold on gilded paper, 178.2x379.8 cm, New York Metropolitan Museum



Fig. 4 Maruyama Okyo, *Green Maple and Waterfall*, 1787, Color on paper 177.7 x 92.0 cm, Suntory Museum of Art, Tokyo



Fig. 5 Jacob Philipp Hackert, *The Great Waterfall of Tivoli near Rome*, Oil on canvas 126x171 cm, Palace Museum Belvedere, Wien



Fig. 6 Joseph Vernet, *Landscape with Waterfall and Figures* 1768, Oil on canvas 176.2 x 135.2 cm, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore



Fig. 7 Joseph M.W. Turner, *The Great Fall of the Reichenbach, in the Valley of Hasle, Switzerland*, exhibited 1804, Watercolour on paper 102.2 x 68.9 cm, Trustees of the Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford



Fig. 8 Caspar David Friedrich, *The Sea of Ice* 1824, Oil on canvas, 96,7x126,9 cm, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



Fig. 9 Martin von Rohden, *Hermit offering Hospitality to a Pilgrim*, 1818, Sepia 43.5 x 58.2 cm, Städel Museum, Frankfurt



Fig. 10 Miyanaga Aiko, *The Beginning of Landscape 2011–12*, cm, 120,000 trimmed fragrant olive leaves, ©Miyanaga Aiko, NAKASORA the reason for eternity, The National Museum of Osaka, 2012, p. 36, 43.

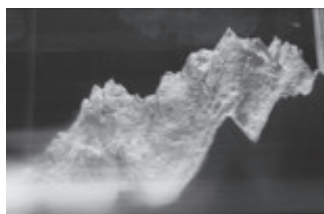


Fig. 11 Mariele Neudecker, *Heaven, the Sky*, 2008, Mixed media 77 x 107 x 221 cm





Fig. 12 Caspar David Friedrich, *Morning Mist in the Mountains*, 1808, Oil on canvas 71 x 104 cm, Museum Schloß Heidecksburg, Rudolstadt

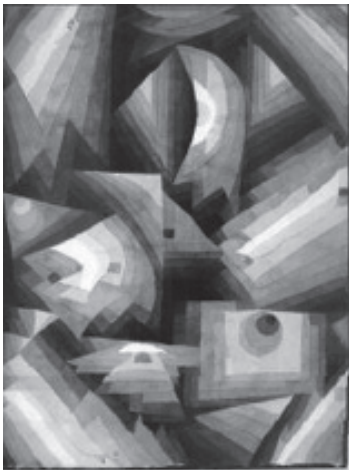


Fig. 13 Paul Klee, *Crystal Gradation*, 1921, Watercolor on paper 24.5 x 31.5 cm, Kunstmuseum, Basel

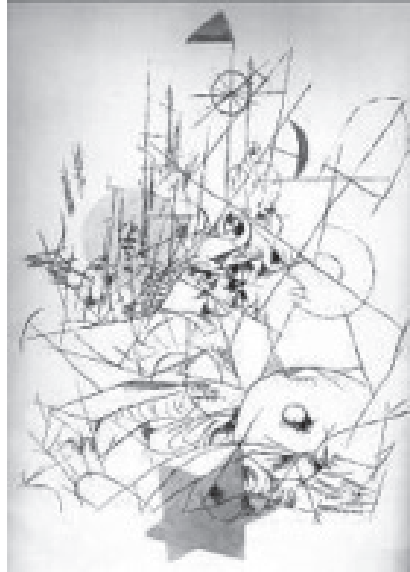


Fig. 14 Paul Klee, *Destruction and Hope*, 1916, Lithograph with color 40.3 x 33 cm, Kunstmuseum, Bern



# Chinese Aesthetics and Art

(Keping Wang)



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Keping Wang

## Waterscape Aesthetics in Perspective

As known in Chinese tradition, natural landscapes are called *shan shui* that literally means mountains and waters. These two types of things are inseparable as far as the intrinsic structure of scenic beauty is concerned. Their inter-connection goes to the degree that mountains would look as if alive with waters nearby, but as if dead without waters around. For they tend to mirror each other and make an organically interactive and integrative whole in many aspects. Notwithstanding their complementary relationship, mountains and waters can be approached separately because of at least two primary reasons: in some spots waterscapes stand out to be more appealing than mountainscapes, and in some others, it could be the other way round; then, in certain sceneries, both of them tend to connote distinct characteristics, symbolisms, and aesthetic qualities, among others.

This discussion attempts to examine waterscape aesthetics from Chinese viewpoints with particular reference to Daoism (Taoism), Confucianism and landscape poetry. It is sensuously engaging and philosophically provoking in the eyes of Chinese thinkers and poets alike. For it bears distinct values not merely appealing to aesthetic contemplation, but also stimulating to intellectual reflection. All this can be discerned at least in the three leading realms as follows: the philosophical implication of the water allegory in Daoism, the moral symbolism of the river image in Confucianism, and the aesthetic significance of the picturesque waterscapes in landscape poetry. Now we proceed to analyze them for further elucidation and clarification.

## The Philosophical Implication of the Water Allegory

Daoism is one of the leading schools of ancient Chinese thoughts. It is renowned to distinguish between such binary categories as the Yin and the Yang, the soft and the hard, the weak and the strong, the inactive and the active, and so forth. It treats them as opposite forces that exist, interact and interchange within the myriad things of the cosmos. However, it is inclined to tender more attention to the Yin, the soft, the weak and the inactive rather than their counterparts in order to illustrate its dialectical mode of thinking. It retains this tendency ever since its founder Laozi.

As read in Laozi, the soft is, for instance, often allegorized to water due to its special character that denotes something more than its surface. What is noteworthy is the water allegory below,

The supreme good is like water.  
Water is good at benefiting all things  
And yet it does not compete with them.  
It dwells in places that people detest,  
And thus it is so close to the Dao.<sup>1</sup>

Water is hereby compared to “the supreme good” because it pertains to such merits as altruism, selflessness, modesty and so forth. As the description shows, these merits underlie the positive features of water in that it is altruistic, always benefiting all things in growth; it remains selfless, never competing with others so as to become more outstanding; it appears modest, always flowing down to and dwelling in the low or humble places. However, it is potentially powerful, able to overcome all others encountered. It is therefore approximate to the nature of the *Dao* that is claimed to be invisible in form but invincible in essence.

Along this line of thought, there arises a popular insight into the symbolic virtue of water. It is found inscribed on a stone built in a bulletin wall in Lijiang Ancient Town of Yunnan province. It proclaims, “The wise are like water, for the water benefits all things without contending with others; it flows shallow around stones and thus forms a stream; it stays on in a lower pit and thus forms a pool; it stumbles down with natural circumstances and thus forms a cataract; it moves into a great valley and thus forms a broad sea. It varies in shape but retains its same nature wherever it appears. That is to say, it has few desires and wants such that it changes itself in accord with the situations involved and enjoys its freedom of movement with no obstacles in its way.”

Quite interestingly, the allegorical exposition of water in view of the Dao inspires Martin Heidegger in a way when he is pondering over the problem with the “homelessness” of the people in the modern world. The problem as such is deeply concerned about the dominant function of technology that takes nature as “equipment” for humans to gratify their practical needs and other utilitarian purposes. For example, a river is revealed either as a source for generating electricity or as a place to attract tourists for sightseeing. Then the problem goes so far as to lead humans into “the forgetfulness of Being”, meaning a lost sense of the mysterious source of things. This sense once sustained human beings in their confidence that their lives had something to answer to and be measured by. As noticed in one his essays, Heidegger uses the term “Way” [Dao] for the mysterious source, the “great hidden stream which moves all things along and makes a way for everything.”<sup>2</sup> This reflects his fascination with Daoism...Heidegger’s son related that a well in the garden had special significance for his father’s metaphor for the mysterious ‘hidden stream’ that was itself a metaphor for the Way [Dao].<sup>3</sup> The “well” is found in the garden of a small chalet or hut, on the edge of a village high in the mountains of the Schwarzwald.

According to David Cooper, the hut was built in 1922. Over the next 50 years, most of Heidegger’s writing was done here. It was not simply that the place “up there” afforded peace and quiet in which to work. More importantly, as Heidegger explained in a radio broadcast, this work was “sustained and guided” by the landscape, where he “experienced the great comings and goings of the seasons”, and where mountains, trees and lakes “penetrated daily existence”. Consequently,

As soon as I go back up there...I am simply transported into [my] work’s own rhythm...People in the city often wonder whether one gets lonely up in the mountains...But it isn’t loneliness, it is solitude...Solitude has the peculiar and original power of...projecting our whole existence into the vast nearness of the presence of things.<sup>4</sup>

“The landscape” that enriches Heidegger’s experience and inspiration is composed of “mountains, trees and lakes”. The “lakes” herein, just like the “river”, “stream” and “well” aforementioned, imply the “mysterious source” or water in terms of the Way [Dao]. All this creates an inspiring atmosphere that draws the German philosopher into an ontological awareness of the union of the “whole existence” of humankind with “the presence of things” in nature.

Now let us turn to the water analogy again. Elsewhere Laozi goes on to explain more explicitly the heuristic message of water through such a eulogistic aphorism:

Nothing in the world is softer and weaker than water,  
 But no force can compare with it  
 in attacking the hard and the strong.  
 For this reason there is no substitute for it.  
 Everyone in the world knows  
 That the soft can overcome the hard,  
 And the weak can overcome the strong,  
 But none can put it into practice.<sup>5</sup>

Ostensibly, water is transfigured into something incomparable and unconquerable even though it seems softer and weaker than anything else. It is so unique and irreplaceable as a result of its twofold character: it helps things grow and flourish by virtue of its vital function on the one hand, and conquers all others by means of its hidden power on the other hand. All this turns out to be an evident justification of its being “close to the Dao” as Laozi declares.

As a matter of fact, Laozi himself appreciates the wisdom and power exemplified by the qualities of water, and intends to apply them to personal cultivation in general and to political leadership in particular. To his mind, the best personality is expected to learn from the qualities of water aforementioned. For in reality, only those who are modest and selfless are most apt to enjoy more companionship or friendship from others. Likewise, only those who take up what others find too insignificant, unpleasant or difficult to do are most likely to succeed in their career development. This is also true of the leaders who are able to establish themselves and retain them in favorable conditions providing they manage to evade being arrogant, dominant or bossy with peers and subordinates alike. Hence Laozi advises people, especially the leadership, to derive wisdom and virtue from the seemingly humble, soft and weak water. Just as he claims, “In dwelling, (the best man) loves where it is low. In the mind, he loves what is profound. In dealing with others, he loves sincerity. In speaking, he loves faithfulness. In governing, he loves order. In handling affairs, he loves competence. In his activities, he loves timeliness. Since he does not compete, He is free from any fault.”<sup>6</sup>



## The Moral Symbolism of the River Image

The river image in Confucianism is perceptually appealing in an aesthetic sense, and philosophically provocative in a moral sense. All this is due to the moral symbolism of the flowing current. As recorded in the classical texts, the way to perceive delight from the river image is said to commence with Confucius. In *The Analects (Lun yu)* Confucius affirms,

The wise are delighted in waters while the humane in mountains. The wise are active while the humane tranquil. The wise are feeling constantly joyful while the humane enjoying longevity.<sup>7</sup>

Hereby “waters” are referred to “running rivers or swift currents” in the main. The distinction between waters and mountains is made in terms of their respective characteristics and appeals. The former is flowing and active by nature, transparent when shallow while unfathomable when profound, thus looking as if it is quick, witty, sensitive, observant and progressing all the time. The latter stays still and quiet by nature, ready to accommodate the myriad of things and provide them with what they need, thus appearing as though it is stable, reliable, firm, consistent and benevolent in any case. Likewise, the distinction between the wise and the humane is also made according to their respective traits and personalities. In short, the wise are corresponding to waters whereas the humane to mountains. Hence the wise are prone to feel delighted with the symbolism of the river image because they are intelligent and quick-witted, thus acting like the swift currents when perceiving things and handling problems encountered. Moreover, they tend to find pleasure (*le*) instead of confusion because they are able to attain the most insightful understanding and knowledge of what human life means and where it proceeds. With respect to the humane, they are saturated with the consciousness of reciprocal love and kindness for other fellow beings. They seem to go beyond such social bondages or shackles in the form of fame or profit. They remain therefore peaceful and tranquil to the extent that nothing could disturb or distract them at all. In their mentality, according to Li Zehou, they are well in the position to experience “the timeless time” that is metaphorically identified with longevity (*shou*). At this stage, both the wise and the humane have returned to nature as a consequence that they have succeeded in freeing themselves from any social alienation. Such a state of being is not merely psychical, but also physical. It is actually the outcome of “naturalization of humanity” (*ren de ziran hua*).<sup>8</sup>

Along this line of thought, the Confucian attitude towards the contemplation of the river image is further extended when Zigong asked his Master Confucius about the reason why he found it a must to gaze at each big river encountered. The reply follows,

As regards the water flow of a torrential river, it is in a way like de as virtue because it benefits all beings without a deliberate purpose for itself; it is in a way like yi as righteousness because it flows into low places according to the natural courses; it is in a way like dao as principle because it runs ceaselessly forward; it is in a way like yong as courage because it is resolute and fearless while cutting through deep valleys; it is in a way like fa as justice because it keeps the same water level when it fills into low pits; it is in a way like zheng as uprightness because it spills over any container without being coerced when it is full; it is in a way like cha as sensibleness because it is soft and reaches the minute wherever it goes; it is in a way like shanhua as moral transformation because all things that grow out of water are fresh and clean; it is in a way like zhi as volition because it zigzags here and there but continues eastward with unshakable determination. It is due to all this above that a superior man finds it necessary to gaze at the water flow encountered each time.<sup>9</sup>

Judging from the analogical characterization, we can observe a solid correspondence between the natural phenomena and moral symbolisms. It is often recognized that human nature is fostered and moulded by human culture, but it preserves some resemblance originated from the natural world. This is due to mankind's observing and imitating what has been happening in the living surroundings. In other words, when finding out what is going on in the natural world, humans would be aesthetically stimulated, intellectually provoked and morally enlightened one way or another. This is noticeable in the Confucian delight drawn from contemplating waters and mountains. Such being the case, Qian Mu (1895–1990) makes a remark from a moral and artistic viewpoint. He assumes that human morality is rooted in human nature. Human nature is stemmed from the natural world *per se*. The beautiful in the natural world is perceived and reflected through human mind. The beautiful as such is transformed into art when expressed by relevant media. Therefore, the morally virtuous tend to be those who know and enjoy art more than others. All this is associated with the natural world, because the ancient thinkers in China would be prone to equate the oneness between humanity and heaven [the natural world] with the oneness between goodness and beauty.<sup>10</sup>

Here are at least four points to make with reference to the moral symbolism of the river image. First and foremost, the delight or pleasure drawn

from waters and mountains as well is not merely an aesthetic reaction to the sensuous aspects, but also a spiritual feeling of the moral import. It reveals a vicarious experience of the natural beauty in landscapes that is parallel to a moral judgment. Secondly, the Confucian stance towards both waters and mountains manifests a special kind of affinity to natural objects that is further developed into the conscious oneness between nature and humankind. It is then incorporated into the Chinese tradition of contemplating the beautiful in nature both aesthetically and spiritually. Thirdly, it is peculiar to the landscapes across China that contain rich cultural elements and historical traces, comprising an important part of Chinese aesthetic phenomenology and art creation, poetry and painting in particular. Fourthly, the way of appreciating the beautiful in landscapes involves a hierarchy of value judgment. According to Confucius, “Those who know it are no better than those who like it; those who like it are no better than those who are delighted in it.”<sup>11</sup>

Why is that? Those who know it just as it exists are not feeling as strongly as those who like it. However, those who like it are simply fond of it but have not got hold of it yet, in other words, they are unable to put it into real practice in a joyful manner. As for those who are delighted in it, they are those who both know it and like it, and in addition, they have mastered it and thereby take pleasure from it in practice. In contrast to those who know it and those who like it, those who are delighted in it stand out as they are capable of experiencing and perceiving the aesthetic state of being in an ontological sense. For they enjoy the spiritual freedom through such experience, and go so far as to live an artistic life as it is.

## The Aesthetic Significance of the Picturesque Waterscapes

Poetry does not merely exemplify the magic power of words, but also the aesthetic wisdom of times. As noted in Chinese literature, the general output of the poets in the Tang and the Song Dynasties contributes a great deal to the development of picturesque waterscapes through poetic expression or grotesque imagery. As a result, the value of waterscape aesthetics is enriched and promoted far and wide ever since then. It is generally the case that the aesthetic significance of the picturesque waterscapes boasts such four cardinal features as verbally expressive, visually evocative, thought-provoking, and mood-affective. It is represented in differing modes that can

be displayed here by at least two broad categories including the beautiful, and the majestic.

## The beautiful waterscapes

In accord with the essential properties of the beautiful aforementioned, the beautiful waterscapes are thus conducive to the harmonious interaction and joyful convergence between the subject and the object. They are therefore seen in the tranquil stream, the transparent pond, and the sensuous river in particular. In actuality they appear as the main scenes of poetic descriptions owing to their aesthetic attraction and significant suggestiveness.

Typical illustrations are easily available in the poems composed ever since the Tang Dynasty. For instance, we read first in Wang Wei (701–761) and then in Su Shi (1037–1101),

Fresh rain has fallen on the vacant mountains;  
When autumn's evening approaches.  
The bright moon is shining through the pines,  
The clear stream flowing over the stones.  
Bamboos rustle, as washing maids return.  
Lotuses stir, a fishing boat descends.<sup>12</sup>

In the pen of Wang Wei and as noticed in the above description, the waterscape is associated with the “fresh rain”, “clear stream”, “washing maids” and “fishing boat”, all of which are soaked in “the bright moon” and set out by the “pines”, “stones”, “bamboos” and “lotuses”. The tranquility is indicated by the “vacant mountains” as are devoid of any other intruders and noises. What could be audible are the sounds of flowing water over the stones in contrast to the rustling bamboos and rowing boat. The depiction invents a verbal painting that invites the reader to enjoy the beautiful scene and tranquil atmosphere.

By Sandy River pond the new-lit lamps are bright.  
Who sings “the Water of Melody” at night?  
When I come back, the wind goes down, the bright moon paves  
With emerald glass the river waves.<sup>13</sup>

What is noteworthy in the stanza above is the image of the pond produced by Su Shi. It is similarly placed against the background of the “bright moon”. The water surface mirrors as if it is like “emerald glass”. The song

in the tune of “the Water of Melody” is accompanied by the rhythmic ups and downs of the “river waves”, and vice versa. They interact to procure a symphonic effect. The entire setting strikes out the quietude “at night” in the moonlight. It is not only pleasing to the eyes, but also to the ears when you imagine your happening to be present on the occasion.

## The majestic waterscapes

In comparison with the beautiful waterscapes afore-exposed, the majestic counterparts become what they are owing to their dynamic, amazing and even awesome properties including rapidness, powerfulness, greatness and vastness, among others. They will likely lead to opposing interaction and even conflictive tension between the subject and the object in certain cases. As a rule they are exemplified in the rapid torrent, the powerful waterfall, the great waves, the vast lake and the like.

Incidentally, the experience of the majestic waterscapes could be much more intensified when it goes through conventional mode of sightseeing. That is to say, it is to be done by traditional instead of modern means of transportation in varied kinds. This is simply because the poets who described the majestic scenes gained their access to and their feeling of such aesthetic objects by traditional means at that time. They would have felt something rather different if they could take up the modern means as we do nowadays.

Here is an example to show what Li Bai has perceived and experienced on an old-fashioned boat along the Yangtzi River.

Leaving at dawn the White Emperor crowned with cloud,  
I've sailed a thousand miles through Three Gorges in a day.  
With monkeys' sad adieux the riverbanks are loud,  
My skiff has left then thousand mountains far away.<sup>14</sup>

The rapid torrent is not directly mentioned in the poem. However, it is indicated by the fast speed that brings the persona “a thousand miles” away from the White Emperor Town down to the Jiangling City. Practically the distance between the two places is just a hundred miles or so. It is so exaggerated to strengthen the sensational experience of this unusual boat-travelling. A skiff winding through the Three Gorges is always an adventure, either in the past or at the present. It requires a courageous spirit to face its tremendous risk. Furthermore, the ambiance is immensely magnified

by virtue of the fragile skiff along the swift current on the one hand, and on the other, by the sad adieux of the monkeys admit the mountains over the riverbanks. It is so breathtaking and heart-stirring, not merely for the traveller inside the scene, but also for the onlooker outside it.

Moreover, the majestic qualities are demonstrated through the powerful waterfalls. Across the world there are a number of cataracts renowned for their overwhelming volume and power. They are thus developed into famous attractions for global tourists. As is read in the Chinese poetry of its prime age, the creative representation of waterfalls plays a crucial part even though it is not of high frequency. Notwithstanding this, we find the most familiar and outstanding image of all in Li Bai's poetic composition. It goes,

The sunlit Censer Peak exhales incense-like cloud;  
The cataract hangs like upended stream, sounding loud.  
Its torrent dashes down three thousand feet from high,  
As if the Silver River fell from azure sky.<sup>15</sup>

Geographically the Censor Peak is one of the summits among the range of Mount Lushan in modern Jiangxi Province. Now according to the allegorical depiction, it is wrapped in sunlight while giving off purple cloud as if it is serving as a huge incense-burner. Flowing down from its top is a gigantic cataract in huge volume. It is hanging there “like up-ended stream” and “sounding loud” enough to be heard miles afar. More amazingly, its torrent of an unexpected length is dashing down to the bottom of the deep valley, appearing as though the Silver River, a typical Chinese analogy for the Milky Way or Galaxy, falling “from azure sky”. The rhetoric hyperbole of the image for the Silver River or Milky Way is derived from unique imagination. Such features as unusual height, volume, length, loudness and powerfulness of the waterfall are vividly synthesized to expose what a majestic waterscape might be. More often than not, the poetic description of a waterfall cannot be identified with its real scene. For the poet tends to make an idiosyncratic judgment or comparison according to his own perceptual experience and productive imagination. Yet, he draws his inspiration one way or another from what he sees and feels after all.

In addition, certain traits of a majestic waterscape are reflected in the great waves or tides that occur in big rivers or seas. Many poets and painters alike are apt to contemplate and depict them in their works. Off-hand evidence can be found in the output of the Tang landscape poetry as a whole.

## A Two-dimensional Experience in Brief

Judging from the horizon of Chinese cultural heritage, we could arrive at a tentative conclusion that waterscape aesthetics plays an inevitable role in human life from the past to the present. It bears philosophical, moral, and aesthetic values altogether that can be perceived in the relevant expressions in Daoism, Confucianism and Chinese poetry at large.

To mention in passing, the experience of the aesthetic values of waterscape works chiefly in two dimensions: perceptual and mental. One is pleasing to both eyes and ears (*yue er yue mu*) in a sensuously perceptual sense, while the other to the mind and spirit (*yue zhi yue shen*) in an intuitively cognitive sense. When it comes to the aesthetic contemplation, the psychological reactions are initially evoked by the halo effect of the scenery that attracts the aesthetic attention of the viewer. During the process of psychological reactions in general, there are at least two acts involved: one is aesthetic detachment and the other aesthetic engagement. The former expects the viewer to free himself from cares and worries for a moment, directs and concentrate his attention to the aesthetic object alone. The latter advises the viewer to feel himself into the object concerned. It leads him to obtain an experience that could be sympathetic, vicarious or empathetic. Empirically the two acts procure an aesthetic attitude towards what is to be perceived and contemplated.

In order to discover and appreciate more, we may well adopt four practical approaches to sightseeing as an aesthetic activity. They are termed as the eye-based approach (*muyou*), the body-based approach (*tiyou*), the mind-based approach (*shenyou*), and the lying-in-appreciation approach (*woyou*). They are to be exercised flexibly in accord with the specific situations and corporeal conditions. In practice, they are measured in no way other than effectiveness or validity with regard to the enhancement of our aesthetic sensibility and *Erlebnis*.

## Endnotes

1. Laozi, *The Dao De Jing of Laozi*, in Keping Wang, *Reading the Dao: A Thematic Inquiry*, London: Continuum, 2011, Appendix, Section 8, p. 143.
2. Martin Heidegger, *The Nature of Language* in *On the Way of Language*, trans. Peter Hertz, New York: Harper and Row, 1971, p. 92.

3. David E. Cooper, *Converging with Nature: A Daoist Perspective*, Totnes: Green Books, 2012, p. 31. In 1946, Heidegger worked, with a native speaker of Chinese, on a translation—never completed and now lost – of the *Dao de jing*. The “native speaker of Chinese” is said to be Xiao Shiyi who studied Western philosophy in Wiener by then.
4. Cited from David Cooper, *Converging with Nature...*, p. 30. See Adam Sharr, *Heidegger's Hut*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006, pp. 64–65.
5. Laozi, *The Dao De Jing of Laozi*, Section 78, p. 172.
6. *Ibid.*, Section 8, pp. 143–144.
7. Confucius, *The Analects (Lun yu)*. The English translation is mine according to the Chinese original. Other English renderings are to see James Legge (tr.), *The Confucian Analects*; D. C. Lau (tr.), *The Analects*, London: Penguin Books, 1979, 6:23.
8. Li Zehou, *Lun yu jin du (Reading the Confucian Analects Today)*, Hefei: Anhui Wenyi Press, 1998), pp. 161–162.
9. Xun Kuang, *Xunzi quan yi (The Works of Xunzi Paraphrased by Jiang Nanhua et al, Guiyang: Guizhou Renmin Press, 1995)*, Section 28, p. 593. The English translation is mine according to the Chinese original.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
11. Confucius, *The Analects*, 6:20.
12. Wang Wei, *Evening in My Mountain Abode* in Zhang Tingchen & Bruce M. Wilson (compiled and trans.), *100 Tang Poems*, Beijing: CTPC, 2008, p. 37.
13. Su Shi, *Tune: “The Beautiful lady Yu”*, in Xu Yuanchong (ed. & trans.), *100 Tang and Song Ci Poems*, Beijing: CTPC, 2008, p. 121.
14. Li Bai, *Leaving the White Emperor Town at Dawn*, in Xu Yuanchong (ed. & trans.), *Selected Poems of Li Bai*, p. 195.
15. Li Bai, *The Waterfall in Mount Lu Viewed from Afar*, in Xu Yuanchong (ed. & trans.), *Selected Poems of Li Bai*, p. 15.



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Chengji Liu

## The Agricultural Trait of Chinese Aesthetics and its Manifestation in Landscape

Since the period of Wang Guowei (1877–1927) and beyond, in the sphere of Chinese modern aesthetics, reconstructing tradition from modern perspectives and interpreting thereby the spiritual connotation and value of Chinese aesthetics, have been the penetrating tasks for scholars for over a hundred years. Nonetheless, in so far as aesthetics originates from the West, particular difficulties are confronted with when people want to unfold the studies of the history of Chinese aesthetics.<sup>1</sup> Comparatively speaking, howbeit the historical background wherein western aesthetics came into force is complicated, the commercial trade of ancient Greece and the citizen society with *polis* as the subject produced thereby are fundamental, which goes greatly different from Chinese social state based on agricultural civilization with village as the unit. For the part of aesthetics, the difference as such leads to the typical agricultural trait of Chinese traditional aesthetics specifically manifested as follows: first, the reliance of agricultural productive mode on nature brings the relation between man and nature to the centre of concern of Chinese aesthetics. Secondly, natural materials such as soil, vegetation etc. concerned with agricultural production are the most fundamental materials employed by Chinese artistic creation. Thirdly, the reliance on the earth of agricultural production has shaped Chinese conception of time and space which is of distinctive aesthetic characteristics. Fourthly, nature dominates Chinese environmental cognition and landscape fancy and “moving the nature to home” is the fundamental idea of landscape design.

### 1. National characteristics and artistic traits

It is generally held that Chinese agricultural civilization originates from the Neolithic Age and the condition of the early development of this sort

of civilization can be described, in manifold fashion, by virtue of Mr. Su Bingqi's words, say, "clusters of stars in the sky". Meanwhile, nevertheless, the manifold conditions are at last integrated into one, to which the agricultural civilization of the drainage area of the Yellow River has laid the foundation for later Chinese economy, politics and culture. As regards the shaping role played by the agricultural civilization on Chinese economic mode, political construction and view of state, it can be understood in the following aspects:

To begin with, agricultural economy is a sort of natural economy wherein nature is the object of labour, and of obtaining living materials as well. The high degree of reliance of man on nature determines the complete approval of conceptual sphere with regard to natural value. It is by reason of this that in ancient Chinese thoughts, that the *Dao* of heaven is natural is, be it to Confucianism or Daoism, the schools of Moism, Dialecticians or Legalism, the starting point of philosophical cognition when "integrity of heaven and man" is the common value choice. In the second place, traditional Chinese politics is a sort of natural politics, and only when man's socio-political action is put into natural order can it be of legitimacy. The political mode as such comes, plainly, from the recognition and discovery pertinent to natural law by agricultural productive mode. Take *Liji Monthly Regulations* 礼记·月令 as an example: in the 12 months of a year, the daily as well as political actions of the king, the ministers, the people engaged in various careers and commoners are all adopted into the alternation of the four seasons, and the temporal alternation of nature offers measurement and support to the operation of human affairs. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Quesnay the French Enlightenment thinker has once said, "In China, speculative science fails to progress greatly but studies as to natural law have reached a perfect stature."<sup>2</sup> This recourse to natural law on setting laws for human actions and the consideration of natural law as the general principle of politics are the typical characteristic of agricultural nations. In the third place, traditional China is a country limited to human-earth relation before a nation. Different from nomadic and commercial nations, the wealth (the earth) of agricultural nations are unmovable. The particularity of this sort of wealth determines the reliance of peasants on the earth, and that settling without easily moving becomes the most fundamental human-earth conception. In ancient China, that the Central Plains has long been the steady political and cultural centre of Chinese nation appertains, in close fashion, to the reliance of the nation on the earth. According to the early national geographical

state established by *Shangshu Yugong* 尚书·禹贡, the realm of the Central Plains fundamentally centres on the “the emperor’s reign demarcated by the Yellow River and Luo River” at the middle reaches of the Yellow River, extending in all directions in accordance with the arithmetic progression of “*dianfu*”甸服, “*houfu*”侯服, “*sui fu*”绥服, “*yaofu*”要服, “*huangfu*”荒服<sup>3</sup> etc. till “the sea to the east end and desert to the west end”. Some hold that this view of state or world is Central-Plain-centrism, but I contend that it is agriculture-centrism. To put it another way, the earliest developed agricultural area of China is considered as the centre of the state or the world and the nearer to the centre, the more civilized, the farther, the more barbarous. The differentiation between civilized and barbarous Chinese societies is not eternally unchanged. When a nation in some border area occupies the Central Plains, it may obtain political legitimacy and hence represent Chinese national civilization. This indicates that nationality is not the determinant factor to the constitution of a state; rather, the earth and agricultural productive mode are essential.

Agricultural civilization is deeply rooted in soil. The earth determines Chinese economical, political and national states, but also the attributes of beauty and arts. In the history of Chinese aesthetics and arts, the employment of the media material of soil was dominant. E.g. according to archaeology, making tools is usually considered as the origin of beauty as well as man, and people position thereby, as a rule, the starting point of Chinese aesthetics at the Stone Age. In the early history of China, nevertheless, stoneware was plainly not the main labouring tool. In the area of central plains deposited by the silt from the Yellow River, stoneware is hardly available and the cumbersome stone tools are unsuitable for agricultural implantation. Contrariwise, trees qua the direct product of soil are available for making tools and suitable for the loose soil in the drainage area of the Yellow River. It is due to this that to China the agricultural nation, the earliest recorded labouring tools is not stone but wooden articles, say, Shennongshi 神农氏’s “cutting the tree for ploughs, curving the tree for plows” (*Yizhuan Xici* Part B 易传·系辞下). In addition, according to the dating as to Chinese early history of civilization by archaeology, the age (Yangshao Culture) when potteries appeared in large number in the drainage area of the Yellow River is called the Neolithic Age, which also remains to be precise. Qua the ware directly made of soil, pottery emerges on an important premise, viz. Chinese understand the attributes of soil, and this sort of understanding cannot live without agricultural civilization, either. In

later ages, Chinese process with regard to soil has been increasingly delicate which in consequence makes for wonderful china. It can be said that the evolution from pottery to china shows the surmounting path of Chinese agricultural civilization from cognition of soil via practical recreation to aesthetic sublimation, but also indicates that Chinese aesthetics starts from the age of ploughs, first develops in the age of pottery and gets mature in the age of china rather than that its starting point is in the so-called late Palaeolithic Age or early Neolithic Age.

Identical with ordinary utensils that are based on soil and pursuit aesthetic surmounting, Chinese literature and arts are also extended from agricultural practice. For example, the “艺” (skill) in oracle bone inscriptions originally means planting, “乐” (pleasant) whereas expresses the pleasure for harvesting crops.<sup>4</sup> Another example is the character “美” (beautiful) illustrating “large sheep is beautiful” which, apparently, has bearings on the livestock breeding in the agriculture of remote antiquity. In later ages, “艺” develops from agricultural planting into refined technique, i.e. “six art(s)”, and further into spiritual “art”, “乐” from appraisal of crop harvesting into general pleasure and further into the artistic way of “music” that expresses pleasure, and “美” from clumsiness on sight and deliciousness on taste into general aesthetic appreciation. The evolution of the meaning of characters as such has embodied the advancing tendency of man from material to spiritual, from practical to aesthetic, from pleasant to aesthetic feeling on the one hand, and indicates the fundamentality of agricultural civilization for Chinese aesthetics and arts on the other. In the sphere of poetry, early Chinese poetry centres at agricultural affairs, as is said in “those who are hungry sing about food, those who labour sing about their work [via poetries]”. Later they transferred, step by step, to landscape and pastoral poetries. Comparatively speaking, poetries of agricultural affairs show the trait of plainness and decorum due to their more deeply rooted in human-earth relation based on agricultural production whereas landscape and pastoral poetries are characterized by vividness and aesthetic for their formal consideration as to the countryside. On this account, it is a must to set up the idea of the general evolution from practical to aesthetic so as to understand the genesis of Chinese aesthetic consciousness and arts. In this aesthetic continuum, the steadiness and reliability provided by the earth and planting for man’s subsistence are of founding significance to Chinese aesthetics and arts.

## 2. Temporal experiences and spatial experiences

According to the view of French Physiocracy, nature participates in the productive process without asking for any reward. This selfless bestowing contributes to agricultural products' being purely "new products".<sup>5</sup> Apparently, that the nature is capable of realizing the bestowing as such is pertinent to the ceaseless reproducing capacity. In Chinese aesthetics, this sort of reproducing capacity of nature or the earth is given aesthetic significance in two aspects: in the first instance, nature's reproductiveness is its liveliness. This active feeling of life differentiates itself from the ossifying and mechanic western modern nature on the one hand, and is naturally of the essence of beauty thanks to it containing life on the other hand. As is said in "The great virtue between heaven and earth is called reproducing", the so-called essence of beauty is the essence of life of nature. Furthermore, natural life is forever embodied as a procedure during movement, and realizes its formal traits by dint of the blossoming and falling of flowers, the thriving and withering of grass on the earth. In this way, man's experience of the changes of natural things becomes the experience of the process of natural life. This experience enables Chinese to discover time and further take this as the regulation for human affairs. We can see from *Xiaxiaozheng* 夏小正, *Yizhoushu*.*Shixunjie* 逸周书·时训解 till historical books in later ages that the view of time of Chinese is based on the seasonal changes in agricultural sense and natural observations. Say, *Xiaxiaozheng* starts as follows: "In the first month, hibernated creatures wake up, migrated wild geese begin to fly back to the north, pheasants begin to chirp, and fishes begin to appear on the surface of the melted river. These are hints for peasants to prepare for coming fieldworks by repairing their tools." Here nature conceives time while agricultural practice regulates man's perception of time. The consciousness of time embodied in Chinese poetries in later generations is mainly of this sort of nature-dominated aroma and style. As to the work and life of people from commoners to the kings and ministers regulated by seasonal changes and solar terms, they are full of sense of rhythm plainly due to their coordination with the changes of the four seasons, and hence are adopted into a unified aestheticized natural progression.

What is noteworthy, nevertheless, is that in the history, qua a state originating from the Central Plains and continuously keeping extending in all directions, China's conception of time regulated by calendar is not

that popular. As was stated afore, Chinese ancient calendar is based on natural cognition with the warm temperate climate of the Central Plains as the standard, the reign of China however covers, from the Qin and Han Dynasties on, various climate forms like tropical, subtropical, temperate, and so on. Therefore, the agricultural calendar of the Central Plains is short of practical value to lives of nomadic, fishing and hunting nations, but also lacks instructive significance to people engaged in agriculture in non-central-plain areas. Zhang Jingzhong in the Tang Dynasty has written a poem *Written at the Frontier* (*Bianci* 边词), “In Wuyuan<sup>6</sup>, so late comes the spring / that willows have yet to bud, even in March/ when the ice in the river here is just melting, the spring flowers in Chang’an have begun to fall, standing no touch.” This poem reveals, in precise fashion, the area difference of the experience of time in the age of agriculture. Another point deserving our notice is, Chinese ancient calendar has never become manifold in accordance with area difference, and the constant standard for the establishing of the calendar is “central-plain time”. The compulsive unity of this sort of calendar obtained in virtue of political power gives rise to ideological traits of time, and adds institutionalism content to the understanding of the perception of time in Chinese aesthetics.

Just like the time in ancient China centred at the Central Plains, the space then also started there from. The earliest geographical literature of China, *Shanghu Yugong* classifies, in clockwise fashion, the country into such nine states as Ji, Yan, Qing, Xu, Yang, Jing, Yu, Liang, Yong, having fundamentally outlined the geographical map of early China with the Central Plains as the centre. In terms of pure space, nevertheless, there is no so-called centre of the world. As is stated in *Zhuangzi* 庄子, “The centre of the world in my view is north to Yue and south to Yan.” (*Zhuangzi, Under the Heaven*).<sup>7</sup> That the conception of the centre of the world is formed mainly due to the fact that the developed agriculture in the Central Plains at the time helped people to form the reliance on the earth and hence set, in accordance with their temporal experience, where the centre is and where borders are. It can be contended that the non-objectivity of the early spatial experiences of Chinese society makes for its poetic trait or aesthetic particularity, and the so-called geography hence is of poetic flavour. According to the “individual experience” purely relying on perception, the central-plain nations set the five directions of east, west, south, north and centre, and adopted five colours, five pentatonic tones, five flavours and four seasons into this steady spatial structure, making for the circling of various aesthetic elements around the

“centre” of the world. The territory transgressing this empirical scope is considered, under the manipulation of the theory of cultural superiority and inferiority barbarous which, nevertheless, is imagined by aesthetic sphere as the dwelling place of immortals. *Shanhaijing* 山海经 (Legend of Mountains and Sea) is the fruit of the aesthetic imagination as such and other works from *Mutianzi zhuan* 穆天子传 (Legend of Emperor Mu in the Zhou Dynasty) via *Huanmanzi Zhuixingxun* 淮南子·墜形训 to Zhang Hua's *Bowuzhi* 博物志 (records of legends in various aspects), on the other hand, show the path of gradual change from the actual perception as regards the Central Plains to the aesthetic imagination pertaining to remote areas. In this vein, since the central areas are definite, relevant arts usually are actual copies with distinctive realism style; peripheral areas, on the other hand, are often appealed to imagination due to their transgressing the scope of experience, and relevant artistic creations are fantastic and magnificent, full of romantic flavour, showing distinctive traits of romanticism. This view of world of Chinese with clear centre but vague periphery indicates, seen at the level of aesthetics, the aesthetic system gradually passing over from empirical to imaginative, from actual to romantic.

I said ten years ago that man, time and space are the “one centre, two basic points” in the sphere of aesthetics.<sup>8</sup> Insofar as Chinese aesthetic history is concerned, the categories that have been highly abstracted by modern science like time and space keep, under the setting of agricultural civilization, lively aesthetic traits thanks to their reliance on nature. In other words, time and space under the setting of agriculture are the time (four seasons) and space (landscape) manifested by nature, so their natural trait is their perceptibility which is also their aesthetic trait. In the mean while, when man participates in agricultural engagement, he is integrating himself into the nature or fusing his individual into the life rhythm of natural space and time. As to this sort of beauty of agricultural life constituted by man, time and space, Zong Baihua has once said, “To ancient Chinese peasants, their houses are their world. They obtain the conception of space from their houses and that of time from “Engaging in labour at sunrise and resting at sunset” (Song of Hitting the Soil). Time and space constitute their cosmos and settle their life which is leisure and rhythmic. To them, time is inseparable from space and spring, summer, autumn and winter match up east, west, south and north. This sense is manifested in the philosophical thought of the Qin and Han Dynasties. The rhythm of time (one year, twelve months, twenty four solar terms) leads the spatial directions (east, west, south, north) so as to constitute

our cosmos. So our spatial perception is rhythimized and musicalized along with our temporal perception.”<sup>99</sup> It can be easily seen from this argumentation that agricultural civilization has constituted the spatiotemporal experience and directional imagination, but also input, via the interpenetration of man and nature, essential aesthetic content into human subsistence.

### 3. Ideals of poetry and paintings and landscaping construction

Tao Yuanming (A.D.365–472) is a famous poet in the middle antiquity of China. Qua an aristocratic descendant and a famous scholar, he has been an official in the East Jin Dynasty for 14 years. In A.D.405, drastically tired of officialdom, he began to live in seclusion under the foot of Mount. Lu (belonging today’s Jiangxi province). In the following 22 years, he has written plenty of pastoral poetries and is thus called by later generations the first pastoral poet in China.

In terms of describing rural life by dint of poetry, there are poetries of agricultural affairs and pastoral poetries in ancient China. Comparatively, howbeit the objects of description of the two sorts are identical, great difference exists with regard to the cognition of rural life. Poetries of agricultural affairs are generally authentic records of the agricultural productive activities, concerning such specific moments as sowing, harvesting etc. in a year. Hesiod’s *Works and Days* in ancient Greece and Cato’s *On Agriculture* in ancient Rome are of similar trait. In China, the most famous poetry of agricultural affairs is *Shijing July* 诗经•七月 in the West Zhou period which is mainly developed in the form of agricultural calendar. Compared with poetry of agricultural affairs, pastoral poetry is different, in full measure, on it treating rural life as the object of appreciation (rather than participation). Pastoral poet is an onlooker of rural life, and he treats the countryside as an aesthetic landscape wherefrom he relishes the transcendental spiritual value and significance without necessarily being engaged in agricultural labour. Tao Yuanming is both an actual participant of agricultural labor and an aesthetic onlooker, which enables his poems to reveal the trait of passing over from traditional poetry of agricultural affairs to pastoral poetry.

To Chinese classic aesthetics, Tao Yuanming’s poems are of great significance in that from him Chinese art begins to realize the landscape-oriented cognition as to the countryside. The landscape cognition as such turns the countryside in poets’ eyes into the pure form of beauty, representing their ideal of “poetically dwelling”. Qua the artistic expressions of this sort of



ideal, since the middle antiquity and beyond, pastoral and landscape poetries have become the main form of Chinese poetry and landscape, flower and bird the main objects of painting art. These poetries and paintings are incapable of, due to lacking the concrete participation in agricultural production, reflecting the hard life of peasants. This “drifting” from content to form however has effectively ensured the pure form of beauty of rural landscape. That is to say, Chinese pastoral poetry and painting in the middle antiquity are of typical Utopian trait and are the most ideal expression of the class of scholars at the time insofar as poetic life is concerned.

In ancient China, the high degree of reliance of agricultural production on natural resources gives rise to man’s unconditional love for nature, and hence enables nature to be the value carrier for man. In the language of Chinese, nature is, insofar as its original meaning is concerned, is “be itself”, that is, a thing is itself. Further speaking, if a thing is completely itself, this means that it has broken away from artificial processing and restricting, representing the top freedom. Here the issue of the earth bestowing man wealth during agricultural labour leads, in consequence, to the issue of “taking nature as freedom” in Chinese philosophy. Further speaking again, landscape is the illustrative revealing of nature and if nature represents the top freedom, landscape becomes the symbolic form of freedom. On this ground, we can see that in the middle antiquity of China, the copying and expressing of natural landscapes in pastoral poetries and paintings are not merely conveying a sort of rural fantasy; rather, they are intended to offer various copies worth following for man’s ideal of free life. Here the gist of life is, it seems, not to realize spiritual addiction and intoxication in this sort of fantastic landscape but to turn the ideal of landscape expressed via poetries and paintings into reality, making “human world” into “heaven”.

In China, the fruit of this sort of “turning” landscapes in paintings into reality is the landscape construction of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Some Chinese scholars contend that landscape is, in terms of its basic intention, to “move the nature back home”. On this account, we can obtain a sequence from nature to human life, viz. agriculture→ nature→ freedom→ poetry and painting→ landscape. The landscape manifestation of Chinese traditional agricultural civilization comes, in precise fashion, from the circling process from nature to art and again from art back to the reconstruction of nature.

## Endnotes

1. Feng Youlan, *A Brief History of Chinese Philosophy* [M], Beijing: Peking University Press, 1996.
2. François Quesnay, *Despotism in China* [M], trans. Tan Min, Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1992, p. 57.
3. This is a sort of ancient distribution system of territory in the Xia and Zhou Dynasties. *Dianfu* refers to the territory with the radius of 250 kilometers, *houfu* refers to the territory outside the circle of *dianfu* with the radius of 250 kilometers more. The same holds of *sui fu*, *yaofu* and *huangfu* in successive order.
4. Xiu Hailin, *The Original Meaning of “Yue乐” and its Historical Evolution*[J], in *The People’s Music*, 1986. 3.
5. Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, *Reflections on the Formation and the Distribution of Riches* [M], trans. Tang Risong, Beijing: Huaxia Publishing House, 2007, p. 2.
6. A county in today’s Inner Mongolia.
7. Originally, Yue is the south end and Yan the north end of the territory of China at Zhuangzi’s age. Here Zhuangzi means that there is no center by means of making the map in contrary way.
8. Liu Chengji, *On Aesthetic Development* [M], Urumqi: Xinjiang University Press, 1997, pp. 39–48.
9. Zong Baihua, *Collected Works of Zong Baihua* (vol. 2) [M], Hefei: Anhui Education Press, 1994, p. 431.

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Hongbao Niu

## Table Painting and Easel Painting: A Cross-cultural Analysis between Chinese and West Paintings

To encounter with others is the precondition of self-consciousness, because in the cross-cultural context formed by the encountering of different cultures, one culture can discover who it is or not, from others, meanwhile discover one's potentialities that leads to what it would be. But there are other respects of cross-cultural context, one culture always intensifies its specific characteristics for self identification by refusing universal values, or one culture uses its own epistemological logics to interpret others and to ignore the otherness. All aspects above will always mingle during the formation of knowledge in the cross-cultural context.

After Chinese painting encountered Western painting at early the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were three main models of interpreting traditional Chinese painting. In the first model, some scholars sharply criticized Chinese painting due to the lack of realistic and scientific spirits in accordance the Western perspective painting.<sup>1</sup> The second model emphasized specific characteristics of “numerous points of view” (多点观看) or of “space with shifting point of view” (游目的空间) in Chinese painting, especially compared with the “mono-perspective” of Western painting.<sup>2</sup> The third main model originated from the West, regarding Chinese painting as “reverse perspective” (Ocvirk and Stison, 2009), or as “glance”, which is contrary with the “gaze” of western perspective<sup>3</sup>. Among all of these models, there is a common logic which uses the western visual theory to conceptualize Chinese painting.

In this paper, I intend to go back to the initial formation of Chinese painting and to rediscover its original roots. There are three key issues: firstly, contrary to the Western easel painting as free art, Chinese traditional painting as free art is table painting. Secondly, I will interpret the

main characteristics of table painting: the hand-writing, or the calligraphic language. Thirdly, I want to suggest that the suitable method of discovering and understanding the aesthetic characteristics of table painting is the phenomenology of trace.

The Western painting has been called the easel painting, because it is a kind of independent fine arts operated over a vertical plane on the easel. Accordingly, Chinese painting should be called the table painting, because it is operated over a horizontal plane on the table. This difference seemingly identifies the between two methods of painting manipulation. But in fact, it means that the painter setups different relationship with his operating planes, including different physical, visional and spatial relationships, as well as different methods and conceptualization of representations.

Historically speaking, the painting plane as a kind of the independent arts has been transformed from fresco. As we can find, the Western painting directly transforms the vertical plane of fresco into an independent vertical plane on the easel. Because the plane of the easel painting is vertical, it builds a relationship of visual opposition between the painter and the vertical plane on the easel. In front of the plane on the easel, painter's body can move forward and back, left and right. I therefore postulate that this kind of visual opposition between the painter and the vertical plane on the easel has significant function of calling up perspective methods, and makes the painter construct an illusive solid space on the vertical plane. On the contrary, when Chinese painting becomes an independent fine art, it transforms the vertical plane of fresco into a horizontal plane on the table. During painting operations, the visual relationship between the painter and the horizontal plane on the table is looking down. The painter can not move forward or back, but only left and right. Otherwise he or she has to move the whole operation plane on the table forward and back, or left and right. These moving gestures are the origin of the four kinds of Chinese painting formations: the long scroll (长卷), the vertical scroll (立轴), the hand scroll (手卷) and the album of painting (册页).

Setting up a strict two dimensional flat is the beginning point that painting frees from its adhesiveness to instruments and buildings, becoming the pure and free painting. This kind of two dimensional flat suggests series challenges to any person who wants to paint images on the flat. The key to these challenges is that any images or pictures must fit to this two dimensional flat of time and space. To meet these challenges, there have been two basic strategies in art history: one is to condense the image into a two

dimensional picture and make it fit into the two dimensional flat. Paintings on wares and fresco use this strategy to settle the challenge coming from the two dimensional flat, on which images are drawn. Even though the image itself is three dimension, it must be predigested and condensed into the two dimensional image in order to fit the planeness of the two dimensional flat. The other strategy is to simulate the three dimensional image on the two dimensional flat, on which the painter manipulates in order to adjust to the planeness of the two dimensional flat. Through this strategy, the painting establishes a verisimilitude solid image that resembles the real scene. The first strategy is not more advanced than the second one, or vice versa. But the choice between these two strategies is not arbitrary. The different inquiries of painting and the historical context of different cultural traditions determine the choices.

According to the generation of the Western easel painting, when the adhesive flat of fresco transformed into the independent vertical plane on the easel, the sculpture-in-the-round which matured in Ancient Greek had made some guidance as a model. In spite of the painting in ancient Greece being plane, its sculpture-in-the-round had overcome the planeness of Egyptian sculpture, and transfused new aesthetic energy into the ancient Greek arts. Afterwards, the solid image and its reality set by sculpture-in-the-round lifelikeness had established a model of three dimensional image for painting, called for European paintings that follows the model of sculpture-in-the-round, and made European painters to draw solid images on the plane. This is the direct inducement of the generation of perspective in Italy Renaissance. In Alberti's *On Painting*, this inducement is described as following:

“It would please me more to [have you] copy a mediocre sculpture than an excellent painting. Nothing more can be acquired from paintings but the knowledge of how to imitate them; from sculpture you learn to imitate it and how to recognize and draw the lights. It is very useful in evaluating the lights to squint or to close the sight with the eyelashes so that the lights are dimmed and seem painted in intersections. Perhaps it will be more useful to practice relief than drawing. If I am not mistaken, sculpture is more certain than painting. He who does not understand the relief of the thing he paints will rarely paint it well. It is easier to find relief in sculpting than in painting.”<sup>4</sup>

Following sculptures is the origin of drawing plaster figure as basic trainings of painting. In other words, after Ancient Greek, overcoming the

planeness of painting and drawing a solid image like a relief or sculpture on the painting plane continuously called up European painters. To fulfill this beckoning, using the Egyptian's easel for painting by Roman was not just the inheritance of painting instrument, but acquiring aesthetic effects of sculpture which guided painters to choose the easel for painting. Painter's operation over the vertical plane on the easel is like a sculptor's operation in front of a vertical marble. This pursuit guided early artists of Italy Renaissance like Masaccio, Brunelleschi, to use solid space image of sculptures or buildings to imagine the painting plane. Masaccio's fresco *Trinity* (1427–29) looks the painter digging a hole on wall. In Alberti's *On Painting*, he imagines the painting plane as a window. The window through which people could see a solid picture with width, length and depth, resembles the picture that any people acquire in the real scene through real window. So to speak, the origin of perspective is based on the aesthetic pursuit for solid real scene seen by real people at present. The poetics of the perspective painting on the easel is the poetics of seeing and eyewitness, but is not the plane drawing of "essential copy" as in the Medievalism any more.

The generation of Chinese free painting differs from the European free painting. Chinese painting transforming from the adhesive plane into the independent plane was not guided by sculpture, but by free calligraphy, because in Chinese art history, the first kind of free arts was not sculpture, but free calligraphy. Calligraphy metamorphosed from the practice of handwriting into free calligraphy in Eastern Han Dynasty (25B.C–220b.c). It developed the first kind of pure aesthetic form which is without practical utility and moral function, meanwhile inspired Chinese pure aesthetic interest. Till Eastern Jin dynasty, the calligraphic works made by Zhong You, Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi, etc., advanced calligraphy as the most important and classic form of Chinese art that agglomerated Chinese aesthetic experience. In virtue of the inducement of calligraphy, the lines of painting that had been controlled by limners, was transmitted into literati's and calligrapher's hands, literati's calligraphic lines had depressed the limner's lines. Meanwhile, the abundant visual phenomenon that were developed in the relief stone and fresco of Han dynasty gradually gave their ways to literati's and calligrapher's creation of calligraphic lines. The vertical plane of fresco was not inherited by literati, but replaced by the horizontal plane on the writing table, which was the place where the literati and the calligrapher operated and played on. Then, from Gu Kaizhi of Jin dynasty to Wu Daozhi of Tang dynasty, the basic language

of Chinese painting, including table painting and the fresco of Buddhism, was the calligraphic lines. Zhang Yanyuan, an important critic of arts in Tang dynasty, summed up the four kinds of line models (笔法): Gu Kaizhi's model of line, Lu Tanwei's model of line, Zhang Sengyou's model of line, and Wu Daozi's model of line. This basic language was mainly the language of calligraphic and hand-writing lines. It was formulated around the horizontal plane of literati's table and the ways of hand-writing, as the birth of Chinese table painting.<sup>5</sup>

At the early days of perspective painting on the easel, the painter was induced as an observer. On contrary, Chinese table painting did not call up the painter as an observer, but a hand-writer or a calligrapher. In Alberti's *On Painting*, the painter as an observer has very notable position. The observer is not a stander-by. The latter is passive and negative, does not treat himself as subject. Comparatively, the former is active and voluntary. The activity of the observer is that he/she casts his/her observing model into his/her observing action and process. The observer sets up itself as subject, he/she uses his/he's prior visual space to manage objects on the vertical plane.<sup>6</sup> Alberti focuses on the painter's observing action: in the visual progress of observer and the appearance and visible aspects of the observed object, the aesthetics of perspective establishes, as well as the visual imaging in observer's eyes. In this situation, the painter appears as the subject of observing and the center of measuring all things. How does the painter measure and what tools does he use to measure? The painter measures things he/she sees accidentally. The measure that the painter uses to scale is the observer's visual ray or visual line. What the painter measures is a visual relationship between the position of the observer's eye and object which he/she observed. At this moment, the observer as the observing subject is condensed into observer's eye. In other words, the observer as the subject transforms into the visual center of observing. The body, the feeling and the mind of painter are also condensed into his/her eye. Thereby we can say, the birth of the perspective painting on the easel is the result of the painter as the observer, who has been transformed as the visual center. The perspective of easel painting is of the visual measurement which includes the distance between the position of observer's eye and the object he/she observes, the angles between the visual ray and the object observed, and the relationship between the lights of the visual rays and the visibility of the observed object, etc. The perspective of the easel painting shows the emergence of the integrative whole which integrates all

the relationships above. During this progress, the appearance that the object casts on one's retina is completely transformed on the vertical plane on the easel. It means that the picture on the plane of the easel is a re-projection of the appearance that the object casts on the retina. In seeking the visible reality, the perspective painting hopes that it can realize zero distance between the appearance of the object reflected on retina and appearance on the vertical plane of the easel<sup>7</sup> Hence we can say the perspective on the easel makes painting completely visualized.

From 1920<sup>th</sup>, many Chinese scholars encountering with the perspective painting confirmed traditional Chinese painting as “perspective with numerous points”. In *Vision and Painting: The Logic of Gaze* (1997), Norman Bryson interprets the perspective painting coming from the logic of gaze, and the Chinese table painting from the logic of glance.<sup>8</sup> These interpretations all use the western visual theory to sum up the Chinese table painting. But the key problem is whether the Chinese table painting could be analyzed by the visual theory originated from Western perspective painting, or whether the Chinese table painting could fit into the western visualized theory. As we have said above, the perspective indicates observer's techniques of painting, and is the technique of visualization and operation which makes painting as a visual progress. But the Chinese table painting is not only a visual progress. In the imagination over the horizontal plane on the table, the function of eye is just the receiver of the object outside, once the eye has received visual images, it at once transmits the visual image to mind, then its function is finished. Afterwards, mind works on the visual image and generates image in mind through the intuitions from spirit. Philosopher Zhuangzi calls this process as “being met by mind without looking at by eye” (以神遇而不以目视, Zhuangzi ). When the image in mind has been formed, the painter writes it down on the table thereby realized the image in mind as “image in hand-writing”. A famous painter in Qing Dynasty, Zheng Banqiao analyzed this progress in three steps according the scenario he painted bamboo. The first step is “bamboo in eye”: when the painter looks at the real bamboo in yard. In this step, the painter mainly receives the appearance or the image of objects outside his eyes, and generates “visual image”. We must emphasize that the painter maybe not look at only one clump of bamboo, but many clumps of bamboo in different places and eventually form his “visual image” of bamboo. The second step is that the “visual image” is transmitted to mind and the painter understands or



intuits the “visual image” in his mind, hence forms the “mind image” of bamboo. In this step, the painter uses his internal life-force, feeling and spirit to understand or intuit the object’s internal life-force, feeling and spirit, through the “visual image”, arriving at the state where the painter’s ego and the object’s image fuse together with no distance, then forming the “mind image”. If the first step can be called as “learning nature” (外师造化) then the second step can be called as “receiving the internal source of mind” (中得心源). In the third step, the painter spreads paper or silk on table, grinds ink, and writes or draws the “mind image” down on paper or silk. But in this step, the image on paper or silk realized by hand-writing is not the copy of the mind image, because during the operation of hand-writing, the state of paper or silk, the state of the dip-dye of ink on paper or silk, and the movement, the force, the feeling and the spirit of painter’s body and hand etc., all involve in the same progress of hand-writing and the generation of image. As the result, the image realized by hand-writing is not the faithful copy of the “visual image” in the eye or of the “mind image” in mind, but the “image in hand-writing” (手中之竹), which is a fusion of “visual image”, “mind image” and the force of hand-writing. During the progress, the function of eyes is just as a receiver of the appearance of objects. The visual action is not the center of Chinese table painting. Examining the history of Chinese painting and corresponding theories, there is no system of visual theory based on a visual center, but the systemic theory of artistic or poetic mind, and of the hand-writing of brush-strokes and ink. Comparatively speaking, if the perspective painting on the easel is a visualized progress which projects the function of mind and the hand-drawing to visual imaging, well then, the Chinese table painting is a progress of transmitting from eye to mind and then from mind to hand-writing, step by step. If the perspective painting on the easel is projecting the function of mind and of hand-drawing into the eye, and makes the vision having the function of mind and hands, It can be understood as the mathematics of the perspective painting.<sup>9</sup> By contraries, Chinese table painting is of projecting the function of eye to mind and to hand-writing, when the mind has the function of vision; it is called as the “eye of mind”. The Chinese table painting does not exploit the zero distance between the eye and the hand. The operation of hand-writing all along is mediated by mind. Therefore using Western visual theory can not interpret and discover the main characteristics of Chinese table painting properly.

Comparatively speaking, the center characteristic of Western perspective language is its plasticity or formativeness, but the center characteristic of Chinese table painting language is its hand-writing figurative. When European painter paints over the vertical plane on the easel, his/her operation focuses on how to faithfully project the visual image in his retina onto the vertical plane on the easel. During this progress, the strokes, the traces, the spirit and the movements of the painter, should be realized or concealed completely in the plastic image on the plane. The traces of the painter's operation do not possess important position. But when Chinese painter paints, he is more like a writer or a calligrapher. These aspects bring up the calligraphic characteristics and unique ways of visual spatial representation. During the evolving history of Chinese free painting from Eastern Jin to Tang dynasties, the table painting gradually dominated, the tools on literati's writing table: brushes, xuan paper, ink, inkstones became painter's main tools. The basic language and technique of Chinese painting is formed around the writing-table and these tools.

There are three main aspects of the basic language and technique founded on the table: the first is the methods of brush-stroke (笔法), the second is methods of ink-operating (墨法), the third is the principle of spiritual-resonance among whole (气韵生动). Regarding to the formation of brush-stroke methods, it mainly absorbed the sources of calligraphic language and techniques developed from Eastern Han dynasties, and completed in Tang dynasty: the calligraphic techniques and its basic language began to breed the language and the aesthetic theory of the table painting, and formed the training methods. For example, how to operate the tip, the middle tip and the tip-side of pen, and how to emphasize operating pen with wrist-strength, etc. In my opinion, Xie He's famous "six principles" (about A.C. 400) is the summary of the aesthetics and techniques of calligraphic pen-operation in the context of table painting. The "six principles" are as follows: the first is "spiritual resonance among whole"; the second is "bone of painting generated by brush-strokes"; the third is "picturing correspondence to objects"; the fourth is "picturing colors fitting to the types of objects"; the fifth is "managing the space of plane"; the sixth is "transmission and copy of models and the classic works". Emphasizing "spiritual resonance" and the "bone of painting generated by brush-stroke" among the "six principles" is the root of the aesthetics of calligraphy. We can find the obvious change from Gu Kaizhi's "writing spirit through the appearance of object" to Xie He's emphasizing "spiritual resonance" and

taking root in “bone of painting generated by brush-strokes”. Up to Tang Dynasty, Zhang Yanyuan summarized this change in his *Records and Commentaries on Historical Famous Paintings*: “picturing objects must be similar in appearance, the similar in appearance must draw the bone and the spirit (骨气) of object. The bone and the spirit, similar in appearance, all take roots in mind and originate from the brush-operation of painters. Therefore good painter should be good in calligraphy.”<sup>10</sup> He also summarized that “calligraphy and painting have same principles in brush-operation”. I believe that aesthetic theory of painting interpreted by Zhang Yanyuan is a theory transformed from calligraphy.

The basic techniques and language of the table painting based on calligraphy include main aspects as below:

The first is the writing of calligraphic lines. The writing of calligraphic letters produces calligraphic lines, which shapes the dominative position of calligraphic lines in the table painting. This domination of calligraphic line also leads to the ignorance of the volume of objects. Different kinds of calligraphic lines predominated the development of the table painting from Gu Kaizhi to Wu Daozi. During this period, painters formed five styles of calligraphic line, Gu Kaizhi's style, Lu Tanwei's style, Zhang Sengyou's style, Cao Buxing's style and Wu Daozi's style. I must emphasize that the calligraphic lines of Chinese table painting are not simple lines of contours, but the line which synthesizes two lines of contour (双钩) into one. So the calligraphic line is the line, but also the form or the shape, as Zhang Yanyuan says, “Just one or two lines, the form or the shape has been there.”<sup>11</sup> The second is the writing character of operating ink. Up to Tang Dynasty, following the development of paper making, painting on paper became possible. The methods of operating ink on xuan paper had been developed. The principles of operating ink were developed also to offset the lack of volume, and can expand the lines to express the texture and the volume of image. There are two aspects of operating ink: one is the change of heaviness and lightness, dryness and wetness, and the “jiao” (焦) of operating ink; the other is the methods of “cun” (皴法), brushing dipped ink rubbing against paper or silk and producing texture or forms. The methods of cun can be regarded as the expansion of calligraphic lines. But it is necessary to stress that both the methods of operating ink and the methods of cun have the character of writing quality of the table painting.

The third is the “spiritual resonance among whole”, which originates from the expression of the life state, the feeling, and the body movements

of painter through his/her operations of brush-strokes. These movements of brush strokes are like dances, which can move speedily or slowly, heavily or lightly, slantingly or uprightly, and produce the traces of life actions.

## Conclusion

According to Roman Ingarden, every literary work is composed of four heterogeneous strata: the physical elements of symbol (word sounds and phonetic formations of high order); meaning units (formed by conjoining the sounds employed in a language with ideal concepts; these also range from the individual meanings of words to the higher-order meanings of phrases, sentences, paragraphs, etc.); Schematized aspects (these are the visual, auditory, or other “aspects” via which the characters and places represented in the work may be “quasi-sensorially” apprehended); and represented entities (the objects, events, states of affairs etc., represented in the literary work and forming their characters, plot, etc.).<sup>12</sup> If we adapt Ingarden’s “four heterogeneous strata” from literary work to analyze the table painting work, I want to say that Ingarden’s four strata should add another strata, the traces of brush-strokes and operating ink. I prefer to regard Chinese table painting as the art of trace of the hand-writing on horizontal plane.

According to Derrida, the trace is the writing of the absence of presence.<sup>13</sup> Then, the language of Chinese table painting is an art of trace of hand-writing on the table. It is the hand-writing of the double absences of presences: one is the absence of the presence of painter’s life; the other is the absence of the presence of objects. We need a phenomenology of trace to understand and interpret the Chinese table painting.

## Endnotes

1. Kang Youwei, *The Content of The Collection of Wanmucaotang*; Xu Beihong, *On The Reformation of Chinese Painting*; Chen Duxiu, *On the Revolution of Fine Arts*, the three papers also see: *The Selection Articles of Fine Arts in 20th Century of China*, vol.1, ed. by Lang Shaojun, Shui Tianzhong, Shanghai: Picture Publishing House of Shanghai, 1997.
2. Zong, Baihua, *A Walking of Aesthetics*, Shanghai: Peoples’ Publishing House of Shanghai, 1981.
3. See Otto G. Ocvirk, Robert E. Stinson, *Art Fundamentals: Theory and Practice*, ninth edition, Boston: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 2002; Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: the Logic of Gaze*, Cumberland, Rhode Island: Yale University Press, 1997.

4. Leon B. Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. by Cecil Grayson, London: Penguin Classics, 1970, p. 94. .
5. Zhang Yanyuan, *The Records and Commentaries on Historical Famous Paintings*, Shanghai: Picture Publishing House of Shanghai, 2007.
6. James Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.
7. Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: the Logic of Gaze* .
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 89–93.
9. Leon B. Alberti, *On Painting*.
10. Zhang Yanyuan, *The Records and Commentaries...*, p. 29.
11. 笔才一二，象已应焉, Zhang Yanyuan, *The Records and Commentaries...*, p. 42.
12. Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Works of Art*, trans. by George Grabowicz, Evanston: Illinois Northwestern University Press, 1973.
13. Jacques Derrida, *On Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore – London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

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Curtis L. Carter

## Aesthetics and Action: A Perspective on Chinese Contemporary Art\*

Aesthetics embraces a life force that adds meaning to human actions extending beyond their logical connections and practical outcomes. My aim in this presidential lecture for the 19<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Aesthetics is to encourage philosophers, artists, and others engaged in Aesthetics to be mindful of the place of aesthetics in the enhancement of life beyond their respective tasks in creating theories and practicing the respective arts. As our Congress theme, for 2013 implies, aesthetics has a place in the wide range of activities that we engage in including nature, the built environment, technology, education, religion, the political, as well as other multiple expanses of everyday life.

As early as my days in graduate school in Boston, the need to create a bridge between aesthetics and other dimensions of life was clear to me. This interest and the desire to relate aesthetics and the arts to social change have served as a primary motivation throughout my career. My objective has been to activate aesthetics and the arts in as many areas of life as possible. The pursuit of this interest has taken me in directions not necessarily typical of most academic aestheticians. It has led to a joint career as professor-scholar, a founding museum director, and active participation in numerous leadership positions of advocacy and practice aimed at advancing the aesthetics thru the arts in relation to social services, education, fostering of leadership in dance, theater and visual arts organizations, and the training of future political leaders. Such experiences once found me on the road with a dance company imparting aesthetics to the company members and the audiences. On another occasion these efforts found me

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\* The text was presented during ICA 2013 as the IAA President's Lecture.

in a prison, fortunately not as an inmate. The visit to prison was part of a program aimed at taking aesthetics beyond its usual purviews. In this case it meant bringing the arts to persons inside the prison environment. It was a special moment of validation of our theme “aesthetics in action” when a prisoner sitting next to me leaned over and said, “If I had only taken ballet and could leap as high as the dancers on the stage, I might never have ended up here.”

The recommendation for the theme of this 19<sup>th</sup> IAA Congress, “Aesthetics in Action,” came from a suggestion made to the IAA Executive Committee at our Congress in Beijing three years ago. The members of the IAA Executive Committee initially expressed reservations. Nevertheless, the members of the Congress Planning Committee in Krakow decided to go forward with this theme, and here we are ready to engage the results which all of you helped shape.

There is one more preliminary mention that has had an important influence in validating and encouraging the pursuit of aesthetics in action. This is the example set by the philosopher Nelson Goodman, whose efforts to activate aesthetics through extending his efforts in a range of practices beyond his important contributions to aesthetic theory. As the founder of *Project Zero* at Harvard University Goodman was responsible for establishing a cognitive based research center dedicated to research in arts education, and grounded in his *Languages of Art*. His efforts at Harvard also led to the founding of the Harvard Business School program in Arts Management and the establishment of the Harvard Summer School program for dance. As a means to connect theory and practice Goodman worked with choreographer, composer, dancers, video production crew and supporting designers to produce a dance-theater work, *Hockey Seen* which explored the relation of aesthetics to sport.<sup>1</sup> Goodman’s example in extending his interest in aesthetics to education, business, sports, animal welfare, and the applied arts offers an important role model for bringing aesthetics into action in a variety of life activities. Hence, I would like to dedicate this lecture to, Nelson Goodman who helped me to see the possibilities for realizing aesthetics in action.

In deciding how to approach the subject of “Aesthetics in Action” for this occasion, I have chosen to focus on the area of contemporary Chinese art and aesthetics. The particular issue for consideration here will be the interplay of aesthetics and politics in the dynamics developments in Chinese art since 1979. During this particular time period, the Avant garde

artists working in China engaged successfully in efforts toward opening up freedom of expression including, but not limited to, greater opportunities for artists to publicly display new forms of art. For example the Chinese Stars artists group, (1979–1989) was the first to launch an unofficial public exhibition within the People’s Republic of China. This protest exhibition challenged the Central Communist Party’s official policy that mandated that art should reflect the views of the people and conform to the aims of the Party. Some of the works produced by the Stars artists’ contained only lightly concealed censorious references Mao Zedong and the official views concerning art. The forced closure of the Stars exhibition outside the National Art Gallery was followed by a protest march thru the streets of Beijing.<sup>2</sup>

## I. “Viewing the Development of Chinese Contemporary Art as Metaphor”

The progression of changes in the work of Chinese artists during the period initiated by the Stars artists in 1979 to the present can perhaps be examined fruitfully by likening the dynamics of its progression to the unfolding stages in a metaphor. My use of metaphor here is suggested by, but not confined to a discussion of metaphor as cited in Nelson Goodman’s *Languages of Art*. According to Goodman, “a metaphor is an affair between a predicate with a past and an object that yields while protesting.”<sup>3</sup> In its initial framing, Goodman’s theory is applied mainly to linguistic predicates. However, its application broadly construed remains open for applications to any human activity capable of functioning as symbolization and thus able to inform understanding. In this respect metaphor will be used here as a way of seeing the events, activities, ideas characteristic of the respective stages of art during this period in relation to each other as the art develops. The leap from metaphor in a linguistic context (language or language-like system) to other social-political-artistic contexts thus offers a frame for our look at the dynamics occurring throughout Chinese contemporary independent art from 1979 to the present.<sup>4</sup>

Briefly, then how will we understand metaphor in this context? Metaphor functions as a conceptual device to aid in our understanding of the artistic practices and ideas taking place in the art of China in an important transitional period in history. For example Socialist Realism yields while protesting to avant-garde art as represented in the Stars Group. Similarly, the western influenced Chinese Political Pop initiates another stage of



development, and now the focus turns to more indigenous explorations of individual artists.

## II. Western Juncture

In a 1982 visit to Tiananmen Square Andy Warhol posed before a large portrait of Mao thus affirming both his interest in and admiration for this Chinese icon. Earlier, in 1972 Warhol had made 400 portraits of Mao, echoing the sentiments of “Life” magazine where the Chinese leader was declared the most famous man in the world. When Warhol arrived in China at age 54, he was virtually unknown there, as was much of what was happening in western contemporary art. The China that he visited, was then devoid of the trappings of the commodity driven commercial culture, now common in Beijing, Shanghai, and other Chinese cities, consisting of “brand names, restaurants, luxury cars” familiar to Warhol in the West. “When asked what he thought about China not having a McDonalds, Warhol commented, ‘Oh, but it will,’ ” as reported by the photographer Christopher Makos, who accompanied Warhol during his 1982 visit to China.<sup>5</sup>

There was little hint of the impact that Warhol and Western pop art would have on the future of Chinese contemporary art. Perhaps, Warhol’s comment concerning the future of McDonalds in China, “Oh, but it will,” could have equally been said of his own and the West’s future impact on Chinese art. Subsequently, it seems, Warhol became the Godfather responsible in part for the aesthetic and philosophy of the new Chinese contemporary art during the 1980s and 1990s. Perhaps a Chinese perspective on this matter might wish to temper this claim as giving too much credit to Western influences.

Memories of Warhol’s 1982 visit to Beijing were stirred in 2008 at the time of the Olympics in Beijing by an exhibition of photographs of Warhol’s 1982 visit to China taken by Makos. But not until this year (2013) was it possible to mount a major museum exhibition of Warhol’s art in China. His paintings were shown in China during 2013 in *Andy Warhol: 15 Minutes Eternal*, an exhibition of 300 works organized by the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh. The exhibition opened in Shanghai in April 2013 after venues in Singapore and Hong Kong, with additional venues planned for Beijing, and Tokyo. And even then this exhibition was not without controversy, as the Chinese officials objected to a proposed showing of Warhol’s 1972 portraits of Mao. The result is that the current exhibition does not include Warhol’s 1972 paintings of Mao.

Looking back again, to another possibly forgotten moment in the development of Contemporary Chinese art, it is useful to take note of the 1981–1982 exhibition, “Important Original Works from the American Paintings Collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.” This exhibition was conceived under the watchful eye of the American government agency USIA in the shadow of protests by the Stars Group and other Chinese artists in 1979 and thereafter. The 70 masterpieces from Boston included works of the 18 to the 20<sup>th</sup> century by a selection of major American artists John Singleton Copley, John Singer Sargent, Winslow Homer, Marsden Hartley, and Edward Hopper, as well as 12 abstract works by Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock, Helen Frankenthaler, Hans Hoffman, and others. The selection of the works for the exhibition, organized at the initiation of the American government cultural agency USAIA, was intended as a statement in support of freedom of artistic expression, with the hope that it might influence the advancement of freedom of expression for artists in China. (Note that the timing of the Boston exhibition in 1982 coincides with the Stars artists’ ongoing efforts to advance freedom of expression during the period after their initial protest in 1979.) Despite Chinese officials’ objections to the abstract works and a nude, the American lender insisted on an “all or nothing” acceptance of the proposed works. After intense negotiations between the American Ambassador and a Vice Minister, Chinese eventually agreed. The exhibition took place at the Zhongguo Meishuguan, now known as the National Art Museum of China. According to reports of the Chinese bureau of cultural affairs, the exhibition was a resounding success marked by daily attendance of some six to seven thousand visitors. The first run of 30,000 catalogues sold out the first week of the month long run in Beijing, followed by a month in the Shanghai museum.<sup>6</sup>

The significance of the Boston exhibition for the future of Chinese art is of considerable weight, given that it offered many Chinese artists their first opportunity to see original modern abstract from the West, and to contemplate its relevance for the future of Chinese art. For better or for worse concerning the future influences of Western art on Chinese independent artists, this exhibition was an important point of departure for the intervention of non-Social Realist Western art into China after the Cultural Revolution. A photograph of students at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing posed in front of a Jackson Pollock painting, *Number 10, 1949*, from this exhibition no doubt conveys the excitement generated by a first sighting of the painting in the Boston Museum exhibition.<sup>7</sup>

A testimony to the importance of the Boston Museum Exhibition is documented in the reflections of Chinese artists Zhang Wei (part of the No Name or Chumin Group of dissident artists) and Zhi Yong, and the critic Li Xianting on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the exhibition that took place in 2012. All in their twenties when the exhibition occurred, these artists might have been hesitant to speak about the art with foreigners at the time when the Boston exhibition came to Beijing. Li Xianting recalled being punished for publishing articles on abstract art in 1983. Thirty years later, the artists felt able to speak freely with Meredith Palmer, a member of the USIA who helped organize the Boston Museum exhibition of 1982. On the occasion of the exhibition's anniversary in 2012, the artists reflected openly on their experiences of the 1982 exhibition. They recalled gaining mental and spiritual support, and then being inspired to consider alternative ways of working in their art.<sup>8</sup>

### III. The Stream of History in Chinese Art from 1979 to the Present

The problems of how to deal with the past thirty years of Chinese art weighs heavily on the present. Where to begin? Would it be a visit to Tiananmen Square to reflect on the meaning of Mao Tzedong for art during this period, and observe the veneration of throngs of both curious and devout visitors (as many as 30,000 on some days) as they pass through this memorial to the architect of modern China and the Cultural Revolution? Within the monument Mao lies in a transparent coffin augmented by live orchids, a four man honor guard, and a large banner which proclaims: "Long Live the memory of our great leader and teacher Chairman Mao Zedong." Is this monument which opened in 1977 not itself a metaphor of the tensions in Chinese art and culture as it aims toward greater freedom for the development of new art in China? The monument symbolizes a state of culture that at once embraces resistance to what is to come, while at the same time yielding to the inevitability of change as the nation seeks to position itself as a global power. Is not the persistence of Mao's image in contemporary Chinese art, despite his demise, now some 47 years past, a witness to his continuing metaphorical participation in the art of China from then to now? Reinforcing the metaphor are giant sculptures of Mao in his home city of Shao Shan and elsewhere in China that continue to evoke reverence among the people toward his lingering presence.

Each of the two narratives from 1982 respectively points to important sets of events pertinent to our theme concerning aesthetics in action. One is focused on the visits of Andy Warhol to China and the subsequent influence of Western art and culture on the future of independent artists in China. The other addresses the importance of the Boston Museum exhibition of 1982 in underscoring the role of aesthetics in the political realm. The problem of how to understand such events from the past and their implications for the context of contemporary Chinese art is expressed succinctly in the words of a journalist on his first visit to the Tiananmen Square monument: “Weighing how to look back without seeming to stare. Wondering if the whole thing is over.”<sup>9</sup> Subsequent views of Mao Zedong by artists created beginning in 1979 are themselves indicative of the struggles both metaphorical and actual, taking place within Chinese art. The artists’ Mao paintings of this era and beyond pass thru stages of reverent respect and on to irreverent critiques as the metaphor embedded in the art yields to the changing political and artistic conditions of the time.

For example, Wang Guangyi’s series of Mao portraits, such as *Mao A O* created in 1988 reveals a very different attitude and the emergence of diverse artistic means to address its subject. In Wang Guangyi’s paintings, Mao’s image is encapsulated behind a grid of lines. Another artist Zhang Hongtu represents Mao in whimsical portraits showing traces of abstraction, and also as parodies on commodity images, for example *Mao Quaker Oats*, *Fashion Mao*, and a decorative motif for a ping-pong tabletop.<sup>10</sup> The fact that such irreverent images can coexist in Chinese society along side the reverential sculptures of Mao and his tomb in Tiananmen Square suggests that the aesthetic tolerance sought by the Stars and other Avant garde Chinese artists has been to some degree successful in advancing the freedom of artistic expression in China.

#### IV. The Current Generation

Philip Tinau, Art Director of the Ullen Centre in Beijing describes the current generation of Chinese artists as a “schizophrenic generation” with a multiplicity of concerns and resonances in their art, perhaps offering a direct reflection of how the country changes from day to day. For example, Li Zhangang’s *Rent*, 2007 is a farcical recasting of a Socialist Realist sculpture, *Rent Collection Courtyard*, 1965. The 1965 sculpture in Sichuan Province tells the story of Chinese feudal landlords’ exploitation of peasant

farmers before Communist rule, while Li Zhangang's *Rent* portrays famous characters of the contemporary art world.<sup>11</sup> *Rent* consists of some 34 life sized colored fiberglass figures representing Chinese and Western artists, art dealers, curators, collectors. This work offers a none too flattering satire on the dynamics of the contemporary international art world figures. One of his numerous groupings in the installation shows artist Joseph Beuys along side a seated sculptural representation of Chairman Mao Zedong. It is as if these two were presiding over the art scene from their respective privileged positions, Beuys as a star in the contemporary art world, Mao as recurring figure in the art of the period we are examining.

Li Zhangang's *Rent* carries a double critical wallop as it challenges the political viability of the original sculpture *Rent Collection Courtyard* 1965, which was intended to celebrate the Cultural Revolution's accomplishments, while also directing a humorous, skeptical look at the pretentiousness of the international art world. It is as if the art world figures had replaced the tyrannical landlords of the 1965 Socialist Realist work. (Regular attendees of the Venice Biennale will recall that another Chinese artist, Cai Guoqiang, presented his own version of the original 1965 *Rent Collection Court Yard* as a conceptual performance at the 48<sup>th</sup> Biennale in 1999.)

In January 2013, *The Economist* published an informative review of the exhibition *On/Off: China's Young Artists in Concept and Practice*, discussing the works of artists born after the death of Mao Zedong. The article pointed out that in contrast to "old guard contemporary artists who lived thru or in the shadow of the Cultural Revolution, the new generation represents "art more rooted in everyday competition of urban life, and the rapid changes that China has gone through as they grew up."<sup>12</sup> For example the artist Li Liao created a work focused on his experience as a factory worker in A Fox Conn plant where he worked inspecting circuits for Apple products, and used his pay to purchase an I Pad. The resulting art work, *Consumption*, 2013 as displayed in the exhibition "On/Off" included the artist's uniform, security badge, and contract and the I Pad he had purchased placed on a pedestal beside the other items.<sup>13</sup>

Another work from the same exhibition by artist Zhao Zhao consisted of cut cubes of stone from Buddha statues destroyed by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. The aim in Zhao's work was to juxtapose metaphorically a moment in the history of Chinese Buddhist sculptures as altered by Red Guard political action with the creation of his own work of contemporary art. In this case the memory of the past art acquires new

meaning through the artist's creative intervention. Along the same path, He Xianagy's contemporary piece *Tank*, references through a sculptural metaphor the tanks rolling into Tiananmen Square. *Tank* is a conceptual art piece consisting of a deflated military tank made of leather that lies crumpled and impotent on the gallery floor, nevertheless "charged with meaning."<sup>14</sup>

Among the issues advancing in current discussions of Chinese independent artists is an increasing self-reflection of women artists on their role in independent Chinese art.<sup>15</sup> Moving beyond the history of male hegemony and the problem of how to distinguish art with reference to gender, the women artists of the 1990s and thereafter increasingly choose to explore their own spiritual world and personal experiences. In fact, themes such as striving for freedom, artistic or personal self-discovery, or "feelings of 'alienation, anxiety, fear, insecurity'" or distrust of men, do not suffice to differentiate art on the basis of gender. Instead, women artists today may choose to focus the value of the individual in everyday life. For example, the painter Yu Hong uses personal images taken from shopping, swimming, and family photos as subjects for her art.<sup>16</sup> This trend points increasingly toward the necessity of moving beyond the search for women artists who create a particular gender based grounding for their art.

The facility of women artists in creating art with the new artistic vocabularies offered by performance art, installation art, and new media arts such as video, internet, and everyday life, as well as traditional art media, is evidenced in a quietly growing number of exhibitions perhaps more outside of China than inside, dedicated to women artists. For example, the 2011 exhibition *Half the Sky: Women in the New Art of China*, co-curated by the National Art Museum of China and the Leonard Pearlstein Gallery at Drexel University in the USA, offered a look at some of the leading Chinese women artists of today.<sup>17</sup> Among the growing populations of experimental women artists in China are these artists tagged in a 2008 article by Holland Cotter in the "New York Times", "*China's Female Artists Quietly Emerge*."<sup>18</sup> Lin Tianmiao who initially created works in her apartment from used household utensils such as teapots, woks, and scissors wrapped in white cloth later escalated her creative productions to include floor to ceiling self-portraits made of braids of yarn. The installation artist Xin Xiuzhen makes art from unraveling yarn from second hand men's and women's sweaters, and reconstructing it into gender-neutral garments. Lu Qing applies marks on 82-foot bolts of silk with reference to the Chinese tradi-

tion of scroll making. On a more provocative note, Cui Yiuwen employs a hidden video camera to film a gathering of women including prostitutes engaged in conversation, making contact with clients, etc. in the bathroom of a Beijing karaoke bar. The result is her video *Lady's Room*, which explores the role of women as active agents in consumer eroticism.

It is interesting to note that amidst all of the clamoring of the independent artists of China for ways to explore installation, video, electronic media for creating art, there is at the present time a significant revival of interest among Chinese artists working today in brush and ink painting. It may come as a surprise to think of brush and ink as a contemporary art medium. But no less a major artist than Feng Meng Bo, known for his experimental video games in 2013 announced that he has ceased working with the computer and video game technology to seek mastery in the art of ink painting. A closer look will show that ink painting has a strong place in the works of many independent artists working today. Among these artists Xu Bing has probed deeply into the symbolic powers of ink painting to articulate important themes in contemporary culture. Among these is the role of language as articulated in his *Book from the Sky*, 1987–1988, which confounded Chinese viewers when they discovered the characters to be unreadable. Wu Genda's reflections on the implications of intense social changes in China during the 1980s in such works as *Pseudo-Character Series* also produced experiments with unreadable characters aimed examining the place of language and art in a changing Chinese society. Pan Gongkai, who continues to practice ink painting alongside his other interests as a contemporary artist, finds new meanings for ink paintings. Others who mark new paths for ink painting include Ghen Guangwu who has developed his own postmodern visual language rooted in calligraphy and Daoism and Buddhism. In working with ink on paper, Qin Feng articulates his reluctance to part with ink painting in a series called *Bird's Painting* 2008 which bridges his grounding in Chinese ink painting with western abstract expressionism.

Why is this current interest in ink painting taking place at the present time? The question was addressed in a symposium at Peiking University and the Today Museum in 2013 with no clear answer emerging. Is it not in part a desire to assess what it means to be a Chinese in the face of so many competing forces arising in part from western influences and globalization, as well as from the rapid transformation of China from a socialist to a modified capitalist society? Clearly this new interest in ink paintings is not simply an attempt to halt advances made over the past thirty years.

The experiments represented take the medium well beyond traditional calligraphy and ink painting. Viewed in the context of a recurring metaphor, might the present day return to ink paintings show the tradition of calligraphy and ink painting yielding to new threads of Chinese art and culture, while resisting other western driven influences? The metaphorical protest expressed in the return to ink paintings against influences of Western art, whether passive or active, is a reminder that calligraphy and ink paintings are after all the root of all Chinese art and culture.

## V. Issues Driving Contemporary Chinese Independent Art/Artists

From these brief observations it seems clear that the current generation of Chinese artists is still sorting out options both remembering the past and trying to make sense: personal sense, national sense, global sense of the present and the future. The successes of the best known of these artists who now command multi-million dollar prices in the global art market are equal to or surpassing the economic power of the best known western artists. We need only mention a few of the global stars: Wang Guangyi and Yue Minjun connected with the political pop and cynical realism or the conceptual art of Xu Bing and Gu Wenda. Thousands more must struggle with finding their own vision and the means for its communication with greater and lesser degrees of artistic success.

There is not time here to go more deeply or to advance an overriding theory to connect the issues raised by these recollections of the sometimes forgotten moments in the past 30 years of Chinese Independent Art. Let me end with one issue that will be necessary to address as we try to sort out the developments that have taken place and their place in art history.

This is the problem of methodology. It is tempting to proceed according to methodologies developed in western aesthetics and art history for assessing these recent developments in Chinese art. This would mean using categories such as modernism, post-modernism, or pluralism. But some Chinese scholars would argue that modernity as understood in the West does not fit the contemporary art developments in China. For example, Gao Minglu contrasts western modernity based on a progression of temporal-historical epochs (pre-modern, modern, post-modern, pluralism) where art emerges in the conflict between aesthetic autonomy seeking individual creative freedom and capitalist bourgeois materialist



values, with “total modernity” in Chinese contemporary culture. Instead, Gao Minglu embraces “total modernity” a new Chinese modernity that unifies politics, aesthetics and social life. According to Gao Minglu, Chinese history does not fit the linear periodization of the western system. Total modernity, as Gao Minglu argues, consists of “particular time, particular space, and truth of mine,” and represents a century-long effort in China to realize an ideal environment by focusing on specific physical spaces and social environments. The new art in China as understood in the context of total modernity thus aims toward integrating art and life as a whole by concatenating art into particular social projects and taking into account changes in the social and political environments.<sup>19</sup> Given these assumptions, as Gao Minglu would argue, Chinese art today is best understood in the context of specific local time and space embodiments. This does not mean that the Chinese embodiments occur in isolation from external influences or artistic movement from the west, as Gao Minglu acknowledges the influences of western art movements such as Dada, Surrealism, and Pop art explicitly. Similarly he recognizes the complexities of globalization and other shifting social and political forces for Chinese *avant-garde* artists.

Metaphor as I have applied the concept here does not give us a new theory that replaces modernism or post-modernism, or pluralism. However it does offer a way to think of the dialectical relations that occur among the developing stages of independent art being produced in China since 1979. Given the rapid changes and diversity evident in Chinese contemporary art, understanding these relations seem more useful than attempting to forge discrete stylistic differences as in western art history.

Are there any measures to employ in acknowledging when a metaphor is relevant to our understanding? Goodman would likely suggest novelty and fitness as measures of the contribution of a metaphor to understanding. Novelty suggests keeping an eye out for innovation through careful observation, comparison, and taking measure so as to gather the full richness and diversity of what is happening. Fitness as applicable here refers to efficaciousness or usefulness for aiding understanding what is being examined. What seems clear is that the stages in the progression of the works of independent artists in China since 1979 are based on resisting, while at the same time embracing aspects of Western art. Similarly, the current interest in renewed exploring contemporary ink painting offers yet another dynamic of resistance to traditional Chinese art, while continuing to explore its relevance for Chinese independent artists today.

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# Applied Social Art: The Potential of Art and Criticism After March 11, 2011

(Akiko Kasuya)



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Akiko Kasuya

## Introduction

The massive earthquake and tsunami that caused extensive structural damage in eastern Japan on March 11, 2011 were also responsible for the nuclear disaster in Fukushima. This devastating crisis showed us that every seemingly solid foundation and assumption was actually completely unreliable. It also revealed that advanced technology was no match for nuclear power, as the menace of radioactivity forced people to take concrete action in every field.

Situations of this kind have been discussed in metaphoric terms since the emergence of postmodernism. Since March 11, however, these imaginings have taken on a much more realistic aspect. Against this backdrop, the third installment of the International Convention on Manga, Animation, Game and Media Art (ICOMAG) was organized by Professor Hiroshi Yoshioka and the Agency for Cultural Affairs in Tokyo in February. The central theme of the event concerned “criticism” in the context of hybrid culture. Since the advent of postmodernism, the hybrid nature of culture has been recognized in both politics and industry, leading to a curious situation in which a variety of heterogeneous fields coexist while remaining segregated from each other. In today’s politically neutered, hybrid culture, the conference considered what form criticism might take in the future. In this panel discussion, we will attempt to build on and develop the conclusions of ICOMAG 2013. With “applied social art” as a key phrase, we hope to explore the potential of art and criticism in a post-March 11 world.

Artur Żmijewski, a Polish artist who acted as curator of the 7th Berlin Biennale in 2012, advocates “applied social arts,” declaring that artists do not work isolated from the world, but must recognize themselves as embedded in the inherently politicized world, functioning as a part of the

power network and the ideology machine. Źmijewski calls his own activities “critical art.” During the Berlin Biennale he invited activists from the Occupy movement to set up camp in the main venue, and not only provided a venue for debate, but also clarified his own stance as a provocative social critic. Art in Western Europe has a long history of seeking autonomy from politics, religion, economics, authority or any other outside force that would turn art toward other ends. Artists have intentionally chosen engagement with the here and now, and they willingly accept political entanglements so as to meet their responsibilities as members of a group. They do not hide behind a veil of otherworldly esotericism, nor do they shirk danger. Źmijewski once said that art means responsibility for him. “The artist is not an innocent and secluded monk or nun living through his or her own individual obsessions - the artist is part of a power network, an ideological machine” (*My History of Art* series of lectures at the Centre for Contemporary Art at Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw, 2008). Similar artists who feel strong responsibility to society had also turned up in Japan especially after the catastrophe, tragic earthquake and tsunami in Tohoku area on 11 March 2011.

Recent artists have gotten involved with society, producing works that transcend the boundaries of art and infiltrate every aspect of daily life, and such actions have found an increasing number of venues and an appreciative audience. They have changed the way information is disseminated, and altered the very structure of society. By referencing Źmijewski’s “Applied Social Art” and extending it, we’d like to discuss the potential of art and criticism in a post-March 11 world.



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Miki Okubo

## Proposition for Participative Art as an Avenue Toward Open-Mindedness in Criticism

### 1. The state of web writing after 3.11

Since the popularization of various types of web writing such as blogging services which allow us to disseminate our writings across a vast online network, the recent upsurge in social network activity which has begun to dominate daily life, and the development of virtual communities, we observe new characteristics in the mode of discussion in Japanese society. These changes may relate to the social and political environment in Japan following the tragedy of Fukushima on March 11, 2011. Japanese relations with foreign countries were complicated by the nuclear disasters. As a result, some Japanese come to keep a closed-off/unsociable attitude, an attitude reminding us of the seclusion during the Edo period. This may sound like an exaggeration or figure of speech, but take one glance at Japanese online writing activity and it is impossible to ignore a renewed existence of this closed-off attitude among the Japanese.

Tadasu Takamine, one of the most renowned Japanese artists today is famous for his politically and socially radical messages (See his interview videos, *Japan Syndrome*, *God Bless America* (2002), *Kimura-san*). His recent exhibition titled *Tadasu Takamine's Cool Japan*, illustrates a remarkable observation. Takamine produced one chapter, entitled “the room of free expression” which presents hate speeches written by Japanese people. We encounter critically violent and discriminative words aimed at others, including foreigners living in Japan or people who differ from “the standard.” Colourful language blasts the Japanese government, people of other generations, disabled people, and any other category of people imaginable.

The ensemble of hate speeches sounds shocking and scandalous. Keep in mind, these were not invented but are extracted from real posts online. We are obligated to accept this horrible fact as we begin our deliberations. In order to understand the conditions which made this hate speech possible, it is important to consider the role of cyber activity in Japanese society, dating back to the start of the Internet boom. Japanese have tended to clearly distinguish cyberspace from the real world in terms of human relationships and behaviours, considering the Internet as an ideal space to chat freely and without accountability, even for discussing sensitive or secret subjects. People remain anonymous in their online relationships and activity, hiding their identity with pseudonym. The Japanese have maintained this attitude, even in the recent era of social network services, such as Facebook and Twitter, which generally ask members to use their own names.

The exhibition explains this particular tendency as following:

Japanese prefer eloquent silence, and tend to avoid expressing their own opinions in a high-handed or assertive way. (...) Online bulletin board, social networking services have given them a relatively free and anonymous channel to voice their thoughts without fear of reprisal.

The violent attitude toward foreign countries and people is considered a sort of psychologically defensive attitude against overseas attacks and bashings on radioactive pollution caused by the accident of Fukushima Daiichi Plant. Strong bashing of the Japanese government and Tepco's inappropriate operations traumatized some sensible people. Some decided to close themselves off to avoid being hurt by others. Whatever reasons they have, malicious hate speeches can result only in a vicious circle.

Curiously, people writing these hate speeches are often unaware of the possibility of their influence on foreign Japanese speakers. They innocently believe as if Japanese language were a kind of secret code allowing them to communicate only with other Japanese, keeping their discussions away from the eyes of foreigners. Needless to say, the Japanese language is not a minority language and cannot function as a protective suit from potential aggressive adversaries. Japanese violent online writing activity is due to a shortage of imagination. Now, I identify a current trend in certain groups: violent criticism of foreigners or socially weak people with no specific reason, as an otaku-like policy.

It is necessary to examine the meaning of the term "otaku" or "otakish" in this context. The term, "otaku," is commonly used in Japanese society

to describe any situation that is difficult to understand, or a person's non-communicative, closed attitudes, or as a kind way to describe experts in any field who are unable to make themselves understood without using technical terms. In this sense, professors, doctors, researchers and crazed-fans or maniacs of a certain subject can all be called otaku. This way of using the term "otaku" is very usual in Japan. The term "otaku" implies a certain level of communicational impossibility. Until recently, multidisciplinary studies such as cultural studies, sociology and psychology have focused on important social phenomena surrounding the otaku culture. In "otakism," the theory of otaku, otakish attitude means a non-communicative attitude in which people use technical terms used in computer programming, medical fields, or advanced research, in order to be understood only within their own field. In fact, even the language itself is transformed into an otakish tool if people deny the possibility of a translation.

## 2. Moving beyond otaku-like exclusivity in criticism

The 3rd International Convention of Manga, Animation, Games and media arts on February, 2013 (commonly called ICOMAG), chaired by Hiroshi Yoshioka, examined current trends in criticism in order to consider new appropriate/possible contemporary criticism for today's hybrid culture. Despite the inclusion of multiple disciplines, including literature and the arts, far more exclusive, extremely specialized discourses are becoming widespread. Otaku culture and its closed-off mode of discussion are seen as responsible for shutting down any possibility for open criticism. It is necessary to position this discussion differently. Done appropriately, this could encourage a different outcome and help overcome the current trend of exclusivist tendency in Japanese art criticism.

After Mr. Yoshioka's announcing of a questionnaire concerning 3rd ICOMAG's aim, Professor Jean-Louis Boissier (University Paris 8), media artist, and the attendees of his seminars met together to discuss the possibility of criticism in hybrid culture.

France, the second greatest manga consumer worldwide, is a country that keenly accepts Japanese pop-culture. Even it is government promotes *Cool Japan* or *Japanese kawaii Culture*. In early July every year, Japan Expo, one of the most important events in France celebrating Japanese culture, attracts more and more visitors (In 2012, this event attracted more than 210,000 visitors). Nevertheless, many young French find it difficult to comprehend

what's really happening in Japanese pop culture because of the linguistic barriers. Most Japanese websites are presented only in Japanese. Young foreigners generally have no chance at comprehension even in considerably attractive fields. They navigate online Japanese communication through online automatic translators. Unfortunately, one cannot translate directly between French and Japanese so this process often fabricates modifications or distortions, making the language difficult to de-code even with the aid of translation software.

The Otaku community maintains an attitude of exclusivity and a non-communicative nature. It is especially difficult for foreigners experiencing linguistic problems to recognize the otaku communities' disposition. Based on this current situation, how could we take a step towards open criticism? How does the criticism contribute to dialogue that is useful in examining contemporary hybrid culture? Following is a brief report on our discussion of this subject in a seminar at the University Paris 8.

To look deeply into this theme, we read an article uploaded on Mr. Yoshioka's personal blog, titled *Why Be Ashamed of "Cool Japan"?* (The text is Japanese, French version by my translation is available at: *Pourquoi avoir honte du "Cool Japan"?*, [http://www.mrexhibition.net/wp\\_mimi/?p=1427](http://www.mrexhibition.net/wp_mimi/?p=1427)). The article provides a clear background of the negative attitude among Japanese people toward "Cool Japan", focusing our attention on historic conflicts between high culture and popular culture in Japanese society. The article is available for viewing on the blog. This report will cover only key points.

There is a widely shared impression that Japanese high culture is no more than an imitation of other cultures. Before modern times, everything Japanese did was in imitation of Chinese Culture. In modern days, Occidental Culture has infiltrated Japan. Foreign countries express a much greater attraction to Japanese popular culture than to their high culture, which Japanese have made sophisticated through great effort. Devoted appreciation of popular culture is doomed to be considered an "exotic" subject abroad. This is why Japanese reject their Cool Japan. The notion of "exoticism" gives off an offensive air, reminding us of historical frustration regarding colonialism. Accepting Cool Japan might mean yielding to these implications. Japanese people, therefore, maintain an inevitable negative attitude toward Cool Japan.

As a result, Japanese people do not appropriately assess their own culture. They avoid making an effort to understand different people and aspects

of their culture, or they develop their discussions exclusively within their familiar community circle using jargon, thus closing the doors of the conversation on the wider public. The negative stance toward Cool Japan has aggravated this current impasse in criticism. While cultural structure in a country is very complex, Japanese are often willing to divide it into just two: high and low culture. Even taking a glance at popular culture, different degrees coexist: culture for the majority, culture consumed by the majority, avant-garde culture in which the majority turns over the conventional culture, culture developed as well as consumed by the majority, transitional culture at the limit of high culture and so on. It is impossible to draw a line between high and pop culture. Therefore, the said hypothesis: Japanese high culture as no more than an imitation is not persuasive. Furthermore, this kind of inferior stance and pessimistic thought has probably obstructed any possible conversation between different fields.

Otakish attitude appears in a certain self-sufficient system where a culture can develop by itself. To illustrate, fields of derivative work, such as Comikets, fanzines, Japanese manga and animation have a self-reproductive mechanism in place. Inside of these communities, authors and consumers exchange mutually, working as both authors and consumers. Understanding this characteristic of the otaku-world is crucial: the closed otaku-ism system rejects outsiders' involvement. Although any specific otaku-like use of language can be difficult to comprehend, we cannot ignore any specialized discussion among otaku people because they are themselves creators and supporters of culture, so the otaku world is the actual scene of production and creation. Finally, "otaku" is not a particular group but a specific mental attitude restricting communications. It is necessary for the revival of criticism, for the respect of written word and for the recovery of human beings' authentic conversation, to unblock the otaku-like attitude.

### 3. Shinbunonna (Newspaper Woman) – proposition for participative art

How could we open "otaku-ism discourse"? What do we do to overcome the current closed off situation? To begin with, this closed-off feature is a part of otaku communities according to its definition. We have to change our minds concerning this point.

Instead of using incomprehensible technical terms to avoid being understood, or using secret languages as a violent tool to attack others (as

we saw Takamine's outstanding work in his exhibition, *the room of free expression*), we can talk each other and most importantly, share something. "Open-minded" communication occurs at the moment where people are ready to share something with others.

I would like to introduce a proposition of "participative art" as series of artistic practices enabling people to realize a reciprocal communication.

Generally, media arts and games are considered participative, however, they are not truly interactive because games are based on programmed codes and fixed roles are often pre-established. True interaction consists of a commitment to events and participation in actions.

Newspaper Woman, a Japanese artist, whose real name is Miyuki Nishizawa, is the direct successor of the late Shozo Shimamoto, Gutai's founding member. Her art's aimed principally to liberate people's mind. Through her art, she always delivers joyfulness and happiness she experienced herself. Anyone lucky enough to encounter her dynamic performance finds their mind liberated from the ennui of daily life. Newspaper Woman proposes her spectators to get involved in the performance, to act together and share the experience.

On March 9, 2013, having been invited by the Guggenheim Museum in New York, she carried out her performance for more than 1000 visitors. I had the opportunity to experience the special occasion, being involved instantly in the spectacle as one of her staff. The three hour long performance began with a work titled *Please Walk under Here* (2013), in which the staff form together a sort of an arch made from her 30 meter long newspaper dress hem. In experiencing this piece, visitors could walk under the long hems of her dress. *Please Walk under Here* is the homage paid to her later mentor Shozo Shimamoto whose performance *Please Walk on Here* took place in 1955. Following this opening performance, visitors were invited to participate in the Newspaper costume parade with Shinbunonna and her fellows wearing newspaper dresses. Various collaborative and participative performances engaged the public, making everyone happy. I believe participative propositions such as these could effectually drive otaku-minded people to communicate openly not only by means of words but also in physical ways.

Shinbunonna was also invited for the congress of Japan Association for Semiotic Studies (JASS) in Kobe Fashion Museum in May 2012. She gave a successful performance, wrapping students, professors and museum staff participants in newspapers. An unusual situation created by Shinbunonna,

who played the important role of making people feel free from any kind of daily troublesomeness, transformed a meeting place of academic conference into an alien space.

Moreover, her performances are not limited only to art museums and cultural centres. She appears on city streets, in commercial shopping centres and under arcaded streets! She gives beautiful dreams to children and families during their holidays as well as workshops to craft amateurs to teach newspaper cloth know-how. She bravely appears on TV and in other media. Through her practice of using newspapers, she brings to people a certain alien experience, making a hole our tedious routine, freeing participants from the reality. It is the alienation effect, as Brecht said in his theory regarding the theatre, that helps people join and relate each other, turning their attitude toward mutual conversation. When we encounter what we have never seen, we are driven by necessity of altering our habitual convention into another unknown. Such experiences could transform into an overture of alternative interaction adapted to our hybrid culture's era, reviving authentic discourse and meaningful written communication. Participative art and experimental expression could offer new possibilities in overcoming the dead-end situation in criticism.

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Takafumi Kato

## A Tentative Theory: the Actual/Possible Matrix Extracted From Art

After the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, children who had directly and indirectly suffered as a result of the earthquake began to play a seemingly strange game called “jishin-gokko”.<sup>1</sup> “Jishin” is the Japanese word for earthquake, and “gokko” is the Japanese word that means make-believe play. “Jishin-gokko” is thus a kind of game of make-believe. Children participating in this game pretend that they are now experiencing a devastating earthquake, a catastrophic tsunami after it, or an extremely tense atmosphere in disaster shelters and other places of refuge. For example, in some cases, children shout “Earthquake!” and violently shake chairs and desks around them. In other cases, children pretend that a huge tsunami is approaching: some of them play the role of the tsunami making the growling noises of huge waves, while others exclaim “Hurry up! Take shelter!” Such games might seem tactless; these games might recall to adults and children the overwhelming nightmare and sometimes hurt them seriously. However, some health practitioners and those who are engaged in the educational profession argue that such games should not be prohibited because they may work as a kind of self-managing therapy for children.<sup>2</sup>

This article focuses on the aspect of self-managing therapy that games of make-believe might have, following K. L. Walton’s theory about make-believe games.<sup>3</sup> In addition, it will be argued that experiences of artworks can be regarded as participations in games of make-believe in some circumstances; experiences of artworks can have an aspect of self-managing therapy. However, it must be noted that the word “therapy” in this article is used in a broad sense; “therapy” may take place not only in a hospital or a counseling room, but also in a museum or a temple, or on more common occasions, for example, in a classroom, at home, or in a community space.



When aesthetic experiences are considered as games of make-believe, several “actual” and “possible” aspects of the experiences can be pointed out, and such “actual” and “possible” aspects are complexly intertwined. These aspects will be listed in the last section, and then, a theory of “the actual/possible matrix of art” will be suggested. When a catastrophic disaster strikes, the sufferers are forced to face a harsh reality. To discuss potentialities of art, it is essential to examine several actual/possible aspects of art; it is needed to extract “the actual/possible matrix” from art.

## 1. A game of make-believe: “jishin-gokko”

“Jishin-gokko” is, as explained above, a kind of game of make-believe. “Jishin-gokko” can be described in reference to K. L. Walton’s book *Mimesis as Make-Believe*.<sup>4</sup> Because there is no space here to comprehensively follow Walton’s discussion, only three important concepts are picked out from his theory: 1) fictional truths, 2) props, and 3) fictional worlds. Each of these concepts can be applied to the case of “jishin-gokko”.

### 1.1. Fictional truths

Fictional truths are defined as propositions which are believed in the games of make-believe.<sup>5</sup> For example, two kids, say, Eric and Gregory play a game of make believe; Eric says “let’s say that stumps are bears”, and Gregory agrees; when there is a tree stump in front of them, the proposition “there is a bear in front of them” is a fictional truth. When a given proposition (p) is a fictional truth, Walton calls (p) fictional. To put this concept in cases of “jishin-gokko”, propositions such as “a violent lateral vibration is happening” or “a huge tsunami is approaching” are fictional.

### 1.2. Props

Props can be used in order to generate fictional truths in the games of make believe.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Eric and Gregory’s make believe play described above, it is tree stumps that generate the fictional truths; the tree stumps are thus props. Here is a critical point; if there is a tree stump, the proposition “there is a bear” is fictional, while if there is no tree stump, this proposition is not fictional. This means that who or what make propositions fictional are not the participants in the games, but the props themselves. For example, in the case

of Eric and Gregory's play, if there is an actual tree stump buried in a thick bush behind Eric but neither Eric nor Gregory realises it, the proposition "there is a bear" is a fictional truth; the actual existence of the tree stump makes the proposition fictional even if both Eric and Gregory do not notice the tree stump. As long as the participants generate fictional truths in the games, they may also be regarded as props; when Eric finds a tree stump in front of him and pretends to be dead to wait till the "bear" goes past, Eric as a prop makes the proposition "Eric is pretending to be dead" fictional.

In the case of "jishin-gokko", chairs and tables being violently shaken are regarded as props. Moreover, participants shouting "Earthquake!" or "Take shelter!" can also be regarded as props.

### 1.3. Fictional worlds

When children play a game of make believe, they build up a fictional world in which some propositions are fictional truths.<sup>7</sup> For example, when Eric and Gregory agree to say "stumps are bears", they make up a fictional world. Propositions such as "there are bears in front of them" are fictional in this world. Each fictional world has its own fictional truths; each play of "jishin-gokko" generates its own fictional world and holds its own fictional truths.

More remarks should be made on fictional worlds. Walton argues "there are fictional world of games of make-believe, fictional world of representational works, and fictional worlds of dreams and daydreams."<sup>8</sup> In other words, he argues that representational works may also function as props and generate fictional truths. Thus, art works may also build up fictional worlds. An analogy between participating in games of make-believe and experiencing artworks can be seen at this point; both participating in games of make-believe and experiencing artworks can be regarded as activities of generating a fictional world. Moreover, those who are engaged in such activities are, so to speak, imaginatively settling themselves in the fictional world. Here is a key to understand the potential of artworks this article is trying to clarify: a therapy-like function of artworks.

## 2. How do games of make-believe work as therapy?

As argued above, experience of artworks may well be identified with experience of participating in a game of make-believe. Then, how do games of make-believe work? This section would like to address this question,

as a first approximation, by explaining games of make-believe in terms of children's practices that prepare them to live their future social life. However, "jishin-gokko", a special case of game of make-believe in which children have confronted overwhelming reality, should be more carefully considered; it may involve a therapy-like process rather than a mere practice.

## 2.1. Games of make-believe as practices

Consider a case of children playing house. When children play house, they take the roles of mother, father, children or neighbours, and pretend to chat with each other like adults. Playing house is a sort of game of make-believe. Children play roles they will possibly take in the future; children can be regarded as engaging in a rehearsal of the life they will possibly lead when they grow up. When children play house, even though they make fictional truths, these fictional truths usually correspond with real facts to some extent. For example, while the economic situation is serious, children playing house may say "it's difficult for me to find a job in this day and age" or "we must buy a lottery ticket because I'm not earning enough." Although children could generate fictional truths independently from the reality, arbitrary fictional truths might ruin the game. Therefore, fictional truths in house play should not be too arbitrary; they should be based on reality to some extent.

To summarise what is argued above, children engaging in house play are following the reality to some extent, and thereby, they rehearse the social lives of adults. This argument can be generalised in the following way. Children playing games of make-believe are generating a fictional world, to some extent based on the reality. Games of make-believe are devices to generate such a fictional world and put participants in the world, in which participants do try and error, or introduce new props, and rearrange the world. The children become accustomed to the fictional world in the process of doing so, and this leads them to learn how to manage their lives in the future. Fictional worlds generated from the games of make-believe can thus be considered as practice fields for children to prepare for the future.

## 2.2. Games of make-believe as therapy

Then, consider the cases of "jishin-gokko", in which children are overwhelmed by the cruel reality. It seems too difficult, virtually impossible, to

become accustomed to such a harsh situation. It is true that also in the cases of “jishin-gokko” a fictional world is generated and participants come to reside in the world. When a catastrophic disaster strikes, however, children are helplessly exposed to the reality: in the past, they were leading their life with several social bonds, norms and conventions functioning well, but after the disaster, such social functions have been in disorder. They confront the severe new reality, so it is certain that practice for the future like house play will not function in fictional worlds generated from “jishin-gokko”.

What children attempt to carry out in “jishin-gokko” may not be a rehearsal of their future life, but a self-managing therapy. They introduce several props into “jishin-gokko”, and generate a fictional world that reflects the reality to some extent. The children put themselves in this world, and again and again, they imaginatively re-experience the overwhelming facts. Participating in “jishin-gokko” can be understood as a process of trying to re-capture who they are. Social bonds, norms, and conventions have been in disorder since the disaster, so the children have had trouble in finding themselves. At least, socially defined identity does not work anymore. Therefore, what the children seek is not the self as they were, but quite a new one: it is this process of seeking a new self that this article is trying to propose as a self-managing therapy process in “jishin-gokko”.

This idea can be applied to experiences of artworks. As argued above, experiences of artworks can be regarded as a sort of games of make-believe. Artworks function as props and generate a fictional world. Once we undergo a huge disaster, we are exposed to the severe new reality, and we are forced to abandon the past self. Now, we have to find a new self to live in the actual world. Artworks can come to function as props to generate fictional worlds in which therapies are taking place.

### 3. Conclusion: the actual/possible matrix of art


Taken the above arguments into account, several aspects of possibility and actuality about artworks can be suggested. Firstly, artworks exist in the actual world, but at the same time they may work as props to generate possible worlds. Secondly, while those who experience artworks are actual entities in the actual world, they sometimes make use of artworks in order to glimpse at a possible way to deal with the actual facts. However, it should be noted that they may usually enjoy placing themselves in possible worlds generated from artworks, but a very harsh reality sometimes

overwhelms the people and prevents them from enjoying possible worlds. In such cases they cannot even rehearse in possible worlds, and moreover, they might consequently refuse to participate in such games of make-believe. At this moment, experience of artworks may begin to involve a therapy-like process.

When it comes to experiencing artworks, three factors of art should be considered: “artworks”, “viewer-participants”, and “experiences”. Each factor has its possibility and actuality. As shown in Matrix 1, art viewer-participants experience both the actual side and the possible side of artworks, and rearrange possible worlds in which they imaginatively reside. What is taking place here can be called a therapy or a negotiation. By traversing the actual world and possible worlds in the process of art experience, art viewer-participants negotiate with their actual selves and their possible selves. In doing so, they are trying to find their new selves, even after social functions have been broken by a catastrophe.

In conclusion, artworks can offer a negotiating field to art viewer-participants. This factor enables the experience of artworks to function as therapy. To discuss potentialities of art, actual/possible aspects of art should be examined; a negotiation (or therapy-like process) can be occurring in the process of experiencing art, and there is here the potential power of art.

Matrix 1

ARTWORKS	Actual entities existing in the actual world		Props to generate possible worlds
EXPERIENCES		 <p>Negotiation</p>	
VIEWER-PARTICIPANTS	Actual entities residing in the actual world		Possible selves sought in possible worlds

## Endnotes

1. M. Kobayashi, *Jishin-gokko, Tsunami-gokko ga motsu kodomo no jikochiyu asobi no imi ni tsuite*, [http://for-supporters.net/column\\_play1.html](http://for-supporters.net/column_play1.html), accessed on December 12, 2013,
2. *Ibid.*
3. K.L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

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Miho Iwata

## Performance

Miho Iwata took part in the panel discussion with her performance. The participants were invited to the court space. This court is opened to the parking and the former garage space, which keeps the different atmosphere, contrasting with the solid modern building of Auditorium Maximum, Jagiellonian University. It was something from our daily history, something fragile in our life. She used three flags from *FUKUSHIMA! Project* <http://www.pj-fukushima.jp/jp/> which was conceived by various artists in order to remember Fukushima through art festivals just after the tragic earthquake in 2011. They sewed a huge sheet together with clothes from the world, and then cut it to make many smaller *FUKUSHUMA Flags* next year. Iwata has been engaged in this project and performed and travelled with it in Poland. It was a small action to remind of the common people's life and to bond them. The audience might not know where the clothes are from. But the clothes may get the more universal sense.

Akiko Kasuya









# Aesthetic Account on Japanese Pop Culture

(Hisashi Muroi)



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Hisashi Muroi

# Introduction – How We Should Think about Pop Culture

## 1. Introduction

In this round table, we would like to discuss how we think about Japanese pop culture or pop culture in general.

My original field of study is art theory or aesthetics. In the field of art theory and aesthetics, it is said that you should think about the theoretical condition of traditional Western art in general. Of course, art of a different age and ancient or medieval art will also be in the subject, but even in those cases, studies about modern Western art would be always thought as a standard.

In such a context, it is a little bit difficult to think about pop culture seriously.

Talking about myself, I have been much influenced by pop culture in general. I was born when TV broadcasting had started. Since then, I have been fascinated by movies, pop music and computer games, etc.

However, when I decided to think about pop culture theoretically, why did I feel there was a big wall in front of me? Is it because there is a strict border between high culture and pop culture inside myself and unconsciously I think that I should not see such pop culture as a serious object? Or, was I hesitating to talk about pop culture for it would show my affinity orientation or childishness to the public? Both seem to be true and false and I cannot decide which it is.

## 2. What is Pop culture?

Firstly, I would like to distinguish what pop culture is.

It can be said that before pop culture, there was what is called Traditional Culture and Folklore.

These contain festival, ritual, mythology and customs of dress on a certain day, and eating certain things, and singing and dancing in some cases.

These are also overlapped in the concept of Folk Culture. However, you should keep in mind is that those are different from official court culture.

Then, there appeared the civic culture or bourgeois culture in the 18th century. By taking over the aristocratic culture, it accompanied behavior like collecting oil paintings or going to the theater or opera frequently, and the bourgeoisie obtained their class satisfaction. Such a style of bourgeois life was called “snobbism”.

At last, was the birth of popular society, which is called Popular culture or Mass culture, appeared. It is totally different from the previous Folk culture, because it is based on Mass media like printing technology and photography.

It is important that cultural commodities were born by the appearance of media technologies like printing technology or photography and the reproduction of culture spread out on a large scale. With the appearance the record, the movie and further digital technology, these forms of culture have been extended further and further.

Movies created a complex entertainment industry with a huge worldwide network and the CD or record created a huge music business market that sells tens of millions of copies worldwide. Digital technology is becoming produced by the license business, called the content industry.

In short, a new cultural industry was born by the maturation of the industrial society that enabled mass production and mass distribution.

It provides a large amount of cultural goods for people with an unprecedented wide range. Only from its contents, it looks like very similar to previous popular cultures like the freak show, circus or Panorama in urban areas, but it is totally different in its overwhelming quantity in terms of the distribution amount. Hundreds of thousands of consumers and hundreds of thousands of cultural goods appeared and media technologies like newspapers, photos, posters, telegraph, telephone, movie and the Internet.

### 3. How has pop culture been discussed?

So, how has pop culture been discussed?

“Culture and Anarchy”(1869) by Mathew Arnold and “The revolt of the masses”(1929) by Jose Ortega y Gasset are well known. Both described the huge threat of mass culture from the viewpoint of intellectuals in the early years.

“Avant-garde and Kitsch” (1939) by Clement Greenberg was also opposed to the vulgar popular culture called kitsch. It was intended to defend the authentic culture like “modernism” or “Avant-garde” opposed to the pop culture or political art like socialist realism of the Soviet Union at the same age. Looking from the standpoint of traditional principles of intellectuals, they could not put up with flood of vulgar and bad taste of popular culture.

Among the thought dealing with this problem from the side of the intellectuals, “Dialectic of enlightenment” (1947) by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno and “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936) of Walter Benjamin are noteworthy and very important.

Benjamin argued that “duplicating media” such as photography and film stripped out the privileged “aura” from the culture based on the originality and had the potential to make a revolutionary and truly rational new culture. However, Horkheimer and Adorno accused popular culture of being the apparatus of domination by the ruling class which pumps cultural products continuously to the masses. We should keep attention here that both positions keep the idea of “enlightenment”. Whereas Benjamin talked with great hope about the possibility of new culture which will bring people a true awakening, Horkheimer and Adorno claimed the so-called dialectic of enlightenment will lead to barbaric inevitably and the standardized vulgar popular culture is the inevitable consequence of the movement of enlightenment.

Post-war sociological studies have tried to argue about popular culture not from such a perspective of the intellectuals, but rather from the viewpoint of the masses themselves.

In “The lonely crowd” (1950) by David Riesman the writer defined three social characters of the masses “other-oriented”, “tradition-oriented” and “internal-oriented” and described the loneliness of rich urban consumers in the United States.

In his “Culture and Society” (1958), by abandoning the traditional narrow “culture” concept from the viewpoint of Marxism, Raymond Williams presented a viewpoint that Culture should be regarded as “everything in daily life” such as football, picnics and cooking, etc.

In other words, he made the standpoint affirming popular culture as it is, and claimed that we should create a road map to political revolution and cultural innovation.

Stuart Hall and the British cultural studies group took over this wide ranged concept of culture by Williams. They inherited the semiotic research by Roland Barthes on Fashion, Pro-wrestling and photographic magazines

that appeared around the same time in “Mythologies” (1957). They tried to approach to popular arts and popular culture at the same way.

In “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse” (1973), Hall had shown the possibility of making a revolutionary stream by “reading”. That is to make revolutionary flows by finding and rescuing the potential move to change the status quo in society inside the dominant discourses.

If you take such a position, Michael Jackson and Madonna will be able to be read as a text that leads to a better direction to society. They will be “good” if they can change the cultural hegemony on the issues of race and gender and it will be possible when they are “read” revolutionarily by researchers and critics.

We can summarize that there is a class conflict between popular culture and high culture.

The privileged class, who has high cultural capital, supports high culture while the wide range of lower class, without any complex knowledge and training, supports pop culture. However, the benefit of pop culture will finally be sucked into the company of the ruling class.

Therefore, it is important which position we take, whether it is the viewpoint of the privileged intellectuals or the viewpoint of the uneducated masses, when we discuss pop culture.

If you take the position of the intellectuals, you can accuse pop culture of being a false culture and claim the necessity of making authentic true culture from the perspective of intellectuals like Greenberg; you can find a meaningful message inside pop culture and implant it into the inside of academic discourses like aesthetics or sociology; you can rescue the hidden message in pop culture and enlarge it to reform society.

In addition, from the point of view of the masses side, in the forms of such pop culture criticism without any academic discourses, there are so many non-historical, horizontal or private discourses. In the past, film critics and literary criticism were the center of such discourse, but now there is a greater amount of critical discourse about animation, comic and pop music are spread out on Internet. Those discourses are all non-integrated and non-historical and horizontal.

On the other hand, since the 1960s, the border of high culture and pop culture has been gradually becoming ambiguous. Since Pop Art in the 60s and simulationism in the 80s, the art works on the high culture side themselves have been dissolving the distinction between pop culture and contemporary art.



Such a trend is particularly apparent in the case of Japan.

In Japan, the class difference is not so clear; most people consume high culture and popular culture equally including us. We read Jacques Derrida's text and at the same time we watch "Evangelion" or other animation, too. We have graduate schools of Manga and Pop culture in college and don't have an aversion to pop culture. By contrast, it seems there remains a stubborn borderline between pop culture and authentic culture among the intellectuals of Europe and the United States,

However, the hierarchies of culture are certainly dissolving in the world. Everything has been absorbed in the global capitalistic supermarket. Contemporary art, pop culture, fashion, ethnography, web-design or characters of animation film; All are included in the art museum as a cultural supermarket.

Under these circumstances, some artists, architects, animators, cartoonists, musicians, and various craftsmen resist being commodity providers in the global supermarket like this. However, such behavior itself would be commercialized in the global supermarket culture like the case of Jimi Hendrix or Kurt Cobain of Nirvana.

#### 4. What kind of research do we need?

The difference between high culture and pop culture is becoming ambiguous at a certain level, but it doesn't mean it has been completely eliminated.

And there remains the difference between the class who was highly educated and has a high cultural capital and the class who is listening pop music, reading only comics and free Internet content.

And we must notice that the ruling class all around the world create the museums, music halls and institutions. And they also control the journalism and media for circulating those contents.

In short, everything still depends on the old paradigm of the bourgeois high culture.

However, I do not think it will continue in the future.

In a sense, pop culture will be the main stream in the future. Therefore, I think the research on pop culture should inevitably be on the politics of culture.

So rather than individual analysis of the work of pop culture in a non-integrated or horizontal way, I think that we should consider the politics of pop culture.

Although not enough, but this is my problematic of this roundtable.

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Fuminori Akiba

## Can Aesthetics Treat Hybridity in Pop Culture? In Case of *Aesthetics of MOMOCLO*

The aim of this paper is to examine the book *Aesthetics of MOMOCLO* (2013) written by Professor Anzai (University of Tokyo). This book treats the famous Japanese girls' idol group, MOMOIRO CLOVER Z, abbreviated as MOMOCLO. In the first two sections of this paper, I pay attention to the procedures by which Professor Anzai analyzes MOMOCLO, especially, to the way he analyzes the 'hybridity' that he regards as the most essential character of MOMOCLO. Through these two sections I point out the problems in his analysis; oxymoronic expression and too much juxtaposition. In the final section, I introduce the idea of "being out of place" proposed by Hiroshi Yoshioka, and raise a question about the possibility how aesthetics can speak of hybridity.

### Introduction

MOMOIRO CLOVER Z, commonly abbreviated as MOMOCLO<sup>1</sup>, is one of the most popular girls' idol groups in Japan. On this group Professor Shin-ichi Anzai (University of Tokyo, suddenly died on February 10, 2014, at the age of 53) authored a book entitled *Aesthetics of MOMOCLO* (the original Japanese title is *MOMOCLO No Bigaku*).<sup>2</sup> The book drew much attention not only because the author himself was a fanatic fan of MOMOCLO but also because as a university Professor he treated the idol group in an academic way.

At this point some fans showed displeasure saying that we must directly *feel* MOMOCLO's music and performance, so we must *not read* it<sup>3</sup>. But I do not agree with this opinion. On the contrary, as Professor Muroi says, it is quite important for academics to speak popular culture in order "to restore the circuit or discourse that cuts across various genres and layers."<sup>4</sup>

However, at the same time, it is also important for academics to examine the procedure by which Professor Anzai treats the idol group.

In the following sections, therefore, I pay attention to his procedure, especially, to the way how he analyzes the ‘hybridity’ of the group that he regards as the most essential character of MOMOCLO. I begin with the general procedure of this book.

## 1. General Procedure of *Aesthetics of MOMOCLO*

The book *Aesthetics of MOMOCLO* consists of four chapters. It begins with the most elementary constituents of MOMOCLO’s live performance; the movements of bodies, their music and staging (Ch. 1, Ch. 2). Then it moves to the broader cultural contexts; the relationship between MOMOCLO and Japanese girls’ growing-up movies such as “Hula-girl” and “*Shodo-girls*” (Ch. 3).<sup>5</sup> Finally it goes beyond such cultural contexts to the much wider social contexts; their relationship to nationality and patriotism, to the narrative types of *Sekai-kei* and *Nichijo-kei*,<sup>6</sup> to another narrative type of girls who save helpless male adults, and to the religiousness (Ch. 4).

Here I focus only on the first two chapters (the movements of bodies, their music and staging) and point out the characteristics of his analytic procedure. As shown below, he begins his analysis with the description of phenomena, and then interprets them by using the frameworks of existing aesthetics. I take his analysis of the body movements in MOMOCLO’s live performance as an example.

Firstly he describes the body movements from the point of harmonious cooperation between performers (MOMOCLO) and audiences (*Otaku*). According to his description, in the live performance of MOMOCLO, MOMOCLO aggressively moves their bodies and audiences (*Otaku*) also aggressively move their bodies imitating MOMOCLO’s movements. As the result it emerges the harmonious cooperation between them.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, he points out the existence of different body movements of audiences, that is, the original (not imitative) movements that correspond to the performers’ movements. These movements are called *Ota-gei* (active performance by *Otaku* audience).<sup>8</sup> Then he concludes that these three kinds of body movements create the feeling of unity in the live performance of MOMOCLO.

After the description he interprets it from the point of existing aesthetics. In this case he borrows the framework of interpretation from Hiroshi Ichi-

kawa's influential book entitled *Structure of the Body* (the original Japanese title is *Mi No Kozo*). In the book Ichikawa classified the synchronization between body movements into two types; one is 'imitative', the other is 'responsive' or 'role-playing.'<sup>9</sup> As we can easily imagine, Professor Anzai interprets the imitative body movements of *Otaku* audience as 'imitative synchronization,' and original body movements of *Otaku* audience (*Otagai*) as 'responsive or role-playing synchronization.'<sup>10</sup>

In this way he connects MOMOCLO to existing aesthetics. In other words, he generalizes the singular event in MOMOCLO's live performance into the event that academic persons who have never seen it can understand. At this point, however, one familiar question comes up to my mind. Does he open MOMOCLO to the general public or close MOMOCLO into traditional aesthetics? To this question I will give an answer in the last section.

## 2. Problems in Depicting Hybridity: Oxymoron and Juxtaposition

As I mentioned above, Professor Anzai regards the hybridity as the most essential to MOMOCLO. Therefore, he repeatedly points out how MOMOCLO realizes various kinds of hybridity through various kinds of hybridization in their activities. To explain such hybridity he borrows and uses various oxymoronic phrases.

I can take at least three examples of oxymoron from his explanation on the body movements. He writes, "they [the aggressive body movements of MOMOCLO] have virtual powers like exploding chaos, but at the same time, they have certain order," that is, "Chaosmos" (chaos and cosmos, from Guattari's *Chaosmos: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*). Another two oxymoronic phrases are used to express the same characteristics of body movements; one is "Dionysian and Apollonian" (from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*), and the other is "matriarchal/ introverted/ body-liberating/ fantastic/ abstract and paternalistic/ extroverted/ body-binding/ sensuous/ empirical" (from Sachs' *World History of Dance*).<sup>11</sup>

In his explanation of the music and staging of MOMOCLO, he repeats the same procedure, that is, he makes a long list of various hybridity. According to him, the music and staging of MOMOCLO, at least, consist of hybridization of 1) real and virtual,<sup>12</sup> 2) of bodily performance of male idols and female idols.<sup>13</sup> 3) of various dance styles such as Japanese, ethnic, classic, etc.,<sup>14</sup> 4) of various nationalities,<sup>15</sup> 5) of various genres,<sup>16</sup> 6) of various

music styles,<sup>17</sup> 7) of various voice characters,<sup>18</sup> 8) of heterogeneous musical fragments,<sup>19</sup> 9) of heterogeneous historical recognition.<sup>20</sup>

Here I feel two problems. The first one is about the oxymoronic expression such as Chaosmos, Dionysian and Apollonian, and body-liberating and body-binding. Of course I know that oxymoron is an established rhetoric and that it combines two words that seem to be the opposite of each other in order to bring shocks to the readers. However, at the same time, oxymoron weakens the shock of the uncanny things because it sets two opposite poles and locks the uncanny things in between these two poles. It reduces their uncanniness. In other words, oxymoron, or the dualistic way of thinking, cannot express the impact of hybridity. It only shows us two ingredients before hybridization.

The second problem is in his too much juxtaposition of the ideas from different philosophers or researchers such as Guattari, Nietzsche, and Sachs. I cannot imagine how I can relate their ideas each other (Should I understand this juxtaposition as another kind of oxymoronic expression?)

About the procedure by which he treats hybridity in music and staging of MOMOCLO I feel the same problem. He picks up various hybridity one after another. Probably they are so. However, as I said above, such juxtaposition does not create images of MOMOCLO's hybridity at all. It only shows the ingredients before hybridization.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. How Can Aesthetics Speak of Hybridity?

In the previous sections I offered a question and problems about the procedure of *Aesthetics of MOMOCLO*:

1. Does *Aesthetics of MOMOCLO* open MOMOCLO to the general public or close MOMOCLO into traditional aesthetics?
2. Oxymoronic expression weakens the shock of the uncanny things because it locks hybridity in between two opposite poles. In other words, it reduces their uncanniness. It only shows us two ingredients before hybridization.

Now it is easy to answer the first question. His dependence on oxymoronic expression closes MOMOCLO into existing aesthetics. But then, how can we give expression to the hybridity of MOMOCLO without reducing it to the ingredients before hybridization?

Here I introduce the idea of "being out of place," originally proposed by Professor Yoshioka. He said, "The first step I suggest for reinvigorating

linguistic criticism in a hybrid culture is to disobey the implicit rules of the forum and to be insensitive to the situation.”<sup>22</sup>

At first sight Professor Anzai seems to be out of place because he disobeyed the implicit rule that a university Professor must not treat popular culture in an academic way (or popular culture must not be treated in an academic way). As the result he succeeded in drawing the attention of academics to MOMOCLO and drawing attention of fans to an academic field called aesthetics. However, his procedure completely obeys the rules of existing aesthetics. He should have spoken of MOMOCLO in such a way that MOMOCLO completely destroys frameworks of existing aesthetics. If he did so, he could open a new channel through which academics and fans can discuss MOMOCLO with each other, though I do not know whether we still call such discourses ‘aesthetics.’ Then, again, how can we speak of hybridity? This is what I would like to discuss in this penal session.

## Endnotes

1. See the MOMOCLO CLOVER Z's official site. <http://www.momoclo.net/>, accessed October 17, 2014.
2. Shin-ichi Anzai, *MOMOCLO No Bigaku (Aesthetics of MOMOCLO)*, Kosaido, Tokyo, 2013.
3. For example, see the comment on the following website (in Japanese). [http://www.amazon.co.jp/product-reviews/4331516997/ref=cm\\_cr\\_pr\\_hist\\_2?ie=UTF8&filterBy=addTwoStar&showViewpoints=0&sortBy=bySubmissionDateDescending](http://www.amazon.co.jp/product-reviews/4331516997/ref=cm_cr_pr_hist_2?ie=UTF8&filterBy=addTwoStar&showViewpoints=0&sortBy=bySubmissionDateDescending), accessed on October 17, 2014.
4. Hisashi Muroi, Media Geijutsu and the Vanishing of Critique in *ICOMAG2013: The Possibility of Critique in Hybrid Cultures*, 2013, pp. 51–53, p. 53.
5. Girls' growing-up movies are the movies that depict those girls who try to revive their desolated communities through their activities such as *Hula* (Hula-girl, 2006) and *Shodo* (Calligraphy) (*Shodo-girls*, 2010). Through these activities the girls also become grownups. See: Shin-ichi Anzai, *Aesthetics of MOMOCLO*, Ch. 3.
6. Shin-ichi Anzai, *Aesthetics of MOMOCLO*, pp. 189–216.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 30–32.
8. About *Ota-gei* in general please check the following website. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wotagei>, accessed on October 17, 2014.
9. Hiroshi Ichikawa, *Mi No Kozo (Structure of the Body)*, Seidosha, Tokyo, 1984, p. 54.
10. Anzai, *Aesthetics of MOMOCLO*, p. 32
11. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 67–68.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 97–100.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 100–107
21. Furthermore, Professor Anzai points out not only hybridity but also “chiasm.” He takes MOMOCLO’s musical piece *Run!* and the live performance of this piece for example. Originally the word chiasm expresses the inversion in a second phrase or clause of the order of words in the first. But in *Run!*, according to Professor Anzai, such inversion occurs between male subjectivity and female subjectivity in the following way. The lyrics of *Run!* represents the world and gaze of male fans. But at the same time the protagonist “you” in the lyrics is female and it seems to indicate MOMOCLO themselves as female subjects. Nevertheless in the live performance MOMOCLO identifies themselves with male subjects (MOMOCLO calls themselves *Boku* that indicates a male subject) and sings this song as male subject. Consequently, the body movement running toward “you” becomes “interactive” between MOMOCLO and the fans, and their feelings of unity are reinforced (Anzai, *Aesthetics of MOMOCLO*, pp. 37–38).
22. Hiroshi Yoshioka, *Hybridity and the Possibility of Revitalizing Critique* in *ICOMAG 2013: The Possibility of Critique in Hybrid Cultures*, 2013, pp. 22–26.

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Morihiro Satow

## Railfan and Photographic Collection: A Way to Possess the World

*Otaku* subculture, Japanese term for enthusiasts, or geeks, especially for manga, anime and videogames, started to be known in the world. *Otaku* phenomenon started to be widely known in Japan from the 1980s. But long before their emergence, there were the enthusiasts for railroad in Japanese popular culture. The emergence of Japanese rail fandom can be traced back as early as 1930s when magazines for the enthusiast were started to be published. Since then, railfans have been one of the representatives of Japanese fan culture, before otaku sat the throne. Still, railfans are one of the most important subculture in Japan. Many celebrities, including some important politicians, declare that they are railfans.

Railfan is sometimes called *tetsu* in Japanese. *Tetsu* is derived from *tetsudō*, the Japanese word for “railroad” (*tetsu* means “iron” and *dō* means “road”). Also, sometimes they are called *tetsu-ota*, shortened form of *tetsudō otaku*, which shows railfan subculture and *otaku* subculture sometimes link. Anthropomorphism of Trains movement shows their linkage. Although we can find some linkage between railfans and otaku subculture, we cannot totally identify them each other. Still, they have something in common, which is the desire to collect.

Japanese railfans can be divided into several sub-categories depended on their object of obsession. Some love to take photos of train, some love to record the sound. Some love to collect parts of train, tickets, plates, timetables, etc. Some love to ride trains and some try to get off at every little station in Japan. Among them, one of the most popular sub-category is one of photography. They are equipped with expensive cameras. They also seek advantage points to photograph trains’ figure.

In this paper, I would like to pay attention to railroad photography and its collection. There are some attempts to explore the relationship between



railroad and photography. Tokyo Station Gallery held an exhibition called *Railroad and Painting*, which included the section on photography.<sup>1</sup> Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography held an exhibition called “Iron Heroes” which exclusively focused on the photographic representation of steam engines.<sup>2</sup> Among them, the exhibition by J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, *Railroad Vision* explored the interactions between railroad and photography.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the relationship between railroad and photography, a historian of photography, Clément Chéroux presented the concept of *Railroad vision* (*Vision ferroviaire*). His argument is, of course, based on the issue on the change of perception with the emergence of railroad in the 19<sup>th</sup> century raised by Wolfgang Schivelbusch.<sup>4</sup> Chéroux argues that the railroad vision is, like the photographic capture, not only instantaneous, but also fragmented and focused. From inside train, what is offered to the travellers is a vision framed, defined and fragmented.<sup>5</sup>

Chéroux’s argument is very insightful in discussing the similarity and affinity between railroad and photography. But, as he himself admits, he’s mainly interested in “view *from* train,” not “look at train.” On the other hand, in this paper, I would rather like to focus on “looks at train.”

\* \* \*

Railroad and photography were the modern technology developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The railroad constructed between Stockton and Darlington in the United Kingdom in 1825 was the first commercial railroad ever made. Nicéphore Niépce (1865–1833)’s experiment on photography was done at the same time. And the invention of photography was officially announced in 1939, when the network of railroads started to cover Western Europe.

A landscape image photographed from a station in Edinburgh by David Octavius Hill (1802–1870) and Robert Adamson (1821–1848) in 1845 is said to be the oldest *Railroad Photograph*. Also, Sir Daniel Gooch, the senior engineer of Great Western Railway was shot along with the scale-model of the train he designed at the same year. In the United States, Langenheim brothers (William; 1807–1874, Friedrich; 1809–1879) took photos of documentary of railroad construction, station and trains in the mid-1850s (figure 1). By the late nineteenth century, many railroad companies hired photographers to photograph their trains as advertising materials. Hired by a maker, Bayer Peacock, James Mudd (1821–1901) and John Stewart

(1831–1907) took many photographs of such kind (figure 2). By the 1860s, as photography had already diffused, photographic postcards and stereograms of railroad became to be sold at the waiting rooms at stations, or the newsstands near stations. A photographer, Alfred Hart (1816–1908), who worked exclusively for Central Pacific Railroad, printed 30 thousand stereocards from 3 hundred negatives just for 3 years (figure 3).<sup>6</sup>

Here, I would like to overview the history of railroad and photography in Japan. Railroad was introduced by the American fleet lead by Commodore Matthew C. Perry (1794–1858) who came to Japan to conclude the Japan–US Treaty of Peace and Amity (Kanagawa Treaty) in 1854. He brought a scale model of steam engine as a gift from American president. At the same time, the war photographer of American fleet, Eliphalet Brown Jr. took some photographs of the Japanese. Therefore, it can safely be said that railroad and photography were simultaneously introduced to Japan as modern technology.

In 1872, the first commercial railroad was laid in Japan, between Shinbashi, Tokyo and Yokohama. The railroad cars called “Black Ox” (slightly different from Western “Iron Horse”), and its majestic existence made the Japanese surprise. Many representations of trains were produced in prints and photography (figure 4). Lynne Kirvy calls such desires to represent the railroad as “techno-fetishism” which fetishizes modern technology and industry.<sup>7</sup>

In the beginning of this paper, I pointed out that the emergence of Japanese rail fandom started in 1930s. But long before that, two bourgeois young men, Iwasaki Teruya (1887–1956) and Watanabe Shirō (1880–1921) had enthusiastically collected railroad photographs. Both were sons of millionaires and commissioned the top photographer of the age, Ogawa Kazumasa (1860–1929) to take photographs of all the steam engines existed in Japan at the time, between 1902–1907 (figure 5). Their collection, containing over 3 thousand glass-negatives, is now called *Iwasaki-Watanabe collection* and preserved in Railway Museum in Saitama, Japan.<sup>8</sup>

Most of the images in the collection are so-called “train type pictures,” which illustrate the significant features characterize a certain type of train. Train type pictures are different from images which capture the running form of trains or the combination of landscape and train.

In an example from the collection, iron-made black body of a steam engine with tender car shines glossily. Details of the features of the train body are accurately depicted. At the same time, it seems to praise the magnificent, even phallic existence of the iron horse.

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Then why did they want to collect such images? Here, I'd like to explore the desire of the collectors, Iwasaki and Watanabe, by referring Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009)'s discourse on miniature. He points out, "the vast majority of works of art are small-scale [models]," or miniatures. In this case, "small-scale" does not necessarily mean small in size. Any paintings or sculptures involve "giving up certain dimensions of the object: volume in painting, colour, smell, tactile impressions in sculpture and the temporal dimension in both cases".<sup>9</sup> Railroad photographs shrink huge trains to palm-size, transfer the three dimensional to the two dimensional and abstract only visual aspect by omitting auditory, olfactory and tactile aspects. In this sense, railroad photographs are nothing but a miniature.

Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss points out that the reduction of scale causes "a sort of reversal in the process of understanding." When we "understand a real object in its totality we always tend to work from its parts." On the other hand, in the case of miniatures, "Being smaller, the object as a whole seems less formidable. By being quantitatively diminished, it seems to us qualitatively simplified. More exactly, this quantitative transposition extends and diversifies our power over a homologue of the thing, and by means of it the latter can be grasped, assessed and apprehended at a glance." Thus, "knowledge of the whole precedes knowledge of the parts."<sup>10</sup>

A Japanese critic, Taki Kōji (1928–2011) comments that the miniatures are the lingualization of reality. Because we are involved in the syntactic combination of various elements in the real world, we can just perceive parts by parts we contact. By repeating various perceptual experiences over and over, we can finally grasp the whole with the inference of the relationship. We are inevitably inside the reality. On the contrary, miniatures or scale-models are so small and exist at our external world. By those miniatures, we can reach the whole immediately. In short, we become the subject of understanding by the existence of miniatures. Lévi-Strauss points out that in a doll and through a doll "a person is made into a subject."<sup>11</sup> Like this, in a railroad photograph and through a railroad photograph, a railfan is made into a subject.

A Japanese sociologist, Ukai Masaki comments on the railfans that the railfans can easily ride on trains, but it is difficult to possess trains or drive a train. Only things they can possess are all secondary objects; that is, "photography, models, goods, train timetables, and experiences."<sup>12</sup> All of these objects have a kind of rhetorical relationship with the real, gigantic material called railroad.

Krzysztof Pomian once comments on collections saying that objects lose their use-values and only possess exchange-values by preserved at a specific place as a collection. Thus, the collected objects turn to visible and perceivable signs and thus represent the invisible and unreachable whole<sup>13</sup>. Pomian stresses the principle of the representation is based on language's rhetorical functions; that is, partiality, contiguity and causality, and similarity.<sup>14</sup> In the terms of rhetoric, partiality means synecdoche, contiguity and causality mean metonymy, and similarity means metaphor. Photographs are metonymical when we consider they are the traces of light. Railroad tickets are the part of railroad. Rail models are metaphorical.

Rail models are, just like photography, the objects of collectors who wish to possess the whole world of railroads in visible form. Susan Stewart analyses the rail models in her *On Longing*. Rail models, or the miniature railroad were originally made for the demonstration or display models which had an utilitarian function. But by the middle of the nineteenth century, the models found their primary function in the aesthetic or play sphere. Stewart observes, "in the miniature railroad we have a reduction of scale and a corresponding increase in detail and significance, and we are able to transcend the mechanical as well as the natural that forms its context." Originally, railroad was machinery served to labor and production in the capitalism. But once its size was reduced and miniaturized, it became playful and aesthetic object. At the same time, in the railroad georama for example, nature surrounding the railroad became playful and aesthetic one. "The movement here is correspondingly one from work to play, from utility to aesthetics, from ends to means."

Stewart also mentions although the miniature itself is the mimicry of the real world, it lives in totally different and closed world. The closed world has its own order which is different from the real world. "The metaphoric world of the miniature makes everyday life absolutely anterior and exterior to itself. The reduction in scale which the miniature presents skews the time and space relations of the everyday life world, and as an object consumed, the miniature finds its "use value" transformed into the infinite time of reverie." Thus, miniature creates "other" time, which negates change and the flux of lived reality.<sup>15</sup>

Just like railroad miniatures, the world of railroad photography is isolated from the real world of railroad. By the power of photography, the trains become miniatures, losing their use-values, separated from the original context, which is rails and stations. The sizes are reduced and lost their own

aura and collected by the hand of the collectors, a part and the whole, the train and their optical traces. These double metonymical transformations connect Japanese railroad as an invisible whole and closed semiotic world of the collection of railroad photographs.

Thus, railroad photographs rhetorically are linked with the real world. By reproduced by photography, all Japanese trains were collected by the railfans like André Malraux (1901–1976)’s *le Musée imaginaire*.<sup>16</sup>

## Endnotes

1. *Tetsudō to Kaiga [Railroad and Paintings]*, Fukuoka: Nishinihon Shimbunsha, 2003.
2. *Eien no Jōki Kikansha: Kurogane no Yūshatachi [Immortal Steam Engines: Iron Heroes]*, Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 2002.
3. Anne M. Lyden, *Railroad Vision: Photography, Travel and Perception*, Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003.
4. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1977.
5. Clément Chéroux, *Vues du train: Vision et mobilité au XIXe siècle*, “Études photographiques”, No. 1, November, 1996, p. 76.
6. On the history of railroad photography, see Anne M. Lyden, *Railroad Vision...*
7. Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema*, Durham: Duke U. P., 1997, p. 25.
8. *Kōtsū Hakubutsukan Shozō: Meiji no Kikansha Korekushon [The Collection of Steam Engines in Meiji Period in the Transportation Museum]*, Tokyo: Kigei Shuppan, 1968.
9. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966, pp. 22–24.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.
11. Taki Kōji, *Hiyu toshitenno Sekai: Imi no Katachi [World as a Figure of Speech: Form of Meaning]*, Tokyo: Seidosha, 1988, pp. 151–152.
12. Umai Masaki, *Tetsudō Mania no Kōgengaku: “Otokorashisa” kara Ridatsushita Otokotachi no Gyakusetsu [Modernology of Railfans: Paradox of Men Seceded from Masculinity]in Nishikawa Yūko, Ogino Miho, eds., Kyodō Kenkyū: Dansei-ron [Joint Research: Men’s Studies]*, Kyoto: Jimbun Shoin, 1999, p. 116.
13. Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux*, Paris, Venise: XVIe–XVIIIe siècle, Paris: Gallimard, 1987, pp. 15–17.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.
15. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1984, p. 65.
16. See André Malraux, *Museum Without Walls*, in *idem, The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978, pp. 13–130.



Fig. 1: William and Frederick Langenheim, *Niagara Falls, Summer View: Suspension Bridge and Falls in the Distance*, ca. 1855-56, Glass Stereograph, 8.3x17.1cm, J. Paul Getty Museum.

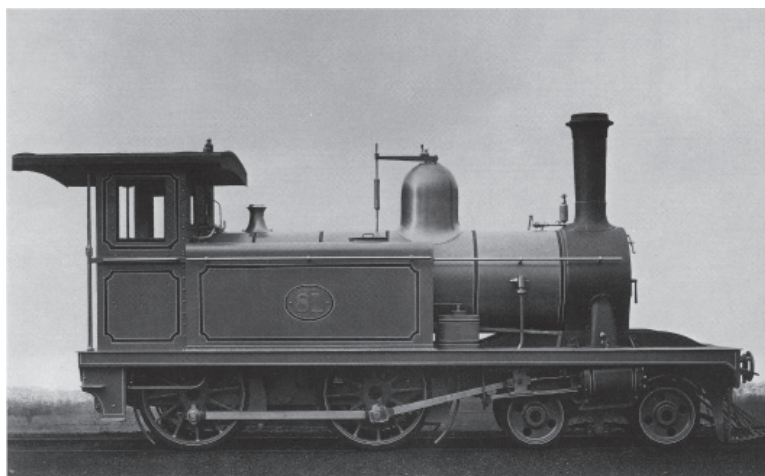


Fig.2: John Stuart, *Nielson Locomotive Engine (Cape Government Railway, South Africa)*, 1880, Albumen print, 21.6x34cm, Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

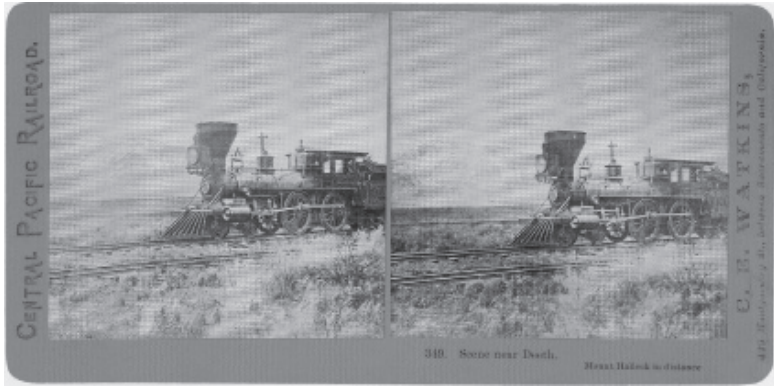


Fig. 3; Alfred A. Hart, *Scene near Deeth—Mount Halleck in Distance*, 1870, Albumen Stereograph, 8.7x17.5cm, J. Paul Getty Museum.

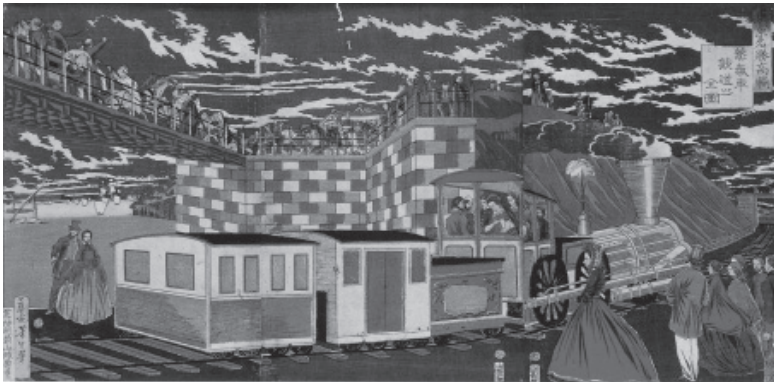


Fig. 4. Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, *Famous Site in Tokyo: Steam Engine in Takanawa*, 1871, Ukiyo-e Woodblock Print, 35.1x71.2cm, Railway Museum, Saitama.



Fig. 5: Ogawa Kazumasa, *Steam Engine Type 5500*, 1902-1907, Railway Museum, Saitama.



## Author biographies

### PANEL 01

ARNOLD BERLEANT is Professor of Philosophy (Emeritus) at Long Island University (USA). His work ranges over aesthetics, the arts, ethics, and social philosophy, and he has lectured and written widely in these areas, both nationally and internationally. Berleant is the author of numerous articles as well as eight books on aesthetics, the arts, and especially the aesthetics of environment. He is also the founding editor of the on-line journal, *Contemporary Aesthetics*.

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DR. MIŠKO ŠUVAKOVIĆ is professor of applied aesthetics and theory of art at Faculty of Music, Belgrade. He has published or edited 40 books in Serbian, Slovenian and English, among them: *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991* (The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2006), *Epistemology of Art* (TkH, Belgrade, Vienna, 2008), *The Clandestine Histories of the OHO Group* (Zavod P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E, Ljubljana, 2009), *Konceptualna umetnost* (Orion\_Art, Belgrade, 2012). He is president of *Society for Aesthetics of Architecture and Visual Arts Serbia* (DEAVUS).

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### PANEL 03

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TANEHISA OTABE is professor of aesthetics at the University of Tokyo. He has academic interests in aesthetics in Germany in the 18th century and intercultural aesthetics. His publications in German include: “Ästhetische Subjektivität. Romantik und Moderne” (Würzburg 2005) and “Kulturelle Identität und Selbstbild. Aufklärung und Moderne in Japan und Deutschland” (Berlin 2011). He is a coeditor of the “JTLA” (an international journal for aesthetics on behalf of the University of Tokyo). He is President of the Japanese Society for Aesthetics, an EC of the International Society

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KRYSTYNA WILKOSZEWSKA is professor of philosophy and aesthetics and Head of the Department of Aesthetics at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Poland. She is President of the Polish Society of Aesthetics and Director of John Dewey Research Center founded by her at the Jagiellonian University. She is a delegate in the Executive Committee in the International Association for Aesthetics and a member of Board in Central European Pragmatist Forum. She was awarded research grants from ACLS and Humboldt Foundation. Her main interest is in pragmatist philosophy and aesthetics, somaesthetics, postmodern philosophy and art, eco-aesthetics, transcultural studies. She published *Art as the Rhythm of Life: Reconstruction of John Dewey's Philosophy of Art; Postmodernism in Philosophy and Art* and edited among others three volume *Japanese Aesthetics; Vision and Revision; Transcultural Aesthetics; Aesthetics and Cultures*. She is editor of the series: "Aesthetics in the World", "Classics of Polish Aesthetics".

## PANEL 04

WOLFGANG WELSCH, born in 1946, is professor emeritus of philosophy (Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena) and lives in Berlin. In 1992, he received the Max Planck Research Award. His main fields of research are anthropology, epistemology and ontology, theory of evolution, aesthetics and art theory,

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EDUARDO KAC is internationally recognized for his telepresence and bio art. A pioneer of telecommunications art in the pre-Web '80s, Eduardo Kac (pronounced "Katz") emerged in the early '90s with his radical works combining telerobotics and living organisms. His visionary integration of robotics, biology and networking explores the fluidity of subject positions in the post-digital world. His work deals with issues that range from the mythopoetics of online experience (Uirapuru) to the cultural impact of biotechnology (Genesis); from the changing condition of memory in the digital age (Time Capsule) to distributed collective agency (Teleporting an Unknown State); from the problematic notion of the "exotic" (Rara Avis) to the creation of life and evolution (GFP Bunny). At the dawn of the twenty-first century Kac opened a new direction for contemporary art with his "transgenic art"--first with a groundbreaking piece entitled Genesis (1999), which included an "artist's gene" he invented, and then with "GFP Bunny," his fluorescent rabbit called Alba (2000). Kac's work has been exhibited internationally at venues such as Exit Art and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York; Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris; Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid; Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai; and Seoul Museum of Art, Korea. Kac's work has been showcased in biennials such as Yokohama Triennial, Japan; Biennial of the End of the World, Ushuaia, Argentina; Gwangju Biennale, Korea; Bienal de Sao Paulo, Brazil; International Triennial of New Media Art, National Art Museum of China, Beijing; and Bienal de Habana, Cuba. His work is part of the permanent collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, the Museum of Modern

Art in New York, the Museum of Modern Art of Valencia, Spain, the ZKM Museum, Karlsruhe, Germany, and the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, among others. Kac's work has been featured both in contemporary art publications (Contemporary, Flash Art, Artforum, ARTnews, Kunstforum, Tema Celeste, Artpress, NY Arts Magazine), contemporary art books (Phaidon, Thames and Hudson, Oxford, MIT Press) and in the mass media (ABC, BBC, PBS, Le Monde, Boston Globe, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, New York Times). Kac has received many awards, including the Golden Nica Award, the most prestigious award in the field of media arts and the highest prize awarded by Ars Electronica. He lectures and publishes worldwide. His work is documented on the Web: <http://www.ekac.org>.

## PANEL 05

POLONA TRATNIK is the president of the Slovenian Society of Aesthetics. She is the head of the Department for Cultural Studies, docent for philosophy of culture at Faculty of Humanities and research associate at Science and Research Centre of the University of Primorska, director of Horizonti Institute. She was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar and Guest Professor at University of California Santa Cruz in 2012 and a guest professor in Beijing, Helsinki, Mexico etc. She is an author of five monographs, one forthcoming: *Hacer-vivir más allá del cuerpo y del medio*, Mexico City: Herder, and one just written (*Conquest of Body. Biopower of Biotechnology*).

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JOS DE MUL studied philosophy, art history and social sciences at the universities of Amsterdam, Utrecht and Nijmegen. At present he is full professor Philosophy of Man and Culture at the Faculty of Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam. He has also taught at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) and Fudan University (Shanghai) and in 2012 he became a visiting fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, USA. From 2007-2010 he was president of the International Association for Aesthetics. His research is on the interface of philosophical anthropology, aesthetics, philosophy of technology and history of 19th and 20th century German philosophy. His English publications include: *Romantic Desire in (Post)Modern Art and Philosophy* (State University of New York Press, 1999), *The Tragedy of Finitude. Dilthey’s Hermeneutics of Life* (Yale University Press, 2004), *Cyberspace Odyssey. Towards a Virtual Ontology and Anthropology* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), and *Destiny Domesticated. The Rebirth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Technology* (State University of New York Press, 2014) He is the winner of the Praemium Erasmianum Research Prize (1994) and the Socrates Prize (2003).

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SIDEY MYOO is Michał Ostrowicki’s net name. He is an associate professor in the Department of Aesthetics in Institute of Philosophy at the Jagiellonian University and in the Department of Theory of Media Arts at the Academy of

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PIOTR ZAWOJSKI, an associate professor in the Department of Film & Media Studies at the University of Silesia, Katowice. He also works at Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. His research interest focuses on the theory of photography, film and cinema, new media, digital arts and cyberculture. He is a chief of the Film and Media section at Polish cultural quarterly *Opcje*, member of the Board of the magazine *CyberEmpathy* and artistic director of festival “digital\_ia”.

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ANTONI PORCZAK, an artist and professor, the Head of Department of Interactive Media Study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. He participated in more than 120 joint exhibitions (about 40 of them held abroad), including, among others, the 43rd Biennial of Venice in 1988. He devotes himself to sculpture, drawing, actions, multi-media forms and installations. The author of numerous articles on the interactive media art and artistic education.

## PANEL 07

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## PANEL 08

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## PANEL 10

AKIKO KASUYA, Associate Professor at Kyoto City University of Art. She specializes in aesthetics, art theory and Polish and Japanese contemporary art. She has worked as part of the National Museum of Art, Osaka (NMAO) Curatorial Department. Major Publications: *Modern Art of Central Europe*, (Sairyusya, 2013, Joint authorship), *Contemporary Art of Central Europe* (Sairyusya, 2014), *Polish Avant-garde Art: Applied Fantasy for Survival* (Sogensha, 2014). She is the artistic director of Tatsuno Art Project from 2011 to 2014.

TAKAFUMI KATO received his Master’s Degree in Aesthetics and Art History from Kyoto University. He is now a doctoral student at Kyoto University. Miki Okubo, born in Sapporo, studied aesthetics at Kyoto University. Since 2009, she studies and teaches at University of Paris 8, where she received her master’s degree in aesthetics, specializing in conceptual art and new media art. Her thesis’ title is “Exposition de soi à l’époque mobile / liquide». She was

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MIHO IWATA, a performance artist living in Kraków since 1986. Born in Ichinomiya-shi, Japan 1962 ; Study of architecture in Kyoto Prefectural University; Study of Polish Philology in Jagiellonian University in Kraków. She started her artistic activity with the performance in Krzysztofory Gallery in Kraków in 1994. She took part in „FUKUSHIMA!” action with her performance. Her works are presented in many important artistic places and festivals; ex. @KCUA /Kyoto/, Kyoto Art Center, Tatsuno Art Project 2014 FLOW /Hyogo, Japan/, Tesla /Berlin/, ART POINT Parkmusic /Trombache Hof, Germany/, Liang's Garden /Foshan, China/, Ujazdowski Castle Contemporary Art Centre, Zacheta Gallery /Warsaw/, Krzysztofory Gallery, Otwarta Pracownia /Krakow/.

## PANEL 11

HISASHI MUROI, Professor of Yokohama National University. He specializes in aesthetics, art theory and semiotics. He is the delegate of Yokohama Culture Laboratory since 2012 and organizes many cultural projects.

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MORIIHIRO SATOW, Professor in The Faculty of Design, Kyoto Seika University. After a master degree from Columbia University in New York he obtained a doctoral degree in Art Theory from Doshisha University. He specializes in the fields of Art History and Visual Culture, and is the author of *Topografi no Nihon Kindai – Edo d Doro-e, Yokohama Shashin, Geijutsu Shashin (Topography and Japanese Modernity: Edo Doro-e, Yokohama Photography and Art Photography)* (Seikyusha, 2011). He was one of the Japanese translators of Geoffrey Batchen's *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (joint translation, Seikyusha, 2010).



