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Table of contents

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Triebchicksal und affektive Lebenspassibilität.
Zur Frage der Nachträglichkeit von Bedürfen/Begehren
ROLF KÜHN
Pages: 7-56

Le transfert de l'identité linguistique, culturelle et politique face à la mondialisation
IRENA KRISTEVA
Pages: 57-73

Liminal Thresholds: Perception and Imagination under the Reign of Virtuality: A Phenomenological Approach
IOAN COROAMĂ
Pages: 74-110

Politics, Morality and Nothingness: On the Coherence of Jan Patočka's Reflections on Sacrifice
SIMAS ČELUTKA
Pages: 111-132

“Mimesis of the Alienated”: Commodity Form and Artwork's Autonomy in late Capitalism: An Analysis of Hirst's For the Love of God and Santiago Sierra
ROLANDO VITALI
Pages: 133-158

Mythos „Ichauflösung“ (Ego Dissolution). Zur Unterscheidung von Selbst und Ego
THORSTEN STREUBEL
Pages: 159-181

The Art of Biblical Hermeneutics: The Story of the Canaanite Woman
TARAK DRIDI
Pages: 182-205

The Analogy between the Infinity of the World and the Infinity of Mathematics in Relation to the Absolute
CORDELIA MÜHLENBECK
Pages: 206-223

A Phenomenological Reading of Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato si'*
through Jean-Luc Marion's Account of the Saturated *Phenomenon*
BEN CARLO N. ATIM
Pages: 224-251

Ethical Challenges in Designing a Machine Learning System
VIOREL ȚUȚUI
Pages: 252-277

SYMPOSIUM WITH RICHARD SHUSTERMAN

Symposium on Richard Shusterman's *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*
RICHARD SHUSTERMAN, STEFANO MARINO (ED.), ELENA ROMAGNOLI
(ED.), VALENTINA ANTONIOL, ANNA BUDZIAK, MARTA FAUSTINO,
MARCELLO GHILARDI, THOMAS LEDDY
Pages: 279-325

Research Articles

Tribschicksal und affektive Lebenspassibilität. Zur Frage der Nachträglichkeit von Bedürfen/Begehren

Rolf Kühn
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Abstract

Drive Destiny and Affective Passibility of Life: On the Question of Apres-Coup of Need/Desire

Questions of origin are considered undecidable in metapsychology, since the constant transformations of drives result in a decentred subject whose fate can only lead to a certain relaxation of conflict through subsequent rewriting. For a radical phenomenology, affect denotes the reality of all appearances and is therefore still ahead of the instinctual unconscious. This article reflects upon the modality in which affect/drive destiny can be understood in relation to an original desire that knows no final drive goal, but refers back to the unnamable unity of an immanence of life in every feeling and action. In this respect, pure affect knows no death drive, but makes possible the sublimation that, for Freud, allows a certain synthesis between the pleasure and reality principles. Since this possibility is particularly evident in aesthetics, the connection between affect/pathos as the originality of fiction and the imaginary can be demonstrated at the same time. Overall, the relationship between drive, affect and art allows an understanding of culture that acknowledges more space for the creative imagination than the one allowed by the modern concept of objectivity.

Keywords: affectability, originality of life, chain of signifiers, fate of instinct, primal repression, theory of seduction

Insofern jeder wissenschaftliche Diskurs in seinem Bemühen um Begründung menschlicher und kultureller Wirklichkeit an die Erkenntnisgrenzen von Bedürfen/Begehren stoßen wird, ist es angebracht, nach deren

originärer Gegebenheitsweise zu fragen. Phänomenologie und Psychoanalyse, die beide zunächst am subjektiven Faktor solcher Originarität ausgerichtet sind, bevor auch gesellschaftliche Fragen in Augenschein genommen werden, nähern sich solchem leiblichen oder affektiven Bedürfen auf reduktivem beziehungsweise regressivem Wege, um Impressionalität und triebhafte Wünsche als Bedingung jeder ideierenden Vorstellung oder Repräsentanz auszumachen. Dabei kommt dem zeitlichen Aspekt eine grundlegende Bedeutung zu, da jedes Jetzt-Bewusstsein auf eine immemorale Vergangenheit verweist, die limeshaft wie ein Unbewusstes auch bei Edmund Husserl auftritt. In der frühen Daseinsanalytik durch Martin Heidegger ersetzt der situative Lebensbegriff als "Wie des Seins" die Suche nach einem eigenen Selbst in jedem reflexiven wie psychologischen Sinne, um sich ausschließlich "im Offenen" des möglichen Erfahrungsvollzugs zu bewegen und dessen "Bezugssinn" ohne jeden "besonderen Gehalt (Was)" (Heidegger 1995, 63, ebd. 12, 23, 244ff. und 261-262) zu erfassen. Unbewusstes wie Lebensvollzug versucht die Psychoanalyse ihrerseits in einer doppelten Bewegung zu ergreifen, nämlich einerseits als triebdynamische Linearität und zum anderen als eher hermeneutische Rückinterpretation der traumatisch verstellten Primärerfahrung von Bedürfen/Begehren durch eine symptomale Deutung, welche den triebhaft fixierten Wiederholungszwang in der Gegenwart über die nachträglich umgeschriebene Erinnerung auflösen soll.

Diese Diskussion soll zunächst an Hand der Untersuchungen von Jean Laplanche (Laplanche 1988) und Jean-Bertrand Pontalis (Laplanche & Pontalis 1961; Laplanche 1988/2017; Laplanche 1999; Laplanche 2011, Dejours & Votalolovo 2016) hinsichtlich ihrer Konzeption eines Ursprungsphantasmas weitergeführt werden. Es ist bekannt, dass es für Freud kein Ursprungsdenken im philosophisch oder religiös metaphysischen Sinne gibt (Ricœur 1965, 69ff. und 396ff.), denn er will eine solche Originarität ausschließlich auf metapsychologische Gegebenheiten zurückführen, an deren Anfang in analytisch-therapeutischer Perspektive eine Urverdrängung als Urszene steht, begleitet von einem Phantasma der Verführung, Kastration oder Rückkehr in den

mütterlichen Schoß (Freud 1926/1991, 145ff.). Diese Phantasmen bilden nach seiner Auffassung zugleich ein archaisches Erbe bei allen Menschen, welches es ihnen erlaube, sich innerhalb der symbolischen Ordnung von Gesellschaft und Kultur zu entwickeln, deren geschichtlich weltanschauliche Stadien – ähnlich wie bei Auguste Comte – Totemismus, Religion und Wissenschaft sind. Diese ersten Phantasmen stellen keine unmittelbare Repräsentation dar, sondern bedeuten für die jüngere Psychoanalyse – besonders seit Jacques Lacan (Lacan 2005) – eine phallische Einschreibung des Symbolischen als "Namen-des-Vaters" in unsere leiblich symptomale Wirklichkeit. Diese bilde sich beim Kind als phantasmatische Aktivität zugleich mit der Autoerotik heraus, insofern der Leib die Unmittelbarkeit von Bedürfen, Begehren und Lust darstelle. Durch die mütterliche Brust sowie die Pflege dieser leiblichen Bedürfnisse seitens der Mutter tritt nun ein, was Laplanche und Pontalis eine "Verführung" (*séduction*) in einem erweiterten Sinne im Anschluss an Freud genannt haben, das heißt eine sexuelle Reizerregung durch Erwachsene, welche über die anfängliche Fassungskraft des Kindes hinausgehe. In der Darstellung dieser Sichtweise werden wir auf die dabei auftretende philosophische wie psychoanalytische Grundfrage von originär affektivem Erleben sowie zeitlicher Erinnerung als "Nachträglichkeit" eingehen.

Es tauchte schon bei Freud in "Emmas Fall" seit seinem frühen *Entwurf* (Freud 1895/1950, 387-477) sowie seinen *Studien über Hysterie* (Freud 1896) der Begriff dieser Nachträglichkeit auf: "Anstelle dieser unbestimmten hysterischen Disposition kann nun ganz oder teilweise die posthume Wirkung des sexuellen Kindertraumas treten. Die Verdrängung der Erinnerung an ein peinliches sexuelles Erlebnis reiferer Jahre gelingt nur solchen Personen, bei denen dieses Erlebnis die Erinnerungsspur eines Kindertraumas zur Wirkung bringen kann." (Freud 1944, 195) Dieser Begriff des Nachträglichen durchläuft dann nicht nur später vor allem über Jacques Lacan und Jean Laplanche eine komplexe psychoanalytische Rezeptionsgeschichte (Eickhoff 2009. Kerz-Rühling 1993. Quindeau 2019. Kirchoff 2009), sondern bereitete zugleich zusammen mit dem freudschen Begriff der

"Überdeterminiertheit" die dekonstruktive Analyse der Postmoderne mit vor. Bei Derrida findet diese als *Différance* im Sinne von Aufschub und Supplement zu jener noch aktuellen Metaphysikkritik hin, die seit Heidegger (Heidegger 1967; Derrida 1972, 1-30) die Infragestellung jeder angenommenen Sinn- und Subjektidentität als einer unmittelbaren Selbstwahrheit bildet (Nancy 2023). Wir werden diese ideengeschichtlichen Konturen aufgreifen, um allerdings letztlich auf eine methodisch entscheidende Frage zu verweisen, ob nämlich alles Bedürfen/Begehren noch diesseits von Primärerfahrungen und differentielltem Zeitaufschub an die selbstaffektive Originarität des rein phänomenologischen Lebens zurückgebunden ist.

Eine erweiterende Analyse der Psychoanalyse in Bezug auf Philosophie, Religion und Kultur kann nämlich erheben, inwieweit eine ontologische Wirklichkeit der Affektabilität als solcher von jeglicher bloß ontischen Triebrealtät zu unterscheiden bleibt (Kühn 2020, 9-84). Denn weder Unbewusstes noch libidinös gebundene Traumatisierungen wären möglich, falls nicht zuvor ein solch absolut phänomenologisches Leben gegeben wäre, das allen perzeptiven und begrifflichen Vorstellungen prinzipiell vorausliegt. Insofern ist auch jede Entstehung eines Symptoms und das ihm zugrundeliegende Ereignis später als das Leben in seiner Ursprünglichkeit selbst. Aber geschichtlich arbeitete gleichfalls bereits die *Moses-Studie* Freuds (Freud 1950) mit beiden Zeitaspekten der Nachträglichkeit, das heißt als Rekonstruktion kausal-deterministischer Art eines weit zurückliegenden historischen Ereignisses sowie als Konstruktion einer gegenwärtigen subjektiven Wahrheit des kulturell gewordenen Gottesbildes wie im Judentum und Christentum. Beide Zeitaspekte sind nach Freud für die zeitliche Komplementarität zum Verständnis archaisch wie latent unbewusster Vorgänge notwendig und setzen mit der grundsätzlichen Symbolisierungsfähigkeit des Individuums die Entwicklung einer Ich-Organisation voraus. Dabei impliziert allerdings jede Nachträglichkeit als Rückübersetzung von unbewussten Erinnerungsspuren in unseren Augen eine gegenreduktive Passibilität, die keiner Deutung jemals zugänglich sein wird, da im Verhältnis von Leben/Lebendigen eine

Unmittelbarkeit herrscht, die weder in einer philosophischen noch psychoanalytischen Differenz erfasst zu werden vermag. Man kann diese originäre Transzendentalität des subjektiven Lebens sein absolutes "Voraus" oder "Mehr" nennen, das in seiner Abgründigkeit noch jeder symptomalen Entstehung vorhergeht und daher in jeglichem Bedürfen/Begehren wiederzufinden ist, sofern darin jeweils dieses absolut selbstimpressionale Leben ohne jede Distanz praktisch erprobt werden muss (Henry 2005, 19ff.)¹.

1. Kindliche Sexualität als Trauma und Erinnerung

Um die grundlegenden Bezüge zwischen entsprechenden Primärerfahrungen und solcher Lebensaffektabilität herauszuarbeiten, greifen wir die psychoanalytische Sichtweise auf, dass Erinnerungen derartige ereignisbildende Sinnstiftungen darstellen, die immer schon mit einer bestimmten Bedeutung ausgestattet sind, weshalb Symptome seit Freud als automatisches Identifizieren von solchen Erinnerungen aufgefasst wurden (Botella 2014). Diese unbewusste Wiederholung soll mit dem Konzept der "Nachträglichkeit" erhellt werden, um die bisher wiederholte unbewusste Bedeutung einer bewussten "Umschrift" zuzuführen, was impliziert, dass das Symptom nicht unlösbar mit einer bestimmten Erinnerung an ein Ereignis verbunden ist. Mit anderen Worten können frühe Erfahrungen, Eindrücke und Erinnerungsspuren aufgrund neuer Erfahrungen umgedeutet werden, so dass ein traumatisches Geschehen erst nachträglich im weiteren Lebenslauf seine Bedeutung gewinnt (Quindeau 2004). Schon für Jean Laplanche ist daher solche Nachträglichkeit nicht nur durch eine Verschränkung von linearem und rückbezüglichem Denken hermeneutisch bestimmt, sondern ebenfalls durch den Primat des Anderen als einer strukturellen Asymmetrie zwischen Kind/Erwachsenen. Denn das Kind als Säugling ist auf die Anrede der Eltern angewiesen, aber gleichzeitig auch deren Ansprüchen unterworfen. Solche Passivität zu Existenzbeginn wird zur Aussetzung an das Fremde und Unverfügbare, wodurch das Kind nicht seine eigene Entwicklung in der Hand hat, sondern zum *sub-iectum* wird. Dieses Vergangene findet durch die

leiblich-seelische Entwicklung und den weiteren Lebenserfahrungen immer neue Gestalt, so dass bei traumatischen Ereignissen nicht nur eine Reizüberflutung stattfindet, die das Ich in solcher Notfallsituation mit einer Abkapselung des Unverständlichen beantwortete. Vielmehr entstehen zusätzlich "Überbleibsel", wodurch sich das Ereignis mit Phantasie verbindet, was gemäß Laplanche neben der grundsätzlichen Abhängigkeit vom Anderen besonders auch das frühe erotische Erleben der Eltern mit ins Spiel bringt, welches als "Fremdkörper" der "Verführung" beim Kind wirkt. Deshalb bleiben in der Kur für das Verstehen der Traumatisierung besonders die unbewussten Phantasien aufzugreifen.

Dadurch impliziert die Nachträglichkeit jene Janusköpfigkeit mit rätselhaften Botschaften, die zunächst unübersetzbar sind und nach einer Zeit der Latenz diese Übersetzung in psychoanalytischer Sicht einfordern. Dabei zeigt gerade eine von den genannten französischen Autoren inspirierte Freud-Lektüre einen Theorieansatz, worin Konzepte von Befriedigungserlebnis hinsichtlich Bedürfen/Begehren, Schwere des Lebens, Wunsch und Todestrieb aufeinander zu beziehen sind und gleichfalls die kulturell-gesellschaftliche Dimension miteinschließen. Um also das linear-deterministische Missverständnis des Zusammenhangs von Ereignis/Trauma zu vermeiden, das lange durch die Übersetzung von *deferred action* für Nachträglichkeit in den englischen Übersetzungen der freudschen Werke vorherrschte, hat der Begriff *après-coup* im Französischen im Sinne von "Danach" ein besseres Verständnis in der Folge ermöglicht (Lacan 2010. Lacan 2007, 35ff. Laplanche 2005. Laplanche 2006. Dahl 2010). Es handelt sich dann nicht mehr um einen bloßen Aufschub vergangener realer Ereignisse bis in die Gegenwart, um "abreagiert" zu werden, sondern um eine rückläufige Wirkung von der Gegenwart auf die Vergangenheit, wie wir schon sahen, um eine neue Sinngebung zu erlauben. Es werden also nicht länger bloß empirische Fakten aus der Vergangenheit kausal erklärt; im *apres-coup* ergeben affektiv-präsymbolische Ereignisse eine nachträgliche Deutungsmöglichkeit. Damit wurde innerhalb der

Psychoanalyse die Trennung von Ichpsychologie (Hartmann, Kohut, Kernberg) und Objektbeziehungstheorie (Melanie Klein, Bion) überwunden, die schon bei Freud selbst als solche nicht gegeben war (Fäh 2012, 361ff.). Besonders bei Laplanche wird in dessen generalisiertem Verführungstheorem die "Übersetzung" des psychischen Lebens zu einer Fortentwicklung freudscher Ansätze, wie dieser sie schon im Brief an Fliess vom Dezember 1896 geäußert hatte (Kirchhoff 2009, 72ff. Dahl 2019).

Die Befriedigung illusionärer Wünsche ist nach Freud an die Trennung von Innen/Außen gebunden, wobei dieses psychisch Innere im Gegensatz zur Wahrnehmung der Außenrealität allein dem Lustprinzip folge. Der verborgene Ursprung ist demnach hier ein seelisch Unbewusstes, welches insoweit die Phantasmen hervorbringt, als es ausschließlich diesem Lustprinzip gehorcht. Genau deshalb wird in der Kur die Konfrontation mit der Realität favorisiert, da deren Anerkennung in der Neurose auf halbem Wege stehen geblieben sei. Die psychische Realität – als dritter Bereich zwischen Unbewusstem und äußerer Realität – ist daher die spezifische Dimension der unbewussten Wunschphantasien, welche den fiktiven Ausdruck des Phantasmas bilden und von der Philosophie in der Vergangenheit zumeist nur unter dem Begriff der Phantasie und des Imaginären im Zusammenhang mit den Affekten untersucht wurden (Spinoza 1967, Richir 2004). Freud selbst hat für diesen Bereich seine anfängliche These von der realen sexuellen Verführung des Kindes durch Eltern oder andere Erwachsene und Geschwister als Grund des Traumas aufgegeben, weil er erkennen musste, dass das Trauma das Phantasma selbst ist – nämlich die Maske der spontanen Manifestation der kindlichen Geschlechtlichkeit. Das Kind verbirgt dahinter seine autoerotische Aktivität, so dass sich der latent neurotische Zusammenhang von Sexualität, Trauma und Abwehr für die entstehende Psychoanalyse ergab. Hierbei teilte Freud das Trauma der "Verführungsszene" in zwei Stufen ein; einerseits in ein genital gesehen vorgeschlechtliches Erleben, insofern das anfängliche Kind weder die somatischen Bedingungen sexueller Erregung noch das Empfindungs- und Vorstellungsvermögen zur Integration eines solchen Erlebens besitzt. Nach der Pubertät

als der zweiten Stufe des Traumas bringt andererseits die Erinnerung der "Urszene" eine effektiv sexuelle Erregung hervor, welche das Ich ohne Abwehrmöglichkeiten lässt. Denn diese sind normalerweise gegen die äußere Realität gerichtet, so dass sich jetzt eine pathologische Abwehr einstellt, nämlich die Verdrängung der Erinnerung, was als nachträglich primärer Prozess angesehen wird (Freud 1948. Quindeau 2008).

Dieses psychogenetische Schema der Sexualität beim Kind enthält nun für Laplanche und Pontalis zwei zentrale Aussagen, die wir schon andeuteten. Zum einen breche die Sexualität wie von außen in eine – traditionell gesehen – unschuldige Kinderwelt ein und bringe eine Abwehrreaktion hervor, die in ihrem Ereignischarakter als solche nicht pathogen ist. Aber es stelle sich zum anderen zugleich eine Unlust ein, deren Ursprung die Erinnerung der Urszene wäre, weil das wie von außen hereinbrechende Ereignis als ein innerer "Fremdkörper" erfahren würde. Insofern der Trieb hierbei keine entlastende Entladung herbeizuführen vermag, befinde sich das kindliche Subjekt in einem Zustand grundsätzlicher "Hilflosigkeit", wie es schon bei Freud heißt (Kirchhoff 2009, 285ff.). Das Entscheidende ist mithin für die Frage des Zusammenhangs von Ursprung/Phantasma, dass es die unbewusste Erinnerung ist, welche eine weit beträchtlichere Wirkung hervorbringt als das Ereignis selbst. Demzufolge wird die eigentlich metapsychologische Problematik darin erblickt, dass das seelische Trauma von etwas ausgehe, das bereits da ist – ein "Da", welches gerade in seiner Bildung zu erklären bleibt, wozu die erste Szene als Ur-Szene dient. Sandor Ferenczi (1873-1933) hatte die Theorie der Verführung nach Freud ebenfalls aufgegriffen, indem er vorschlug, dass die Erwachsenen in die kindhafte Sprache der Zärtlichkeit die Sprache ihrer eigenen Leidenschaft einführten, denn das Kind erfährt – selbst wenn es keine tatsächlich sexuelle Verführung gegeben hat – die Introjektion der Erotik der Erwachsenen in seine leiblich-psychischen Affekte (Ferenczi 1933; Freud & Ferenczi 1993-2005).

Wenn Freud mithin die These einer Perversion der Erwachsenen in Bezug auf den familiären oder anderweitigen

Missbrauch eines Kindes aufgibt, da nicht alle Väter pervers sein könnten, dann ergibt sich daraus eine neue theoretische Konstellation hinsichtlich kindlicher Sexualität und Ursprungsphantasma als Wunschphantasie oder Ödipuskomplex. Denn beim Letzteren stelle sich zusammen mit dem Schuldgefühl gerade im hysterischen Phantasma der Verführung durch den Vater zumeist bei Patientinnen ein Bezug zwischen Symptom der Hysterie und kindlich sexuellem Phantasma ein, der Ausdruck des Ödipuskomplexes sei (Freud 1926/1991, 59ff.). Damit kreist die Diskussion der sexuellen Urszene als Ursprungsmythus stets um strukturelle Gegensatzpaare von Eigenem/Fremden im Sinne von Subjekt/Objekt, Konstitution/Ereignis, Innen/Außen und Imaginär/Wirklich. Daraus ergibt sich des Weiteren für die Analyse/Therapie, dass beim Patienten durchgehend – wie im Traum – ein manifestes Material mit einem latenten Inhalt hinter dem Symptom gegeben sei. In diesem Sinne sagen die eingangs genannten Autoren, dass Freud nie darauf verzichtet hätte, die von ihm gesuchte Urszene auf eine rein imaginäre Schöpfung zurückzuführen (Laplanche/Pontalis 1961, 54-55), um mit dem Begriff der "Urphantasie" wie in der Patientengeschichte des "Wolfsmannes" (Freud 1926/1991, 134-135) eine Ursprünglichkeit anzuzeigen, die das individuelle und phantasierte Erleben übersteigt. Da solche Ursprungsphantasmen in der jeweiligen individuellen Biographie nicht direkt aufzufinden sind, versuchte Freud über die Gattungsgeschichte eine archaische Struktur festzuhalten, was jedoch über jedes aufweisbare historische Ereignis hinausgehe (Freud 2012, Totem und Tabu).

Wenn einiges dafür spricht, dass die Patienten in neurotischer Hinsicht meist dieselben Ursprungsphantasmen in die Kur einbringen und jedes Mal entsprechend mit demselben Inhalt gebildet werden, dann liegt dem für Freud nämlich ein phylogenetisches Organisationsprinzip zugrunde. Mit dessen Hilfe würde das Kind die Lücken seines je individuellen Erlebens zu füllen versuchen, was allerdings für Laplanche und Pontalis theoretisch in Bezug auf die Nachträglichkeit gerade einschließt, dass nicht der subjektive Ereignischarakter das ursprüngliche Movens bildet, sondern

eine andere Wirklichkeit vorausliegt (Freud 1926/1991, 59-60). In Übereinstimmung mit den zeitgenössischen Analysen von Claude Lévi-Strauss und Jacques Lacan wird dieses Wirkliche, welches die imaginäre Bildung des Phantasmatischen speist, als eine Vorform der schon genannten symbolischen Ordnung betrachtet (Lévi-Strauss 1964-1971/1976. Derrida 1994, 422-442. Wörler 2015).² Was strukturell an Freuds Mythen vom Urvater und der Horde hierbei maßgeblich bleibe, sei die Unzugänglichkeit dieser Ur-Gestalt für das jeweilige Subjekt. Damit liegt bei Freud eine nur relative Synthese vor, denn das phylogenetisch weitergetragene Unbewusste, welches eine ursprünglich konstitutive Gegebenheit für jeden Menschen sein soll, erschließe sich allein über eine analytisch-therapeutische Rückinterpretation in der Kur. Diese vermag daraufhin nur eine strukturelle Parallele zum subjektiven Erleben zu sein, da dieses ursprüngliche Unbewusste nicht direkt aufzufinden ist. Der Ödipuskomplex, welcher dieser Ursprungshypothese ohne eigentliche Vermittlung beigelegt wird, kann hingegen ein subjektives Erleben des Patienten selbst bilden, das durch eine individuelle Deutung in Bezug auf die familiäre Elternkonstellation erschlossen werden kann. Der Begriff, welcher eine Zuordnung von Struktur/Erleben bildet, ist bei Freud jener der schon erwähnten "Urphantasie", wodurch angezeigt sein soll, dass der Ursprung selbst des Phantasmas in die Struktur des ursprünglichen Phantasmas integriert wird, und zwar als biographische Familienlegende wie beispielsweise beim Wolfsmann: "Die Aktivierung des Bildes, das nun dank der vorgeschrittenen intellektuellen Entwicklung verstanden werden kann, wirkt wie ein frisches Trauma, ein fremder Eingriff analog der Verführung." (Freud 1914/1948, 92-93. Freud 2012, 91-119. Hamburger 2005)

Wie der Mythos in der geschichtlichen Entwicklung der menschlichen Weltanschauungen sollen die Ursprungsphantasmen eine Lösung mittels fiktiver Repräsentation für das bieten, was dem Kind hinsichtlich der Sexualität als ein Rätsel erscheint. Mit anderen Worten wird in diesen Ursprungsphantasmen der Ursprung des Individuums imaginiert, und zwar in einem doppelten Sinne. Wenn nämlich die Phantasmen der Verführung das subjektive

Aufkommen der Sexualität darstellen sollen, so bieten die Phantasmen der Kastration (von der Mutter aufgezehrt, vom Vater bestraft zu werden) die Möglichkeit, den Ursprung der Geschlechtsdifferenz zu erklären. Die Konvergenz von thematischem Inhalt, Struktur und Funktion enthalten dadurch Hinweise für jenes Wahrnehmungsfeld, in dem sich die individuelle Suche nach den unbewussten Anfängen herausbildet, so dass die Annahme einer bestimmten phantasmatischen Urszene den Ursprung des Subjekts als solchem ergibt. In der Sprache Lacans lässt sich mithin sagen, dass die Ursprungsphantasmen mittels einer imaginären Inszenierung die Einschreibung des Symbolischen in die Wirklichkeit des subjektiven Leibes darstellen (Laplanche/Pontalis 1961, 69-70). Man muss daher den historischen Versuch Freuds positiv anerkennen, dass er das Phantasma durch eine psychologisch wissenschaftliche Theorie fassen wollte, um auf diese Weise mittels der phantasmatischen Funktion jenen Ursprung zu plausibilisieren, wie die menschliche Sexualität zur Wirklichkeit bei jedem Subjekt wird. Dies kann von einer radikal phänomenologischen Analyse in Bezug auf eine originär transzendente Lebensaffektabilität weitergeführt werden, deren leiblich impressionale Wirklichkeit die immanente Einheit von Hervorbringung/Hervorgebrachtem als unmittelbaren Affekt betrifft, der als phänomenologische Originarität jedoch nicht auf rein sexuelle Feststellungen im bloß ontischen Sinne reduziert werden kann (Henry 2005, 106-123).

Nach Freud, der stets den Begriff Phantasie benutzte und letztere sowohl als unbewusst wie bewusst betrachtete, hat sich gerade im Französischen die Unterscheidung von *phantasme* und *fantasme* eingebürgert. Mit ersterem Begriff sind das Unbewusste und die Primärinhalte gemeint, während der zweite Begriff die nächtlichen Träume ausdrücken will. Freud fand in den Phantasien (*fantasmes*) den topisch-energetischen Übergang vom bewussten zum unbewussten System, was die Verdrängung und die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten einschließt. Dabei ist es die libidinöse Besetzung, welche die Grenze dieses Übergangs auszeichnet, so dass die Verdrängung jenen Prozess bildet, welcher die transgressiven

Wunschphantasien zurückweist, das heißt aus der bewussten Vorstellung entfernt. Die freudsche Metapsychologie findet dergestalt eine Strukturverwandtschaft zwischen Phantasie und Traum, wie auch bei der Erklärung des religiösen Phänomens (Kühn 2016, 251ff.), denn die Erregung der psychischen Systeme geht von den unbewussten Phantasien bis zum Vorbewussten, wo Traumreste oder Übertragungsgedanken geschöpft werden können. Allerdings ist die Phantasie auch in der sekundären Traumbearbeitung gegeben, insofern in der metaphorischen Traumerzählung gerade Inszenierungen zurückbehalten werden, welche in die nächtlichen Phantasien oder Träume vom Tag vorher übernommen wurden. Die zwei Modalitäten der Phantasie im Traum, nämlich die sekundäre Bearbeitung der verborgenen Traumreste und der unbewusste Wunsch, tauschen sich untereinander aus, indem sie sich gegenseitig symbolisieren. Unterscheidet man nun mit Laplanche und Pontalis ursprünglich unbewusste Phantasmen (*phantasmes*) und bewusste Phantasien (*fantasmes* oder *phantasie*), dann muss für den ersten Fall das ursprünglich unbewusste Urphantasma vom verdrängten unbewussten Phantasma abgehoben werden. Da dennoch beide miteinander vermengt sind, finden wir hier sowohl die allgemeine Erfahrungsstruktur wie das subjektiv Imaginäre wieder (Laplanche & Pontalis 1961, 107-108).

Der nächtliche Traum benutzt alles aus dem individuellen Erleben wie ursprüngliche Phantasmen, die der Familienlegende entnommen und daher durch den Ödipuskomplex strukturiert sind. Bleiben Imaginäres und Struktur hierbei zu unterscheiden, so gilt andererseits ebenfalls, Ich und Subjekt voneinander zu trennen. Der nächtliche Traum ist immer um den Ichpol herum gruppiert, während das Subjekt invariabel ist, folglich seinen Traum lebt, beladen von den geträumten Ich-Szenen (Ricoeur 1965, 99ff. Kirchhoff 2009, 72ff.). Das originäre Phantasma hingegen kennt keine Subjektivierung, welche mit der Präsenz des Subjekts in der Urszene parallel wäre, so dass das Kind beispielsweise nur eine Person unter anderen des Phantasmas ist (Freud 1948, 54-69). Und in dieser Hinsicht besitzt die Erinnerung, die als Struktur fungiert, eine Verwandtschaft

mit dem Ursprungsphantasma, was erklärt, warum die Struktur des Phantasmas eine Inszenierung mit vielfältig interpretierbaren Zugängen bietet. Schon für Freud wurzelt das Phantasma (Phantasie) mithin nicht in einer biologischen Faktizität, was man auch daran erkennt, dass er die Triebe nicht mit dem Instinkt der Tiere analogisiert, sondern mit den Ursprungsphantasmen des Menschen. Daraus ergibt sich für das Subjekt des Phantasmas eine strukturelle Reihung von Somatisch–Es–Phantasma (Phantasie) – Abwehrmechanismen des Ichs, denn das Phantasma findet seinen Ursprung in der halluzinierten Befriedigung des Begehrens.

Auf diese Weise soll die besondere innerpsychische Zeitlichkeit des Begehrens in seinem Hervorbrechen selbst erfasst werden. Dies kann als eine analytisch-therapeutische Konstruktion angesehen werden, da ein Vorher und Nachher zugleich als Moment des Übergangs aufgefunden wird – mithin das mythische Moment der Auftrennung zwischen Bedürfnisbefriedigung und Wunscherfüllung. Anders gesagt, gibt es hierbei zwei Zeitformen einer wirklichen Erfahrung und deren imaginär halluzinatorischer Wiederbelebung, so wie es hier ebenfalls ein erfüllendes Objekt und ein Zeichen gibt, welches sowohl die Einschreibung wie reine Abwesenheit eines solch Objektalen darstellt (Laplanche & Pontalis 1961, 90f.). Dies ist folglich jenes "mythische Moment", in dem Laplanche und Pontalis die Aufspaltung des libidinösen oder erotischen "Hungers" (Freud) und der Sexualität in einem "Ursprungspunkt" festmachen wollen. Dies bildet allerdings in unseren Augen einen sekundären Vorstellungsbereich gegenüber der anfänglichen Lebensaffektibilität als Passibilität, welche ausschließlich von der prinzipiellen Unzertrennbarkeit zwischen Leben/Lebendigen gekennzeichnet ist, um unsere Analysen dementsprechend in Bezug auf die urimpressionale wie kulturelle Originarität weiterzuführen.

2. Die analytisch-kulturelle Relevanz von Bedürfnis/Wunsch

Hinsichtlich der Autoerotik des Kindes bedeutet dies das Auftreten einer "Lustprämie" gemäß Freud, welche ein Zusatzeffekt der Stillung des erotischen Hungers ist. Und hier

erkennen wir zugleich die Relevanz unserer Untersuchung zur Originarität hinsichtlich unserer kulturellen Lebenswelt insgesamt, insofern sich der sexuelle Trieb von seiner nicht sexuellen Funktion trennt, welche die permanente Selbsterhaltung betrifft. Die menschliche Sexualität wird auf diese Weise dem Phantasma ausgeliefert, wodurch eine Zirkularität zwischen Sexualität/Bedürfnis eintritt, die beide dem Hervorbrechen des Phantasmas geschuldet sind. Für das Kind trennen sich nämlich die Funktion des Saugens an der mütterlichen Brust als Autoerotik, wo die Lippen sich im Sinne Freuds "selbst küssen", und die genitale Sexualität als Subjekt-Objekt-Verhältnis. Dass sich beide, Autoerotik und Sexualität, dennoch stets miteinander vermischen, ist in dieser Perspektive die Grundfrage der Kultur und ihrer versuchten Entflechtung als Über-Ich in der Psychoanalyse, insoweit es nur eine imaginäre, aber niemals eine reale Verschmelzung der Geschlechter gibt (Badiou & Cassin 2012). Die mütterliche Pflege bedeutet ebenfalls ein Ursprungsmodell für alle kulturellen Beziehungen, denn es sind Begegnungen zwischen dem Begehren, den mütterlichen Phantasien und den Ursprungsphantasmen, die über die Leiböffnungen wie Mund, Anus etc. die Szene für das Phantasma bilden. Dieses wiederholt sich dann in den späteren sozialen Begegnungen als Oralität oder Analität, das heißt als lebensweltliches Nehmen und Verweigern. Das Begehren (*désir*) ist dabei nicht einfach das Hervorbrechen des somatisch libidinösen Triebes, sondern in seiner Bindung an die Ursprungsphantasmen ist es zugleich die Wahl der frühesten Abwehrreaktionen als Introjektion und Projektion sowie als Verneinung und Selbstaggression. Strukturell gehören deshalb die Inszenierung des Begehrens und die Funktion des Phantasmas als Wunsch und Abwehr zusammen, wie sie überall im kulturellen Miteinander alltäglich zu beobachten sind (Kirchhoff 2009, 85ff.).

Dass der deskriptiv schwierig zu erfassende Übergang von Bedürfnis/Begehren ein Ursprüngliches beinhaltet, das individuell wie kulturell äußerst relevant ist, steht mithin analytisch-therapeutisch wie radikal phänomenologisch außer Zweifel. Es bleibt jedoch die hier untersuchte Problematik gegeben, ob die letztmögliche Auskunft diesbezüglich ein

imaginär ontisches Phantasma ist oder die bereits erwähnte rein phänomenologische Lebensaffektabilität als ipseisierende Ursprungsgegebenheit. Michel Henry weist mit Recht darauf hin, dass diese imaginäre, halluzinatorische oder onirische *natura naturans* letztlich von keiner Text- oder Sprachstruktur jemals angemessen ergriffen werden kann, da sie ontologisch dem rein affektiven Leben geschuldet bleibt (Henry 1985, 8ff. und 343ff.). In ihrer klinischen Grundausrichtung hat die Analyse/Therapie hingegen ein besonderes Interesse für das Verdrängungs- und Abwehrproblem des frühen sexuellen Traumas, wie es Freud durch seine Studien zur Hysterie begründet hatte (Freud 1925/1991, 47ff.). Es liegt dennoch dabei ein epistemologisches Apriori vor, von dem die Ursprungsfrage als solche nicht abhängig sein kann, sofern Ursprung etwas apriorisch Bedingungsloses bezeichnen will, was wir durch die radikal phänomenologische Wirklichkeit des je ipseisierten Lebens ausdrücken. Der Begriff der "Verführung" macht in solchem Zusammenhang nur darauf aufmerksam, dass Innen/Außen psychisch stets miteinander verschränkt sind – mithin ein äußeres Ereignis wie ein endogenes Erleben gegeben ist, wodurch ein Zuviel wie Zuwenig in der affektiven Dialektik menschlicher Sexualität als libidinöse Grundform des Begehrens gekennzeichnet wäre. Das seelische Trauma entspringt demzufolge gleichzeitig in einem Zu-Früh und Zu-Spät eines Ereignisses. Deshalb vermag jede zeitgebundene Erinnerung, die sich zwischen Bedürfnis/Begehren einschreibt, nur das zu symbolisieren, was in der Tat schon da war und somit nicht originär, sondern als imaginäre Inszenierung erinnert wird. Auch Heidegger verwies auf den Unterschied von Leiblichkeit und Bewusstsein, insofern die Explikation des faktischen Bezugssinns eine unmittelbare Lebensbedeutsamkeit beinhaltet, welche zugleich der "radikalsten Selbstbekümmern" als "Selbsterfahrungssituation" entspricht (Heidegger 1995, 33, 64-65 und 253).

Obwohl also jede erste Szene als "Ur-Szene" unbegreifbar bleibt, muss das Subjekt sich analytisch-therapeutisch dennoch daran ausrichten, da es deren Bedeutung existentiell rein passiv erlebt, nämlich für das Kind

jene Sexualität, die es vorher nicht kannte, welche aber unaufhebbar nunmehr biologisch wie sozial zu ihm gehört. Rein psychoanalytisch kann demzufolge reflexionstheoretisch von einem Subjekt vor dem Subjekt gesprochen werden (Henrichs 2016), was lebensphänomenologisch im strengen Sinne nicht möglich ist, insofern die Ipseisierung durch die originäre Lebensaffektabilität jeweils ein Individuum zeugt, welches im radikalen Ursprungsbereich keine Distanz zu sich kennt und sich dergestalt – von keinem Phantasma imaginär fundiert – als rein passibles Mich/Ich je praktisch erprobt (Kühn 2019, 11-36). Die Kultur versucht sich genau an dieser Stelle des unmittelbaren Übergangs von Bedürfnis/Begehren – mithin von originärer Ipseisierung/Subjektivierung – phallisch einzuschreiben, so dass diese kulturell lebensweltlichen Angebote zumeist biographisch als allgemeine Gesetze oder naturhafte Notwendigkeiten angenommen werden. Aber als diskursiv sprachliche Symbolisierungen sind sie nicht mit dem radikal individuierten Ursprung selbst zu verwechseln, weshalb sich gegenwärtig auch zunehmend die mannigfachsten Identitätsdiffusionen ergeben, indem dieser Unterschied gesellschaftlich nicht genug beachtet wird (Thiberge 2018, 259-272 und 383-334). Exemplarisch haben wir dafür in Bezug auf das Kind Ferenczis Unterscheidung der Sprache der Leidenschaft seitens der Sexualität der Erwachsenen erwähnt. Tritt solche Sprache beim Kind als phallisches Begehren im Sinne von Lust auf, so ist das Verbot zugleich mitgegeben (Rath 2017) – und damit das Gefühl von Schuld, Neid, Wut und Hass, die wiederum narzisstisch oder autoerotisch als eigene Vernichtung erlebt werden können, wie Melanie Klein dies grundlegend untersuchte (Klein 1992). Denn dadurch wird beim Kind jene fundamentale Unlust erklärbar, die sich bei der frühen sexuellen Erregung einstellt und ebenfalls Verdrängung und Abwehr hervorruft, was sich dann als "Kulturverneinung" später zuspitzen kann (Freud 1927, 357-358). Deshalb ließe sich nicht so einfach Theodor W. Adornos Diktum unterschreiben, Freuds Psychoanalyse sei "nichts mehr als ihre Übertreibungen" (Adorno 1970, 56).

Der Mythos als Phantasma dringt demnach gemäß der leiblich sexuellen Zeitlichkeit *sui generis* eines Zuviel und

Zuwenig in das Kind ein, was eine gewisse biologische Entwicklung einschließt, aber zugleich das Zu-Früh der Geburt und das Zu-Spät hinsichtlich der Pubertät. Hingegen ist die Ipseisierung durch das Leben prinzipiell ohne Temporalität, weshalb sie stets neu und in jeder immanenten Modalisierung als Affektibilität am Werk ist, so dass es hier auch keinen ontischen Hiatus zwischen Wahrheit des Unbewussten und Fühlen des Affekts in Bezug auf einen "zurückphantasierten Ursprung" wie bei Carl Gustav Jung gibt (Giegerich 1999, 176ff. Körner 2008). Für die Tiefenpsychologie bleibt allgemein daher nur eine Wirklichkeit gegeben, welche sich als Fiktion manifestiert, das heißt als Phantasma eines Ursprungs, dem ich als solchem niemals beiwohne, während das originäre "Zuviel" des Lebens als sein ständig vorausliegendes "Mehr" unsere abgründige Untrennbarkeit von ihm darstellt, wie dies gerade auch Nietzsche schon gesehen hat (Kühn 2023, 37ff.). Deshalb ist der Affekt als unsichtbarer Trieb ohne Repräsentanz ein Affekt diesseits jeglicher Vorstellungsmöglichkeit, um denselben in einer je unmittelbaren Lebensselbsterprobung existieren zu lassen (Proença 2016). Demgegenüber beinhaltet das Zuviel/Zuwenig als Nicht-Koinzidenz von Phantasma/Trieb mit einer gewissen logischen Konsequenz bei Freud die Konzeption eines "schwebenden Subjekts", welches die Postmoderne als dezentriertes Subjekt festschrieb, da dieses sich in der symbolischen Ordnung nirgendwo festmachen könne. Daraus folgte dann Lacan seinerseits kritisch, dass eine religiöse Frage in der Analyse/Therapie fortbestehe, wenn der Ursprung als "das Reale, das Ding oder das Eine" weder durch die Wissenschaft noch durch die Kur beantwortet zu werden vermag (Žižek 2020). Die psychische Realität des Phantasmas bleibt – ohne die Unterscheidung von einem Affekt als Lebenspassibilität ohne Triebrepräsenz und als traumatische Phantasie – rein imaginär, was aber nicht heißt, dass das Phantasma seelisch nicht gegeben wäre. Diese Spannung in der Verführung zwischen vorsubjektiver Struktur und phantasmatischem Ereignis auszuloten, impliziert analytisch-therapeutisch daher nicht nur eine flexible oder "schwebende Logik" der Gegensätze (Kühn 2018 (2), 107ff.). Für

Sexualität und Kultur bedeutet dies außerdem, dass alle subjektiv gelebten Ereignisse mit Verbot und Umkleidungen im Sinne Freuds maskenhaft konfrontiert sind. Denn Phantasma und Verführung können als symbolische beziehungsweise phallische Erregung weder voneinander getrennt noch als Struktur des Ursprungs über das kollektiv Imaginäre aufgeklärt werden, da dieses sich selbst vom Phantasma nährt.

Fassen wir die erläuterte Position von Laplanche und Pontalis zum psychoanalytischen Ursprungsdenken hier kritisch zusammen, dann gibt es einerseits ein fast transzendentes Schema typischer Phantasmen wie vor allem vorgeburtliches Leben im mütterlichen Schoß (Rank 1924/2004. Freud 1926/1991. Meyer 2004),³ traumatisch miterlebten Koitus der Eltern, Verführung oder Kastration und andererseits eine postmoderne Sichtweise solch phantasierter Urszenen im Sinne neo-strukturalistischer Nachträglichkeit, wie sie besonders Derrida zum Zentrum seiner Dekonstruktion gemacht hatte (Kühn 2019 (2), 353-407). Das heißt, die Struktur ist in gewisser Weise autonom im Sinne einer organisierenden Signifikanz, welche kein Subjekt jemals als seine singuläre Wahrheit einzuholen vermag, sie aber dennoch als psychische Realität in sich trägt, um damit eine gewisse Wirklichkeit seines subjektiven Lebens fiktiv zu berühren. Dieses Leben tritt jedoch nicht radikal phänomenologisch als Selbstgebung im Sinne einer unmittelbaren Lebensaffektabilität auf, sondern als eine imaginär geprägte Symbolkette, die wie ein innerer struktureller Diskurs als phallische Möglichkeit von Erfahrungen überhaupt fungiert, die dann phantasmatisch in ihrer individuellen Kontingenz erlebt werden. Kulturell bedeutet dies zugleich, dass die nachträgliche Gesetzmäßigkeit des Zusammenhangs von psychischem Erleben/Ereignis als Bedürfen/Begehren eine Austauschstruktur bildet, in die sich das unbewusst Parentale wie Archaische als "Name-des-Vaters" eingeschrieben haben und als alltägliche Besetzungen über Objekte und Beziehungen inszeniert werden (Thiberge 2018, 479-489).

Positiv gesehen, handelt es sich dabei nicht nur um eine bloße Kombinatorik von isolierten Elementen, sondern

um die Konfiguration von unbewusstem Begehren, das nach Henry als Ipseisierung und Kopathos eine unmittelbare Gemeinschaftlichkeit im Ursprung des Lebens selbst gewährt, was die lebendige Kulturation aller Individuen als solche phänomenologisch erst konkret ermöglicht. In der klassischen Analyse/Therapie als dualem Beziehungsgeschehen tritt daher die "Familienlegende" als Ödipuskomplex in den Vordergrund, wobei jedes Gesagte (*Dit*) des Patienten retroaktiv auf die Ursprungsfrage dieser Legende im Sinne von frühkindlichen und aktuellen Wunschphantasien (*fantasmes*) zurückbezogen wird. Assoziative Hinweise aus Träumen und anderen Formen des individuellen Erlebens wie Lapsus, Vergessen, Symptome etc. haben entsprechende Indexfunktion auf einen solch ursprünglich relationalen Anfang hin, der sich – gedeutet – jedoch stets nur als Inszenierung erweist (Donnet 2001). Dadurch sei das Subjekt imaginär gegründet, und zwar zwischen einem phantasierten Akt der Zeugung oder Geburt und der Kindschaft, anders gesagt zwischen kontingentem Elternkoitus und ödipaler Triade von Mutter-Kind-Vater. Gewiss wird dem subjektiven Leib hierbei eine affektive Primordialität zuerkannt, aber nur in dem Maße, wie sich die genannte phantasmatische Symbolik in ihn einschreibt. Dies wird dann im Übergang von der frühen leiblichen Autoerotik zur späteren genitalen Sexualität hin von Laplanche & Pontalis als "Menschwerdung" in deren besonderer zeitlichen Dialektik von Zuviel/Zuwenig in jedem libidinösen oder phallisch bedingten Bedürfen/Begehren gefasst. Allerdings sollte die Einsicht Heideggers dabei mitgegeben bleiben, dass der existentiell faktische Vollzugssinn des Lebens nie vergegenständlicht werden kann, da sich "der Vollzugszusammenhang selbst mit dem Vollzug bestimmt" und dergestalt auf einem "vorstellungsmäßigem Nichts" gründet (Heidegger 1995, 109).

Mit anderen Worten ist die Inszenierung eines letztlich unbewussten Begehrens stets eine ontische Subjektivierung im Modus von Abwehrmechanismen, mithin keine ursprüngliche oder unmittelbare Subjektivität im urfaktischen Sinne von absoluter Lebensaffektabilität ohne Deformierung oder Masken. Die Phantasie, welche phantasmatisch den Ursprung

zu symbolisieren versucht, ist daher analytisch-therapeutisch weniger die freiheitlich transzendente Einbildungskraft im Sinne Kants und Heideggers (Heidegger 1951, 117ff.) als das Phantasieren einer imaginären Welt. Dabei ist allerdings das Schöpferische dieser Aktivität zu würdigen sowie darüber hinaus in dieser Tätigkeit die selbstaffektive Lebensursprünglichkeit in ihrem Selbstbegehren als Selbststeigerung in jedem ihrer Momente zu erkennen. Die strukturelle Nachträglichkeit von Ereignis/Erleben lässt nämlich das Phantasma in seiner Ausdehnung unbegrenzt sein (Turnheim 1996), weil es analytisch-therapeutisch stets auch mit der perzeptiven Außenrealität und den kulturellen Ansprüchen konfrontiert. Dennoch kann es als rein empirische Feststellung kein absolut Ursprüngliches im Sinne einer unmittelbaren Lebensselbstgebung offenbaren, wodurch überhaupt erst jede Transzendenz in der Immanenz einschließlich des Imaginären ermöglicht ist (Henry 2005, 72ff.). Auf der anderen Seite durchzieht das Phantasma die gesamte psychische Realität, ist sogar deren Kern, so dass es analytisch-therapeutisch als ein Reales betrachtet wird. In Letzteres sind außerdem das schon erwähnte Archaische und Parentale als transindividuell typische Ereignisse eingetreten, um mit dem subjektiven Erleben Konstellationen einzugehen, die sich nicht grundsätzlich einer möglichen Sublimierung widersetzen (Rath 2019). Aber trotz dieser Offenheit für eine gewisse affektive Subjektivierung des nachträglich erlebten Phantasmas bleibt die radikal phänomenologische Zentralfrage bestehen, wer prinzipiell Struktur, Phantasma und Nachträglichkeit als Erleben eint, damit sich überhaupt ein selbstaffektiv bedingtes subjektives Erleben ergeben kann.

Zwar gestand schon Freud zu, dass die Phantasien (*fantasmes*) sich ebenfalls dem Bewusstsein nähern und dort solange verharren können, wie ihre Besetzung nicht zu intensiv ausfällt (Freud 1915/2014, 141ff.). Aber diese Feststellung dient hauptsächlich dazu, Analogien oder Übergänge zwischen perversen, paranoiden und hysterischen Phantasmen zuzulassen, wodurch das gesamte libidinöse Leben des Subjekts durch eine Phantasmatik geprägt ist. Hier liegt gleichfalls wieder die erwähnte allgemeine Struktur dem einzelnen

subjektiven Erleben voraus, aber diese generalisierte Phantasmatik ist weniger eine jeweils inhaltliche Thematik als vielmehr eine Dynamik. Diese findet ihren libidinösen Ausdruck in Bewusstsein und Handeln, indem stets neues objektale Material herangezogen wird, mit anderen Worten sich im kulturellen Austausch mit den Dingen wie Situationen symbolisiert und individualisiert. Insoweit das Phantasmatische nach Freud grundsätzlich auf die imaginär halluzinatorische Besetzung einer früheren Erinnerung von Befriedigung zurückgeht, stellt es ein Begehren als Wünschen dar, das phallisch objektal wiederholt wird. Auf diese Weise kann es phänomenologisch nicht auf eine "wache Intentionalität" des Subjekts im Sinne Husserls zurückgeführt werden, so dass es eine Mittelstellung zwischen bewusster Anschauung (Intuition) und originärer Lebensaffektibilität (Pathos) einnimmt (Nakamura 2019).⁴ Dies erlaubt es nicht nur, die analytisch-therapeutischen Hinweise von Freud, Abraham, Rank, Lacan, Laplanche & Pontalis wie Kirchhoff für eine Problematisierung der hier verfolgten affektiv-impressionalen Originarität zu berücksichtigen, sondern auch kategorial zu erkennen, dass in beiden Perspektiven der Ursprung niemals ein Objekt sein kann, das imaginär als Ursache vorstellbar wäre. Ursprung im radikal phänomenologischen Sinne ist stets unmittelbare Ipseisierung – und nicht bloß eine Inszenierung als Sequenz von symbolisierender Teilnahme und Rollenzuteilung an das Subjekt, die es tiefenpsychologisch erst zu einem solchen werden lassen, und zwar stets in der primären Gegensätzlichkeit von Begehren/Verbot sowie Verneinung/Projektion. Diese beinhalten ein prinzipielles Leidenkönnen, welches die originäre Subjektivität vor allen feststellbaren Einzelmomenten eines unbewusst oder reflexiv aufgefassten Subjekts ausmacht.

Entscheidend für Analyse/Therapie bleibt hierbei die tiefenpsychologisch kaum abgeschlossene Untersuchungsfrage, was letztlich den Ursprung der Neurose bildet, die für Freud primär sexuell bedingt war, nämlich als Triebverzicht aus Kastrationsangst. Radikal phänomenologisch bleibt die Ursprungsfrage eine Selbstgebung transzendentaler Subjektivität als reine Empfänglichkeit des Lebens, mithin als ein Mich/Ich, welches nie von seiner lebendigen Ipseität getrennt

ist und auch nicht mit "mythischen Konstruktionen" geklärt werden kann (Freud 1962, 252-253. Freud 2005, 22).⁵ Ein phantasmatisches Leben, sollte es epistemologisch die anfänglich allgemeine Form des Lebens sein, wäre kein unmittelbares Leben, sondern als halluzinatorisch begehrtes Leben ein unwirkliches Leben, weil sich eine Distanz zwischen originär gelebter Selbstaffektion und der Nachträglichkeit des phantasmatischen Wünschens einschleibt – selbst wenn der Affekt der Halluzination als Pathos eine immanente Modalisierung des Lebens impliziert. Versteht man solche Distanz, Differenz oder Dialektik der Nachträglichkeit in analytisch-therapeutischer Hinsicht als traumatische Urszene, weil keine Erinnerung ein solches Ereignis jemals einzuholen vermag, dann kann allein die Rückführung des Traumas auf die Ursprungsgewalt des Lebens im Sinne reiner Passibilität diese ontische Kontingenz von Erleben/Ereignis als Spannung von Zuviel/Zuwenig auflösen (Kühn 2018, 12-22). Dass die Phantasmatik als eine regulierende Struktur zum Beantwortungsversuch der Grundrätselfragen menschlicher Existenz heuristisch hinführen kann, muss dadurch nicht in Zweifel gezogen werden, wobei jedoch sowohl die Gesamtheit der menschlichen Erfahrung wie ihre prinzipielle Abgründigkeit zu berücksichtigen bleibt (Kühn 2019, 409-432). Das heißt, dass außer der Psychoanalyse gerade auch Philosophie und Phänomenologie neben Ästhetik und Religion sowie Ökonomie, Soziologie und andere Kulturwissenschaften hiervon nicht ausgeschlossen werden können, wie es mit Blick auf unsere Zukunft und ihre kulturelle Vielfalt leicht einsehbar ist. Eine vorsektorielle Struktur des Erlebens verhilft begrenzt zu einer mythischen Anerkennung der menschlichen Grundrätselfragen, womit zugleich eine Einbettung in die Geschichte möglich ist – der eigentliche Träger der subjektiven Erfahrung bleibt allerdings weiterhin unbeantwortet. Auch eine zusätzlich intergenerative Erklärung übergibt das einzelne Erleben dabei einer historischen Kontingenz (Shchytsova 2012), die gleichfalls radikal phänomenologisch hinterfragt werden muss, sofern die jeweilige Erfahrung als selbstaffektive Erprobung eine phänomenologisch absolute ist, nämlich notwendigerweise stets individuiert und modal konkret bestimmt.

Zwischen radikaler Lebensphänomenologie und Psychoanalyse ließe sich in solcher Perspektive eine mittlere Position wie vergleichsweise im *Anti-Ödipus* von Gilles Deleuze und Félix Guattari auffinden. Der Zentralbegriff der *machines désirantes*, um das schizophrene Phantasma zu beschreiben, vertritt nämlich bei ihnen weder eine sprachlich symbolische Struktur noch eine symptomale Normalisierung mythologischer Fixierungen durch Bewusstwerdung, sondern eine transversale Präsenz des individuellen Begehrens in allen sozialen und familiären Systemen. In Verbindung mit einem als "organlos" gedachten Körper finden affektiv nur noch intensive Ein- und Ausschlüsse als Erleben statt, die weder metaphorisiert noch diskursiv verallgemeinert werden können, insoweit es sich um ein je singuläres Geschehen im Sinne rein immanenter Differenzierungen als Wiederholungen des Begehrens handelt. Gewiss ist diese Immanenz nicht jene des absolut phänomenologischen Lebens, aber sie teilt mit dessen ursprunghafter Ipseisierung die Wirklichkeit unmittelbar passibler Ursprünglichkeit, auch wenn letztere sich nicht als zeitlicher Werdensprozess im Sinne eines anonymen Lebens ereignet, um allerdings wie schon bei Schopenhauer und Nietzsche durch keine Vorstellung mehr kodierbar zu sein. Die Verknüpfungen der *machines désirantes* markieren außerdem weder einen Mangel noch ein fehlendes Objekt wie bei Lacan, sondern schaffen nomadische oder rhizomatische Vielfalt, die keinem begrifflichen Austauschgesetz mehr unterliegen und dadurch auch zu keiner Ordnung irgendeines Allgemeinen gehören. Damit wird ebenfalls in den Augen von Deleuze & Guattari die phantasmatische wie ödipale Struktur nach Freud, der sie zu einer geschichtlich universalen Gesetzmäßigkeit des Unbewussten erhob, dieser singulären Vielfalt des Begehrens nicht gerecht. Denn auch die Mythologien von Verführung und Verwerfung als Ur-Verdrängung versuchen noch eine Einheit innerhalb des Unbewussten herzustellen, während es im *Anti-Ödipus* gerade um eine unablässige Produktion der genannten Vielfältigkeit des Unbewussten selbst geht, die radikal phänomenologisch dem ununterbrochenen Vollzug

selbstaffektiver Modalisierungen des Lebens als originär subjektiver Praxis entspricht.

Im gesellschaftlichen Gefüge tritt beides oftmals als "Störung" im psychoanalytischen Sinne auf, aber die Einschnitte der Intensität rhythmisieren unabwendbar eine nur vermeintliche Kontinuität des Werdens. Deshalb sind Begehren wie Leben nicht diskursiv symbolisierbar, weil Symbolisierung stets Repräsentationseffekte anstelle von jenen lebendigen Einschnitten hinterlässt, die keinem Herrschaftszentrum – sei es Psyche oder Markt – länger folgen, sondern reine Immanenz ohne jede leitende Transzendenz bleiben. Auch nach dieser Sichtweise als Kritik an Freud und der jüngeren Psychoanalyse liegt demnach dem Phantasma eine unmittelbare Wirklichkeit im Sinne einer Begehrendynamik voraus, die keine erinnernde Nachträglichkeit kennt, ohne damit jedoch als Immanenzphilosophie ein Ursprungsdenken zu postulieren, um jedem postmodernen Metaphysikverdacht zu entgehen, so dass an die Stelle von "Ursprung" (*origine*) die "Abdrift" (*dérive*) tritt (Deleuze & Guattari 1972, 61ff., 94-95, 127ff. und 211ff. Kühn 2019, 217-262). Anders gesagt, bildet der Ödipuskomplex als mythologische Konstruktion hier einen familiär ideologischen "Schirm" gegenüber der begehrenden Produktion der immanenten "Wunschmaschinen", um in dieser Funktion als Vorstellbarkeit des Unbewussten zu dienen, wie auch die Kritik bei Henry etwa zur gleichen Zeit lautete. In Verbindung mit einer an Marx angelehnten Kapitalismusanalyse werden zudem Politik und Ökonomie als libidinöse Besetzungen gesehen, für welche die anti-psychiatrische "Schizo-Analyse" von Deleuze & Guattari die Grenzen einer solchen Marktvorherrschaft über die Vielfalt als affektives Leben aufzeigt, welches sich nicht als ein konstitutiver Mangel hinsichtlich rein objektaler Bedürfnisbefriedigung vereinnahmen lässt. Die noch umfassendere Debatte, welche sich daraus zusätzlich als Vergleich zwischen Kulturalismus und Tiefenpsychologie zum Verständnis von ethnologisch erhobener Partikularität und ödipalem Universalismus ergibt (Blankenburg 1984), ist ein weiterer Hinweis darauf, dass Kultur und Leben nicht über bloße Vorstellungsstrukturen subsumiert werden können. Vielmehr folgen beide eigenen

Begehrens- und Triebgesetzen, welche auch Ursprung und Mythos schließlich als immanent praktisches Lebenswissen des Subjektiven wie Gemeinschaftlichen zusammenfallen lassen.

3. Nachträglichkeit und genetisches Nicht-Wissen

Freuds Betrachtung des Unbewussten trug – wie wir gesehen haben – in der neueren Moderne zu einer Denkbewegung bei, die man als Dezentrierung des Subjekts bezeichnete und speziell in Analyse/Therapie im Sinne von verdrängter Erinnerung eines noch nicht präsent gewordenen Sinns der subjektiven Zeitlichkeit untersucht wurde. Diese kann zusätzlich die Spannung zwischen *carpe diem* und *momento mori* als manische Verleugung und depressive Reaktion umfassen (Kirchhoff 2019). Die Kernfrage solch unbewusster Verdrängung soll abschließend philosophisch noch genauer aufgegriffen werden, um die Diskussion zwischen Psychoanalyse, Phänomenologie und Dekonstruktion in ihrer unterschiedlichen Grundproblematik als Bezug von Ursprung/Genese methodologisch besser nachvollziehen zu können. Dies vermag zu einem breiteren Verständnis dessen zu verhelfen, worum es hinsichtlich einer genetischen Theorie und Praxis des Aufschubs oder Supplements als Nachträglichkeit unbewusster Sinnbildung letztlich geht und mit Blick auf die originäre Passibilität des rein phänomenologischen Lebens als ein "Nicht-Wissen" schlechthin einzuordnen bleibt, wie letzteres auch bereits von Heidegger für den direkten Vollzugssinn von Leben festgehalten wurde. Durch die "faktischen Sinnesimplikate" als "hermeneutische Existentialien" sind nämlich nicht nur die traditionellen Kategorienlehren von Aristoteles und Kant erweitert, sondern das "absolute Sein" wird nicht länger mit dem "allgemeinen Sein" verwechselt, da es immer geschichtlich "einzelnes Sein" ist. Dadurch wird die Frage virulent, wie "das Leben sich selbst haben kann als Abfall und Gewinn seiner selbst", ohne ein vorheriges oder umfassendes Wissen davon zu besitzen, wie es die bisherige Metaphysik noch voraussetzte (Heidegger 1995, 245 und 260. Serban 2013).

Bereits das husserlsche Begriffspaar Urpräsenz/ Appräsenz wich seinerseits vornehmlich in der französischen

Phänomenologie der bevorzugten Artikulation von *présence/dé-présentation* als Zusammenhang von Urpräsenz/Entgegenwärtigung, welcher die Ek-stase gerade bei der Leib- und Fremderfahrung im Sinne Maurice Merleau-Pontys (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 417. Kühn 2019, 123-175) schon zu einem gänzlich "Aus-mir-Herausgeworfen-sein" macht. Diese Sichtweise hatte Husserl selber durch die Analyse der "Entgegenwärtigung" meines primordialen Selbst bei der "Einfühlung" des Anderen und durch die "passiven Synthesen" noch mit vorbereitet. Solche Abwesenheitserfahrung für das Ich, dessen Begriff dann Heidegger existenzanalytisch weitgehend zugunsten der "Geworfenheit" des Daseins aufgab (Heidegger, 1968, 175ff.), konstituiert zugleich ein Gefühl der Nötigung, welches für das Passivitätserleben kennzeichnend ist, aber von Husserl aus Reduktionsgründen auf die Assoziationsmotivation hin immer stärker als ein vorkonstitutives "Für-mich" (das heißt ohne mein aktives Zutun) denn als ein "Gegen-Mich" (im Sinne nicht gewollter "Aufdrängung") beschrieben wurde (Kühn 1998, 39ff.). Als habitualisierte Spontaneität finde ich diese passive Investitur in mir ebenso am Werk wie meinen Herzschlag. Aber diese "aktive Anonymität" bleibt eben in ihrem Wesen Ich-Abwesenheit des "wachen Bewusstseins", die dann zugunsten eines immer stärker zurückweichenden anonymen Weltsinnes beziehungsweise einer gegen-intentionalen Gegebenheit (*Donation*) in den nachfolgenden Phänomenologien bis hin zu Marc Richir, Renaud Barbaras und Jean-Luc Marion diskutiert wird (Gondek & Tengelvi 2011, 238ff. und 581ff.).

Die Radikalisierung eines solch phänomenologischen Grundsachverhalts führt in einen letztlich nicht mehr zu entscheidenden Weltsinn aus diesem selbst heraus, der von einer Entmächtigung der Subjektivität als intentionaler Konstitutionskraft begleitet wird oder zur Postulierung eines Spielraums der Interpretationen als Differe(ä)nz (*différance*) hinüberlenkt. Letztere schließen sich nicht mehr zu irgendeinem festen Sinn zusammen, weil das vielgestaltige Bedeutungsspiel das Subjekt ständig mit seinen darin verflochtenen Fremdheiten überbordnet und dementsprechend als ausschließlichen Referenzpunkt dezentriert, wie wir schon bei

Freud sahen. Eine solche Konsequenz zog exemplarisch Jacques Derrida, dessen Lektüre die husserlschen Empfindungsanalysen an den neuralgischen Punkt der originären Sinnkonstitution als angenommener "Selbstgegebenheit" überhaupt verweist. Für die neo-strukturalistische Postmoderne sei nämlich in der "lebendigen Gegenwart" – als prinzipiellem Anspruch auf eine universal absolute Form der transzendentalen Erfahrung – ein zu destruierendes allgemeines Metaphysikpostulat auszumachen. Dieses verliert sich in den "Verflochtenheiten" der impressionalen Unterschicht, weil dieser "Ur-Boden" deskriptiv nicht als Fundierung des Diskurses selbst in der angeblich originär gegebenen Präsenz der "Sache selbst" auszumachen wäre. Vielmehr ließe er sich nur metaphorisch zum Beispiel als "Widerspiegelung, Abbildung und Einbildung" anzeigen, was genau auf die Problematik von Phantasie, Phantasmen und Illusion in der Psychoanalyse zurückverweist.

Wenn Husserl auch die Bedeutsamkeit der kinästhetischen Bewegungen für die passiven Synthesen bis hin zu einer instinktiv gespannten Urhyle immer stärker herausgearbeitet hatte, so gilt dennoch, dass einzelne impressionale "Daten"-Elemente nicht als Konstitutiva isoliert werden können, sondern die Sinndiffere(ä)nz als solche jede Erscheinung begleitet oder – gemäß Derrida – sogar begründet. Nach Husserl müssen passiv-genetische Ähnlichkeiten keineswegs thematisch erfasst sein, um phänomenal wirken zu können, denn auch als unbemerkt selbständige Sinnstiftungen von Gegenständlichkeit und Welt leisten sie vorkonstituierte Synthesen, die dann nachträglich ergriffen werden können. Gerade mit der Frage solch passiver Urstiftungen stellt sich jedoch das Grundproblem impressionaler Urformen, die nicht in einem metaphysikfreien Bezug zu einem ontologischen Ursprung oder einer logischen Ganzheit gedacht werden können, wie es die husserlsche teleologische Vernunft als deskriptiv aufgeklärtes An-sich der Erfahrung überhaupt sein soll. Das heißt, Husserls Analysen sind nicht, wie er selber sagt, "Analysen im gewöhnlichen Sinne (reelle Analysen), sondern Enthüllungen intentionaler Implikation (im Fortgang etwa von einer Erfahrung zum System der als möglich vorgezeichneten Erfahrungen)" (Husserl 1929/1981, 147, 214,

217 und 275ff.). Die Gespanntheit zwischen einer vorintentionalen Konstitution von primärem Gegenstandssinn (Husserl) und perzeptiver Identität im Sinne jeweiliger Sinn Ganzheit ohne einholbare Weltvorgängigkeit als Differe(ä)nz (Derrida) bildet folglich eine Schlüsselkonstellation der neueren Phänomenologie und Dekonstruktion, die sich reduktiv in immer mehr Substrukturen des phänomenalen Feldes verzweigen (Bernet 1986).

Denn sieht man dieses Problem von der fertig konstituierten Vorstellungsseite her, die alle Bewusstseinserscheinungen nach einem Ausdruck Freuds "überdeterminiert", oder in Husserls Sprache einen "Überschuss" oder eine "Mehrmeinung" aufweist, dann besteht darin ein Kernstück der klassischen phänomenologischen Entdeckungen überhaupt. Allerdings haben wir damit auch die zentrale genetische Frage zu stellen, wie Nachstiftungen und Urstiftungen zueinanderstehen, ohne die habituell gewordene Übertragung als "Assoziation" immer ausfindig machen zu können, weil sie in einer ursprünglichen "Verflochtenheit" nach Derrida gründet. Außerdem lernen wir die Bedeutungsdifferenzen kulturell und bilden sie dergestalt lebensweltlich oder kontextuell zu "Dingen" heraus, wobei passive Wiederholung und Generalisierung als universale Strukturprinzipien eine entscheidende Rolle spielen, so dass sich der Übergang vom Eigenen zum Fremden nicht mehr ohne weiteres entscheiden lässt. Insofern ist es für das Verhältnis von Affekt/Vorstellung als Nachträglichkeit wichtig festzuhalten, dass die *surdétermination* in der französischsprachigen Phänomenologie auf Freud (Freud 1942, 289 und 313) zurückgeht, der in solcher "Überbestimmung" eine gemeinsame phantasmatische Struktur zwischen Totemismus, Traum, Neurose und religiöser Illusion sah.

Genau dieses reduktive Problem von Geschichte als empirischer Existenz und transzendentaler Genese wird als Grunddifferenz in Husserls eigener Werkentwicklung wie auch als Hauptgegenstand der phänomenologischen Analyse in dekonstruktivistischer Perspektive diskutiert. Als Konzept vereinigt Genese zwei gegensätzliche Bedeutungen, nämlich Ursprung und Werden als Antizipation oder Protention. Jede

Genese ist zunächst absolut neues Hervorbrechen eines Moments oder Vollzugs, die sich als radikal originäre Autonomie nur auf sich selbst beziehen und damit als Originarität anzusprechen sind, wie wir es für die Lebensaffektibilität meta-genealogisch in Anspruch nehmen. Auf der anderen Seite jedoch gibt es Genese nur innerhalb einer ontologischen wie zeitlichen Totalität, welche die originäre Genese als metaphysisches Formproblem umfasst, insofern *eidós/morphé* unabtrennbar von der *ousía* und dem seit Platon kategorial daran geknüpften Prädikat "Ist" als ständig koextensiver Präsenz des Seins bei jeglichem Seienden als Sinn, Noema, Begriff, Ausdruck usw. bleiben (Derrida 1972, 189ff.). Jeder Genese geht mithin noch eine immemorale Vergangenheit voraus, von der aus das ontisch Genetische oder Genealogische hervorgebracht wurde, wie es die Psychoanalyse für das affektive und traumatische Tribschicksal einzufangen versucht.

Genese ist also nicht nur reine Transzendenz als das ursprünglich Neue, sondern ebenfalls Bedeutung in einem jeweiligen Kontext der Bewusstseinsimmanenz. Wenn sich Husserl also der Genese des transzendentalen Ego in der phänomenologischen Reduktion zuwendet, dann geht es dabei um den Ursprung der Philosophie im Allgemeinen. Denn entweder empfängt dieselbe ihren Gehalt von einer zeitlichen Vorgegebenheit aus wie Geschichte, Existenz, Praxis, Epistème, Trieb, Wille zur Macht usw., oder sie etabliert sich in der Epoché aller Empirie, um stets absolut ursprunghaft nur sie selbst zu sein – mithin rein ausgewiesener Sinn von effektiv Erlebtem im Gegensatz zu mundan Realem jeglicher Natur: "So ist die einzelne Wahrnehmung mit ihrer Retention und Wiedererinnerung doch nie eine abgeschlossene Evidenz für Seiendes, sondern es ist weiter zurückzufragen, was das Seiende konstituiert, als innerhalb des identischen Ego identisch Seiendes." (Husserl 1929/1981, 252) Und genau dies macht die Diskussion mit der Psychoanalyse aus, insofern letztere von einer – durch das Unbewusste oder die Libido geprägte – Geschichte des "archaischen Erbes" als Latenz des Subjekts ausgeht, welches mit seinem reinen Ego zu keinem Augenblick identisch war, sondern seine phantasmatisch

fixierte Sinnidentität immer nur nachträglich als solche festhalten konnte (Ziegler 2010). Wenn der verallgemeinernde Begriff philosophisch die Bewegung des nomadischen Sinns in den Ausdruck hinein bedeutet, mithin schweigende Intention des Bedeutens als "Sagen-Wollen" (*vouloir-dire*) nach Derrida ist (Derrida 1972, 196-197), dann ist dieses prä-reflexive Schweigen bei Freud die Widerspiegelung des Triebs in der Repräsentanz. Letztere impliziert damit eine genetische Verflochtenheit von Sinn und Metaphorik, um sich im nachträglichen Erleben libidinös wie subjektiv aussagen zu können.

Im postmodern dekonstruktiven Sinne soll die Differe(ä)nz zwischen empirischer Existenz und transzendentaler Absolutheit des reduktiven Ursprungs hinsichtlich einer genetischen Dialektik aufrechterhalten werden. Um dies zu erreichen, lässt sich darauf verweisen, dass Husserl den Gehalt der effektiven Erfahrung im geschichtlich existentiellen Sinne eines "Jetzt"-Erlebnisses durch die Aufhebung der Existenzsetzung nur "neutralisieren" will – ihn also durchaus weiterhin "bewahrt". Diese Neutralisierung angesichts einer tatsächlichen geschichtlichen Genese scheint insofern transzendental möglich, als die phänomenologische Reduktion sich ja nicht in eine realitätsbezogene Triebgenese einschreibt, was dementsprechend den bleibenden epistemologischen Unterschied zwischen Psychoanalyse/ Philosophie ausmacht. Letztere interessiert als Phänomenologie die konstituierende Ursprungssphäre als solche, was aber trotzdem ein originär zeitliches Erlebnis besagt, denn sonst bliebe die Reduktion eine bloß logische Operation von formalen Begriffen aus: "So verfahren hat man stets von Neuem lebendige Wahrheit aus dem lebendigen Quell des absoluten Lebens und der ihm zugewandten Selbstbesinnung in der steten Gesinnung der Selbstverantwortung." (Husserl 1929/1981, 246) In ihrer Originarität ist die Zeit dieses Erlebnisses der Reduktion die Zeit selbst, die sich selbstverzeitlichend konstituiert. Die Schwierigkeiten dieser Selbstverzeitlichung des transzendentalen Ego sind früh diskutiert worden (Held 1966), um somit hier nur festzuhalten, dass die Grundspannung jeder Genese als Verhältnis von Ursprung/Antizipation mit der

transzendentalen Zeitgenese als Egogenese nicht aufgehoben werden kann. Vielmehr verfallt eine solch zeitliche Genese in einen Regress, falls man nicht im postmodernen Sinne das existentiell geschichtliche Moment in der Transzendentalität selbst beibehält, und zwar als ein konstitutiv unverzichtbares. Dies impliziert zugleich die Begrenzung der logischen Begrifflichkeit in ihrer allgemeinen Formalität, denn niemals wird letztere die Integralität des vorausliegenden noematischen Sinns in das Bedeuten als Ausdruck überführen können (Derrida 1972, 201-202).

Da es dementsprechend um den Sinn der Philosophie schlechthin geht, nämlich eine transzendente Reduktion sein zu müssen, um sich keinem bloß faktischen Werden ihrer historisch aufeinander folgenden Themen zu überlassen, verweist Derrida (Derrida 1967, 59ff.) grundlegend darauf, dass Husserl selber die Existenzialität als irreduzible Alterität innerhalb des originären Ursprungs beibehalten hat: "Die Phänomenologie ist Philosophie des Lebens nicht nur, weil in ihrem Zentrum der Tod sich nur als empirische Signifikation und äußerliches Akzidens anerkannt sieht, sondern auch, weil die Quelle des Sinns immer als *Vollzug des Lebens (vivre)*, als Akt des Lebendigseins, als '*Lebendigkeit*' bestimmt ist. Die Einheit des Lebensvollzugs (*unité de vivre*), der Herd der '*Lebendigkeit*', der sein Licht über alle fundamentalen Begriffe der Phänomenologie wirft [...], kennt nicht die transzendente Reduktion, ja, bahnt ihr sogar erst als Einheit des irdischen und des transzendentalen Lebens den Weg [...]. Dieses Nichts (*rien*), das die Parallelen des Psychologischen und Transzendentalen voneinander scheidet, dieses Nichts, ohne welches keine Erklärung, d. h. keine Sprache (*langage*) sich frei in der Wahrheit entfalten könnte, ohne durch Reales deformiert zu werden, dieses Nichts, ohne welches keine transzendente, d. h. philosophische Frage Luft zum Atmen fände, erscheint, um es so auszudrücken, insofern die *Totalität* der Welt in ihrer Existenz neutralisiert und auf ihr bloßes Phänomensein reduziert wird. *Und diese Operation ist die der transzendentalen Reduktion.*" Die Zeitlichkeit sei dabei zugleich primitives Substrat, von dem aus sich alle transzendente Konstitution entfalten wird, wie auch die originäre Bewegung

der intentionalen Protention auf Anderes hin. Mit anderen Worten ist der logische Kern im Sinne allgemeiner Form als schweigend gegenwärtiges Seiendes der dekonstruktive Grundsachverhalt des "Übergangs" (*passage*) jeden Diskurses von Sinn/Bedeutung und somit die Verflochtenheit von Eigenem/Anderem im Ausdruck (Derrida 1972, 206-207).

Um also die Konstitution eines transzendentalen Ego aussagen zu können, damit in solcher Passivität seines ursprünglichen Seins ein reiner Ursprung gewahrt bleibe, muss die Genese nicht nur der Reduktion widerstehen, sondern sie hat sich sogar in dieser zu offenbaren. Damit erscheint die Dialektik vom Selben und Anderen im Ursprung nur sich selbst, indem sie an die Pluridimensionalität der Zeit als originäre Vergangenheit wie auch originären Zukunftsentwurf verweist. Da keine abstrakte Dialektik – wie die Hegels etwa (Derrida 1972, 79-128) – die These der geschichtlich existentiellen Mit-Phänomenalisierung in der transzendentalen Sinngeneese metaphysisch formal unterminieren soll, ist die Entfremdung des originär Absoluten eine Umschreibung des eingangs genannten subjektdezentrierten Abwesenheits-Phänomens im Ursprung selbst. Für die Psychoanalyse heißt dies methodisch, keine radikale Reduktion des mundanen Lebens vorzunehmen, um die Dynamik und Energetik des subjektiven Lebens an jeder Stelle als ein different oder sogar dualistisch verbleibendes Erleben beim Patienten beschreiben zu können. Damit herrscht die ontische Genese als Triebmythologie über jeden denkbaren Ursprung, da letzterer den analytisch-therapeutischen Anspruch als epistemologisches Aufschieben subjektiver Wahrheit selbst in Frage stellen würde. Nur so vermag die Analyse das singuläre Leben oder die psychische Realität zu einem ständigen Aufschub werden zu lassen, der nie zum Originären hinfindet, da die Dialektik von Topik/Energetik oder Eigenem/Fremdem sonst zum Stillstand käme.

Die Zeit und der Andere als Nachträglichkeit sind dergestalt stets konstituierend anwesend (Green 2003. Altmeyer & Thomä 2006), während die transzendente Reduktion in ihrer phänomenologischen Autonomie jegliche Existenz aufheben muss. Das heißt, die Zeit und der/das

Andere können nur als "abwesende Anwesenheit" erscheinen, falls man die transzendente Genese nicht durch eine mundane Genese kontaminiert sein lassen will, wie Freud es durch die Verschränkung von Archaik/Latenz für die metapsychologische Genese des Neurotischen und Kulturellen unternimmt. Daher rührt der durchgehende Grundzug in den postmodernen Analysen, im Erscheinenden das jeweils zunächst ungesehene Nicht-Erscheinende als das Notwendig-Andere im Sinne eines originären Supplements aufzuweisen. Und diese sich nie aufhebende Nachträglichkeit wird als fragmentierende Struktur überall am Werk gesehen, auch wenn man sie nicht erneut ontologisieren will, um die analytisch-deskriptive beziehungsweise phänomenologisch-dekonstruktive Problematik unentscheidbar offen zu halten. Dadurch ergibt sich das Aufschieben von Vorstellung zu Vorstellung aus der nicht abbrechbaren Widerspiegelung von Metaphorik und Begrifflichkeit allgemein oder von Text und Rand. Auf diese Weise lässt sich in einer faktischen Endlichkeit eines je phantasmatisch unbegrenzten Bedeutungsspiels operieren, was bei Freud zuletzt der Wiederholung als Todestrieb und bei Lacan der Signifikantenkette als Mangel im subjektiven Bedeutungsintervall entspricht (Kirchhoff 2009, 92ff.).

Das phantasierte Originäre erscheint so ursprünglicher als das Primär-Ursprüngliche (Erlebnis), dessen Sinn das Originäre darstellt, während wiederum das als primär Erlebte ursprünglicher ist als der Ursprung, da es zugleich den transzendentalen Grund (Genesis) wie das letztangewiesene Sinnssubstrat (Reduktion) bildet. Dem entspricht in der analytisch-therapeutischen Fortentwicklung nach Freud, dass die Ursprungsmythologien wie Vätermord, Kastration oder Geburtstrauma als Ursprung und Struktur des Erlebens dialektisch gesehen werden, mithin sich als Mythos des Ursprungs ins Erleben selbst mythisch als unzugängliche Archaik einschreiben. Verfolgen wir dabei insbesondere die Kritik der zeitlichen Unmittelbarkeit als Augenblick noch genauer, da er ebenfalls zentral für die Kur als Moment subjektiver Wahrheit ohne weiteres festgeschriebenes Wissen im Sinne des jeweiligen "Einfalls" ist. Die husserlsche

anschauliche Gegebenheit des intentional erfassten Dings zielt auf eine Identität von Sehen und Gegebenem ab, welche eben die Anwesenheit eines gegenwärtig gegebenen Gegenstandes ist. Nur das, was sich jetzt an diesem zeigt, ist originär Seiendes, und diese Gegenwart ist sich selbst unmittelbar und absolut. Hier scheint es phänomenologisch keine Andersheit oder Abwesenheit zu geben. Aber der Augenblick ist nicht nur ständig durch den Zeitfluss darin bedroht, keiner mehr zu sein, sondern er ist auch bloß ein idealer Grenzpunkt zwischen protentionalem "Noch-Nicht" und retentionalem "Nicht-Mehr". Mit anderen Worten hebt sich die "Jetzt-Präsenz" von einer zeitlich verschobenen Vergegenwärtigung eines Jetzt ab, das noch nicht oder nicht mehr ist. Diese Affektion des Augenblicks – nunmehr als "Infektion" für Derrida – durch Zukunft und Vergangenheit bedeutet gerade ein "ursprüngliches Supplement", und zwar genau als jene Nachträglichkeit, die das Jetzt-Bewusstsein erst erzeugt. Die Anwesenheit des Jetzt entzöge sich also dem reduktiven Zugriff, verschiebt und verzögert sich, um für immer auf sich warten zu lassen. Dies ist gerade auch für die zuvor genannte Nachträglichkeit in der Psychoanalyse maßgeblich, insofern Repräsentanz und Affekt der Libido nie unmittelbar zusammenfallen, sondern über eine Erinnerung vermittelt werden sollen, die das Verdrängte vom primären Erleben als ein Originäres vergessen oder sogar verworfen hat. Daher muss die Deutung des Analytikers eingreifen, wodurch die Nachträglichkeit einer Interpretation unterliegt, die erst in der Übertragung als der frühere traumatisierende Affekt wieder aktualisiert werden kann (Henry 1985, 379-380. Riss 2018).

Die Metaphysik wie Mythologie des Originären bliebe konstitutiv bestehen, wenn die Abwesenheit bloß mangelnde Anwesenheit wäre, denn dabei würde die Differenz noch innerhalb einer Identitäts- und Negationslogik gedacht. Kann von Gegenwart differe(ä)ntiell nur die Rede sein, wenn das Jetzt in einer ursprünglichen Passivität von einem Nicht-Jetzt affiziert wird, so fügt dieses ursprüngliche Supplement sich dem Ursprung hinzu, ohne dass ein vermittelnder dritter Terminus gebildet würde (Derrida 1967, 63-64). Dies korrespondiert analytisch-therapeutisch mit der

"schwebenden Logik" gemäß Jacques Lacan zwischen einem mythisch oder illusionär angenommenen Originären und der signitiv symbolisierten Nachträglichkeit (Kühn 2018 (2), 218ff.). Das Supplement lässt das Durchgestrichene oder Vergessene in seiner zeitlichen wie affektiven Gebrechlichkeit stehen, und in diesem Sinne ist es Zusatz wie Substitut, das den fehlenden Ursprung im Nachhinein zu Stande bringt. Die dekonstruktivistische wie psychoanalytische Anti-Präsenz-Methode ist dadurch anzuerkennende erhöhte phänomenologische Wachsamkeit dafür, wie ein Phänomen durch ein anderes verdeckt wird (Kirchhoff 2009, 25, 33-34 und 56-61), um dieses Andere – ergänzend wie ersetzend – in den Rand bisheriger philosophischer oder subjektiver Kontextualität einzutragen. Was hierbei mithin gegenüber der klassischen Phänomenologie neu ist, sofern es sich paradigmatisch um das Auftauchen eines gegenwärtigen Jetzt und der gegenwärtigen Erfassung eines vergangenen Jetzt in der Zeitanalyse wie Erinnerung handelt, besteht mithin in der Tatsache, dass eine derartig verzögerte Erfassung des Jetzt nicht bloß zu einer gegenwärtigen Erfassung des Jetzt hinzukommt, sondern diese zugleich vertritt. Für Husserl, der durchgehend im Rahmen der Wahrnehmungsanalyse denkt, ist die Retention nur eine Modifikation der Urimpression, die phänomenologisch die ursprüngliche Gegenwart des Jetzt bestimmt. Aber eine solche Reduktion setzt einen Jetzt-Punkt gegenwärtig, der nicht mehr als gegenwärtig gefasst wird, so wie die analytisch-therapeutische Wiedererinnerung eine aktualisierende wie verschiebende Repräsentanz des früheren Affekts als Tribschicksal darstellt (Ricoeur 1965, 396ff.).

Für eine dekonstruktive Kritik der Zeitlichkeit steht mithin das metaphysische Zeitverständnis als Anwesenheit überhaupt auf dem Spiel, denn wenn das Jetzt nicht durch sich selbst bestimmt werden kann, dann ist es auch nicht mehr der "Urquellpunkt" der Zeit im Sinne Husserls. Sofern die Retention ein wesentliches Moment der Gegenwart ist, muss die Erfassung des Jetzt in seiner Gegenwärtigkeit von der Erfassung eines vergangenen Jetzt begleitet werden. Selbst wenn diese Retention keine eigentliche Wahrnehmung ist, aber doch zur Erfahrung der Gegenwart notwendig bleibt, dann wird

eine solche Gegenwärtigung als Anwesenheit auch niemals ganz wahrgenommen. Insoweit die Anwesenheit nicht nur Abwesenheit ist, ist sie dennoch stets mit dieser durchsetzt, so wie das freudsche Unbewusste unsichtbar in der Repräsentanz des Triebes gegeben sein soll. Die Erfassung eines rein gegenwärtigen oder unbewussten Augenblicks erscheint mithin als reduktives Phänomen nicht möglich, so dass er auch keine selbständige Identität beanspruchen kann. Eher ist der Augenblick die Bruchstelle zwischen Selbst/Anderem oder zwischen Trieb/Erinnerung, denn das Jetzt kann nur als neu auftauchen, wenn es sich vom vergangenen Jetzt als Nicht-Jetzt unterscheidet – so wie die Vorstellung vom Affekt. Die Differenz verschränkt sich daher mit der Identität, und die Retention erhält dieses Vergangene in der Anwesenheit, allerdings als Nicht-Jetzt oder als Abwesenheit. Daraus folgt schließlich, dass das Jetzt sich niemals unmittelbar präsent ist, da es nur als selbes erscheint, wenn es ein anderes ist, sowie nur dann als anwesend, wenn es abwesend ist. Das Selbstbewusstsein der Jetzt-Anwesenheit als Ego hat mithin die Form der Nachträglichkeit und nicht der "strömenden Gegenwart" als einer "verharrenden Form für immer neue Materie" gemäß Husserl (Husserl 1976, 183). Denn für das Selbstbewusstsein des Jetzt bedarf es der vergegenwärtigenden Retention eines Nicht-Mehr-Jetzt als Kontrast oder Abgrund. Damit ist dekonstruktivistisch prinzipiell der Begriff des *Cogito* in Frage gestellt, insoweit hierin als Ursprung der inneren Zeit dieser der intersubjektiven und historischen Zeit vorausgehen soll. Was topisch-energetisch auch das Ich bei Freud der Dezentrierung unterwirft, insoweit es ständig vom Es und Über-Ich in seinem phantasmatischen Alleinanspruch relativiert wird – nicht "Herr im eigenen Hause" sei.

Die Anwesenheit als zeitliche Gegenwart im und als Jetzt kann nach dieser Lesart demzufolge nicht ohne den Spielraum des Unterschieds zur Retention mit dem sein, was diese als abwesend ergreift. Der Aufschub (*différance*) ist ein Supplement, das sich einem Nichts hinzufügt, genauer mit Derrida gesagt, wodurch das mit Verzug hervorgebracht wird, dem sich das Supplement hinzufügt. Seinsanwesenheit erscheint dadurch nicht völlig ausgeklammert, sondern Sein

bedeutet nunmehr "Retardieren" oder "Differe(ä)nz" im Gegensatz zur philosophischen Tradition als Identität von Sein/Denken seit Parmenides. Gegenwart ergibt sich erst, nachdem der passiv vorintentionale Konstitutionsakt der Zeit sein Werk vollendet hat, damit Gegenwärtiges existieren kann. Mit dieser Kritik sieht die Postmoderne die bisherige Geschichte des Seins als metaphysisches Postulat von Anwesenheit/Gegenwart zum Abschluss gekommen. So wie Freud selber diese Sichtweise mit vorbereitet hat, indem er das Selbstbewusstsein des Ichs im Sinne angenommener Unmittelbarkeit seiner eigenen Ego-Wahrheit aufhob, um jedes Vorgestellte mit einer Mehrdeutigkeit zu versehen. Dies verweist auf eine archaisch neurotische Latenz des Unbewussten zurück, die in sich einen phantasmatischen Aufschub für das Zusammentreffen von Affekt/Vorstellung als stets differiertem oder überdeterminiertem Ichbewusstsein enthält.

Um hier in eine Bewertung der dekonstruktivistischen wie metapsychologischen Reduktionsweise eintreten zu können, ist nicht nur deutlich zu sehen, dass die postmoderne Differenz-, Andersheits- und Abwesenheitsdebatte besonders seit Heidegger, Sartre und Merleau-Ponty den Angelpunkt dessen ergreift, was phänomenologisch als Ursprung, Transparenz oder Selbstgegebenheit auf dem Spiel steht (Dopatka 2019).

Vielmehr muss ebenfalls epistemologisch erkannt werden, dass diese Einwände ihrerseits methodisch – trotz aller berechtigten Traditionskritik – dem Wahrnehmungspriori verhaftet bleiben. Das problematisch Originäre verharret als ein zeitlich Distanziertes in der Schau und somit als ein vorgestelltes Originäres, während wir nicht nur die weiteren Selbstradikalisierungen der Phänomenologie in Rechnung stellen, sondern dadurch auch für einen notwendigen Umsturz des Gegenstandes der Phänomenologie selbst plädieren. So schreibt Husserl selber: "In den Gang der Welterfahrung mich ganz einlebend und in alle offenen Möglichkeiten ihrer konsequenten Erfüllung, richte ich dabei den Blick auf das Erfahrene und seine allgemeinen, eidetisch zu fassenden Seinsstrukturen." (Husserl 1929/1981, 214) Anders gesagt, ist das absolut selbstaffektive Leben gerade vor diesem Blick als

differierender Schau noch verortet, was auch die Psychoanalyse mit ihrem ontisch Unbewussten betrifft, das weiterhin der herkömmlichen Metaphysik der prinzipiellen Vorstellbarkeit oder Repräsentanz zugeordnet bleibt. Daher liegt über die Verabsolutierung der strukturalen Differenz als solcher hinaus nicht nur die Verkennung vor (Frank 1991, 45ff.), dass jede erkennbare Differenz in einem Struktursystem ein Minimum an erkennbarer Identität voraussetzt. Hinzu tritt vielmehr, dass das retardierende Sein als originäres Supplement, welches Ursprung nicht ohne Ek-sistenz erscheinen lassen kann, nur *hin-sichtlich* eines Seins für das Bewusstsein gilt, welches seine Selbstwerdung in der Distanz zwischen Demselben/Anderen oder zwischen Affekt/Vorstellung als eigene Setzung hervorbringt. Hat aber die Ur-Impression als lebendige *cogitatio* seit Descartes ihr Sein nicht durch den auffassenden Akt, sondern in der wesenhaft immemorial vorgängigen Selbstaffektion gemäß den gegenreduktiven Analysen Henrys, dann ist die verbleibende Spur des Ursprungs und des Anderen, der Existenz oder der Zeit, phänomenologisch konkret nur auf dem ursprünglichen Grund dessen möglich, was selbst keine Aufschiebung beinhaltet, sondern die Hervorbringung aller Differenzen transzendental erst erlaubt (Sebbah 2001). Denn ohne diese absolut innere Affektion, die keine signitive Immanenz einer Totalität ist, sondern die originäre Selbstbindung an sich selbst als Leben ohne Referenz zu einer Ordnung welcher Art auch immer, steht jedes "Bewusstsein von ..." (Husserl) über einem – materialphänomenologisch festzuhaltenden – Nichts der Genese (Kühn 2021, 44-51).

Kein Jetzt-Originäres könnte retardiert werden, wenn es nicht von einem stetig es verlebendigen Ursprung gezeugt und bewegt wäre, der diese zeitlich primäre Distanz aus der methodischen Vorgabe der Schau heraus nicht kennt. Es reicht also nicht aus, dass man die dekonstruktivistische Husserllektüre auf jene Weise als notwendig rezipiert, um die retentional ursprüngliche Selbstwahrnehmung in ein vorgängig Unbewusstes hineinzuverlegen. Denn die Retention im husserlschen Sinne lässt in der Tat jedes Jetzt des Sich zu einem intentionalen Grenzerlebnis werden, so dass dieses

limeshafte Unbewusste – als von der Bewusstseinspriorität noch abhängig – selbst zu verlassen ist. Ein Un-Bewusstes gibt es nur in Bezug auf ein Bewusstes, das damit im Sinne einer Vorstellungsinstanz weiterhin als maßgebliche Phänomenreferenz anerkannt wird, wie wir ebenfalls für Freuds Repräsentanzbegriff erwähnten. Man kann die postmoderne Kritik zur Herausstellung der Metaphysikgebundenheit Husserls gegenüber den tatsächlichen Phänomenen – wie vor allem in der Zeitgenese – kritisch nutzen, aber es bleibt dennoch dabei ein methodisches Apriori von anonymer Weltphänomenalität und dezentrierter Endlichkeit bestehen. Daher gilt die Nachträglichkeit der Zeit/Akt-Differenz eigentlich nur für das Sein in der Schau, das die retentional reduktive Selbstwerdung in der Distanz zwischen dem Selben und dem Anderen hervorbringt. Deshalb kann mit Henry unterstrichen werden, dass eben ein Seinsbereich anderer Ordnung hierbei vorausgesetzt bleibt, wo sich das Urimpressionale als lebendige *cogitatio* hält (Henry 1992, 169ff. Henry 2002, 81ff.). Eine Selbstaffektion als ein ontisches "Danach" gemäß Laplanche oder als "Spur" wie bei Derrida, ist schon von dem affiziert, was sie erweisen soll. Ist nämlich die Gegenwart von der Vergangenheit, das Jetzt vom Nicht-mehr-Jetzt affiziert, dann ist diese reziproke Fremdaffektion nur möglich, weil das urimpressionale Jetzt als Selbstanwesenheit des Lebens (welches im strengen Sinne kein zeitliches "Jetzt" kennt) nicht über einem Abgrund des Nichts als "Nicht-Mehr" steht, sondern sich bereits immer schon in einer material passiven Selbstimpressionalität ergriffen hat. Die Anwesenheit der originär affektiven Jetzt-Gegenwart ist somit keine Wahrnehmungszeit; sie ist die immanente Historialität der Sich-Affektion, die in keiner temporalisierten Gegenwart sichtbar wird – und damit auch keine "Infektion" darstellt, sondern ein originäres Nicht-Wissen diesseits jeder Genese bleibt.

Die postmoderne wie analytisch-therapeutische Nachträglichkeit erscheint dergestalt als eine weitere philosophisch ererbte Weise des mundanen Abstandes als Differe(ä)nz, Außen oder Rand, mit der die abendländische Metaphysiktradition zumeist die Phänomenalisierung des

Erscheinens gedacht hat, so dass hier zu früh ein historischer Abschluss solcher Metaphysikgeschichte angenommen wird. Metaphysikdestruktion muss – gegenreduktiv gesehen – deshalb nicht allein an der Anwesenheitsdestruktion haften bleiben, denn sie vermag auf eine andere Phänomenalisierungsart unverbrüchlicher Anwesenheit als radikal phänomenologisches Leben hinzuweisen. Dieses ist jedoch keine bloß neue Sinnreferenz, keine in den Rand überbordende Andersheit zu einer von Abwesenheit durchzogenen Seins- oder Sinnidentität, kein Supplement zu toten Noemen. Vielmehr radikale Immanenz als sich selbstphänomenalisierendes Leben in sich und aus sich allein heraus, das nie abwesend sein kann, weil kein affektives Empfinden als unmittelbar erprobtes – und nicht nur als vorgestelltes – ohne dieses selbsterscheinende Leben denkbar wäre. Das Jetzt schwebt mithin nur transzendent bewusstseinsabhängig über einem Nichts. Die ursprüngliche Anwesenheit, aus der es originär hervorbricht, ist ausschließlich die sich selbsterscheinende Selbstgebung des Lebens in sich selbst, und zwar außerhalb eines jeden wahrgenommenen oder wiedererinnerten Bewusstseinsflusses. Wird aus dem Begriff der Anwesenheit als effektiver Parusie des transzendental Lebendigen jede methodische Gegenüberstellung reduziert, so ist sie absolut, nämlich in einem affektiv erprobten Sinne, denn sie benötigt kein Sein mehr, das sich immer schon zu Differe(ä)nz, Abwesenheit oder Supplement ausgeformt hat. Und dies gilt ebenfalls für die Verdrängung, Verführung oder Kastration, in denen das Leben scheinbar seine Nicht-Anwesenheit manifestiert, indem es sich dem Blick entzieht. Was aber keineswegs bedeutet, dass es auch in solcher Nachträglichkeit nicht weiterhin gegeben wäre, um dergestalt auf sein immanentes Nicht-Wissen im thematischen Sinne zu verweisen. Dies ist es, was letztlich auch jede phantasmatische Nachträglichkeit unsichtbar zu erproben gibt, um die reine Unmittelbarkeit des Lebens zur absolut phänomenologischen Selbstgewissheit werden zu lassen.

Somit ist die interpretationsbezogene Nachträglichkeit eine Problematik, welche das Denken sich selbst schafft, wenn es versucht, den niemals unbewussten Affekt als unmittelbar sich manifestierendes Bedürfen/Begehren oder Wunsch in eine

Vorstellung zu heben. Natürlich ist es notwendig, therapeutisch diese Einsicht zu vermitteln, solange das Denken in sich selbst fixiert bleibt, ohne die Erprobung des originären Lebens diesseits von phantasmatischer Schau und Befriedigungserlebnis anwesend sein zu lassen. Die Nachträglichkeit kann daher ein Vermittlungsversuch sein, um auf das hinzulenken, was in sich selbst nie vermittelt werden kann – nämlich auf die Unmittelbarkeit unserer Affektibilität als subjektive Passibilität vor jeder diskursiven Symbolisierung wie Metaphorisierung, die stets auch ein traditionelles Erbe implizieren, das kritisch angefragt werden kann (Kühn 2023, 181ff.). Es gibt hingegen keinen Augenblick, der nicht zunächst lebendig empfunden oder gefühlt werden müsste, so dass alle Differenzierungen, Aufschübe oder Nachträglichkeiten immer sekundäre Sinnvorstellungen beinhalten, die dem Leben in seiner absoluten Parusie fremd sind. Daher bleibt auch die Nachträglichkeit als das einzustufen, was sie bewirken kann, nämlich in einer zu starken Affektbeladenheit eine vorübergehende Distanzierung herbeizuführen, die es gegenüber der Originarität des Lebens als solcher allerdings niemals geben kann.

Die Nachträglichkeit selbst hat also ihrerseits aufschiebenden Charakter, anstatt durch den originär nicht möglichen Aufschub gegenüber dem unmittelbar selbstaffizierenden Leben dessen Wirklichkeit als solche sein zu lassen, von der es keine Loslösung zu keinem Augenblick gibt. Schon bei den Griechen, insbesondere durch Platon, war der Affekt mit der Ananke im Sinne einer unlösbaren Bindung an den Leib identisch, was von Freud wieder aufgegriffen wurde, ohne jedoch dem Affekt eine eigene ursprüngliche Wahrheit zuzuerkennen (Schreckenber 1964, 150). Sekundäre Vorstellungen oder Erinnerungen sind daher nicht *per se* falsch, aber sie sind dem Anspruch einer hermeneutischen beziehungsweise wissenschaftlichen Erklärung geschuldet, die sich als konzeptuelle Konstruktion nicht der rein subjektiven Selbstgegebenheit lebendiger Wirklichkeit zu substituieren vermag. Reduziert man diesen Erklärungsanspruch, wie er gleichfalls in der Psychoanalyse vorliegt, zugunsten des je unmittelbar selbstaffektiven

Vollzugs, der jeder Vorstellung vorausliegt, dann fällt auch der sekundäre Wirklichkeitsanspruch einer diskursiv gedeuteten Nachträglichkeit dahin, um uns mit der Abgründigkeit unsichtbaren Lebens in dessen rein praktischem Wahrheitsanspruch zu konfrontieren. Insofern gewinnt dann auch eine Aussage wie die des Psychoanalytikers André Green (Kirchhoff 2009, 21) ihren phänomenologisch plausiblen Hintergrund: "*No psychoanalytic theory escapes from the need to establish an origin of psychical processes*".

NOTES

¹ Für die radikal phänomenologische Selbstgegebenheit des Ursprungs als transzendente Lebendigkeit über Husserl und Heidegger hinaus s. Angabe.

² Die umfangreichen Arbeiten zum Mythos (welche an eine Kontroverse mit Sartre über die analytische wie dialektische Vernunft geknüpft sind) zeigen deutlich die strukturalistische Abkehr von jedem Cartesianismus oder Subjektivismus bei Claude Lévi-Strauss, insofern hier eine Rationalität ohne Subjekt erschlossen werden soll, in welcher die Mythen nicht länger als vom Menschen gemacht erscheinen, sondern "sich im Menschen denken", was an die strukturelle Gleichsetzung von Sprache und Unbewusstem bei Lacan erinnert, der dieses Denken früh rezipierte.

³ Wäre die Geburtsangst das älteste Phantasma, dann fiel die Kastration durch den Ödipuskomplex dahin, weshalb Freud sich von Rank diesbezüglich distanzierte. In Lacans Augen herrscht hier die Vorstellung einer primordialen Einheit im Mutterleib vor, die ebenfalls auf Grund seines Subjektverständnisses als "Fehlen-an-Sein" verworfen wird, denn dann wäre die Kur der Versuch, diese Einheit nochmals wieder zu ermöglichen.

⁴ Dies bleibt im Folgenden noch zu nuancieren, wenn etwa schon für Husserl die passiven Synthesen als vor-intentionale Teleologie des Bewusstseins mitberücksichtigt werden.

⁵ Vgl. zum Beispiel die methodischen Hinweise auf Mythologie und Konstruktion bei Sigmund Freud. Auch 1932 im Brief an Einstein (*Warum Krieg?*) spricht er von "unseren Theorien" als "eine Art von Mythologien", auf die auch jede Naturwissenschaft – wie in der Physik – hinauslaufe.

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Le transfert de l'identité linguistique, culturelle et politique face à la mondialisation

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Abstract **The transfer of linguistic, cultural and political identity in the face of globalization**

Starting from the premise that, in order to stand the test of globalization, translation is supposed to overcome the “shock of the incomparable”, we will attempt to problematize the identity challenges that stand before translation today. To this end, we will first circumscribe the distinctive features of contemporary babelization which is at the same time linguistic, cultural, and political. We will then try to identify the effects of the “postcolonial turn” on current translational issues. Finally, we will examine the potential triple threat to the transfer of linguistic, cultural, and political identity. Our aim is to prove that the translation of the identity of a linguistic community imposes a political-cultural perspective and not only a sociolinguistic one. The translation should therefore not simply adapt to the foreign language: being culturally, and even ideologically charged, it must be able to transfer the cultural and political specificities of the source text into the target language; but it has to also raise awareness among the foreign public to the problems linked to the constitution of political identity and the consolidation of cultural identity.

Keywords: culture, globalization, identity, language, politics, translation

Introduction

L'étude philologique des œuvres classiques a transformé la traduction en paradigme du transfert de l'identité sémantique de l'original dans une autre langue par la décontextualisation et la recontextualisation de son sens. Par ailleurs, du fait que la

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« dynamique identitaire » (Boyer 2018, 127) s’associe à la production d’identités par l’activité langagière, l’identité culturelle et l’identité politique émergent des échanges linguistiques. La transposition des unités lexicales d’un texte source, qui vise à engendrer leur sens équivalent dans un texte cible, peut être entravée aussi bien par des différences sémantiques issues de l’identité structurale spécifique des deux langues que par l’incommensurabilité de l’identité culturelle et de l’identité politique des deux communautés linguistiques.

Le temps historique impose ses valeurs aux modes de traduire. Les notions mêmes de traduction correcte ou de traduction fidèle sont tributaires du degré de leur implantation dans les pratiques sociétares. La sélection des textes à traduire tout comme la rédaction et la réception de leurs traductions sont régies par les dispositifs réglementaires des communautés linguistiques à une époque donnée. L’équivalence conforme à l’assujettissement de la traduction aux normes en vigueur témoigne de la subordination des transferts culturels et politiques à la langue-culture cible. Elle s’insère dans un contexte qui prédéfinit ses caractéristiques en fonction des attitudes et des *habitus* prévalant dans une communauté linguistique. En ce sens, il n’existe pas de traductions idéologiquement neutres, négligeant le système de valeurs de la langue cible. La question des normes se révèle à ce point cruciale pour l’activité traductrice entendue comme une activité sociale ancrée dans une culture. Définies dans la dialectique de l’*adéquation* et de l’*acceptabilité* (Toury 1998, 15–20), les normes rappellent au traducteur ce qu’on attend de lui. Le traducteur, pour sa part, peut décider de s’y conformer ou de les enfreindre : les normes intériorisées conduisent à l’adaptation du texte traduit aux conventions de la langue-culture cible ; leur transgression consciente résulte, en revanche, de la solution non conventionnelle d’un problème traductif. En effet, quand « on maintient l’identité du signifiant comme manifestation de l’identité du signifié [...] l’équivoque devient la norme du langage, et l’on blesse au cœur le principe de non-contradiction » (Cassin 2016, 117).

Nous allons donc chercher à problématiser les défis identitaires qui pèsent sur la traduction de nos jours, à savoir

l'identité linguistique menacée par le *globish*, l'identité culturelle liée à l'incommensurabilité des cultures et l'identité politique associée à la langue. À cette fin, nous envisageons d'explicitier d'abord les tenants et les aboutissants de la situation post-babélienne actuelle. Nous allons tenter ensuite de démontrer à travers « le tournant postcolonial » (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999, 13) que la traduction sensibilise à la constitution de l'identité politique et à la consolidation de l'identité culturelle. Nous voudrions faire ressortir enfin le triple danger pour le transfert des trois identités constitutives d'une communauté (l'identité linguistique, l'identité culturelle et l'identité politique), qui émane de l'explicitation du non-dit, de la réécriture adaptative et de l'intertextualité ignorée (Cordonnier 1995, 172–186). Tout cela nous permettra de prouver que comme la traduction subit l'impact des conventions historiques, balisées par le « choc de l'incomparable » (Détienne 2000, 44), surmonter ce choc devient la condition *sine qua non* pour passer l'épreuve de la mondialisation.

1. Babelisation vs mondialisation

La parabole biblique pose la Tour de Babel comme le symbole de l'état de l'humanité d'avant son entrée dans l'histoire. Son effondrement la transforme en symbole de la perte de la transparence entre les signes et les choses. Pour punir les hommes de leur arrogance et de leurs ambitions excessives, Dieu déconstruit la langue et confronte les incommensurabilités. Son « châtement exemplaire démotive le signe et, ce faisant, le réduit à n'être plus que le produit d'une pure convention, déclenchant ainsi la prolifération des langues » (Hagège 1986, 146). Aussi « le péché de Babel » expose-t-il non pas « seulement la différence qualitative (perfection/imperfection), mais également la différence quantitative (un/multiple) » (Rosier-Catach 2016, 77). Du point de vue linguistique, Babel marque les fruits de son effondrement – les langues naturelles – par la langue édénique originelle (Zumthor 1995, 96–97). Du point de vue théologique, il problématise l'unité religieuse et la fragilité de la création humaine. Du point de vue technologique, il souligne la précarité de toute construction. Du point de vue culturel, il implique la

migration des peuples, qui stimule le contact des cultures et des civilisations.

La décomposition de la cité unie des hommes en une multitude de langues-cultures lance un défi à la compréhension : « Babel ne signifie rien d'autre que l'éclatement originel [...] qui donne naissance aux langues » (Goldschmidt 2009, 28). Dieu sème la confusion entre les hommes qui parlent une langue unique en même temps qu'il disperse les langues dont la multiplicité détermine dans une grande mesure l'impératif du traduire. Babel révèle donc le paradoxe de l'établissement d'une loi qui prescrit et interdit d'emblée la traduction (Derrida 1987, 234). D'une part, la pluralité linguistique qu'il engendre suscite le besoin de traduire : à force de comprendre et d'accepter l'affrontement de l'autre, le plurilinguisme apparaît non seulement comme un obstacle à la traduction, mais aussi comme sa raison d'être. D'autre part, en déclenchant le désordre linguistique, Babel met fin au fantasme de la langue unique et associe l'impossibilité de traduire à l'intraduisibilité des langues, présumée par leur variété.

Et pourtant, l'homme a toujours aspiré à une langue supprimant la distance entre les mots et les choses, la forme et le sens, une langue parfaite parce qu'absolue. Cette langue commune se transforme ultérieurement en archétype de concepts tels que « le pur langage » (Benjamin 2000, 142–165) ou « la langue parfaite » (Eco 1994). Pour certains, la langue universelle ressemble davantage « au génie secret des langues de la Pentecôte et de la Langue des Oiseaux, qu'aux formules d'une langue a priori » (Eco 1994, 390). D'aucuns estiment que la langue originelle fut l'hébreu. D'autres pensent que la langue mère de la plupart des langues indo-européennes, fut le sanscrit. Franz Bopp consacra toute sa vie à la quête de la langue primordiale qui destitua l'hébreu de sa position : « Mais le sanscrit n'a pas seulement apporté une légitimité scientifique aux essais comparatifs antérieurs en autorisant l'invention de l'aire indo-européenne. La langue des Veda fournit également à certains savants un support onirique à leur soif romantique des origines » (Olender 1989, 22–23). À l'époque hellénistique, le grec fut la *κοινή*. Au Moyen âge, le latin devint la *lingua franca*. Aux Temps modernes, les esprits éclairés de Gottfried Wilhelm

Leibnitz, de Jules Henri Poincaré et d'André-Marie Ampère furent possédés par le fantasme de la langue unique dont la poursuite jouait un rôle fondamental dans la circonscription de l'espace européen et la formation de l'identité culturelle européenne. À la fin du XIX et au cours de la première moitié du XX siècle l'*esperanto* (1887) du polonais Ludwig Zamenhof et le *novial* (1928) du danois Otto Jespersen tentèrent d'imposer les langues artificielles pour épargner l'apprentissage des langues étrangères, et par conséquent, éliminer la nécessité de traduire. Aujourd'hui, la prétention d'universalité est incarnée par le *globish*. Mis au service de la communication superficielle, celui-ci est devenu l'antipode des langues ontologiquement supérieures, capables de transmettre la pensée en profondeur, de « dire l'être » (Heidegger 1966, 93). On peut se demander alors si le *globish* ne serait pas une projection négative de la langue unique des constructeurs de la Tour de Babel ou une variante caricaturale de la langue du Paradis.

La société globalisée impose des modèles de savoir, de vision du monde, de mode de vie, de langue : « L'anglais est désormais partout. Non parce qu'il est une langue *économique* dans ses moyens, mais, comme dirait La Palice, parce qu'il est partout, c'est-à-dire qu'il est la langue de ceux qui mènent temporairement l'économie » (Marcel 1998, 23). Le fait qu'on traduit beaucoup de l'anglais et peu vers l'anglais¹ permet de voir l'« une des retombées de la mondialisation dans le domaine linguistique, la domination de l'anglais entouré de quelques langues supercentrales » (Calvet 2007, 56) qui « gravitent » autour de cette langue hypercentrale (Calvet 2007, 46). Selon la hiérarchie des langues naturelles dressée par Abram de Swaan (2001), l'anglais est la seule langue hypercentrale ; les langues des puissances coloniales comme l'arabe, le chinois, le français, l'allemand, l'hindi, le japonais, le malais, le portugais, le russe, l'espagnol, le swahili et le turc sont des langues supercentrales ; il existe une centaine de langues centrales ; 98 % des langues naturelles sont périphériques.

À côté de certains aspects positifs incontestables comme le développement des technologies d'information et de communication, la diffusion rapide des nouvelles et des produits, la meilleure culture générale des lecteurs potentiels, la

mondialisation présente beaucoup d'écueils. Elle anéantit la variation linguistique, détruit la différence des langues. En annihilant la pluralité des langues, elle conduit à l'appauvrissement culturel. En abolissant la multiplicité linguistique, elle tend à étouffer la traduction. D'une part, la traduction s'oppose à la mondialisation pour autant qu'elle contribue à maintenir la diversité au sein d'une homogénéisation linguistique croissante. D'autre part, la mondialisation s'institue comme une nécessité pragmatique parce qu'elle permet à toute information de parvenir sans tarder jusqu'aux communautés les plus périphériques.

En tant qu'essentiellement culturelle, la mondialisation contemporaine (Wolton 2010, 15) est destinée à cohabiter avec la babélisation (Oustinoff 2011b, 9–24) qui, malgré la domination écrasante du *globish*, témoigne de l'hétérogénéisation linguistique et du droit de préférence de la langue de communication. La traduction, qui promet la réconciliation post-babélienne des langues et vise à restaurer leur entente perdue, se porte garante de la liberté de ce choix. Malgré les difficultés et les imperfections qu'elle suppose, elle reste une médiatrice indispensable dans les échanges interlinguistiques et les transferts interculturels : « La mémoire des écrivains et des lecteurs est désormais un territoire babélique, où résonnent ensemble des textes venus de près ou de loin, des langues multiples (même si elle les retient en traduction) » (Pradeau et Samoyault 2005, 97).

La survie des langues-cultures dépend donc de leur aptitude à surmonter leur rigidité, leur autosuffisance, leur « autoréférentialité » (Hermans 1999, 59), et à communiquer avec d'autres langues-cultures. Les échanges interculturels impliquent le respect des différences culturelles et leur considération comme une possibilité pour enrichir la propre culture à travers la traduction. La traduction interagit synchroniquement et diachroniquement avec les œuvres d'une langue-culture et s'y insère par leur contextualisation et leur inscription dans sa tradition. Somme toute, dans la situation post-babélienne, elle devient le point d'intersection de trois Babel dont les retombées traductives sont incontestables : « [l]e babel des langues dans lequel se débat l'indispensable traduction [...],

le babel de l'éducation et de la formation, ce centre opaque de la lecture cultivée [...], le babel politique du globe, qui atteint souvent si douloureusement l'actualité littéraire » (Schlanger 2005, 96–97). Du reste, dans le monde actuel, « de plus en plus menacé par les conflits d'ordre culturel et identitaire, il ne s'agit pas seulement de connaître la langue de l'autre, mais de la comprendre de l'intérieur, dans son *altérité* » (Oustinoff 2011a, 164).

2. Le tournant postcolonial

Quels sont les problèmes qui se posent à la traduction quand les visions du monde de la langue source et de la langue cible sont éloignées ou incomparables, incommensurables ou impartageables ; quand les deux traditions présentent des divergences substantielles à tel point que la compréhension partagée des mondes de l'original et de la traduction devient incertaine ? Cette question acquiert une importance capitale dans la traduction postcoloniale.

Quand il se heurte aux spécificités culturelles ou politiques du texte source, le traducteur averti est conscient qu'il doit tester la tolérance de la langue cible et sa disposition à accepter des formes transgressant ses normes. « Le dépassement des usages linguistiques habituels et la reformulation de la propre langue à travers la traduction ne sont nullement faciles et prévisibles, mais dépendent dans une grande mesure de l'aptitude de la langue cible à se soumettre à la force transformatrice de la langue source » (Kristeva 2019, 154). Formes hiérarchiques d'un système sémiotique, les usages linguistiques supposent des rapports de force puisque la langue, à tout moment historique, est une conjoncture de formes fondamentales qui l'ont emporté sur les formes mineures (Venuti 1998, 10). La position dominante d'une forme n'est pas garantie une fois pour toutes : elle peut être renversée par les variations linguistiques (les dialectes, les jargons, les idiolectes, etc.). Cette constatation conduit, d'une part, à l'aspiration à adapter les textes des peuples colonisés au paradigme culturel du colonisateur, et de l'autre, à la sélection de textes qui pourraient renforcer le sentiment national des anciens colonisés.

En révélant les asymétries qui structurent les relations interculturelles au cours des siècles (Venuti 1998, 158), la traduction se place dans la logique coloniale résiduelle qui se manifeste principalement dans le désir du colonisateur d'asservir le colonisé, voire de supprimer son identité. Les traductions vers la langue du colonisateur constituent l'une des manifestations de la domination impériale : à ce titre, l'histoire de l'Inde coloniale a été réécrite dans la clé « civilisatrice » du colonisateur (Niranjana 2002, 55–76). Le colonisé, pour sa part, résiste à cet élan assimilateur. Dans les relations entre centre et périphérie de nos jours, la prise de position favorise plutôt la défense de la cause nationale. La traduction devient le symptôme du désir d'une réécriture postcoloniale de l'histoire : les traducteurs orientaux « s'approprient » pour ainsi dire les œuvres occidentales, en leur attribuant de nouvelles significations importantes pour leurs contextes nationaux. L'essentiel en l'occurrence n'est pas la tension entre la naturalisation et l'exotisation, mais la tentative de surmonter l'hégémonie culturelle du colonisateur. Le dépassement postcolonial des usages linguistiques confirme d'ailleurs que l'« activité traductrice en effet, dans les individus comme dans les groupes, émane d'inquiétudes existentielles relatives à la perception de leur identité » (Zumthor 1995, 205). Pour le colonisé, il est fondamental de protéger son identité culturelle et de faire face au colonisateur, y compris au prix de l'assimilation des œuvres de celui-ci. Le « tournant postcolonial » bouleverse les préceptes de la visée éthique de la traduction (Berman 1999, 73–78), à savoir la prise en considération de l'étrangéité et sa mise à l'épreuve (Berman 1984).

La traduction devient alors envisageable comme une métaphore de l'écriture postcoloniale et l'écriture postcoloniale comme une forme de traduction (Tymoczko 1999, 20–21). Engagée dans la voie des transferts culturels, politiques et idéologiques, la traduction postcoloniale met en jeu les rapports complexes entre la langue du colonisateur et la langue du colonisé, toutes les deux impliquées par la littérature postcoloniale. L'écrivain postcolonial vit dans hétéroglossie ; il traduit et s'autotraduit. L'hétérolinguisme, « indice de l'énonciation spécifique de la traduction et pierre angulaire d'une éthique du traduire » (Suchet 2014, 217), amène à penser la

traduction autrement. Il dénature la langue, fait éclater ses frontières, fait « voler en éclats le mythe de la “Langue saussurienne une et indivisible” » (Suchet 2014, 18).

Voilà quelques œuvres postcoloniales significatives à ce propos. Rédigées en français, bien qu'en tant que descendant d'intellectuels notables leur auteur maîtrise l'arabe classique à la perfection, les romans *Talismano* (1979) et *Phantasia* (1986) du tunisien Abdelwahab Meddeb offrent des exemples d'hybridation culturelle intentionnelle : « J'écris en français, mais je me situe dans la culture arabe classique » (Meddeb, cité in Dejeux 1982, 87). L'une des « immortelles » de l'Académie française, l'algérienne Assia Djebar, inverse le sens de l'interférence de la langue « faible » du colonisé à la langue « forte » du colonisateur. Dans *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985), cristallise la dimension intime de son choix de thématiser l'hétérolinguisme, en écrivant dans « la langue de l'ennemi » (Mehrez 1992, 124). Ce parti pris est déterminé tant par la volonté de décloisonnement, d'interpénétration linguistique et de syncrétisme déterritorialisant que par l'identité rhizomatique (Deleuze et Guattari 1980, 3) de l'écrivaine. L'affrontement entre le français arabisé des témoignages oraux des algériennes analphabètes et le français hexagonal des colonisateurs valorise le français créolisé de Djebar, en rejetant le discours dominant. Un autre académicien, le libanais Amin Maalouf, en s'inspirant d'un fait historique, construit lui aussi l'intrigue de son roman *Le Rocher de Tanios* (1993) autour de la quête identitaire. L'originalité de son écriture découle dans une grande mesure de la contamination de la langue française par l'humour libanais. Maalouf ne perd pas du reste l'occasion pour revendiquer son « identité métisse » et son « écriture métisse » (Solon 2012, 177).

La traduction postcoloniale partage les difficultés identitaires de la littérature postcoloniale, reflétées dans l'hybridation linguistique, culturelle et idéologique :

Art de l'imaginaire, dans ce sens la traduction est une véritable opération de créolisation, désormais une pratique nouvelle et imparable du précieux métissage culturel. Art du croisement des métissages aspirant à la totalité-monde, art du vertige et de la salutaire errance, la traduction s'inscrit ainsi et de plus en plus dans la multiplicité de notre monde. [...] Art de la

fugue d'une langue à l'autre, sans que la première s'efface, sans que la seconde renonce à se présenter. (Glissant 1996, 36)

Or, considérées comme des langues mineures par rapport aux langues majeures, la soumission, voire la mutation qu'impose la traduction aux langues vernaculaires des anciennes colonies paraît plus probable que l'inverse. Somme toute, au sein des langues périphériques et supercentrales se manifestent des tendances et des influences asymétriques, propres à la culture contemporaine.

3. (In)traduisibilité de l'identité culturelle et politique

L'identité culturelle et politique jette un défi au traducteur. Comment transmettre les *realia*, les culturèmes, les identitèmes, les allusions politiques qui risquent de ne pas être compris par un lecteur qui n'est pas familier avec la culture source ? Attendu que chaque langue-culture a ses propres expressions idiomatiques figées justifie leur mise en place dans une perspective politico-culturelle et non seulement sociolinguistique. La traduction est évaluée, en fonction d'une culture, au sens large du terme qui inclut plusieurs aspects, y compris les aspects actuels que le texte source transmet. Il devient essentiel que toute construction figurative soit véritablement entendue dans sa signification communicative pour ne pas risquer d'utiliser sa correspondance directe dans la langue cible, ce qui produirait une traduction erronée (Faini 2004, 103).

Le traitement du « fonds culturel » (Romney 1984, 267) demande d'appliquer le critère de commensurabilité ou « d'équivalence approximative » (Lakoff 1990, 322) comme condition d'adéquation. La traduction réussie dépend non seulement de la compétence linguistique du traducteur, mais aussi de sa capacité de rendre, dans la langue cible, les références culturelles et politiques du texte source. La « dialectique de la Personne » (Peeters 1999, 68) y joue un rôle de premier plan car elle structure l'identité. Normalement, quand il est censé transmettre l'identité culturelle ou politique, le traducteur opte soit pour l'*équivalence* soit pour l'*adaptation* privilégiant toutes les deux la culture cible, étant donné qu'elles

correspondent à l'horizon du lecteur et/ou des autorités publiques. Elles sont des marques de l'orientation ethnocentrique de la traduction et de la sous-estimation de la « dynamique identitaire » du texte source. L'ethnocentrisme vise à atteindre assurément une meilleure lisibilité, mais en même temps, il tend à déformer l'original pour l'adapter aux attentes des récepteurs de sa traduction.

La traduction peut alors être envisagée comme « un acte de réappropriation, de recentration identitaire » (Brisset 1990, 265). On recourt à la traduction identitaire² lorsque les « défaillances du code récepteur concernent [...] des rapports qui par exemple informent sur l'individualité, la position sociale, la région d'origine des locuteurs » (Brisset 1990, 260). Dans ces cas-là, le traducteur hésite inévitablement entre la transmission et la neutralisation de l'effet de l'original. En général, le traducteur prend en considération l'horizon d'un lecteur qui s'attend à retrouver dans le texte cible le langage auquel il est habitué.

Le transfert de l'identité culturelle et politique est menacé par trois dangers potentiels : l'*explicitation du non-dit*, la *réécriture* et l'*intertextualité*. Il incombe au traducteur de « décider s'il faut laisser telles quelles les références aux divers aspects culturels qu'il rencontre ou les transporter en les acclimatant. Son choix dépendra dans une grande mesure du public auquel il destine sa traduction » (Romney 1984, 267), mais aussi de la tradition littéraire et du contexte politique de sa langue-culture. L'explicitation de ce qui est inscrit implicitement ou explicitement dans l'original constitue un problème bidimensionnel : d'une part, il existe le risque de substituer les références culturelles et politiques par des équivalents en fonction du parti pris subjectif du traducteur ; d'autre part, celui-ci tend à expliciter le non-dit. La sous-estimation de l'horizon culturel et politique du lecteur conduit à des déformations du texte cible. Naturellement, le transfert est toujours partiel et incomplet, mais cela n'impose pas nécessairement la compensation des références perdues dans la traduction. Le non-dit est une caractéristique intrinsèque au langage et non pas à la traduction : « Il y a une part de non-dit dans le langage, soit qui provient d'une volonté de manier le secret, soit qui correspond à l'évidence de l'expérience partagée, et supposée commune à tous

les membres d'une communauté donnée » (Cordonnier 1995, 174). En ce sens, on ne peut pas s'attendre au même niveau de compétence culturelle ou politique des lecteurs du même texte en version originale et en traduction. Cela ne veut pas dire « abaisser » le texte source au niveau de ses récepteurs éventuels dans la culture cible, en le privant de toutes les traces de son altérité, y compris les allusions politiques, mais s'efforcer de les rendre de la manière la plus appropriée avec une perte minimum d'effets. La réécriture du texte source est associée à l'explicitation du non-dit qui peut être partagé par la majorité d'une communauté linguistique ou n'être accessible qu'à des *happy few*. La révélation du sens global de l'original implique tant le travail linguistique que le travail sur l'intertextualité comme partie inhérente du sens.

Le dépistage des connotations sous-jacentes acquiert une grande importance dans la traduction des singularités identitaires et culturelles. Dans une langue-culture, il existe plusieurs niveaux d'implicites, et donc, plusieurs lectures possibles de tout texte. Il ne faut pas en déduire cependant que les références culturelles et politiques cachées dans les œuvres d'une riche intertextualité sont transparentes pour tout le monde. Cela pousse certains traducteurs à clarifier et à expliciter l'implicite. La façon la plus facile de traiter l'intertextualité est le recours à des notes et à des commentaires, la rédaction des avant-propos et des postfaces élucidant les éléments clés pour la compréhension de l'original. Il est bien plus difficile de l'inscrire dans la traduction elle-même afin d'inciter le lecteur à élargir ses connaissances sur la langue-culture étrangère et à synchroniser son horizon d'attente avec celui de l'auteur du texte source. Quand le traducteur arrive à « replier tous les sens sous le mot » (Vegliante 2019, 142–144 min), il n'a pas besoin de note : la note devient à ce point une paraphrase inutile. Chaque terme acquiert alors une condensation extrême, s'enrichit de connotations, se charge de significations afin de donner de l'espace à l'imagination du lecteur.

4. Conclusion

La traduction exige un travail linguistique dans l'objectif de rendre explicite le sens porté par le texte. À cette fin, elle ne

doit pas purement et simplement s'adapter à la langue étrangère. Étant culturellement chargée, elle est orientée vers un public curieux de lire et d'apprendre des choses sur le mode de vie d'autrui sans désirer pour autant l'adopter. La civilisation occidentale est habituée à l'expansion de ses paradigmes sans être encline à accepter ceux du Tiers monde. Dans un tel contexte, le traducteur tend facilement et inconsciemment à rendre conforme au paradigme de sa propre langue « forte » un texte rédigé dans une langue « faible ». Avec l'appropriation de la méthode des belles infidèles, le français en fut, historiquement parlant, un exemple représentatif. Renforcée de plus en plus aujourd'hui, cette tendance a deux conséquences fâcheuses : « [l]e lecteur est placé sous tutelle, privé de son droit à la connaissance, et [...] le traducteur est privé de l'invention que suscite le désir de la faire connaître. Les deux herméneutiques sont profondément dépendantes du jeu des possibilités sociales » (Bollack 1992, 42).

Le futur de la traduction demeure toutefois incertain. Serait-elle destinée à disparaître à cause du globish qui détruira tout effort de traduire avec la prétention de retourner à la situation pré-babélique ? Ou bien saurait-elle s'insérer dans l'entre-langues et traverser l'entre-mondes grâce au traducteur – le médiateur, le passeur, le tiers inclus – dont la tâche consiste à réconcilier les langues dans la situation post-babélique ? Or, bien que l'histoire de l'humanité n'ait jamais connue une langue plus diffusée que le globish, le monolinguisme est limitatif et appauvrissant. La traduction, qui favorise les échanges interlinguistiques et les transferts interculturels, devient en revanche la gageure de la survie du plurilinguisme et du multiculturalisme.

NOTES

¹ En 2010, 55–60% de toutes les traductions du marché mondial sont réalisées depuis l'anglais ; 10 % depuis le français et l'allemand ; 1–3 % depuis l'espagnol, l'italien et le russe ; moins d'1 % depuis le chinois, l'hindi, le japonais, le malais, le swahili, le turc et l'arabe (Heilbronn 2010).

² Le rapport à l'autre donne lieu à trois modalités de traduction : *iconoclaste*, *perlocutoire* et *identitaire* (Brisset 1990, 35).

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Liminal Thresholds: Perception and Imagination under the Reign of Virtuality: A Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract

The inquiry that drives this article addresses the human need to understand how perceptual experience and interaction with images change with the transition from an analog mediation of reality to types of digitally mediated experiences. The purpose of this proposal is to investigate how human understanding of one's own corporality (cerebral/neurochemical, psychosomatic) expands at both endosomatic and exosomatic levels, as well as the exteriority in general (surrounding environment, other human or non-human individuals, objects, processes) with the emergence of liminal experiences of reality. In this context, liminal refers to boundary spaces between a world offered to be perceived and the consciousness of the one perceiving it, experiences that blur a clear delimitation threshold between what lies outside the perceiver and what is within their own neurochemical, biological, psychosomatic constitution. The methodology employed in this endeavour will be that provided by applied phenomenology, analysing those permutations in the realm of perception and imagination that arise with the new experiences offered to humans by virtual technologies. A critical revisit of the phenomenological pioneers (Husserl, Fink, Merleau-Ponty) will be conducted, observing how they anticipate the process of blurring the sharp distinctions between reality thresholds, so that the binaries delimiting between real-virtual/fictional or actual-passive hybridize through various technologies that no longer allow us to defend the assumption that human experience of reality is either unmediated or solely mediated by the epistemological instruments of the brain. The concept around which this research is built is that of virtuality, starting from analyzing how Husserlian phenomenology, alongside post-Husserlian phenomenology, describes perception, imagination, presentation and presentification, and image-consciousness. Then, we will question the ontological state of virtuality, drawing on Bergson's and Deleuze's perspectives on the reality of the virtual. We will observe how the understanding that traditional phenomenology provides of virtuality changes with the emergence of the possibility to live experiences with an advanced degree of technological mediation, using social media networks, gaming, and immersive technologies (AR, VR, MR) as applied case studies.

Keywords: perception, Husserl, virtual reality, phenomenology, Deleuze

Introduction

The question that drives this research targets the way the perceptual experience and the interaction between humans and images change over time, alongside the transition from understanding reality through analogic mediation towards the emergence of new types of digitally mediated experiences. By the term *liminal* we mean in this context those spaces of frontier between a world which is given to be perceived and the consciousness of the perceiver, experimentations that prevent the establishment of a clear delineating threshold between what is located outside the perceiver and what is located inside its own neurochemical, biological and psychosomatic constitution. We are referring to the emergence of imersive technologies belonging to the spectrum of Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality.

Early as in 2003, in *The Virtual*, Rob Shields notifies the multitude of meanings that the concept of virtual or of virtuality can acquire, mentioning that ontology and epistemology research for ages the spectra of this concept, which was opposed to the concept of real or reality. Shields was advocating for surpassing the impermeable distinction between reality and virtuality, considering the fact that the Virtual exists precisely for better understanding what means to be real and what are the spectra of reality. Since then the 3Ds arhitectural technologies, flight simulators or RPGs utilised data and sensory informations from physical world for consolidating a world-ensemble constituted by information (Shields 2003, 21). The perspective proposed by Shields proposes the need to go beyond the task of questioning the reality of virtual, announcing the need to construct a new extended theory of reality that will include the virtual and the concrete as two distinct type of real (Shields 2003, 22).

We will utilise applied phenomology as a methodology for researching these permutations that occur within the sphere of perception and imagination, following the new experiences that virtual technologies are offering to humans. We will make a critical revision of traditional phenomenology, observing how Husserl and Merleau-Ponty anticipate the process of blurring the solid distinctions between thresholds of reality, in order

that the dualities which delineate between real and virtual/fictional or between actual and passive are hybridised by different technologies which don't let us to still maintain the assumption that the human experience of reality would be a non-mediated one, mediated at most just by the epistemological tools of the brain. We will notice how social media networks, gaming activities and immersive technologies (AR, VR, MR) extend right away the meaning of notion of experience, and extend implicitly the traditional goals of phenomenology.

Virtuality becomes a way of living in itself. The Pandemics has raised our awareness of this fact, but since the emergence of the first personal computers and smartphones it was expected a dimming of the ontological distinction between real and virtual, or a virtualisation in extenso of human experience in futuristic, utopian or dystopian scenarios. Today, maybe the best example of a life built around virtuality is the one of the life lived by professional gaming communities, that are spending on a daily basis an exponential number of hours training their skills and building international networks of virtual communications through platforms like Discord. Why phenomenology could help us understanding in a more concrete and dynamic way the practical, social, and moral implications of virtuality? Because of its analytical focus on lived and sensed body (fr. *le corps vecu*), on affectivity and kinesthetics, but also because of its attention to the manner in which the lived experience is encompassed by the environment.

The stakes of a phenomenology of virtuality are not just descriptive, but could be as well ethical and political ones, utilising the individual experience of virtuality to infer what are the advantages and the moral menaces that virtuality can offer to contemporary communities.

This approach intends, in the first place, to give a phenomenological description about the experience of virtuality (in which way the objects appears in the perceptual field; what are the psychosomatic processes by which the subject targets these objects), and in the second place, to draw a possible response regarding the questions of the ontological status of virtual objects.

1. Perception in Husserl's phenomenology

Husserl (1918-1926, 3) indicates a possible paradox of perception: the external perception finds itself under the constant pretention of fulfilling a role that is not suitable for its nature. It is about the contradiction between an objective meaning given by the unity of intuition and a cluster of possible appearances and apparitions of a phenomenon. We are questioning about the way *the continuous synthesis, taken as a unity of coincidence, facilitates the apparition of a same meaning, and how a consciousness of an always new possibilities of apparition persists constantly against factual and limited streams of apparition*. The perception presents simultaneously the object in its totality, but the subject is aware of just a singular aspect (*Abschattung*) at a given moment. This aspect is known as *the problem of perceptual presence* (Alva Noë 2004, 59-65), in other words, we are referring to the subject's capacity of having simultaneously the perceptual experience of a human figure that is regarded by the subject, but also the perceptual experience of the wall beneath that human figure. From a phenomenological point of view, the wall constitutes solely a secondary background of the perceptual experience. *In which consists the sense of presence of a detailed environment if not in the fact that we are seeing it* (Alva Noë 2004, 60) ? In this way we could describe the paradox of a perception which is aware also about details that are outside the field of focus. We are taking as example a perceptual experience which consists in holding a bottle in our hands while our eyes are closed. The sensation of the presence of the whole bottle exists, even if the contact is haptic, through few isolated points: *is the experience surpassing what is given or should be affirmed that the sensations of the bottle as a whole it's a kind of fabulation?* How could we sense the existence of an object or of a phenomenon in its integrality, although we are perceiving just an isolated point of it? In other words, *we are taking act of the presence of what, strictly speaking, we are not perceiving* (Alva Noë 2004, 60). A possible explanation could consist in the passage from a limited perception towards conceptualization, namely a logical formalisation: observing a cat's tail – the transfer towards the cat as a whole in the mind.

Taken on its own the explanation does not satisfy, because what is at stake it's not a description of the thinking, judgement or the belief that there exists a bottle taken as a whole, but a description of *the perceptual sense of its presence*. Prior to thinking that there is an object taken in its totality, the subject perceives the objects in a totalized way, even if the subject does not see it as a whole at once. In other words, the sense of perceptual presence does not depend on the *disponibility of a corresponding thought*.¹ A possible heuristic tool in order to resolve this paradox could be the enactivism, as an anti-representationalist theory of cognition which proposes a phenomenological methodology, where the cognition emerges as a process resulted from dynamic interaction between an active organism and its environment. When we see the tail of a cat hiding after the fence, the enactivist approach does not consider that the perceptual presence of the cat as a whole object take place through mental representation of it based on the perception of the tail, but rather through the accessibility given by its perception. The cat's tail give an perceptual access that make the whole cat to be *present in a virtual way* (Alva Noë 2004, 63). The basis of this accesibility consists in our possession of sensory-motor capacities: if I blink the cat is out of sight in totality, if I move a few inches right I can observe besides its tail also its fur stickings through the fence. Our relation with what is exceeding the visual field is mediated by the dynamics of sensory-motor localisation: *the sense of presence of the whole cat or of the whole bottle consists precisely in my implicit knowledge and understanding t through a movement of the eye, head, bring in the visual field parts of these objects that for the moment are concealed* (Alva Noë 2004, 63-64).²

Two types of sensory-motor relations exist: a. movement-dependent relations, when the smallest movement of the body triggers sensory stimulation; b. object-dependent relations, when the movement of object produces sensorial changes. Generally in the moment when a subject perceives something X, the relation is mediated simultaneously by a dependence of movement and a dependence of object. We are taking as example the epistemic relation between us and the next chamber to that in wich we are sitting: this is not a

perceptual relation, because although it is dependent on movement, it is not dependent on object.

This problem of perceptual presence concerned Husserl for a long time, being one of the factors that facilitated the emergence of his theory of perception. We are presenting in the following lines the characteristics of perception in Husserl: the perception is related to presence, namely the everyday external perceptions, belonging to the natural and naive attitude, by which a concrete physical object is given directly and immediately to us; what facilitates the originarity of perception is related to the fact that we are perceiving physical objects through external perception, but not when we move to the spectrum of memory or of a theological expectancy (Husserl 1913, § 1). Husserl (1898-1925, 101) operates with a distinction between perception and memory or expectancy, the latter two being nothing else than different types of *presentification* (ger. *Vergegenwärtigung*), and the former being the quintessential type of *presentation* (*Gegenwärtigung*). The perception is related to the present objects and things, which must be experienced as being real. *Perception makes that a present reality appears to us as being present and as being a reality* (Husserl 1898-1925, 4), in which the German term for reality is *Wirklichkeit*, referring in other places to the idea of actuality, appearing that Husserl uses them in an interchangeable manner (O'Shiel 2022, 10). The actuality or *body*, *I can* refers to a system of an unmodified intentionality in an absolute way, the intentionality of *doxa* (opinion).

The belief or the opinion does not belong to the specifics of a presentation (*Vorstellung*), it isn't defined as a sentiment associated to these presentations, it is not a subject's mode of being affected, but rather it is *the unmodified consciousness itself* (Husserl 1898-1925, 557-558). The belief belongs to the laws of reason, namely those essential laws of the intuitive fulfillment of the unmodified consciousness. These essential laws postulate the objects as identities with a ceaseless confirmation, existing in themselves in opposition with volatile consciousness (Husserl 1898-1925, 557-558). Originally, the belief is not propositional or reflective, under the guise of *I think that this bottle is real*, but rather it is automatic and pre-

reflective (O'Shiel 2022, 11). *The basic mode of perception constitutes and contains a certain recognition of the actuality and reality.* The actuality belongs to the experiential character of perceptual consciousness. The most basic form of perceptual consciousness is the unmodified and the un-modalized one, according to Husserl. By its nature, this form of consciousness postulates the automatic belief in the independence and the durability of objects, despite a series of variations and conscious absences (O'Shiel 2022, 11). Moreover, this is a certain type of belief that posits itself as being *impresional*, giving the basic structure of perceptual consciousness in Husserl's theory of perception (1898-1925, 215-218). In other words, the perception is understood by Husserl as a primordial form of consciousness, being related to the real and present things. This perspective is also encompassed in the term attributed by Husserl to perception, namely that of *original or originary consciousness* (Husserl 1918–1926, 4). The perceptual experience is inexhaustible; it is related to the specificity of perception, as only certain aspects or characteristics of the phenomenon present themselves to consciousness at a particular moment. According to Husserl (1918–1926, 19), there is no all-encompassing or totalizing perception. He asserts that *we cannot think of the given object without empty horizons at any stage of perception.* This means that any perception is situated, embedded in a perspective that implies a subject perceiving³ and, at the same time, *empty horizons* that can be filled with more perception: (eye movement, head movement, hand gestures, displacement, etc.). Understood as belonging to the lived body, perception can only be *synesthetic* and *kinesthetic*. Attempting to discuss each of the five senses separately constitutes a static act of abstraction or analysis, whereas at the level of everyday lived experience, the senses are driven by dynamic relationships and processes among themselves, as well as in relation to the environment, people, or objects. In other words, reductionism of perception to mere sight should be avoided. Husserl's synesthesia encompasses all five senses, considering that synesthetic processes, along with kinesthetic ones, have their roots in the tactile act. Touching is thus a fundamental sense, which not only enables primal activities

such as standing or walking but also brings together the other senses, centralizing and unifying them in a perceptual system (O'Shiel 2022, 13).

This perceptual system is provided in Husserl through the notion of “Leib,” *the absolute Now of the entire spatial orientation* (Husserl 1952, 69), which simultaneously implies the *Ego-pole* of a conscious agent (Husserl 1893-1917, §18). Perceptual consciousness always involves an embodied agent situated in a spatial reality (O'Shiel 2022, 13). This spatiality must necessarily be marked by a horizontal aspect: every perceptual act opens up in relation to a horizon, whether it be an internal horizon (looking inward) or an external horizon (looking outward). Thus, horizontality appears as a fundamental structure of perception (Husserl 1918-1926, 6-7). Husserl aims to distance himself from a privilege granted to the spatial horizon concerning perception, considering that perceptual consciousness is already situated within a dynamic temporal horizon. That *Now* provides the other necessary dimension for the Leib to establish itself as point 0 of perception.

We observe three moments of perception in Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness or consciousness-time, which cannot be understood as separate outside the continuity of the lived current experience (Husserl 1893-1917, § 14): a) *the primordial Now*; b) *retention* (barely past); c) *protention* (not yet arrived/future). This tripartition suggests how an inherent notion of absence or potentiality is implicated in any movement or change that takes place at the perceptual level (O'Shiel 2022, 13). Husserlian researchers acknowledge, even in the 1980s, that there is a certain dynamic between presence and absence unfolding within the perceptual regime: Sokolowski (1980, 640) states that *presence can only appear or be understood in contract and in relation to absence*. This dynamic between presence and absence is established based on the horizontal structure of perception: *someone is never in the presence of a completely absolute presence*. In other words, any act of perception at a certain moment involves a protention, something more along the space-time axis that has not yet been perceived. O'Shiel (2022, 14) concludes by stating that although

perception provides an object or a set of present and real objects, it simultaneously opens up to things, aspects, or dimensions that decisively are not (yet) there. Husserl himself (1918-1926, 11) asserts that every perception implicitly invokes a whole perceptual system. Any appearance is actually inscribed in a system of this appearance, related to internal and external intentional horizons. There is no mode of appearance in which the appeared object can offer itself in its entirety: according to Sokolowski, Bernet (1982, 86) shows that this Husserlian concept of the *presence of presence* (*gegenwärtige Gegenwart*) can be interpreted either as the zenith of the metaphysics of presence (within the Heideggerian post-Husserlian tradition), or as an attempt to derive the presence of a now-existing present from the absence of a non-now.

Following all the considerations mentioned above, we can briefly outline in general terms the characteristics of perception in Husserl's view: present, real, actual, certain opinions/beliefs, and impressive/impressional, inexhaustible, situated, perspectival, necessarily synesthetic and kinesthetic, embodied in space-time, horizontal containing implicit absence. For a phenomenology of immersive experiences in augmented or virtual realities, what is most interesting is precisely the inherent horizontality of perception alongside the structure of presences that are in a dynamic interdependence with implicit absences. These implicit absences will be referred to by O'Shiel (2022, 15) as *virtual presences*.

How could we relate to this notion of the virtual? O'Shiel, following in the footsteps of Rob Shields (2003, 2), points out that in everyday English language, the term "virtual" can be substituted with *almost*: "I have virtually finished" can be understood as "I am almost finished." If we start from this substitution in everyday language and integrate it into a phenomenological analysis, we understand that the back facet of the observed phone is almost-present or virtually-present, as it will be actually present immediately when I turn the phone. However, once I turn the phone, the front facet that was previously present will become absent, suggesting that any new act of presence will be accompanied by new absences, constituting a lived dynamic that O'Shiel (2022, 15) believes

should be carefully nuanced and detailed under the notion of *perceptual or lived virtuality*.

2. The Problem of Image-Consciousness in Husserl

In English, the term *Bild* from *Bildbewusstsein* could be translated as both *picture-consciousness* and *image-consciousness*. O'Shiel prefers the latter to suggest that although Husserl refers to sculptures, paintings, and photographs from his era, this term can also apply to digital images and types of images that are not necessarily visual (such as soundscapes in ambient music). Image-consciousness carries an oxymoronic character in Husserl's philosophy. It seems to contain both present elements, related to perception (real and perceived objects), and absent elements (unreal, imaginable objects). In the case of photography, when I look at a picture, I deal with both actual, perceived elements that constitute the picture as a physical object I can look at or hold, but the content of the picture refers to an object that decisively is not present, not before my eyes.

Husserl (1898-1925, 19) proposes a tripartite structure of image-consciousness: a) The physical image, the material object constituted from marble, paper, or others; b) The object that represents or illustrates (image-object); c) The object that is represented or illustrated (image-subject).

This structure can be suitable for both analog and emerging digital media after Husserl's death, such as televisions, computers, smartphones, and the like. This type of consciousness goes beyond the realm of the visual, as seen in the case of auditory images formed by physical waves (physical image) that are heard (image-object) and refer to a subject image: for example, when we hear a song by a favourite band on the radio, and it reminds us of their concert that we attended.

There are also tactile and olfactory image-consciousness experiences. In the case of touch, when we interact with a gaming controller (physical image), it produces the effect (image-object) of making our avatar run in the game (image-subject). In the olfactory realm, when we smell an apricot-scented pastry (physical image), it evokes the scent (image-object) of an apricot (image-subject). We can extrapolate the

example of the apricot-scented pastry to the realm of taste, showing that when we taste a bite, we can mentally evoke the image of an apricot that is not physically present in our immediate vicinity (O'Shiel 2022, 24).

The difference between the visual and auditory planes compared to the tactile and gustatory planes regarding the relationship between perception and image consists of the following: in the perceptual act, the visual and auditory planes are distanced from the perceived object, giving them a greater capacity to become image-objects, whereas for touch and taste, physical contact with certain objects of the body is necessarily involved. However, we will observe that with the emergence of highly sophisticated immersive virtual technologies, the other senses can easily acquire the status of image-objects. In other words, in any image, its subject is made present by the specific physical version that someone sees, hears, feels, smells, or tastes (O'Shiel 2022, 25).

The tripartite structure of image-consciousness activates a dynamic of intentional implications: perception (*Perzeption*, with the sense of awareness of the sensory substrate, distinct from *Wahrnehmung*, which refers to perception involving a strong tetic character not found in image-consciousness) of the image-object (*Bildobjekt*) on the material support (physical image or *Bildding*) intentionally evokes the image-subject (*Bildsujet*). In the words of Maxime Doyon (2019, 197): *based on the perception of a sensory substrate, a subject is imaginatively presentified*.

Image-consciousness involves, according to Husserl (1898-1925, 79), a *perceptual-imaginative apprehension* (*perzeptiv-imaginative Auffassung*). We can assert that image-consciousness is part of that spectrum in which the perceptual act of presenting an image-object allows for the imaginative presentation of an image-subject based on the materiality of the support through which the image-object is perceived. In other words, based on perceiving an owl framed in the materiality of a photographic frame, I can imagine an owl that is not physically present near me. This phenomenon, which connects perception (*Wahrnehmung*) with quasi-perception (*Quasi-Wahrnehmung*), is due to the fact that the same sensory content

(the image of the owl) is apprehended as an image-object framed in a physical image but simultaneously facilitates the opening to an imaginative consciousness (Husserl 1898-1925, 86). In the case of image-consciousness, imagination does not have a synthetic or transcendental role because the image-subject is represented within the material context in which it is perceived. Thus, imagination takes on an empirical sense, allowing Husserl to affirm that image-consciousness constitutes a moment of perceptual experience, or in other words, that image-consciousness is given based on perception (Husserl 1898-1925, 82).

Maxime Doyon (2019, 198) identifies in Husserl a distinction between image-consciousness and perceptual fantasies, but O'Shiel does not see a fundamental distinction between the two. We could argue that there is rather a difference in degree than in content, a difference related to the capacity for transfer from presentation to imaginative presentation (presentification). In Doyon's view, what gives specificity to perceptual fantasies is the simultaneous co-existence of the actual (perceived) and the non-actual (imagined) in the moment of experience. When we are spectators of a theater play, we experience a state of conflict (*Widerstreit*) between the presence of the actor and the figure of the emperor he is portraying. This coexistence of perception and quasi-perception points to a dual nature of the experience that can be found at the level of representation: *while the actor is present perceptually, the fictional character is imaginatively present in the actor* (Doyon 2019, 198). What could constitute a difference from experiences containing image-consciousness is the reduction of the image-object to the image-subject during the experience. In other words, during a theater play, the spectator undergoes an experience in which what is currently perceived is concealed by the imagined object: the spectator no longer sees the actor but actually sees the king. We consider that this situation is also possible within image-consciousness, so we will not maintain a sharp difference between the two terms, given that both are constituted by the same structural elements (a perceived materiality serving as a support for an image-object representing or illustrating an image-subject; a perceptual-

present-physical background referring to an imaginative-absent-unreal background). An important observation made by Doyon (2019, 199), with which we agree, is that the way perception and imagination collaborate in intentional consciousness does not follow the Kantian path of a synthetic function of imagination. Bundles of sensations do not require a subsequent synthetic realization; rather, imaginative consciousness, at certain moments, requires a material support on which to project its content.

We can describe image-consciousness as *the external physical phenomenon that stimulates one or more senses to experience an object that is not truly present in that field from a perceptual standpoint* (O'Shiel 2022, 25).

The physical image belongs to the realm of the perceptible, while the image-subject is accessible only through presentification. The status of the image-object is ambiguous in Husserl's framework. One possible explanation for this status is the ambivalence that the image-object holds in relation to the physical image. Simultaneously, it can be understood as part of the physical material support given to the perceptual act, serving as a presentation. However, on the other hand, it does not present itself as self-sufficient, where the presented object would be self-referential and not refer to the alterity of a horizon that would be inactual at the moment of experience (the difference between the figure of the owl as a perceived object and the figure of the owl as an image-object referring to a real owl as an image-subject).

Consider the case of a football match broadcast on television: the television is considered as a physical assembly, thus a physical image; the images transmitted from the match are considered as image-objects, and the match experienced directly from the stadium is taken as an image-subject. O'Shiel (2022, 26) names this experience of the image-object as the phenomenal and sensory experience of *looking at something that clearly is not in the room where one is observing*. This “*not being there*” is guaranteed by the final link of the tripartition, namely the actual match taking place in the stadium, presented as an image-subject. If I were at the stadium, I would perceive the match. As I am in my room watching it through the screen,

I can say that I am *pseudo-present* at the match, through this tripartite structure provided by image-consciousness.

Certainly, we can affirm that image-consciousness does not constitute a type of perception, as within perceptual acts, we do not operate with this transgressive attitude of illustrating a certain form of absence or quasi-presence that is not physically within the proximate horizon of experience. Another example suggesting that image-consciousness surpasses the perceptual threshold relates to cases where various non-human animals, when looking into a mirror, try to search beyond the mirror for the figure they observe, implying that they do not have the capacity to access image-consciousness as a post-perceptual threshold.

At the same time, image-consciousness also distinguishes itself from pure imagination or fantasy, as the latter does not require the postulate of a physical image, of an actual materiality, to construct its object.

We could define image-consciousness as a hybridized mix between perception and imagination. However, a contemporary, post-Husserlian term that could be suitable for this type of experience is that of *artificial or virtual presence* (Wiesing, 2010). Husserl reflects on a photograph representing a child: the image-object cannot be confused with the image-subject; rather, it functions as an analog of the image-subject. The child being represented differs in terms of size, color, and other aspects from the child represented. The child in the photograph appears as a photographic image of the represented child. At the same time, Husserl distinguishes between the physical image and the image-object because the physical image constitutes a real object that is perceived. We consider that the ambiguity and complications arising in the understanding of the image-object stem precisely from Husserl's position of not granting the image-object a constitutive status within the physical image. We believe that the image-object can be perceived as a real object itself, belonging to the material framework of the photograph, without bypassing its evocative capacity, detaching itself from its material instantiation in the physical image, and pointing towards an image-subject that is perceptually absent.

The status of image-consciousness remains uncertain in Husserl, potentially being categorized as that liminal space between perception and pure imagination. In the context of the emergence of new virtual-artificial-immersive technologies (AR, VR in gaming, and artistic experiences), a clarification of this status is required to understand the phenomenological nuances of these types of experiences more comprehensively.

How does post-Husserlian phenomenology respond to the ambiguity of the status assigned to image-consciousness in Husserl's research?

3. Perception and Imagination in Merleau-Ponty

For Merleau-Ponty, there is no clear-cut distinction between perception and imagination, as in the realm of lived experience, there is a fundamental intertwining of these two dual capacities of human experience (O'Shiel 2022, 81). If we consider imagination in a general sense as the human capacity to evoke absent objects, this interweaving operates as a primordial framework for the entire existence and human experience. However, there are passages that distinguish, following the Husserlian tradition, between perception and fantasy (understood as imagination in a narrower sense).

Merleau-Ponty remains Husserlian both in *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Primacy of Perception* when he accords perception the status of primary experience. In terms of understanding and describing perception, he borrows terms from the Husserlian language, such as the lived-body or *Leib*, characteristics of inexhaustibility, horizontality, spatiality as a constant now, synesthesia, alongside the structure of spatiotemporal presence as fundamental components of the perceptual system. However, Merleau-Ponty's innovative contribution lies in focusing on somatic experience, analyzing in detail the centrality of the lived body in the frames of experience. This total centrality that Merleau-Ponty attributes to the concept of "Leib" even allows him to claim that a theory of the body already contains within itself a theory of perception (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 239). This total centrality of the lived body allows Merleau-Ponty to argue that the nature of human experience is always dynamic, intertwined, ambiguous, or even

contradictory. The difficulty in phenomenologically separating types of intentional consciousness that coexist interdependently outside the exercise of phenomenologizing experience arises from this dynamism.

While Merleau-Ponty does not systematically focus his research on imagination, there are passages in *Phenomenology of Perception* that can offer exegetical insights into the relationship between perception, imagination, and virtuality (O'Shiel 2022, 83). Unlike Husserl and Fink, who maintain a strong distinction between perception and imagination concerning the ways of presenting an object, Merleau-Ponty, following a Heideggerian line, argues that there is no case where a perceptual act takes place purified of imagination. In other words, no type of consciousness *is closed in on itself* (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 338). However, Merleau-Ponty still maintains the distinction between perception and fantasy as a specific case of imagination, as fantasy can refer to the horizon of pure unreality. Any temporal perceptual structure consists of a mixture of presence and absence, so intentional experience admits relative degrees of presence and reality. In other words, there are no phenomena that are purely present and real or purely absent and unreal in Merleau-Ponty; each phenomenon is constituted through this mixture of immanent presence-reality and transcendent absence-unreality (Merleau-Ponty 1947, 16). In *Eye and Mind* (1961, 24, 41, 54), the French phenomenologist illustrates the interplay between perception and imagination through their relations to the couplet of presence-absence. He shows that sight is divided into the sight of thought (reflection) and the sight of the body (which includes perception, imagination, image-consciousness or fantasy). Mental images (fantasies) bring absent objects into presence, necessarily using elements of the body. The field of the imaginary is simultaneously near and far from what pertains to the actual realm of perception, as it still utilizes the body as the actual structure of experience but in a manner that allows the subject to transcend this field of actuality. What should be understood here is not an affirmation that post-perceptive types of intentional consciousness have the capacity to actualize objects, but rather that any external physical image involves

reality in some form. In other words, the Husserlian couplet of image-object and image-subject or Fink's concept of the image-world should be treated as real structures, even if they do not belong to the order of perceptual actuality. Following Bergson, Merleau-Ponty does not oppose the imaginary to the real but strictly to the actual. Paintings, photographs as physical images possess this capacity to use the body imaginatively to make present objects that exceed the sphere of perceptible actuality.

The presence of an absence in a perceptual experience cannot be explained without invoking the imaginative capacity of the subject, a capacity intertwined with perception in *the pre-objective reality of the being-in-the-world act* (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 95). Although aware of the horizontality in Husserlian perception, Merleau-Ponty does not seem to legitimize terms such as *empty intentions*, which would describe perceptual acts without the need for an appeal to imagination (O'Shiel 2022, 85). However, while maintaining a particular distinction between perception and fantasy, Merleau-Ponty suggests the ambivalence between the general interdependence and the local opposition between perception and imagination. This point seems to support his assumption that human experience possesses a contradictory nature.

Both from Merleau-Ponty's research on painting and his work on film, it emerges that any experience should be analyzed within a particular medium, avoiding attempts to operate with strict and general distinctions between what is real and what is not, what is perceived and what is imagined. Any attempt to give a univocal status to a type of intentional act within a phenomenal experience would be doomed to failure because it would not align with the postulate of interdependence and intertwining between different types of consciousness.

4. The concept of Virtual in Merleau-Ponty

The French phenomenologist uses the term "*virtual*" in several instances (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 129, 289). It proves useful in establishing the relationship between the *body schema* and the *virtual body*. The body schema is understood as the general capacity to be aware of our body engaged in dynamic

interaction with the world, and this interaction necessarily involves a *virtual body*. The virtual body refers to the imaginative ability to mentally project alternative positions of the body through which a situation could be observed (Steeves 2004, 18-26).

The virtual body not only serves the function of facilitating the experience of perceptual change, possibility, or potentiality, but it also has a performative or actional status. This involves facilitating learning and adaptive abilities, inherent in the imaginative ability of the virtual body. In other words, the perceptual horizon of one's own body harbors dynamic potentialities of its various variants that inherently emerge from its interactions with the surrounding environment. Steeves identifies 8 types of imaginative engagements in Merleau-Ponty: bodily imaginings, perceptual imaginings, aesthetic imaginings, fanciful imaginings, pathological imaginings, self-imaginings, elemental imaginings, and existential imaginings. There is ongoing debate about whether these 8 types differ in any way from the Husserlian terms, including imagination, image-consciousness, or perceptual fantasy. However, it is certain that, in Merleau-Ponty, the emphasis on the somatic focus of phenomenal experience involves a broader type of imagination within perception. The body is understood as the pivot that stands between perceiving and imagining, allowing the fusion of the two within the experience. While differences in nature between perceptual reality and imaginary unreality can be observed in Husserl and Fink, Merleau-Ponty exhibits more specific theoretical differences between them. These differences subscribe to a general framework of experience, where the two merge within the continuum of experience.

The status of image-consciousness in Merleau-Ponty is explored in an article by Trevor Perri from 2013, analyzing the ontological implications arising from Merleau-Ponty's research on painting and art as images. Paintings take on the same status as objects mediating between pure perception and pure fantasy, and due to this ambivalence, paintings have the capacity to blend presence and absence, reality and unreality, visibility and invisibility in Merleau-Ponty's view (Perri 2013,

77). Similar to Fink, the quality of being a physical image in photography or painting cannot be denied, establishing itself as a real-present object related to perception. However, this dynamic between quasi-presence (material support + referential content) and absence (the real or fictional referent to which the referential content points) clearly demonstrates that image-consciousness does not constitute a self-sufficient perception. Another aspect highlighted by Perri is that within Merleau-Ponty's theory of art or painting, the function of objects is not one of representation or illustration but rather of expression. In this sense, mediums like painting or photography augment perception rather than presenting a past perceptual act because these mediums make visible details that were previously invisible (Perri 2013, 88). Art adds something to the perceptual field rather than representing pre-existing elements within it. This augmenting function occurs not only on the perceptual field but also on the somatic processes of the body. The idea is that painting, photography, or other artistic mediums open or even unlock a certain awareness or appreciation of internal somatic movements (Perri 2013, 93-94), emphasizing once again the primordial centrality of the lived body in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. However, the French phenomenologist seems to accept the idea of pure imagination, fantasy, which in a local sense differs from perception and other imaginative acts because it does not need that concrete support to make present a phenomenon or object absent from the perceptual field. In other words, human capacity to construct fictions, to imagine worlds, to visualize forms, numbers, letters do not require an immediate perceptual background to activate. The idea of an expansion of perception contradicts arguments suggesting that perception and reality are rather impoverished resources in the face of the imaginary. Anabelle Dufourcq (2015, 39) even speaks of the ability of artworks to activate *a super or over-presence* in spectators.

Art and the imaginary cannot be confined to absences and fictions alone; they must also include elements from the realm of the real. Following the author's footsteps, we can assert that the real possesses a certain imaginative foundation, especially as our daily experiences involve the naturalization of

mediated experiences, where the sphere of the actual-present-perceptible no longer clearly distinguishes itself from the virtual-unreal-absent. This is because the types of objects that could constitute image-consciousness today have been acclimatized to human phenomenal experience.

A simple observation exercise makes us aware that we have in our possession, in close proximity to our bodies, at least one device that generates dynamics between presence and absence, namely the smartphone. Even when we sleep, it is near us, functioning as a sort of non-human assistant to humans, defined by its programmable capacity (the phone's clock/alarm function). The field of the real has been virtualized by filling it with supports that can generate content that cannot be perceived as a physical object. This prompts us to rethink, from a phenomenological perspective, the ways in which we could describe the relationship between perception and non-perceptive acts or how we typologize the status of these intentional acts that phenomenological tradition has theorized and problematized. Here, Husserl, Fink, and Merleau-Ponty agree. Fundamentally, they concur, even with slightly different motivations, on the conclusion that image-consciousness, compared to other types of presentifications, lies somewhere between pure perception and pure imagination. This is because it operates with a quasi-perception and a quasi-absence from the physical plane of an evoked object. In contrast to Husserl and Fink, Merleau-Ponty seems to radicalize this conclusion to the extent of the inability to make a general distinction between perception and imagination. Both operate simultaneously for the continuity of everyday experience, intertwining in the lived body.

At this moment, we are still in ambiguity regarding the methodological debate in the history of phenomenology on the distinction or interdependence between perception and imagination. It is certain that the differences in the positions of Husserl, Fink, and Merleau-Ponty are largely differences in nuance and emphasis, as discussed above. However, in the case of the latter, the phenomenological description of an experience seeks to melt into a somatic continuum what Husserl attempted to describe through a reductive distinction. This was achieved

by separating, in phenomenological discourse, categories of cognitive and psycho-somatic processes that could not be separated in lived experience. One could speculate that Merleau-Ponty does not find a formal distinction between phenomenological discourse and the pre-phenomenological experience being described.

The analysis of a phenomenon must be carried out taking into account the subject's situatedness in a somatic center absorbed by the spatiotemporal continuity of the ambient environment. We could call this type of approach an eco-phenomenology of somatic situatedness. Another way to resolve this uncertainty regarding the separation or fusion of perception and imagination would be to turn to ontology. If we start from the assumption that phenomenology seeks to describe an eminently subjective experience, it is easy to understand that the subject is situated in an ontological environment—put differently, in a field of life or existence. Ontology could help us fit phenomenal experience into an ontological framework that might regulate the relationship between perception and imagination through analogies with the interrelationships between modes of existence.

Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze offer insights that could help regulate a suitable framework for the relationships between the real and the unreal, the actual and the potential, the absent and the present.

Their processual-materialist approach to a theory of life, which is outside the phenomenological method, leads them to question the possibility of pure perception. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson suggests that pure perception and pure memory cannot be experienced in everyday lived experience, and the concept of virtuality has a profound metaphysical significance, as it is found in vast portions of the experience of the real world. The virtual suddenly becomes a threshold, an intercessor, or a liminal space between other thresholds, such as the real and the unreal, the present and the absent, the actual and the potential.

Pure perception and pure memory function more like the two extremities of conceptual poles that cannot be differentiated in the praxis of life. Rather, in a processual and

holistic ontology, they are understood to mutually interpenetrate in the constitution of a lived body's experience. Bergson and Merleau-Ponty converge in granting privilege to a synesthetic approach to the description of lived experience.

Avoiding a fall into either idealism or realism, Bergson constructs what O'Shiel (2022, 92) termed a “monism of the image,” where every element of reality is in some way an image, and even matter is understood as *a collection of images* (Bergson 1896, 1). Bergson's technical sense of the image refers to a kind of existence that is beyond what idealists call *representation* and this side of what realists call a *thing*.

There is a certain equivalence between what phenomenologists call the object of which consciousness is informed, from real-present objects to unreal-absent objects (from chairs to unicorns), and what Bergson terms the image. As a conceptual hypothesis, pure perception would involve a total immersion in the experience of matter, eliminating any form of memory so that the perceiver of matter becomes immanent to matter. In other words, pure perception could be understood as matter itself, as what is perceived without being correlated to an agent perceiving. At the other conceptual pole is pure memory, the realm of a mind that is entirely purified of any perceptual or somatic influence—a mind without a body.

For Bergson, virtuality serves as both an aid to perception and memory. Regarding perception, every perceptual act opens up a horizon of possible actions on objects. Bergson considers that any proximate action separated from the body by an interval function as a *virtual action* (Bergson 1896, 57). When looking at a bottle of juice, I virtualize a number of actions I could immediately take—pick up the bottle, drink from it, place it back on the table. Objects in proximity reflect possible actions arising from the perceptual act. These virtual actions are always in a lively dynamic with the body generating perceptions and enactive memories, which can be understood in Husserlian language as active retentions (O'Shiel 2022, 94). Concerning the realm of memory, any recollection of a phenomenon that was initially perceived remains in a virtual state (Bergson 1896, 270) until the moment it is activated.

The methodological principle that allows Bergson to propose virtuality as a facet of the real is to describe life in terms of lived time, that is, in terms of duration, and not in the form of secondary spatializations that seek to fragmentize the processual continuum of lived life into static moments. If the description of an experience unfolds more as a process than as a logical sequence of frozen moments, we can understand that in the very fabric of reality, there are virtual interstices that ensure the infinite-speed transition from possibility to actuality and back to potentiality.

Due to the comprehensive understanding of the term “*memory*” in Bergson, we can correlate, in phenomenological language, actuality with presentation and perception, while memory corresponds to presentification or imagination in a broad sense, namely the evocation and reflection upon a spectrum of objects stemming from experiences of real past events to purely imagined objects. Virtuality is that liminal threshold between actuality, potentiality, and possibility, with the characteristic of *spontaneous potentiality* being fitting to describe it, especially when taken as an adjunct to perception, particularly when it comes to actions not yet performed but to be carried out based on the perceptual act of an object. Simultaneously, virtuality ensures the spontaneous transition from presentation to presentification, in moments when a perception instantaneously triggers a certain form of presentification or imagination in the broader sense.

Deleuze (1966) emphasizes in his investigations into Bergsonian ontology that the virtual should not be opposed to reality in any way but only to the actual. The virtual has an ontological significance because it actually governs the structures of the processes of realization of bundles of processes, objects, and phenomena interacting in reality, beyond the phenomenological horizon of a subjective experience. Life itself constitutes a process of actualization, and for Deleuze, this aspect arises from the differential nature of existence, where any form of present and actual existence contains a multiplicity of virtual states waiting to be actualized, some of which may never reach actualization. Currently, the television is turned off, but it contains the virtual capacity to be

turned on. There is permeability between the realm of the actual and that of the virtual, with any updating involving a series of underlying virtualizations, and any virtualization involving a series of underlying updates. The television cannot be both turned off and turned on at the same time, indicating that any state of an object is relative to all the other states that constitute it. When the television is turned on, it is not in an actual or virtual state in itself; rather, it is in an actual state in relation to its quality of being turned off, a virtual quality at that moment, which can be updated in turn, transitioning its quality from virtual to actual when it is turned on.

If we accept the understanding that life operates as a constant process or flow between the actual and the virtual, we can observe how the dilemmas arising from Husserlian research are more terminological in nature. The horizontality of perception opens it not to a pure experience but rather to intertwinements in the realm of real elements that intersect: from virtual to actual and back to virtual, or towards the transition from the real to the unreal – from past perception of a horse to the imaginative construction of a unicorn.

5. From a Reality of the Virtual to an Unreal Virtuality: VR, AR, MR Technologies

Since the early 2000s, research on Virtual Reality has gained momentum, with the majority of studies having practical and economic purposes in mind. There are, however, philosophical studies related to the theory of art and how technology can be used to construct ecosystems that generate artistic experiences. Additionally, there are sociological studies investigating the functions of presence in a virtual space in online experiences such as gaming or communication on platforms like Discord, Skype, and others.

Given that VR technologies generate simulations of psycho-somatic experiences outside mediated space, using a combination of elements related to perceptual actuality and elements that are unreal from a concrete, physical existence perspective, the ontological status of objects generated in a VR simulation remains a matter of debate. David Chalmers sparked a controversy in 2017 when he claimed that virtual

objects have a real status, engaging in the broader debate between realism and fictionalism regarding the status attributed to mental and virtual objects.

O'Shiel argues that, from a phenomenological perspective, an attempt to describe a virtual object according to realistic assumptions instantly falls into a form of reductionist representationalism. He accuses Chalmers (2017) of using the term “real” only to indicate the presence of a virtual object within the experience. However, the way that virtual object becomes visible depends on the imaginative capacity of the subject, or rather on the ability to transfer from the raw perception of the analogical material in which the virtual object is fixed to the visualization of the virtual object. This virtual object is unreal in the sense that it lacks the characteristics of a physical, concrete, material object present within the perceptual horizon.

It is inclined to affirm that virtual objects generated by VR technologies are not unreal but rather quasi-real. They are conscious images that cannot be phenomenologically reduced to a specific type of intentionality; instead, they constitute an inter-intentional ensemble in which elements like perception and imaginative evocation continuously intertwine. Similar to Merleau-Ponty, immersive experiences through VR technologies serve to augment the field of lived experience, in a sense, to supplement everyday perceptual experience. If we accept the Bergsonian-Deleuzian ontological model, both virtual objects and the experiences they generate are classified as real because reality is not opposed to virtuality but is constituted, among other things, by virtuality. The philosophical implications of research on VR technologies extend beyond determining the ontological status of virtual objects and seek to understand whether VR-mediated experience functions as a simulation of experiences in physical reality and, if so, how this simulation operates.

Currently, immersion in a VR space could be understood as a quasi-perceptive experience of reality because it involves somatic stimuli of a haptic or even olfactory nature. However, the flow of visually generated objects cannot be termed as phenomenologically perceived *per se* because they do not

constitute material-physical entities. One of the philosophical challenges related to the development of VR lies in the possibility of covering, up to the level of total indistinctiveness, every element of perceptual experience. This could culminate in the erasure of the moment of awareness of immersion into a non-place. In practice, virtual reality might blend seamlessly with the entire reality outside it when the subject loses the ability to discern that the objects observed are not avatars representing other objects in the external space, thereby eliminating the problem of transitioning from one ontological threshold to another.

If we understand reality as a graded spectrum, utilizing the concept of the *reality-virtuality continuum* proposed by Milgram and Kishino in 1994, we can overcome the methodological tendency to absolutize the response to the question: what kind of existence do virtual objects imply, and what kind of experience do these objects generate?

Similar to the spectrum of degrees between pure perception and pure imagination or fantasy in phenomenology, we can extrapolate these two poles to a pole of pure reality, of perceptual order. This would involve an understanding of reality unmediated by digital screens or any platform or device supporting software, thus only mediated by cognitive-somatic processes, and a pole of pure virtuality. In this scenario, the experience is entirely digital, where the perceptual system is entirely blocked due to the subject's immersion in a fully virtualized or digitized space.

The question that arises from this spectralization of reality concerns whether the notion of perception should be redefined so that it is not limited to the human capacity to perceive physical-concrete objects. It would be incorrect to assume that once we put on VR headsets, the objects that appear to us are perceived, thus, in phenomenological terms, being presented, and not as being represented. This is especially true if we understand that even outside VR experiences, we can never speak of the occurrence of pure perceptions that do not involve the understanding of a nearby object and other post-perceptive processes such as imagination.

We consider that all the difficulties, dilemmas, and technicalities we have glimpsed throughout the analysis arise only when we attempt to operate with rigid methodological separations, which in lived experience cannot be entirely separated. Therefore, the VR experience cannot be entirely real or unreal; instead, it functions more like a liminal ecosystem that allows the transition from actual stages (acquiring physical objects like VR headsets) to virtual stages (the generative capacity of those headsets to construct networks and kinetic flows of objects not physically present in the subject's immediate vicinity within the VR ecosystem) back to actual stages (the fact that certain interactions with those objects serve as psycho-somatic stimuli for the subject).

VR technologies have revolutionized gaming by focusing on the lived body through a process of unrealization of elements belonging to the lived body. Real movements that are perceptually felt have direct effects within the game, creating an immersive relationship between the lived body and the game environment, which can be described as an augmentation of self-perception within a virtualized space. For example, in a traditional first-person shooter (FPS), the sensation of death is not felt with the same affective intensity as in the immersive experience of a VR shooter, where a process of virtual embodiment is established.

The term AR refers to augmented reality, as seen in filters on platforms like Instagram or other techniques that distort content representing a real phenomenon/object or a real entity. In VR environments, we can discuss a curation of the self, constructing the relationship between the self-constructed outside the online sphere and the one constructed in the online sphere. This mediation between identity constructs in the physical universe and digital-virtual avatars already points to a form of mixed reality (MR). MR encompasses the spectrum of blends between the real and virtual, covering all types of AR and VR, along with any other medium outside unmediated perception or pure VR experience (O'Shiel 2022, 194-195).

6. On the Possibility of Pure Mixed Reality

The study by Rommanus et al. (2020) illustrates that, with current technology, individuals can visually, auditorily, and tactically experience a virtual heart without the need for haptic gloves or physical screens. This technology integrates the Magic Leap AR Headset, an Ultrahaptics pad, and an Apple Watch, synchronizing them to enable users to interact with an airborne haptic bio-hologram. The hologram is synchronized with the user's heartbeat, allowing them to touch and manipulate the hologram through touchless haptic technology based on ultrasound. This method employs electronically controlled phased arrays of ultrasonic speakers (transducers) to generate high-pressure acoustic points in the air, which can be felt with bare hands (Rommanus et al. 2020, 2). It's important to note a current limitation of holograms: their projection onto flat two-dimensional surfaces; transitioning to three-dimensional projections could enhance the visual, auditory, and tactile experiences.

At Husserl, the haptic/tactile sense is highly esteemed, and outside of it, it is considered that physicality, self-consciousness, or even movement would not be possible. The haptic sense, together with distal attribution (the automatic opening of the body to the external space), offers the possibility to navigate any kind of external environment, whether real or imaginary. Currently, touching immaterial, digital objects, such as holograms, is under strong control, allowing the subject to discern that they are dealing with a digitally fabricated object. However, there is the possibility that through technological evolution, holograms or other phenomena of virtual incorporation can be described both functionally and phenomenologically as real, non-digital objects (O'Shiel 2022, 197). If holograms come to be experienced through all five senses activated simultaneously, we can already explore the emergence of a pure mixed reality (pure MR). Pure MR appears as both a theoretical possibility and a real-time technological development. This field would have a revolutionary character, not necessarily in a colonizing sense to universally replace natural perception in everyday life, but with the capacity to

blur certain well-established ontological and phenomenological distinctions in human consciousness.

7. The Degree of Presence of Subjects and Objects in Mediated Spaces

Since Husserl, we observe this peculiar status of image-consciousness objects, making it difficult to establish the epistemic or ontological regime of sculptures or photographs, later of films, video games, immersive installations, or VR environments. If we follow the traditional phenomenological strategy, where real objects/phenomena are those directly given to our perception, we would conclude that all these types of media mentioned above are not entirely real because they operate based on real concrete supports that sustain the generation of entities absent from the immediate proximity of the perceptual field. In other words, if we see a character in a photograph, that character is not physically present next to us. However, technology had already started a revolution in the early 2000s in how it virtualizes the entire perceptual field of humans by creating three-dimensional virtual spaces accessed through immersive technical supports such as VR glasses, designed to simulate a full perceptual field experience (where at least three senses are active simultaneously). Military technology had been at the forefront of scientific research during the Cold War period regarding the augmentation of human perception through technological means, from night vision to visual systems for underwater navigation, and special audio-video communication systems. We can observe since the 20th century how more and more types of objects with hybrid ontological regimes emerge in the sphere of technology, being used for functional purposes in various industries as well as for cultural-artistic purposes. In other words, the privileging of material, concrete phenomena as the only real ones appears increasingly suspect because human perception becomes more impure, adapting to everyday life objects of image-consciousness type, such as smartphones, smartwatches, GPS devices, etc. We can no longer discuss a genuine and justified dichotomy between the real as actual-present and the unreal/fictional as absent-possible or as present-virtual, as the

human perceptual apparatus has adapted to the considerable use of devices that generate different types of presence than the physical presence of objects.

A study from 2003 (Ijsselsteijn, Riva 2003) investigates the types of presence that occur in collaborative virtual environments (CVEs). In order to understand the type of experience activated by the interaction between humans and a controlled virtual environment, we should first describe the concept of presence and then establish the main types of presence. We can understand the experience of presence as *a multidimensional perception, formed through the interaction between raw multi-sensory data and various cognitive processes, where attentional factors play a decisive role* (Ijsselsteijn, Riva 2003, 3). If we consider presence as a perceptual factor that can determine the type of experience generated by immersion in virtual environments, we can distinguish between two variables that determine the degree of presence of a user in that environment: on the one hand, the characteristics of the environment, and on the other hand, *the characteristics of the user*. In other words, there are external-objective determinants (environmental factors) and internal-subjective determinants (bio-psycho-physiological factors of the individual) of presence.

Sheridan (1992) proposes three determining categories of presence: a. *the amount of sensory information presented to the participant*; b. *the level of control the participant has over various sensory mechanisms*; c. *the ability of the participant to modify the environment*. These three categories refer to the form of the environment, i.e., the physical, objective properties of the arranged environment. At the same time, there is a content of the environment, consisting either of virtualized real entities or fictional entities, such as objects, agents, or communities represented by the environment.

Viewing the generation of the presence experience in human cognition from a cybernetic perspective, we can assert that presence emerges as a circular process, where the multi-sensory stimuli from the environment (output) are cognitively felt through the user's actions relying on the perceptual motor loop (input). This continuous loop of the perceptual *motor* reflects the ongoing process of real-time action-based perception,

meaning perception dynamically changes as we navigate and interact with the real world (Ijsselsteijn, Riva 2003, p. 4). It is also essential not to discriminate between multi-sensory stimuli generated by the physical environment and the virtual one. There is no intrinsic difference between stimuli generated by the real environment (the room we are in) and the mediated space we immerse ourselves in (the television in that room to which we direct our attention). Whether we feel more present in that room or more present in the act of watching TV depends on which perception becomes dominant at a given moment. When it comes to digitally mediated virtual spaces, the more immersive and perceptually plausible the environments become, the more pronounced the sense of presence will be. There is tension or agonistic competition between the computer-mediated world and the local physical environment regarding the subject's attention capture. The concept of telepresence arises when more attentional resources are allocated to the mediated space: *the more attentional resources a user dedicates to the stimuli presented by screens, the more pronounced the identification with the computer-mediated space, and the more acute the sense of telepresence* (Draper et al. 1999, 366). The general consensus on the structure of presence establishes the existence of three structural factors of presence in mediated virtual spaces: spatial presence, involvement or engagement, and the level of reality engaged by the environment (Lessiter, Freeman, Keogh, Davidoff 2001).

At the time of the Ijsselsteijn and Riva study, presence research was understood as an emerging tool for the design and evaluation of virtual environments, from a user-centered perspective. It aimed to assist engineers and software developers in identifying the necessary factors and variables to enhance the quality of users' media experience. Back then, this type of tool sought to facilitate an answer to a question such as: how can we construct environments that can be described as realistic? The 21 years that have passed since then show that this issue serves as a macro-indicator of the quality of the experience in virtual spaces. It is continuously revisited with new technological developments that expand the logistical capabilities of developers to accentuate the reality of the experience.

If we conceptualize presence in terms of realism, immersion, transportation, social richness, socially integrated actors in an environment, or the environment as a social actor (Lombard, Ditton, 1997), we could offer a comprehensive definition of virtual presence as *the perceptual illusion of non-mediation*, meaning the threshold at which *a person fails to perceive or become aware of the existence of a mediated technological environment during an experience* (Ijsselsteijn, Riva 2003, 5). Based on the similarities of the various conceptualizations mentioned above, Lombard and Ditton distinguish between physical virtual presence (the feeling of being physically positioned in a mediated space) and social virtual presence (the sense of communion provided by social group interaction in a virtual environment). The intersection between physical and social perception gives rise to co-presence, the feeling of being together in a shared space, synchronizing elements related to both social and physical perception.

The major difference between physical and virtual presence lies in communicability, in the sense that an environment lacking the ability to convey reciprocal communicative signals can activate a strong sense of physical presence. On the other hand, an environment like the internet or social networks, incapable of reproducing a strong sense of physical presence, can activate a powerful sense of social presence by constructing virtual communities. However, the media of interest for our endeavor are precisely at the intersection of physical and social elements, on the threshold of co-presence. In the diagram proposed by Ijsselsteijn and Riva in 2003, examples of co-presence include video conferencing, video telephony, or shared virtual environments (SVEs), while VR is within the realm of physical presence. It's worth noting that at the time of their article, VR technology was just an emerging possibility for exploring immersive interactions between a subject and a virtual environment, and there wasn't yet a tradition around Virtual Reality as a collective virtual-social space. Thus, with the advent of multiplayer VR games, we can confidently state that VR also falls under the category of co-presence.

If presence can be described as a perceptual illusion of non-mediation, we can understand presence as a quantitative factor that determines the degree of VR simulation enhancement. This sense of (co)presence is activated when the VR support and the external physical environment *disappear from the user's phenomenal consciousness*. Feeling present in a VR environment means activating a series of sensory responses to interaction with it without realizing its mediated nature. We can thus differentiate between immersion *as a description of the overall fidelity offered by screens and interaction systems in relation to physical reality* (Slater 2002, 14) and presence, understood as an augmented form of immersion. For Slater (1999, 560-561), the notion of presence in a virtual environment involves three aspects: the feeling of being present in the generated environment, to the point where the virtual environment becomes dominant, with participants more inclined to respond to events in the virtual environment than in the real world; the threshold at which participants, after the experience in the virtual environment, choose to portray it as visiting a place rather than viewing frames generated on a computer.

Since the year 2000, VR system developers considered the need for a series of socio-cultural parameters to monitor in their attempts to improve user experience regarding socialization and communication mechanisms within mediated spaces. To transition from VR environments as generators of physical presence to environments that generate co-presence, developers sought negotiation strategies for the socio-cultural needs, interests, and goals of users. Churchill and Snowdown (1998, 5-7) identified a series of parameters developers had to consider in the negotiation process: the transition from shared activities to individual activities; multiple and flexible representations and perspectives; a shared context; awareness of others' presence; support for communication activities. In other words, even during that period, there was a search for an understanding of VR environments as what would later be called virtual communities.

At the time of writing Ijsselsteijn and Riva's article, a major challenge in advancing negotiation processes was the inability to reproduce facial expressions and body postures in

virtual environments, essential elements in face-to-face communication. Over 20 years later, VR technology has evolved significantly and is now recognized as an established tool to support motor learning in various activities, with direct effects on motor learning (Shin, Lim et al. 2022). Here are a few ways in which VR environments support motor learning:

a. *Simulated Environments Facilitation*: VR can replicate scenarios from the real world, allowing learners to practice and develop motor skills in a controlled and safe environment. This is especially beneficial for tasks involving complex movements, such as surgical procedures, driving, or sports;

b. *Repetitive Practice*: VR enables repetitive practice, a key element in motor learning. Learners can repeat tasks and movements multiple times without the constraints of the physical world, improving muscle memory and skill acquisition;

c. *Motor Rehabilitation*: VR is increasingly used in physical therapy and motor rehabilitation. Patients recovering from injuries or neurological conditions can engage in VR-based exercises targeting specific motor skills, promoting recovery and functional improvement.

8. Conclusions

The conclusions we draw based on these final considerations invite us to assert that, from a philosophical standpoint, the ontological status of both experiences in VR and the entities (objects and processes) generated by VR environments can no longer be framed in qualitative terms. If, in Husserl's time, the status of objects like conscious images was uncertain because the experience generated by these objects was categorized as quasi-perceptive, and thus we could not classify these objects as entirely real, today we observe that there are no well-founded reasons to discriminate between sensory stimuli originating from physical space and those from the controlled virtual environment. In other words, the ability of VR environments to generate sensory experiences analogous to those outside these environments, along with their capacity to generate a sense of co-presence measurable by quantitative indices, compels us to posit the reality of virtual objects in

interactive VR environments. The lack of materiality in these objects, and their non-existence as physical, concrete entities, can no longer serve as sufficient criteria to deny these objects access to the aforementioned status, as would be suggested by O'Shiel's perspective. As long as immersion in a VR environment directly stimulates the psycho-somatic responses of the participating subject, we can no longer maintain the distinction between virtuality as unreality and actuality as reality, with virtuality, despite its lack of concreteness, developing means equally capable of generating multi-sensory, perceptual experiences.

NOTES

¹ See the case of the *amodal perception* of Kanisza's broken triangle, where the subject can perceive the absent lines of the triangle; these broken parts are present as absent, according to Noë; *amodal perception* = qualities that are perceptually present without being perceived in an actual way; the experience of presence is what we are perceiving as being outside of visual field (few examples: the perception of volume, the perception of color constancy).

² A central thesis of the enactivist or sensory-motor approach upon perception.

³ In Husserl's terminology, we are talking about the "Leib," which refers to the lived body. This Leib is the absolute point 0 of the entire perceptual experience.

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Politics, Morality and Nothingness: On the Coherence of Jan Patočka's Reflections on Sacrifice

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Abstract

One of the most perplexing notions in Jan Patočka's philosophy is "sacrifice for nothing", a form of self-sacrifice with no positive content that transcends every particular thing, object, goal or ideal. This concept is puzzling since Patočka was a dissident and one of the spokespersons of Charta 77 movement, providing philosophical and ethical substance to dissidents' actions. In his "Charta 77 texts" and other overtly political texts, Patočka formulated an ethico-political conception of sacrifice, arguing that authentic politics is defined by a strong commitment to unconditional moral principles, such as justice, freedom and human rights, and that these principles are things for which it is "worthwhile to suffer". However, in his mature phenomenological reflections on sacrifice and war Patočka appears to distance himself from ethical and political considerations, moving into the Heideggerian territory of nothingness, Being and confrontation with one's finitude. What is the relationship between Patočka's ethico-political and existential-ontological reflections on sacrifice? In this paper, I argue that they are internally consistent, the latter serving as an indispensable philosophical grounding of the former. The unifying element of these diverse explorations of sacrifice is Patočka's comprehensive critique of modernity and technoscience.

Keywords: Patočka, sacrifice, solidarity of the shaken, politics, morality, war, nothingness

Introduction

Jan Patočka's notion of sacrifice is usually interpreted as forming a significant part of the Czech dissident movement.

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Patočka's own life, his decision to become a spokesperson of Charta 77 movement and especially his death after a lengthy interrogation by StB secret police, makes the intrinsic link between sacrifice and politics compelling to many interpreters (Tucker 2000, 84-88; Bolton 2012, 152-160). Moreover, the most political of Patočka's texts—the so-called "Charta 77 texts", which were distributed underground in 1977 and made a considerable impact on Czech dissidents—clearly indicate that Patočka regarded sacrifice as a manifestation of genuine political action. His famous statement that "there are things for which it is worthwhile to suffer", which we find in his text "What We Can and Cannot Expect from Charta 77", constitutes for many a definite proof that for Patočka sacrifice is inherently political (Patočka 1989, 346).

On the other hand, Patočka's reflections on sacrifice that we find in his more strictly philosophical writings present a more complex picture. The most ambiguous idea in Patočka's *oeuvre* is "sacrifice for nothing", a self-sacrifice that overcomes the technological understanding of the world and opens up a possibility of a new relation to truth and Being (Patočka 2022, 292). Remarkably, this radical or authentic sacrifice distances itself from any "positive content" (Patočka 2022, 291). Patočka contrasts this genuine form of sacrifice with an inferior one—sacrifice for something. This is confusing because Patočka's "Charta 77 texts" can hardly be read as advocating sacrifice for *nothing*. In these texts, Patočka argues that politics must be subordinated to unconditional moral principles, such as justice, human rights, equality and freedom (Patočka 1989, 341-344). This raises the following questions: what is the relationship between moral-political ideals and nothingness? What does the latter term denote precisely for Patočka? Is there a continuity or rather a contradiction between Patočka's "Charta 77 texts" and his phenomenological considerations on sacrifice? In this paper, I will argue that there is a deep continuity between Patočka's overtly political and philosophical writings on sacrifice, and that "sacrifice for nothing" has a latent, if not direct, political and moral meaning. I submit that Charta 77, Patočka himself and other Central-East European dissidents acted and protested against the communist regime in the spirit

of Patočka's sacrifice for nothing, although this sacrifice included a strong commitment to certain moral principles.

1. Politics, self-sacrifice and moral responsibility

I shall begin my analysis from "Charta 77 texts". Patočka structures his "The Obligation to Resist Injustice" around a central distinction between technology and morality. He criticizes the modern hope that progress of science and technology would generate a new morality. Quite the opposite: the horrors of the twentieth century indicate a staggering demise of moral standards. Hence Patočka's claim that humanity needs "something that in its very essence is not technological, something that is not merely instrumental: we need a morality that is not merely tactical and situational but absolute." (Patočka 1989, 340) To counter the tyranny of the technological and the (mis)use of great power wielded by the modern state, humans need to regain belief in the *unconditional* validity of universal moral principles, since morality is what defines and expresses our humanity.

Patočka specifies his argument with a reference to the idea of human rights. The latter represents the notion that everyone—people, states, societies—are "subject to the sovereignty of moral sentiment, that they recognize something unconditional that is higher than they are". (Patočka 1989, 341) For Patočka, our will to act morally empowers us to sacrifice our daily comforts and sense of security, to overcome our greed and fear, and to reach the level of genuine freedom and responsibility. Charta 77 is a shining example of the spirit of solidarity that re-actualizes the meaning of morality. The central argument of Patočka's Charta 77 essays is directly related to the experience of sacrifice and suffering:

Note that our people have once more become aware that there are things for which it is worthwhile to suffer, that the things for which we might have to suffer are those which make life worthwhile, and that without them all our arts, literature, and culture become mere trades leading only from the desk to the pay office and back. We know all that now, not in the least thanks to Charta 77 and all it has meant. (Patočka 1989, 346)

By distinguishing the “strictly political” from the moral, Patočka stresses that Charta 77 is not a typically political, but instead a “personal and moral” movement. This claim is reminiscent of similar statements made by other Central-East European dissidents who saw their resistance as “anti-politics” or “anti-political politics”. In this context, anti-politics refers to activities that are more fundamental than intra-party bickering and fight for institutional power in the existing system. Rather, anti-political politics seeks a moral and existential transformation of the whole society, which might subsequently have far-reaching political consequences as well (Skilling, Wilson 1991). Such rhetoric was, of course, partly strategic: Charta 77 and other dissident movements behind the Iron Curtain knew well that if they openly declared their political aspirations, they would suffer much harsher treatment from the communist regime. The fact that the latter still treated dissidents harshly is a testament to the fact that their *deep politicity* was recognized as such. Even dissidents themselves were not entirely consistent on this point. As Patočka admitted, a public proclamation that morality and not the state is the highest authority was highly political: “clear conscience and decency have proved to be also *a powerful factor of political reality*”. (Patočka 1989, 344, emphasis added) For Patočka, Charta 77 “never sought more than to educate”, yet we can clearly see that this public humbleness is cunning, for what can be more politically challenging to totalitarian regimes than citizens learning to become “free persons, self-motivated and responsible” and “coming to understand that there is more to life than fear and gain”? (Patočka 1989, 346)

The analysis of Patočka’s Charta 77 texts shows how much emphasis he puts on the ethical and political dimension of sacrifice. For him, political existence becomes meaningful only when citizens summon their courage to sacrifice their daily comforts, egocentrism and sense of security in favor of universal moral principles, of something that is higher than mere survival. Following Hannah Arendt, Patočka argues that this self-transcending orientation lies at the very origins of the concept of politics or *polis* (Patočka 1996, 41-43). Accordingly, he regards living under a communist regime a deeply

impoverished existence; only radical sacrifice can wake people up from mass conformism and passivity. Sacrifice is thus inevitably related to suffering, discomfort and risk, but Patočka insists that there are things in life for which it is worthwhile to suffer, and only these things make us truly human (Patočka 1989, 343, 346) Notably, even in these political texts Patočka cannot resist a broader philosophical critique of modernity. He contrasts morality not only to the communist political apparatus, but more generally to the “technological” as such. Actualized by sacrifice, unconditionality of moral principles is a key element of authentic human existence that runs counter to the instrumental means-ends logic of technoscience, a potentially “destructive” mindset that is grounded in a belief that “any aim whatever justifies any means whatever” (Patočka 1989, 346). In sync with his line of reasoning in *Heretical Essays*, Patočka argues that dissident resistance is needed “to break free of the bondage of wars and near-wars”, a bondage that has become an essence of the twentieth century.

The importance of ethico-political sacrifice can be glanced in Patočka’s other writings as well. Just before assuming the role of the spokesperson of Charta 77, in December 1976, Patočka wrote a short article “On the Matters of *The Plastic People of the Universe* and DG 307”, in which he cryptically discussed the role of young musicians in Czechoslovakia whose nonconformism prompted the communist regime to put them on trial for charges of “hooliganism”. These trials became the catalyst for the creation of Charta 77. In this rather neglected text, Patočka writes about youth as a “guest that comes from the unknown to begin life anew”, youth as a power of negativity or ability to say “no” to the stifling conformism of society and political elites. In this context, sacrifice gives rise to “joy” that comes from “struggle against relief, against comfort, leveling, dishonesty to oneself and to others, against talking oneself into untruth and confusion”. (Patočka 2017, 25) The political potential of youthful courage lies in its ability to disrupt the habituated routines of everyday life and to arouse the spirit of older people:

For the only real help and care for the other comes when I step forward and do what I have to do, whether in hiding or out in the open,

whether anyone knows about it or not, and perchance let my awakened conscience awaken the conscience of others. (Patočka 2017, 25)

In another text from 1976, “Heroes of Our Time”, Patočka writes about several inspiring persons whom he sees as exemplifying a genuinely heroic stance. In his discussion of Sakharov and Oppenheimer, Patočka brings up the notion of sacrifice, stating that they “sacrificed themselves, their positions, their work, their goals, the values and ideals they had once taken for granted”. (Patočka 1981, 13) Later in the text, Patočka invokes the idea of “will to truth” or truthful existence, which only becomes pure in the souls of “the repressed, the reviled, the humiliated, the dead”. The latter have truth on their side, while the powerful, the rulers are “already damned”. Patočka is adamant to stress that as human beings, as political and ethical agents we cannot remain *indifferent* to the sacrifice of the dead who dared to live in truth; their sacrifice is binding on our conscience, making us *obligated* to honor their deeds and continue their mission, because in their sacrifice “they *are* us” (Patočka 1981, 13-14).

Interpreters usually claim that Patočka only became interested in the concept of sacrifice late in his career (Perryman-Holt 2015, 23). This view is a rather misleading. Sacrifice *as a phenomenon* (not necessarily as a term) interested Patočka already in his early career. In his 1938 text “Reflections on Defeat”, dedicated to Czechoslovakia’s surrender to the Nazis, Patočka reproaches his fellow intellectuals for their cowardice and inability to arouse the spirit of resistance in the Czech nation. Their arrogance, self-importance, immaturity and lack of a “vivid feeling of responsibility toward people” are harshly judged by Patočka as a betrayal of their duties as intellectuals (Patočka 2020, 30). He writes about the need to “stand up as a nation courageous but humble, creative but quiet, hardworking but irreproachable, modest but with a lively spirit” (Patočka 2020, 31). Patočka regards sacrifice as an act of self-transcendence, overcoming one’s “snobbishness” and negative freedom to forge authentic ties of solidarity with the whole nation. Notably, Patočka adds that it was not moral ideals or principles that betrayed the people, but intellectuals who were “unable to apply them

properly to reality” (Patočka 2020, 30). Already in 1938, we see that sacrifice for moral ideals and one’s political community lies at the heart of Patočka’s understanding of the duty of an intellectual.

A year later, in 1939, Patočka published a text called “Life in Balance, Life in Amplitude”, which is structured around a distinction between day and night that will later become central to his *Heretical Essays*. Life in balance, or the order of the day, is the philosophy of stability, harmony and peace:

The first type of philosophy is an expression of the common, of the levelling out, of the everyday. The everyday with its normality, in which nothing substantial happens, in which there are no radical incisions, and when in the end the grayness of life triumphs over everything—this is the character of the understanding that we encounter here. Not that it would be a boring or bored philosophy; on the contrary, it is very optimistic and sees life clearly, positively, and practically. (Patočka 2020, 32-33)

Life in balance is an Enlightenment worldview which believes that all societal failures and imperfections can eventually be eliminated with better calculation and more perfect application of scientific knowledge. In a conscious turning away from the finitude of human existence, from “nothingness that will someday embrace us completely”, the order of the day conceals the uncomfortable, unruly, imperfectible aspects of the human condition in the “frenzy of work and activity” (Patočka 2020, 37). By contrast, life in amplitude is a conscious overcoming of one’s ego and the confines of “life in enclave”, it is a reaching out to the boundaries of existence, to the “universal horizon” (Patočka 2020, 38-39). Life in amplitude accepts human imperfectability and even regards *pain* and *suffering* as a welcome fact of life, a potential gateway to truth and moral clarity. To achieve that, we need to, so to say, open an existential wound in ourselves: “we must let grow in ourselves the uncomfortable, the irreconcilable, the mysterious”. (Patočka 2020, 39) In the ambit of this unbridgeable chasm, a person receives an opportunity to *test* oneself, a test that is experienced as a *protest* against everything daily and commonplace. This prompts Patočka to claim that “all of the true lovers of the eternal and infinite are above all those who have gone through adversity and pain.”

(Patočka 2020, 41) This view is in line with the earlier text “Reflections on Defeat”: Czech intellectuals who did not dare to risk their comfort, security and potentially even their lives wanted to live a painless, riskless, comfortable life in balance. Refusing a life in amplitude, which is a life of struggle and suffering, they forfeited their duty to seek truth and lead a responsible life.

It is noteworthy that in his early texts Patočka was not only extolling ethical and political sacrifice, but also identified the worrying tendencies of modern deformations of the experience of sacrifice. In his 1946 text “Ideology and Life in the Idea”, Patočka criticized collectivism and totalitarian ideologies, especially socialism, observing that “the demands on what the individual was required to sacrifice for society were almost unlimited” (Patočka 2020, 46). In a collectivist worldview, persons are regarded merely as small cogs in a gigantic state machine, whose sacrifice (often on a massive scale) is seen as instrumental in achieving an ideologically predetermined *bonum futurum*. The experience of self-sacrifice gets distorted and manipulated as we witness a grand project of sacrificing millions of others (enemies and fellow citizens as well) who are seen as minuscule items “in the general accounting of nature”. Ideologies, including those that systematically employ the noble rhetoric of sacrifice in their propaganda, consider humans to be mere things among other things, seizing them externally, “like certain forces in the overall complex of forces”.

Ideological utilization of sacrifice has nothing to do with genuine freedom that Patočka considers to be “the Idea of Man”; the latter is the true wellspring of *self*-sacrifice and what he would later call “care for the soul”. (Patočka 2020, 43-36) Already in this essay, Patočka alludes to the paradox inherent to the experience of sacrifice, a paradox that will preoccupy him later in more well-known writings: “to the logic of the Idea belongs the *inner* significance of the highest sacrifice; the fact that what is a sheer loss from an external viewpoint, can be inner fulfilment (regardless of all external purposes, such as the kind of response that death for the Idea and its propagandistic significance awakens).” (Patočka 2020, 48) What captures Patočka’s attention is this enigmatic but genuine

feeling of fulfilment and inner freedom that one experiences “right in the fall, in sacrifice, in the *middle* of the struggle, without the result having been attained, and thus without justification by this result”. (Patočka 2020, 49-50) This statement anticipates Patočka’s later reflections on sacrifice as inherently non-instrumental and meaningful “*solely in itself*” (Patočka 1996, 130).

Our analysis of Patočka’s notion of sacrifice as a political and ethical phenomenon is corroborated by many interpreters. In Francesco Tava’s estimation, Patočka regards sacrifice as an ultimate expression of *ethical action* or *ethical movement* that is political in a deeper, more profound sense than everyday politics (Tava 2016, 41, 46, 55). Edward F. Findlay links Patočka’s formulations of sacrifice to political action: “With this analysis [of the concept of sacrifice] he both justifies continued dissidence and offers solace to those whose personal sacrifice is overwhelming.” (Findlay 2002, 139) Jacky Yuen-Hung Tai convincingly argues that sacrifice gives rise to political solidarity that is an intersubjective, “communal” relation between the person who sacrifices and those who witness this act (Tai 2020, 224). However, the question remains: what is the relationship between the politico-ethical sacrifice and Patočka’s notion of “sacrifice for nothing”, a self-sacrifice “with no positive content”? Is it the same or two different phenomena? In search for an answer, we must now turn to Patočka’s mature phenomenological reflections on sacrifice.

2. Sacrifice for nothing

The clearest indication that Patočka modified his understanding of sacrifice is manifest in his so-called *Varna Lecture*, where he shifts his focus away from ethical and political ideals to the notion of nothingness: “It is not a sacrifice for something or for someone, even though in a certain sense it is a sacrifice for everything and for all. In a certain essential sense, it is a sacrifice for nothing, if thereby we mean that which is no existing particular.” (Patočka 2022, 292) *Sacrifice for nothing*—this is perhaps the most enigmatic formulation in Patočka’s reflections on sacrifice. What does “nothingness” refer to? For Patočka, nothingness is the region of exceptional,

boundary experiences which allow humans, at least temporarily, to detach themselves from pre-given meanings of the day, and to glimpse a possibility of a new, deeper meaning of life. Nothingness is negativity that interrogates our commonsense perception of the world, introducing a dimension of problematicity and initiating a fundamental transformation of our relation to truth and Being, a process that changes “the landscape of life’s fundamental meanings”. (Patočka 1996, 131) Nothingness is *no-thing*, no particular thing or object, it is an existential horizon that allows us to draw back “from the realm of what can be managed and ordered”, and to enter “an explicit relation to that which, not being anything actual itself, serves as the ground of the appearing of all that is active and in that sense rules over all. Here Being already “presents” itself to us, not in a refusal but explicitly.” (Patočka 2022, 286) We can clearly see that Patočka, in an unmistakably Heideggerian way, draws a close connection between nothingness and Being, arguing that nothingness appears “as a guise in which Being presents itself in its difference from beings, from the content of the world.” (Patočka 2015, 126) While concentrating on *something* in our daily lives (work, career, hobbies, interests), we deal with beings; only when we leap into the region of *no-thing*, can we hope to develop an explicit relation to Being. Patočka writes:

Being is initially revealed as the “Nothing”, as the shock that, like a flash of lightning, halted all work at the assembly line of relative meaning, which had hid its finitude from itself. “Nothingness”, then, appears like a flash of Being. (Patočka 2015, 108)

Patočka expresses this paradoxical proximity between nothingness and Being as a dialectic of negativity and positivity. Distinguishing between “naïve” (deficient) and “repeated” (authentic) modes of sacrifice, Patočka argues that the former is structured positively, i. e., oriented toward concrete persons, communities, social or political ideals; by contrast, in the repeated sacrifice those ideals or significant others recede to the background:

The entire mode of acting needs to be understood as a protest, not against individual concrete experiences but, in principle, against the understanding by which they are borne. From this perspective, the

repeated sacrifice is something no longer concerned with any positive content. [...] Without ignoring or making light of certain concrete historical social goals, they [humans engaged in repeated sacrifice] have another focus. In giving themselves for something, they dedicate themselves to that of which it cannot be said that it “is” something, or something objective. (Patočka 2022, 291)

The dialectic of negativity and positivity becomes even more nuanced when Patočka contrasts two forms of positivity. The first is the positivity of the day that is oriented towards things, objects, and values that help organize the world of work and consumption. The second is the positivity borne from the leap into negativity, into an unsheltered abyss of absolute freedom and a decisive detachment from things. This shift from relative positivity to an absolute one is made possible by the embrace of nothingness:

In all these experiences one sees manifest what a great contemporary thinker had elucidated in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*—revelation of the “nothing” as a guise in which Being presents itself in its difference from beings, from the content of the world. What becomes apparent is the discovery of the *incommensurable positivity of Being*, the discovery of meaning (that is of something comprehensible or significant) beyond the limits of significances drawn from the relation to human life, its reinforcement and extension. It is a meaning that begins where all relative significations and all relative meanings come to an end. (Patočka 2015, 126, second emphasis added)

In another memorable formulation, Patočka argues that by genuinely sacrificing themselves humans “win their humanity in the true sense of the word” (Patočka 2022, 291). Again, humanity is not *some-thing*, it is not a manageable object that can be put “on order”, incorporated into political strategies or propaganda campaigns; rather, it is *no-thing*, a negativity proclaiming that humanity as an *ontological* ground of appearance and relation to truth is irreducible to any *ontic* uses and manipulations.

Patočka’s reflections on the concept of sacrifice are perplexing precisely because this experience cannot be reduced to a clear-cut formula, doctrine or norm. In authentic sacrifice, “human beings gain access to something beyond the given, yet that ‘something higher’ provides no firm ground or dogma” (Leufer 2017, 38). In our daily lives we strive to achieve closure through clear answers, unambiguous doctrines and comfortable

worldviews. Patočka's entire philosophical *élan* is directed against this sort of moral, political and metaphysical closure. Yet he understands that for most people the leap into the abyss proves too demanding. Hence their wish to treat this "horror of the void" as a "*thing* that can be grasped, tread upon, manipulated, commanded". (Patočka 2015, 106) They want to make sacrifice another *unproblematic* slogan that could be utilized for specific political purposes.

3. War, frontline and solidarity of the shaken

Although Patočka's idea of "sacrifice for nothing" is now clearer, a key issue remains unresolved: why did he shift his focus away from ethico-political vocabulary to more existential-ontological discourse of nothingness and Being? What is the relationship between his ethico-political reflections on sacrifice and his later phenomenological reflections? Did Patočka become disillusioned with political action, perhaps even with universal moral ideals that he emphasized so strongly on other occasions? To answer these questions, we should consult his *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History*.

Interpreters typically express their "shock" regarding the tone and content of the Sixth Heretical Essay (Ricoeur 1996, viii). What is so shocking in this text? First, it is quite unusual to claim, as does Patočka, that the forces of "the day"—the forces of progress, science and technology, of everyday politics with its high-sounding ideals of civilization, peace, democracy and equality—are in fact responsible for the intensification and prolongation of war experience in the 20th century (Patočka 1996, 130). Second, it is striking to many that Patočka sees the possibility of overcoming this war-intensifying logic of the day in the horizon of "the night", the pinnacle of the frontline experience (Patočka 1996, 124-125, 130-132). How is it possible to seek "a solution" to the deep problems of the 20th century at the very *peak* of their practical manifestation?

To get to the bottom of these perplexities, we must begin from Patočka's broader interpretation of modernity. Relying on Husserl, Heidegger and Arendt's investigations, Patočka sees modernity as a gradual entrenchment of "technoscience", an epoch of growing domination of mathematical and natural

sciences that systematically reduce all reality to quantifiable and calculable material, to resources that can be managed and manipulated. Humans are inevitably drawn into this world-picture as well, reduced to their roles (social functions) and objectified as things, tools or means to achieve certain ends (Patočka 1996, 116). Importantly, technoscience conceals the question of our relation to Being, instead focusing all attention on beings. What is lost in this process is the sense of mystery and a quest for deeper meaning (Patočka 1996, 117). Having lost the consciousness of a relation to Being, humans have instead developed an impressive technical mastery of the world and thus become a mighty force:

Especially in their social being, they became a gigantic transformer, releasing cosmic forces accumulated and bound over the eons. It seems as if humans have become a grand energy accumulator in a world of sheer forces, on the one hand making use of those forces to exist and multiply, yet on the other hand themselves integrated into the same process, accumulated, calculated, utilized, and manipulated like any other state of energy. (Patočka 1996, 116)

In Patočka's view, "metaphysics of force" underpinning the technoscientific mindset is not only one possible viewpoint among many others, but a worldview that has significantly changed our perception of reality. Everything exists *only* to an extent that it can be accumulated and exploited as forces or reserves of energy (Patočka 1996, 116-117). For human beings, this understanding of the world generates a sense of alienation from themselves and from nature, eventually generating a deep-rooted feeling of boredom: "The most sophisticated inventions are boring if they do not lead to an exacerbation of the Mystery concealed by what we discover, what is revealed to us." (Patočka 1996, 114) The outcome of humankind's growing scientific-technological capacities has thus been a steady increase in "quantifiable meaninglessness" (Patočka 1996, 116).

How is the question of war related to these reflections on modernity? Patočka insists that the quest for authentic existence is inextinguishable in human beings; where boredom and alienation reign supreme, one can expect people to search for substitutes of meaning, various artificial shortcuts toward an "elevated" sense of existence. Even those who seem content in their forgetfulness of Being might still yearn for authenticity

in the deep recesses of their souls. And since most genuine avenues to deep connection with others as well as relation to truth are foreclosed by technoscience, humans tend to seek alternatives in (self-)destructive ways. It may be gambling, violent sexual exploits, the use of substances, radical aesthetic pleasures and other idiosyncrasies, but it may also be collective endeavors: wars, revolutions or terrorism. The logic of the day thus becomes the breeding ground of *excessive* intensification of wars and interpersonal animosities. Hence Patočka's gloomy interpretation of the twentieth century *as war* (Patočka 1996, 124).

Patočka acknowledges that the 20th century was full of sacrifices and sacrificial rhetoric: tens of millions of people were sacrificed for various military objectives and political ideals (Patočka 1996, 129; Patočka 2022, 289). Patočka finds this sort of sacrifice problematic and calls it "relative" or "inauthentic". This standard understanding of sacrifice is economic or instrumental in nature: we sacrifice something (others or ourselves) to gain or achieve something, thus taking part in an "economy of exchange". For Patočka, one of the most troubling facts is the heavy use of high-sounding moral and political ideals in political-military discourses that justified last century's colossal sacrifices. This tendency encompasses the ideal of peace itself: "Peace and the day necessarily rule by sending humans to death in order to assure *others* a day in the future in the form of progress, of a free and increasing expansion, of possibilities they lack today." (Patočka 1996, 129)

Here Patočka expands his intuitions first formulated in "Ideology and Life in the Idea". For him, the issue lies not with the ideals themselves, but with the fact that they tend to be coopted by technoscience. The latter is such a dominant worldview of modernity that it draws into its orbit not only things, nature and persons, but political and moral ideals as well (Patočka 1996, 132). The consequence of this process is the utilization of values by the state for economic and technological purposes. A techoscientific mindset turns both normative ideals and people who subscribe to them into useful tools, thus reinforcing the stranglehold of metaphysics of Force (Patočka 1996, 136). In modern wars, moral ideals often serve as

catalysts of dehumanization, denigrating the humanity of one's enemies as well as one's co-citizens, who are regarded not as unique persons with irreducible dignity but rather as cogs in a grand ideological project and war machine. In this way, official sacrificial rhetoric loses its moral core and instead speeds up the further release and global extension of Force. In Patočka's own lifetime, the prime example of this process was Soviet communism. Soviet crimes against humanity were largely unacknowledged because they were couched in the rhetoric of necessary sacrifices for noble ideals (Majernik 2017, 29-30). Soviet criminality is a paradigmatic case of instrumental sacrifice, a sacrifice of others for something that sounds noble on paper. Crucially for Patočka, a communist deformation of the meaning of sacrifice greatly reinforced the dominance of technoscience.

When geared towards the ends of the day—political programs, war aims, ideological projects—the rhetoric of values loses its truth-disclosing capacity. It becomes instrumental, manipulative, detached from an existential and moral nature of human reality. In Patočka's worldview, values and principles are only genuine when rooted in ceaseless search for the truth of Being, the recognition of our finitude and mutual vulnerability in human relationships (Patočka 1996, 130). These aspects belong to the *ontological* level of existence. Patočka broadens his analysis of sacrifice not because he disavows his own genuine commitment to certain moral and political ideals—he is truthful in his Charta 77 and other political texts—but because he sees that the real battle for the future of humanity lies at the more foundational, ontological level. For Patočka, the true “saving grace” of self-sacrifice is not a political-military victory in this or that battle, but rather a fundamental transformation of our view of ourselves, others and nature. That is why even in the Charta 77 texts Patočka puts his hopes in “something that in its very essence is not technological, something that is not merely instrumental”. We may conclude that conceptualization of sacrifice as an alternative and challenge to technoscientific thinking is a bridge linking Patočka's ethico-political and existential-ontological reflections.

For dissidents and other political actors, this distinctly Patočkean struggle against the spirit of technoscience might have seemed irrelevant and beside the point, especially when more urgent practical issues were at stake. Nonetheless, Patočka glimpses that ethico-political sacrifice contains a potential to achieve more than just a victory in a limited spatio-temporal context of particular states, nations or regimes (Patočka 1996, 130-131, 134-135). He sees the possibility of conversion (*metanoia*) from the daily, particularized positivity of specific goals to a much more fundamental rethinking—taking place in the abyss of *no-thing-ness*—of the universal horizon of Being, the very grounds or conditions of our understanding that encompasses our moral and political beliefs. In a virtuous circle, the horizon of nothingness then makes our normative beliefs more real and authentic. For instance, only when we cease to view others instrumentally, merely as things or functions (ontological level), can we genuinely appreciate the idea of human rights (practical level), which otherwise tends to ossify into a bureaucratic abstraction or ideological dogma.

Crucially, Patočka interprets this leap into nothingness not as a solitary, but as an interpersonal, communal act. Sacrifice for nothing thus contains a potential to create an “authentic transindividuality” (Patočka 1996, 131). A supportive network of those who managed to leap into nothingness makes this liminal experience “a factor of history”. Patočka calls this fellowship “the solidarity of the shaken” (Patočka 1996, 134). It is generated by a common confrontation with death and finitude, by “understanding what life and death are all about, and so what history is about” (Patočka 1996, 134). Patočkean political solidarity is thus more inclusive and global than any ethnicity, nationality or religious identity. It may initially spring from the latter but realizes itself fully by overcoming ontic particularities and reaching the ontological dimension of intersubjectivity. This dimension reveals our common humanity and every human being’s irreducible dignity. At the core of this fellowship we find a characteristic negativity, a protest against a technical, instrumental worldview:

The solidarity of the shaken can say “no” to the measures of mobilization which make the state of war permanent. It will not offer

positive programs but will speak, like Socrates' *daimonion*, in warnings and prohibitions. It can and must create a spiritual authority, become a spiritual power that could drive the warring world to some restraint, rendering some acts and measures impossible. (Patočka 1996, 135)

To understand Patočka's intentions better, we may recall his and other dissidents' claim that Charta 77 was not a directly political movement but rather engaged in "anti-politics". Sacrifice for nothing is anti- or a-political in the sense that its aim is not to sacrifice for something specific, for a particular political goal, program or policy. It is not part of the daily business of party politics, a reshuffling of political elites or institutional muscle-flexing. Instead, sacrifice for nothing uncovers and problematizes the innermost core of our self-understanding and perception of the world, revealing the forgotten possibility to exist differently, unclouded by technoscientific premises. Though dissident "anti-politics" is primarily negative in nature, at its peak it reveals an immense potential to create something truly meaningful through the enactment of the ontological difference (Leufer 2017, 40-44). Genuine sacrifice becomes indirectly political as it urges us to pursue our explicitly political ideals *with a changed view of life*, a different attitude that strengthens interpersonal solidarity—the solidarity of the shaken—*despite* our ideological differences (Patočka 1996, 134-135).

4. Responsibility and the orgiastic

The question that still preoccupies Patočka's readers is this: does he "celebrate" war, the night and the frontline experience? If war pushes the logic of the day to its limit, uncovering the dimension of nothingness and allowing us to escape the "enslavement to life", does it constitute a new normative orientation? To answer this question, we need to discuss another key distinction between the ordinary (everyday) and exceptional (orgiastic, demonic) that Patočka introduces in the Fifth Heretical Essay. The demonic releases us from the daily toil and burden of responsibility, binding us to a mystical or transcendent power that completely "enraptures" us, opening a path to the real meaning of life that has been hidden from us

in our everydayness. The demonic ushers in a transformation of life that allows us “to forget the entire dimension of the struggle for ourselves, forget responsibility and escape, letting ourselves be drawn into a new, open dimension as if only now true life stood before us, as if this “new life” had no need to care for the dimension of responsibility.” (Patočka 1996, 99) By contrast, the realm of the ordinary is the realm of work and pursuit of one’s interests, of the “self-enslavement of life, of its bondage to itself” (Patočka 1996, 99). The night, or the demonic, is clearly significant for Patočka as it opens up a possibility to detach oneself from this bondage to life and things, to question the self-evidence of our immersion in social roles and anonymous processes of the technological age. Patočka seems to appreciate the fact that the night introduces risk, passion, struggle and genuine excitement into the monotony of the day. However, Patočka acknowledges the limitations of the orgiastic as well.

The demonic is insufficient for Patočka as a way out of the malady of modernity because it lacks *responsibility*: “The demonic needs to be brought into a relation with responsibility as originally and primarily it is not.” (Patočka 1996, 100) The orgiastic entails a complete loss of the self, an essentially *passive* (though perhaps passionate) posture and complete immersion in this new revelation. In the “ecstasy” of self-abnegation, the individuality of a person is willingly abandoned as an unpalatable burden. Such ecstasy can take many forms: religious, mystical, occult movements with rigid hierarchies and divine-like leaders, but also political, (para)military and ideological formations. In parallel with Arendt’s analysis of totalitarianism, Patočka indicates that the loss of self and flight from responsibility inherent to *ek-stasis* of the demonic is among the chief causes of the intensification of war experience in the 20th century. This prompts Patočka to insist that overcoming the rule of the day must be rooted in care for the soul and responsibility (Patočka 1996, 108). Responsibility is of paramount importance for Patočka because it serves as a vital link between directly political sacrifice and sacrifice for nothing. Without the mediation of responsibility—a theme that is central to Patočka’s political reflections on sacrifice discussed above—a collective leap into the night may become malevolent,

resulting in horrific atrocities. Similarly, as I have argued above, instrumental sacrifice for normative ideals may also turn monstrous and dehumanizing. To avoid these extremes, a leap into nothingness is needed, but *without losing oneself in total submission and irresponsible behavior*. In short, a path to genuine self-achievement goes through the mediation of responsibility. It is therefore safe to conclude that Patočka is not a war romantic. The night and the frontline are crucial for Patočka only to an extent that these exceptional experiences activate an acknowledgement of one's finitude and give birth to the spirit of problematcity, questioning the dominance of technoscientific view of the world.

5. Conclusion

There is a deep continuity between Patočka's overtly political writings on sacrifice and his philosophical reflections on "sacrifice for nothing". Their meeting point is Patočka's comprehensive critique of technoscience as a dominant world-picture of modernity. On the one hand, Patočka's "Charta 77 texts" are peculiar since he writes not only about human rights, equality, freedom and justice, which is typical for dissident discourse, but also about the need to ground human life in something that is not technological. On the other hand, his mature explorations of the meaning of sacrifice reveal that the latter possesses a latent political dimension because of its potential to transform not only our relation to truth and Being, but our interpersonal and communal relationships as well. Such potential lies behind Patočka's concept of "solidarity of the shaken". This is consistent with dissident "anti-politics" that seeks a deep moral transformation of the whole society rather than ordinary institutional politics. Sacrifice for nothing, which might at first seem dubious as a choice of words, is an arousal of the spirit of problematcity and ceaseless questioning, a power of negativity that allows us to detach ourselves from things and think about the whole, our place in the universe and the nature of human existence. Inevitably, this sort of sacrifice is a *protest* against political regimes that impose an unproblematic, unfree, closed picture of the world.

Crucially, Patočka adds that sacrifice for nothing is at the same time sacrifice “for everything and for all”. It means that genuine self-sacrifice opens a universal horizon of meaning that is globally inclusive. Initially, a sacrificial act may begin with a political goal in mind (to overthrow a tyrant or regain national independence), but it only becomes a genuine “saving grace” when it aims at something even higher. The same with solidarity of the shaken: this sort of togetherness is not ethnic, national or religious—it is global and, in that sense, truly human. For instance, a truly authentic achievement of sacrifice is not the augmentation of American or Czech national fellow-feeling, but a fundamental change of our attitude toward other human beings *as human beings*. That does not mean that the former is meaningless or unimportant, but through it one can go deeper and create a previously unimagined solidarity with others.

Patočka was well-aware that sacrifice for nothing had a very slim chance of influencing political life since we “continue to be fascinated by force, allow it to lead us along its paths, fascinating and deceiving us, making us its dupes.” (Patočka 1996, 132) After wars and frontline revelations, people typically return to the old routines of life in balance, again focusing on the superficial layer of existence: work, career, entertainment, consumption. (Although some cannot bear the contrast and commit suicide.) That is why Patočka insists we should maintain the heretical spirit of negativity even in peacetime, even in a liberal democracy, even after a military-political victory and subsequent normalization of life. Otherwise, we quickly become complacent, nurturing care for possession and domination instead of care for the soul. In this context, sacrifice for nothing represents the key source of hope for humanity, repeatedly awakening our non-indifference and sense of responsibility for the fate of the world.

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“Mimesis of the Alienated”: Commodity Form and Artwork’s Autonomy in late Capitalism: An Analysis of Hirst’s *For the Love of God* and Santiago Sierra

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Abstract

The article offers a critical reading of Damien Hirst’s *For the Love of God* and Santiago Sierra’s oeuvre, interpreted as two antithetical way to deal with the complex relationship between autonomous artwork and commodity form. To this end, the contribution first clarifies the aesthetic dimension of commodity form: it will be shown that commodity’s social performativity is necessarily carried out within an aesthetic medium. On this basis, and by drawing back to Theodor W. Adorno’s understanding of the concepts of art’s aesthetic autonomy and aura, it will be then proposed an analogy between commodity fetishistic abstraction and artwork’s aesthetic autonomy. This theoretical background will be finally used in interpreting Damien Hirst’s *For the Love of God* and Santiago Sierra’s artistic performances: the first will be read as artistic radicalisation of commodity’s abstraction, whereas the second as attempts to exposes the social relations embedded in and concealed by commodity fetishism.

Keywords: commodity form, fetishism, artwork, Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Damien Hirst, Santiago Sierra

“Die Wunde schliesst der Speer nur, der sie schlug [The wound can be healed only by the spear which smote it]” (Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act III)

Introduction

What is the specific relation between art practices and capitalist society or, more specifically, between autonomous artwork and commodity form? Through which categories should we understand artwork’s autonomy and how does it relate with

commodity abstraction? In this contribution, I am going to offer some preliminary conceptual tools to answer these questions, by offering a critical reading of two artistic practices: Damien Hirst's *For the Love of God* and the performances and installations of Santiago Sierra. As I will try to show, these artistic experiences represent two radical alternatives for the artwork, in a context in which the commodity form has become the central social dispositive. This is why, in order to fully grasp the significance of these artistic alternatives, it is first necessary to understand the aesthetic dimension of the commodity form. In what follows, I do not aim to offer a comprehensive definition of the work of art in late capitalism, nor I propose a general criterion for aesthetic judgements in the epoch of consumerism. Nonetheless, by addressing the aesthetic dimension of the commodity and by creating a bridge between this dimension and the art, I hope to give some conceptual clarifications and methodological indications for a critical assessment of these open questions too.

I will start by focusing the aesthetic value of commodities within the contemporary society, thus further developing the crucial insight of some recent streams of studies. The debate concerning the so called *aestheticisation* (Featherstone 1991; Welsch 1996; Michaud 2003; Lipovestky and Serroy 2013; Matteucci 2016 and 2017) has focused on the growing importance of the aesthetic value in our society, by highlighting the structural link between late capitalism, consumerism and aesthetic values and by developing a philosophical terminology able to grasp this intertwinement. On the wake of these studies, I will argue that, in order to offer a solid and critical understanding of artwork's relationship with commodity form, one should start "from below" and first grasp the structural intertwinement between commodity form and aesthetic dimension. In the second section, I will then consider the modern concept of autonomous art: following Adorno, I will show how art's autonomisation and commodification represent not two different and contrasting phenomena but, on the contrary, two structurally related processes. Finally, on this basis I will be able to offer a critical reading of the two aforementioned artistic experiences, and clarify why they

represents two antithetical alternatives in addressing artistically the link between work of art and commodity form.

1. Commodity form, fetishism and social relations

The first point I would like to highlight is that the so called "aestheticization" does not represent only a historical, contingent phase in the capitalistic development, but more substantially a necessary condition of the functioning of the commodity form and thus of capital society as such. The increase of aestheticization processes in contemporary capitalism has been highlighted by different scholars (See Matteucci 2017, 210 f; Gandesha and Hartle 2017, XI f): according to most of them we live today in an "artistic capitalism" (Lipovetsky and Serroy 2013) or an "aesthetic capitalism" (Böhme 2017); a "medial society" (Carmagnola and Ferraresi 1999, 20 f.), in which we assist to a shift "from the factory to the theatre" that radicalizes the debordian identification between commodity and spectacle (Debord 1995). Yet, as already mentioned, and as I shall attempt to demonstrate shortly, the pervasiveness of the contemporary aestheticization is not the contingent outcome of a specific kind of capitalistic society, or a stage in its historical development, but rather the consequence of an essential feature of its fundamental institution: the commodity form. In fact, commodity's fetish character consists precisely in the attribution of "suprasensible or social" value to "sensuous things" (Marx 1976, 165): aesthetics constitutes in this sense the medium of its functioning. For this reason, to the expansion of capitalist social relations *necessarily* corresponds an expansion of the process of aestheticization.

It is important to stress that the structural relationship between aesthetic field and commodity form cannot be explained only through a phenomenological analysis of the aesthetic experience in its given immediacy. By focusing only on the individual experience, or the aesthetic experience as such, it is impossible to grasp not only commodity's embeddedness within the social process, but also the non-contingent character of its aesthetic dimension: it is necessary to contextualize the experience of the commodity within the social totality, thus

following the dialectical “primacy of the object” assumed by Adorno as methodological frame for his micrological analysis¹. For the same reason, in order to understand the relationship between the singular artwork and the commodity form we need to frame aesthetic theory within a social theory able to highlight the historical determinate constitution of its object. In particular, we have to grasp the aesthetic value as a historically determined apparatus of social praxis (see Agamben 2009, 14), i.e. as a form of social mediation specific of the consumeristic capitalism. The aesthetic dimension related to the commodity permeates “the way in which human perception is organized – the medium in which it occurs”, which “is conditioned not only by nature but by history” (Benjamin 2006, 104). This necessarily has an impact on the production and reception of works of art, both of which cannot be abstracted from taking place within this medium.

The key feature of the capitalistic mode of production is the institution of the commodity as the social institution that regulates not only the productive process and the distribution of the goods, but also the social relations. In analysing commodity’s aesthetic dimension, it is not necessary to consider the whole cycle of capital production, but only to focus on the sphere of circulation: the relevance of the aesthetic element appears namely only within it. Yet it is important to notice, that the primacy thus granted to circulation over production is at the same time true and false: it is true, insofar as commodity’s circulation *objectively* organizes the distribution and the division of labour, but is false, insofar as it also conceals the real social relations that are mediated through the commodity form². In order to highlight commodity’s aesthetic dimension, one has to take the circulation sphere as it *appears* in our society: it is namely the necessity of the commodity to *appear* on the market that grounds its need for an aesthetic field.

Capitalism can be interpreted as a specific form of social regulation that works by objectifying social relations into material fetishes: the commodities. Commodity fetishism maintains a peculiar relationship with the aesthetic dimension: not only it is possible to reconstruct the Marxian concept of fetishism through the lenses of the aesthetic performativity of

the commodity (see Schimmenti 2021), but, more substantially, the construction of an aesthetic field is a necessary precondition for the commodity in order to perform its social function. The aestheticization is not an *additional* element of commodity's essence but rather the necessary *medium* through which it is able to regulate social relations. As is well known, Marx introduces the concept of commodity's fetishism in the fourth paragraph of the first chapter of *The Capital*. As already mentioned, commodities are here defined as "sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social" (Marx 1976, 165; see also Khatib 2017, Carmagnola and Ferraresi 1999, 13 f). The commodity is a material, sensuous thing that "reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things" (Marx 1976, 164 f). The commodity form incorporates the social relations it articulates in the "sensible" dimension of its thingness. Social relations are primarily complex temporal processes: therefore, they are "suprasensible". The commodity form has the capacity to reify this complex process into a sensible, empirical thing. Commodity fetishism is thus a form of alienation (*Entäußerung*) in which a social relation is externalized in an immediate, material thing – a fetish – *independent* from the social actors embedded in it. Commodity form becomes "a category of society influencing decisively the *objective* form of things and people in the society thus emerging, their relation to nature and the possible relations of men to each other" (Lukács 1971, 88 my emphasis). On the one hand, it mediates the social relations embedded in it, but on the other, it conceals these very relations assuming the form of a thing. Commodities "do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material [*dinglich*] relations between persons and social relations between things" (Marx 1976, 166). This is the reason why the sphere of circulation *appears* as the regulator of the productive process: in a capitalist society, productive relations appear as objectively regulated through the exchange of commodities on the market³. In capitalism the commodity becomes "the universal structuring principle" (Lukács 1971, 85) of the whole society. This also implies that in a capitalist

society social objectivity is *necessarily* mediated by appearances, since social relations are objectively mediated through their abstraction in commodity forms. The fetishistic abstraction of the commodity form is thus a “real abstraction” and “therefore not subjective or thought-induced” (Kathib 2017, 51), to the extent that such abstraction performs regulation and coercion. “Wherever commodity exchange takes place, it does so in effective ‘abstraction’ from use. This is an abstraction not in mind but in fact.” (Sohn-Rethel 1978, 25).

2. Market as aesthetic field

It is now necessary to focus the aesthetic performativity of commodity form by analysing its concrete functioning in the market. Commodity’s double nature as material object *and* as social dispositive mirrors the double significance it acquires within the market as use-value and as exchange-value. Use-value refers only to commodity’s sensible and material dimension, whereas exchange-value refers only to its social meaning, i.e. its exchangeability with other commodities. As Wolfgang Friz Haug has pointed out in his seminal study on commodity’s aesthetics, these two aspects play two completely different, even antithetical functions: whereas the seller sees the commodity only as potential exchange-value, the consumer considers primarily its potential use-value (Haug 2009, 25 f). Their position is symmetrical and mutually exclusive. Use value and exchange value are in fact mutually exclusive too. As Marx explains,

Not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values; in this it is the direct opposite of the coarsely sensuous objectivity of commodities as physical objects. We may twist and turn a single commodity as we wish; it remains impossible to grasp it as a thing possessing value. (Marx 1976, 138)

How do these two mutually exclusive aspects of the commodity and their respective social interests meet? They are both present in the commodity form, but it is not clear how they relate with each other during the exchange.

Now, according to Haug it is precisely by *constructing an aesthetic field* that these two aspects of commodity, or more precisely the two interests associated with them, are brought

into relationship with one another. It is only thanks to its aesthetical display that a commodity can act *both* as exchange value – for the seller – and as use value – for the buyer. Their encounter is made possible by constructing a space, prior to sale, in which commodities *appear* as “promise of use value [*Gebrauchswertversprechen*]” (Haug 2009, 29), i.e. as object of aesthetic contemplation: thanks to the “shop-window quality of things [*Schaufenster-Qualität der Dinge*]” it is possible to arouse “the interest of the buyer” with no actual consumption, but only “by the external stimulus of the object” (Simmel 1997, 257). Commodity’s presentation defers both purchase – which would exhaust its exchange-value – and consumption – which would exhaust its use-value: thanks to aesthetic distancing, it enables the two side to meet each other on the market. As Simmel brilliantly explain in his *Philosophy of money* it is “the distance established between the object and ourselves which enables us to accord it a value beyond that of being merely enjoyed” (Simmel 2004, 69). Commodity’s double nature necessitates an aesthetic sphere in which the buyer is distanced from objects but is able to enjoy its promise and thus evaluate its objective social value. On the side of the seller, commodity’s aesthetic presentation expresses its use value *independently* from its actual consumption, that is to say, before the *realization* of its exchange value through the sale. The sphere of circulation, which follows production and necessarily precedes both sale and consumption, is mediated by commodity’s aesthetical “*apparition*” that enables commodity’s qualitative and sensible dimension to meet its quantitative abstract dimension: it *appears* to the buyer *sensibly* by addressing his senses, his aesthetic receptivity, without being consumed, thus remaining nothing else than an exchange-value carrier. With the extension of the market as universal institution, we then assist to a progressive enhancement of commodity’s “staging-value [*Inszenierungswert*]” (Böhme 2017, 27). According to Böhme, in late consumeristic capitalism the staging-value acquires even an autonomous relevance over use- and exchange-value: “through commodity’s aesthetics is satisfied a need that does *not* aim to use-value” (Böhme 2017, 34). This holds not only for consumer goods, like food products or fashion

products – with regard to which the “shop-window quality” is particularly evident – but also for production factors, like workers: they need to *appear* in the market in the form of commodity, i.e. as material carriers of living labour. This is the reason why they are objectively forced to conceive of themselves as a form of capital to be purchased and invested. Self-fashioning thus becomes a key skill required to interact as an entrepreneur of the self within the labour market (Foucault 2005 and 2008).

For this reasons, aesthetic value can be assumed as a structural, non-contingent feature of the commodity form as such⁴. In this sense, it is important to stress the structural function of commodity’s aesthetic value within the market, and to distinguish its function from its contingent role in consumption and sale. Commodity’s aesthetic value is not something additional with respect to use- and exchange-value: it is not the mere packaging of commodity’s physical body, but rather its social *medium*. As we shall see, this aesthetic field that enables the commodity to function as a social medium is of crucial importance in order to grasp not only the problematic relationship of artworks with commodification processes, but more crucially to understand its becoming an autonomous social praxis.

3. Aura and commodity

As we have seen, commodity’s aesthetic performativity takes place within a contemplative distance analogous to that which takes place in the experience of artworks, at least as we understand it since the modernity. Simmel highlights the analogy between economic and aesthetic evaluation: in both cases, “in place of the former concrete relationship with the object, it is now mere contemplation that is the source of enjoyable sensation” (Simmel 2004, 70). In this regard, commodity maintains a relationship, however paradoxical, with the concept of “aura”, understood as “the unique apparition of a distance” (Benjamin 2006, 104 f). On the one hand, the aesthetic performativity of a commodity is entirely built on distance, by evocating its intrinsic and unique use value. On the other hand, its social form negates both its sensible

qualities and its uniqueness, reducing it to a mere exchange-value carrier. Yet, there is no fundamental contradiction between commodity form and aura. On the contrary, auraticity can become an object of categorical and conceptual reflection only in the modern commodified world: in fact, only with the commodity form does the discrepancy between these two contradictory moments – infinite exchangeability and uniqueness – emerge as such. Commodity's double nature, caught between singularity and reproducibility, quality and quantity, intrinsic use value and relative exchange-value's carrier, is an effect of the specific social form that the thing assumes as a commodity. Commodity's serial character is therefore not based primarily on the ontological qualities of the object but on its social form: a commodity *must* strive to be empirically identical to another commodity of the same type because it *must* have the same use value *in order to be* identical as exchange value on the market. It is the primacy of exchange value that determines the aesthetical homogenization of commodities as use values. From a strictly empirical point of view, no object, however produced in series, is totally identical to another; absolutely identical, however, is its value in relation to other identical commodities on the market. The equality between commodities (reproducibility) is first of all presupposed by their social form – that is, by their being exchange values – and only subsequently (re)produced by the technical process that is directed towards the creation of objects that are as empirically indistinguishable as possible. In other words, the empirical homogenization achieved by industrial mass production *follows* the principle of formal equivalence required by the primacy of exchange value in determining the commodity form as such. The "decay of the aura" that implies "changes in the medium of present-day perception" (Benjamin 2006, 104) represents a structural process, internal to the commodity form as such or, more precisely, to its form as aesthetic construct.

It is thus precisely the tension between the two characters of the commodity that makes possible the specific aesthetic experience of the opposition between unique sensible experience and commodified reproducibility. The emergence of

auraticity, as the distinctive feature of ‘authentic’ artwork, can be traced back to commodity’s double nature and to the tension that springs from this contradiction. This is the reason why aura can also be considered an essential element of the “staging-value” of the commodity. In fact, on the one hand, the commodity form, due to its double constitution, must present itself within an auratic distance as irreplaceable in its promise of use value; on the other hand, its social form contradicts its qualitative uniqueness at the very moment when it makes its infinite interchangeability possible as exchange value. The commodity promises a unique happiness, but realizes itself as an exchangeable value: it is always simultaneously a use value – an intensive quality – and an exchange value – a pure quantitative value. The aura, emerges as hallmark of uniqueness, irreplaceability and pure qualitative dimension, in opposition to reproducibility, seriality and quantitative dimension of exchange value. Auraticity can become an autonomous aesthetic category only within the aesthetic medium of capitalism. Therefore, the aesthetic performativity of the modern work of art cannot be fully grasp without taking into account the aesthetic dimension of the commodity form: as I shall demonstrate, not only it’s auratic character, but also the institutional constitution as an autonomous aesthetic field – that makes auraticity possible – has its roots in a social context permeated by the commodity form’s aestheticity.

4. Artwork and commodity

We can now grasp the reason why aesthetics, as modern doctrine of taste and science of sensations, has always maintained a relationship, albeit ambiguous and problematic, with the world of commodities from its very beginning (see Eagleton 1990, 64 f). It has been shown that some of the main categories of modern aesthetics have developed on the basis of the new aesthetic experience of commodities – such as the “sublime” (see Baioni 1981); yet, more radically, in order to offer a comprehensive account of the historical emergence of the modern concept of autonomous artwork itself, it is necessary to take into account the specific aesthetic environment established by modern market society and by commodities: it is namely

within the tension between use value and exchange value, between autonomy and *fait social*, that the modern "autonomous" artwork find its own 'autonomous' field⁵. Aside from this tension, the development of the main artistic currents remains incomprehensible: from classicism (cf. Baioni 1991) up to the avant-garde (cf. Bürger 1984), all significant art movements develop in tension with the commodity form and with modern division of labour. In this sense, not only is there no contradiction in principle between commodity form and work of art (cf. Schimmenti, 2015), but rather the specific aesthetic performativity of modern autonomous art itself would be not fully understandable outside its relationship with the commodity. Modern art, far from *refusing* any relationship to the commodity form, *assumes* its contradictions as operative field: this is why an adequate understanding of the relationship between commodity form and aesthetic field, which recognizes the latter as a non-contingent moment of the former, is necessary to grasp the specific aesthetic performativity of modern artworks. In fact, the ontological and institutional constitution of modern art is built on the radicalization of commodity form's immanent antinomies.

Modern artwork can be understood as a paradoxical object: it is both an *unusable use value and an exchange value without equivalents*. According to the first definition, the work of art contradicts the consumability of the commodity: in the words of Valéry quoted by Benjamin, "we recognize a work of art by the fact that no idea it inspires in us, no mode of behaviour it suggests we adopt, could ever exhaust it or dispose of it" (Benjamin 2003, 337). By arresting the user on the contemplative threshold of aesthetic experience, artwork cannot be *consumed*: that no concept, no interpretation, no behaviour can exhaust its meaning also implies that no use can exhaust its enjoyment. Precisely because its enjoyment is subtracted from both function and consumption, it maintains in tension what commodity must solve once it is used. On the other hand, artwork also contradicts exchange value, insofar as it presents itself in the form of a unique piece without equals. The autonomous work of art is, by definition, a unique example – even when, as in Warhol, it plays with its possible

reproducibility. Yet, even in denying commodity's two natures, the autonomous work of art is *also* a commodity: in fact, it can be sold and thus exists only in capitalist's "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière 2004), i.e. by assuming the social form of the commodity⁶. But this brings up another problem: even if use- and exchange-value are distinct from one another, both are necessary to commodity form. As Marx explains "nothing can be a value without being an object of utility. If the thing is useless, so is the labour contained in it; the labour does not count as labour, and therefore creates no value" (Marx 1976, 131). Should we then conclude that the absoluteness of artwork's commodity-character relies in its being a pure exchange-value with no use-value whatsoever? Or should we follow here Adorno's idea, according to which in late capitalism it is increasingly exchange-value as such that is being consumed (cf. Adorno 1991)? In other words, has exchange value itself become a use value, i.e. a form of enjoyment? The suppression of use-value opens up the idea of an "absolute commodity" endowed with pure exchange-value that becomes aesthetically enjoyable as such. In this case, "exchange value disguise itself as the object of enjoyment" (Adorno 1991, 39). Yet the work of art denies not only its use-value: it also short-circuits its exchange value. By presenting itself as unique and irreplaceable, the work of art is, by definition, not exchangeable. This clearly does not mean that it is not sellable, but that its exchange value is not relative, i.e. is *absolute*, not depending on either a comparison with other commodities or the socially necessary labour contained in it. In this sense, an "absolutely" autonomous work of art would incarnate the realized utopia of the commodity form: a promise of inexhaustible enjoyment and of a value without equals. As Adorno enigmatically states, "the absolute artwork converges with the absolute commodity" (Adorno 2002, 21). What does Adorno mean precisely?

The debate on the relationship between art and commodity can be divided into two antithetical, and yet simple main positions: "art is a commodity; art is not a commodity" (Martin 2007, 16). These two positions should be understood as ideal types in the Weberian sense, i.e. as theoretical constructions that do not correspond to any actual, empirically

given position, but that can be useful to organize and to conceptualize a sociological complex. According to this distinction, different artistic practices, critical analysis or interpretative categories can be interpreted as more or less radical deployments of one of these two positions. Thus, one could compare Pop Art against Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism as possible example of integral conformation to commodity form, in the first case, and radical negation of commodification on the other (Martin 2007, 16). To return to Adorno, what is interesting about his position, is that he maintains *both* the absorption of aesthetic autonomy within the processes of commodification *and* artwork's autonomy (cf. Martin 2007, 17): in Adorno's analysis, if "art's autonomy remains irrevocable" (Adorno 2002, 1), this same autonomy is constructed not only in a context of social constraint, but more radically *through commodity abstraction itself*. That's why "art and artworks [...] right into the smallest detail of their autonomy [...] are not only art but something foreign and opposed to it" (Adorno 2002, 4): because their autonomy is obtained by *assuming* the form of commodity's abstraction, that is to say through the same abstraction that interferes with their autonomy.

This dialectical constitution of the work of art shed light on the convergence between absolute artwork and absolute commodity. In fact, it is by appropriating and radicalizing the contradictions that inhabit the commodity form, and not by abstractly negating them, that the work of art is able to expose these contradictions. In other words, artwork can counter commodity's reification, only by incorporating, and thus exposing, its own commodity-character. The work of art cannot escape the antinomies generated by the double nature of the commodity, because it obtains its autonomy by *mimetically assume* the form of the commodity: abstraction. Like any other commodity, in fact, artworks gain their autonomy by concealing the social process that makes them possible and by presenting themselves as fetishes. As for commodities, the material precondition of artworks' autonomy is their abstraction from the social process: paradoxically enough, "they are a social product that has rejected every semblance of existing for

society” (Adorno 2002, 236). As in the case of commodities, artwork’s abstraction too is connected to social reification:

Social forces of production, as well as relations of production, return in artworks as mere forms divested of their facticity because artistic labour is social labour; moreover, they are always the product of this labour. In artworks, the forces of production are not in themselves different from social productive forces except by their constitutive absencing from real society.

In other words, artworks’ detachment from social labour “as mere form” is itself the index of their embeddedness in social abstraction. Just as the commodity, also artwork obtains its formal autonomy through abstraction “from real society”. Not only their abstraction is the same one that occurs between abstract labour and living labour in commodity form, but also their aesthetic performativity – that is, their auracity – arises from the concealment of human labour, in the same way as in the case of the commodity form in general: “Is not the aura invariably a trace of a forgotten human moment in the thing”, namely “the moment of human *labour* [?]” (Adorno and Benjamin 1999, 321 f) asked Adorno to Benjamin in an often cited letter. Benjamin reacted sceptically to Adorno’s suggestion, arguing that “even if the question of the aura does in fact involve a ‘forgotten human moment’, this is still not necessarily the moment of human labour” (Adorno and Benjamin 1999, 327, cf. Lijster 2017, 57 f). If Benjamin’s objection would best refer to the aura of natural elements – as the example he gave of “a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder” (Benjamin 2002, 105) – Adorno’s argument may be helpful in order to understand the auratic character specific to commodities and artworks. As showed in reference to commodity’s aesthetic performativity, also artwork’s auracity is bounded to its fetish character, that is to say to its abstractness. In this sense it can be said, that “modern art” becomes such “through *mimesis of the hardened and alienated*”, insofar as it “syncopates the overwhelming objectivity of the commodity character”. The alienation of the commodity form from social relations is mimetically imitated by artwork’s autonomy. Therefore, “it is its abstractness [...] that becomes a cipher of what the work is”

(Adorno 2002, 21 f my emphasis). And yet, as already said, by mimetically incorporating the commodity form, artwork is also able to expose its paradoxical constitution. By imitating its abstractness, it reveals "the ideology inherent in the commodity form, which pretends to exist for another, whereas ironically it is something merely for itself" (Adorno 2002, 236). Artwork's mimesis of the commodity form does not mean its capitulation to the omnipotence of the market. Rather, "only by transferring market's *imagerie* to its autonomy, can art surmount the heteronomous market" (Adorno 2002, 21, trans. mod.). In this sense, it is precisely because he "neither railed against nor portrayed reification", but "protested against it in the experience of its archetypes" that Baudelaire stands "supremely above late romantic sentimentality" (Adorno 2002, 21).

5. Autonomy between abstraction and social embeddedness: two case studies

As I have shown in the previous paragraphs, modern work of art and commodity form, far from being abstractly opposed, are, in fact, dialectically interconnected: they explain, influence and clarify one another. The work of art dismantles commodity form from within. As we have seen, according to Adorno, it is the oblivion of social labour that generates the aura: this would also explain the auratic character of both artworks and commodities, since both obtain their abstraction by concealing the social relation embedded in them. Following Adorno's account of the convergence between absolute work of art and absolute commodity, we might also say that the work of art radicalizes its auratic force by embodying the utopia of the self-valorisation of capital, able produce surplus value without labour and without consumption. The absolute artwork mimetically approaches the absolute commodity, that is to say the commodity assumed as *ab-soluta*, as fully abstracted self-valorisation detached from its material condition. A shining example that can help to illuminate both the aesthetic performativity of the commodity form and the structural analogy between artwork's and commodity's aura is Hirst's "absolute artwork" *For the Love of God* (Hirst 2007): as well known, it consists in a platinum sculpture of a human skull

encrusted with 8,601 diamonds. It was sold on 30 August 2007 for fifty million pounds to an anonymous consortium that, apparently, included Hirst himself. It has been argued that also the auction sale was part of the work of performance art in itself, insofar as it seems to be an essential element in understanding its meaning. Hirst's work concentrates in the materiality of his work the archetypal features of the absolute commodity. On the one hand, the skull recalls the archetypal images of death, *vanitas*, transience, which are not only some of the recurring themes in the artist's work, but also, as I argue, metaphors of commodity's transience character. On the other, the diamonds that cover the skull are the archetype of luxuriousness and exchange-value in the most concentrated and purified form. The union of the archetype of transience with diamonds is especially striking and meaningful if one takes into account also the performative dimension of Hirst's work. The process of self-valorisation, to which the work underwent at the auction, and the fact that Hirst himself was part of the consortium that bought it, is not simply a disturbing short-circuit in today's art market. The affinity – or the coincidence – between the mechanisms of valorisation in the art market and those in high finance is not accidental or contingent: it draws back to the structural analogy between commodity form and modern artwork. Artworks and financial assets are both forms of exchange-value that “autonomously” produces surplus value: more specifically both assure a valorisation detached by labour process. Read as mimesis of absolute commodity, i.e. of a value able to produce surplus value by its own, the diamond skull becomes the perfect image of the “dead labour [*verstorbene Arbeit*] [...] which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour” (Marx 1976, 342). Commodity appears here as the dead corpse of living labour: “life is drained from the object and what remains is an empty shell, similar to the Baroque emblems of the ruin, the skull, and the corpse” (Lijster 2017, 59). No life other than capital self-valorisation vivifies Hirst's *For the Love of God*. Hirst's artwork, insofar as it radically pursues artwork's abstraction pushes to the limit the identification with the absolute commodity and brings therefore to the extreme the concealment

of the social relationships that underlies it. As Julia Steinmetz writes, "in *For the Love of God*, we can see capital's maintenance of itself in the artwork's surrender to circulation and indifference to form when it comes to its place in the market" (Steinmetz 2009). The abstraction of value incorporated in diamonds shows no trace whatsoever of the enormous amount of living labour contained in it: by striving to become pure value, *For the Love of God* enact and exposes the concealment of human labour sedimented in it. Human substance and social relations do not appear except as dead material reified as commodified aura: as skull, archetype of death, and as diamond, purest value carrier. In this respect, Hirst's work radically pursues the "mimesis of the hardened and alienated": its reified abstractness instead of exposing commodity's social character, "syncopates the overwhelming objectivity of the commodity character" (Adorno 2002, 21). Its "affirmative character" stresses its separateness from the material world and affirms a superior realm of everlasting "Beauty", where one can overcome time, transience and ultimately death (cf. Marcuse 2007, 87 ff). This utopia is well explained by Hirst himself, where he contends that this artwork is "ethereal and timeless" (quoted in Shaw 2007). According to Hirst, "buy art, build a museum, put your name on it, let people in for free. That's as close as you can get to immortality" (quoted in Steinmetz 2009). Hirst's claims of overcoming time and history through art also confirms the denial and repression of the material, historical relation enacted by his work, which thus mimetically approach the sublime experience of commodity's abstraction (cf. White 2009).

It is however possible to find artworks that, while maintaining the moment of abstraction, i.e. of aesthetic autonomy, strive to *expose* the antagonistic social relationships that are concealed by reification. In this sense, the works of Santiago Sierra, without aspiring to the dissolution of aesthetic autonomy in the sense of relational aesthetics, unveil the space of aesthetic autonomy as a space of abstraction, by showing the antagonistic social relationships that underlies it (cf. Bishop 2004, 70 f). Most of Sierra's works consist in collective actions that imply the direct involvement of active participants, who

are employed in apparently absurd activities that implies the exploitation of their corporeal force or the temporary and even permanent marking of their body. Sierra's works, such as *160 cm Line Tattooed on Four People* (2000), *A Person Continuous Working Hours* (2000), *Persons Paid to Have Their Hair Dyed Blonde* (2001), *Raising of Six Benches* (2001) were interpreted in the wake of relational aesthetics, insofar as they operate by setting-up relations among people. However, unlike relational artworks, which usually aim to create "reconciled" spaces for freed, meaningful human relations (Bishop 2004, 72), Sierra's works always highlight the moment of subordination, even of subjugation of the participants, achieved through monetary remuneration, thus exposing the social material relations that underlie artwork's autonomy and that normally remains concealed by it. The actions requested by the artist to his remunerated participants are often explicitly meaningless and purposeless and always implies physical effort or body modifications, more or less irreversible: in his performances participants are asked, for example, to hold up a bench for set periods of time, to let oneself tattooed with a line of a given length, to get one's hair dyed blonde, being secluded in a small space for a given amount of time and so on. If we analyse Sierra's actions according to the aforementioned analogy between artwork's and commodity's abstraction, we can say that here both use value *and* exchange value are reduced to degree zero: what is maintained in Sierra's oeuvre of the commodity is not the pure value abstractness of the fetish – as in the case of Hirst – but rather the naked social relationships of exploitation that underlies commodity's production and that here constitute both the content and the form of the work of art itself. Thus, it is exploitation itself that stands out explicitly. One could thus affirm that, strictly speaking Sierra's artworks do not mimetically reproduce commodity's *form* as abstraction, but rather, by dismantling the form of its abstractness, they express the social relation concealed by it. In this sense, "the outcome or unfolding of his action forms an indexical trace of the economic and social reality of the place in which he works" (Bishop 2004, 70). For example, in *Raising of Six Benches*, performed at the Kunsthalle in Munich, Sierra (2001a) paid

random people from the city of Munich to hold up all the leather benches in the museum galleries for set periods of time. The action, as stated by Sierra, was thus able to "reflect[] the reality of labour relations in Munich. Munich is a clean and prosperous city, and consequently the only people we could find to perform the task at hand were unemployed actors and bodybuilders who wanted to show off their physical prowess" (quoted in Bishop 2004, 70). In *133 Persons Paid to Have Their Hair Dyed Blonde*, performed during Venice Biennale, Sierra (2001b) invited illegal street vendors – most of whom were migrant – to have their hair dyed blond in return for a small amount of money (\$60). The result was the affluence in the exhibition's spaces of a large number of people normally excluded from the elitist circle of contemporary art. The illegal vendors found themselves in the exhibition spaces, branded with blonde hair, while the audience was forced to confront the mechanisms of exclusion that characterize the social field in which artworks obtains their institutional autonomy. As Bishop notes, "is important that Sierra's work did not achieve a harmonious reconciliation between the two systems [art system and social reality], but sustained the tension between them" (Bishop 2004, 73) It is also important to highlight, that Sierra's work always include the payment of a salary to the participant involved: in this way the subordination and the exploitation of the body exposed in these actions is explicitly associated with the subscription of a contract of employment. Thus, the mechanism of exploitation through salary is made explicit and exposed in all its meaninglessness and violence. The most disturbing and radical example in this sense is probably *160 cm Line Tattooed on Four People*, in which, as the artist explained, "four prostitutes addicted to heroin were hired for the price of a shot of heroin to give their consent to be tattooed" (Sierra 2000). This work was preceded by another action in 1998, during which Sierra tattooed a 30 cm line on the back of a "remunerated person". On his website Sierra explain that he "looked for a person who did not have any tattoos or intention of having one, but due to a need for money, would agree to have a mark on his skin for life. The person received \$50 as payment" (Sierra 1998). In these actions the moment of exploitation is

made as explicit as possible, by appropriating and inflicting a permanent sign, one could say, a scar on a body of a person forced by his social condition to submit itself to such a treatment. In all Sierra's work the aesthetic autonomy is confronted immediately with the social reality in which it takes place and over which it affirms various form of exploitation. The social violence that remains concealed by artwork's and commodity's "space of appearance" is here put at the centre: art's autonomy is made explicit, but not to save artwork's auratic separateness, but rather to allow the emergence of the conflict between aesthetic abstraction and socio-material conditions. The form of abstraction is here immediately a form of exploitation.

6. Conclusions

Commodity form can be interpreted as the translation of social relations between humans into a material, sensible object. Commodity's fetish character implies the creation of an aesthetic field, not only insofar as it reifies a social relationship and transforms it in a sensible object, perceptible with the senses. Moreover, as argued by Haug, commodity operates as social medium by creating an aesthetic space that enables the two contradictory natures of commodity form – use-value and exchange-value – and the divergent interests connected to them, to meet on the market. In this sense, aesthetics plays a structural role in the understanding of the commodity form as such. As I have shown, this fact has important consequences for the status of the work of art in capitalism. Just as the aesthetic dimension is central for the understanding of the commodity form, the understanding of the commodity form is central to grasp the aesthetic performativity of contemporary artworks. The very status of autonomous work of art is not in antithesis with the abstraction of the commodity form: on the contrary, according to Adorno, the very autonomy of the work of art is constituted precisely by mimetically reproducing the abstractness of the commodity form, by formally embodying its alienation from the social relation implied in it. In this sense, the modern artwork's autonomy cannot be understood as opposed to commodified reification, as if it would preserve as

autonomous a space supposedly free from market mechanisms; on the contrary, modern art autonomy assume the same abstraction of the commodity form as its field of aesthetic performativity. However, this socio-historical condition can have different outcomes: on the one hand, as in the case of Hirst, what is emphasized is the formal abstractness of the commodity form; on the other hand, as in Sierra, what is emphasized is the social reality hidden by commodity's abstractness. In this sense, the distinction between critical and affirmative culture should not be made on the basis of the alleged rejection or acceptance of the commodity form, but rather on what is brought to light by confronting this form. The reified forgetfulness of time and history exemplified by Hirst's "ethereal" art is antithetical to "the aesthetic capacity to construct mnemonic experience as one of the few acts of resistance against totality" (Buchloh 2003, XXV) performed by Sierra. To aesthetically "construct the mnemonic experience" means, as exemplified in Sierra's oeuvre, to expose the social conditions, i.e. the material relations and the violent and exploiting social processes that underlies the timeless, ethereal abstractness of both art's autonomy and commodity's abstraction: however, these "acts of resistance" do not occur by abstractly refusing art's reification, but rather by exposing the concealed tensions out of which its abstractness has emerged.

NOTES

¹ In *Minima moralia* he writes that in order to grasp the particular experience we have to comprehend it as a moment of the social totality "that transcends the individual and calls his substance by its name." (Adorno 2005, 16)

² "It thus becomes evident that because the objectivity of commodities as values is the purely 'social existence' of these things, it can only be expressed through the whole range of their social relations; consequently, the form of their value must possess social validity." (Marx 1976, 159)

³ This does not imply that the sphere of circulation determines the process of production: it rather follows from the productive relations not only logically, but also genetically. Its role in determining e regulating the productive process follows from the primacy of the abstraction of the value form. As Isaak Rubin brilliantly explains, the reification of social relations, made possible by the commodity, is crucial for the functioning of the capitalistic society: "in a market society, [...] a thing is an intermediary in social

relations, and the circulation of things is inseparably related to the establishment and realization of the productive relations among people. The movement of the prices of things on the market is not only the reflection of the productive relations among people; it is the only possible form of their manifestation in a market society. The thing acquires specific social characteristics in a market economy (for example, the properties of value, money, capital, and so on), due to which *the thing not only hides the production relations among people, but it also organizes them, serving as a connecting link between people.*" (Rubin 1992, 10, my emphasis). It is therefore within the market, in which commodities are exchanged, that the capitalistic economy regulates production and distribution, the relation between different production branches, the level of investment, etc.

⁴ One could ask if the aesthetic value still plays a crucial role also in the exchange of raw materials or services between different manufacturers: even though these are exchanged as commodities, their aesthetic value seems to be not particularly relevant. In order to address this problem properly, one should further deepen the relationship between sphere of production and sphere of circulation: a task that cannot be undertaken in the context of this contribution.

⁵ We cannot deepen the concept of autonomy adequately. Yet, it is important to distinguish between two different understandings of artwork's autonomy: a formal-ontological, and a sociological one. The first one suggests that in order to grasp artwork's aesthetic value and meaning, one has to consider it in its separateness, i.e. in its autonomy; this understanding can be traced back to Kant and focuses especially the formal dimension of artworks, which are conceived as pure objects of aesthetic contemplation. The second understanding suggests a sociological interpretation and puts into question the "*historical and social conditions of possibility*" of this supposedly pure aesthetic experience: according to this reading, autonomous is not so much the artwork as such, but the social field in which it is recognized as aesthetically relevant (cf. Bourdieu 1996, 285 ff). It can be argued that Adorno tries to offer a mediated understanding of these two approaches, developing on the one hand a immanent hermeneutics of the work of art and, on the other hand, a social theory of its historical constitution.

⁶ Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre has defined a specific form of accumulation connected to artworks: this "economy of enrichment" encompasses markets in fine arts, limited-edition luxury goods, high-end collectibles etc. and is characterized by a specific form of value, that they call "collection form". Cfr. Boltanski and Esquerre, 2020.

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Mythos „Ichauflösung“ (Ego Dissolution). Zur Unterscheidung von Selbst und Ego

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Abstract

The Myth of Ego Dissolution: On the Difference between Self and Ego

In this article I try to give a phenomenological analysis of the so-called „Ego Dissolution“. I differentiate between the self and the Ego. I argue that in Ego Dissolution it is not the ego that dissolves, but the self. The dissolution of the Ego shows two things: the self is not something substantial; and there is an ultimate persistent subject of experience: the Ego.

Keywords: ego dissolution, ego, self, self-consciousness, psychedelics, anthropology, phenomenology

Ich möchte in diesem Artikel eine phänomenologische Analyse eines nicht ganz alltäglichen Phänomens versuchen, welches in der Fachdiskussion als *Ichauflösung* oder *Ego Dissolution* bezeichnet wird. Dabei wird in der Forschungsliteratur zumeist nicht klar zwischen dem phänomenalen Selbst (sowie dem damit korrelativ verbundenen Selbstbewusstsein) und dem Ego (dem letzten Subjekt des Bewusstseins) unterschieden. Ich argumentiere dafür, dass im Falle der *Ego Dissolution* gerade nicht das Ego, sondern das leibliche Selbstempfinden reduziert wird und wir daher jenes Phänomen nur dann adäquat verstehen können, wenn wir diese subjekttheoretische Differenz zwischen Selbst und Ego in der Analyse berücksichtigen. Vor allem offenbart das Phänomen der Ichauflösung aber zweierlei: 1. Das Selbst ist nichts Substantielles (in diesem Punkt stimme ich mit den vorherrschenden neuronalistischen Forschungsansätzen

überein), sondern existiert nur als Korrelat eines ebenfalls nicht substanziellen Selbstbewusstseins. 2. Gerade das Phänomen der Ichauflösung offenbart die Persistenz eines letzten Erfahrungssubjekt, eben des Egos.

1. Vororientierung

Mit der Renaissance der Psychedelikaforschung (seit Anfang der 90er Jahre) ist in den letzten Jahren auch das Konzept der *Ichauflösung* wieder in den Fokus des wissenschaftlichen und philosophischen Interesses gerückt (s. Letheby, Gerran 2017, Millière 2017, Deane 2020, Metzinger 2023). Das Konzept ist gewissermaßen ‚altehrwürdig‘ und als ‚Egotod‘ unter anderem aus der buddhistischen und sufistischen Tradition bekannt (Eintritt ins Nirwana; Fana).¹ Unlängst hat Michael Hampe (im Anschluss an Jay L. Garfield) in einem Artikel in der *Deutschen Zeitschrift für Philosophie* für die transformative Kraft solcher Meditationen und Meditationstechniken geworben, mittels derer eine Art Verschmelzung von Selbst und Welt erreicht werden kann (Hampe 2022; Garfield 2022). Das Ziel dieser scheinbar ichtauflösenden Meditationserfahrungen solle es sein, die Idee des Egos als Illusion zu entlarven, welche für Egoismus und Selbstbezogenheit der Menschen wesentlich mitverantwortlich sei, um dadurch eine praktische ‚Selbsttransformation‘ des Subjekts zu bewirken: Egoistische Subjekte, die eine Art meditative Ichauflösung erfahren haben, könnten durch eine solche Erfahrung altruistischer werden. Eine rein theoretische Widerlegung des Egoglaubens allein hält Hampe dagegen für zu schwach, um ein weniger selbstbezogenes Selbst- und Weltverhältnis zu erreichen. Von ‚Ichauflösungen‘ wird aber heutzutage vor allem im Zusammenhang des Konsums psychedelischer Substanzen wie LSD, Psilocybin und DMT berichtet: man spricht hier von „*drug-induced ego dissolution* (Died)“ (Millière 2017, 1).

Ich möchte im Folgenden dafür argumentieren, dass sich das Phänomen der sogenannten Ichauflösung durch eine Phänomenologie des Selbst und des Selbstbewusstseins sowie eine (davon zu unterscheidende) phänomenologische Egologie verständlich machen lässt. Ich vertrete dabei zwei

zusammenhängende Thesen: 1. In der sogenannten Ichauflösung löst sich weder das *transzendente Ego* im Sinne Husserls auf, noch beweisen diese Erfahrungen die Nichtexistenz eines solchen Egos. 2. Vielmehr offenbaren diese Erfahrungen, dass unser *phänomenales Selbst* (in Differenz zum *transphänomenalen Ego*) etwas ist, was es tatsächlich nicht einfach gibt, sondern welches auf Grundlage des *Selbstgefühls* (Frank 2013) oder besser: des *leiblichen Sichspürens* angeeignet und damit *als Selbst* zugleich *konstituiert* werden muss (Streubel 2021a). Es gilt daher zwischen den Konzepten ‚Selbst‘ (als Sinnkorrelat oder Noema eines basalen Selbst-Bewusstseins) und ‚Ego‘ (= das letzte Subjekt des Erlebens) zu unterscheiden. Es ist das Selbst bzw. das, was als Selbst aufgefasst wird, nicht das Ego, das im Ausnahmefall der Ichauflösung vorübergehend verloren gehen kann. In der bisherigen Forschungsliteratur wird zumeist zwischen Selbst und Ego nicht klar unterschieden, was das Verständnis des Phänomens „Ego Dissolution“ deutlich erschwert. Zum besseren Verständnis möchte ich daher mit einer ersten (und vorläufigen) Klärung der zentralen Begriffe beginnen:

i) *Das Selbst*: Zum Selbst möchte ich diejenigen Teilmomente unseres Menschseins rechnen, die wir uns tatsächlich als ‚meinig‘ zusprechen: Wenn ich von meinem Körper oder meinen Gedanken spreche, so bringe ich damit nicht nur zum Ausdruck, dass sie mir gehören (so wie auch mein Handy oder meine Jacke), sondern dass ich sie als Teile meines ‚Ich-selbst‘ betrachte. Ich bin mit meinem Körper ganz anders identifiziert als mit meinem Handy. Wenn ich ‚ich‘ sage, dann meine ich nicht, dass ich auch mein Handy bin (so wie ich auch meine Hand bin). Aber es stellt sich natürlich trotzdem die Frage, worin der genaue Unterschied in der Sache liegt, wo ich doch unterschiedslos von ‚meiner Hand‘ und ‚meinem Handy‘ spreche.

ii) *Das Ich oder Ego*: Unter dem Ich verstehe ich diejenige *ontologisch problematische* Instanz, welche das eigentlich Subjekt des Bewusstseins, des Handelns, Denkens, Fühlens etc., also des ganzen Menschen, darstellt und von Philosophen wie Hampe, Garfield und vielen

anderen als Illusion betrachtet (und vom Selbst begrifflich oft nicht hinreichend klar unterschieden) wird. Ich behaupte dagegen: Das ‚Ich‘ oder das ‚Ego‘ bin ich im ontologischen Sinne. Ich bin mit diesem Ich streng identisch, nicht jedoch mit dem Selbst. Und weil das so ist, bin ich auch das diachron identische Subjekt jeglicher Erfahrung, einschließlich der Erfahrung der sogenannten Ichauflösung (bei der sich eben das Ich oder Ego gerade nicht auflöst, sondern diese Ichauflösung vielmehr bewusst erlebt).

iii) *Egotod (Ego-death) bzw. Ichauflösung (Ego Dissolution)*: Ich führe hier zunächst eine vorläufige Arbeitsdefinition aus dem Artikel „Ego Death“ der *Encyclopaedia Britannica* an. (Eine präzisere phänomenologische Bestimmung dieses Phänomens zu erarbeiten ist das eigentliche Ziel dieser Untersuchung.)

[E]go death, also called ego dissolution, in psychoanalysis, mysticism, and some religions, the disappearance of an individual's sense of self, or the removal of one's perception of oneself as an entity separate from one's social or physical environment. Ego death as a practise can be traced to early shamanistic, mystical, and religious rites in which subjects sought ego death as a way of communion with the universe or with God. (Martin 2022)

Der Ego-Tod wird hier also als ein Verschwinden des Selbstbewusstseins oder der Wahrnehmung des eigenen Selbst als einer separaten Entität bestimmt, die zu einer Art mystischen Einheitserfahrung mit Gott oder dem Universum führen kann. Im Ego-Tod ist das Bewusstsein nur noch Bewusstsein einer vom Selbst befreiten Welt. (Über Gott und Nirwana schweige ich im Weiteren, da ich zu diesen ‚Gegenständen‘ bisher keinerlei epistemischen Zugang erlangt habe.) Der Psychiater Randolf Alnæs umschrieb „ego-death“ auch konzise als „loss of the ego-feeling“ (Alnæs 1964, 401), was ich als Verlust des Selbst- und nicht des Ichgefühls wiedergeben würde.

Im gegenwärtigen wissenschaftlichen und populärwissenschaftlichen Diskurs, der sich um das Phänomen des sogenannten „Ego-Todes“ oder der Ichauflösung dreht, lassen sich drei Fragestellungen identifizieren: 1. die Frage nach den neuronalen Grundlagen der Ichauflösung, 2. die Frage nach der Phänomenologie des subjektiven Erlebens und 3. die Frage nach den möglichen positiven (seltener: negativen) lebensverändernden Folgen dieser Erfahrung.

Ich möchte mich im Folgenden vor allem auf die zweite Frage konzentrieren. Trotzdem werde ich auch ein paar kritische Überlegungen zum ersten Fragekreis nach den neurologischen Grundlagen anstellen. Zuerst möchte ich jedoch darlegen, warum das Phänomen der Ichauflösung überhaupt philosophisch relevant und interessant ist.

2. Die philosophische Relevanz des Phänomens der Ichauflösung

Wenn man mich fragen würde, warum es für die Philosophie und insbesondere für die Phänomenologie lohnenswert sei, sich mit einem Ausnahme- und Grenzphänomen wie der Ichauflösung zu beschäftigen, so würde ich folgende Antwort geben: Wenn wir uns dieses Phänomen als eine Art anthropologischen Modus des Zur-Welt-Seins oder einfach als Modus des Welt-Seins hinreichend verständlich machen, dann erhalten wir einen tiefen Einblick in die menschliche Verfasstheit. Insbesondere erhalten wir durch die bloße Tatsache, dass es tatsächlich unter bestimmten Bedingungen möglich ist, sein Selbst zu verlieren, einen anderen Zugang zu den philosophischen Problemen des Selbstbewusstseins und der personalen Identität. Mit dem Wissen, dass das Selbst vorübergehend verloren gehen kann, verstehen wir besser, was es eigentlich heißt, ein Selbst und selbstbewusst zu sein und auch, was die Funktion des Leibes bei der Ausbildung und Aufrechterhaltung von Selbstbewusstsein ist und warum wir begrifflich zwischen unserem Selbst und unserem Ich (Ego) unterscheiden sollten. Da es, wie ich zeigen möchte, eigentlich nicht das Ego ist, das sich auflöst oder eine Art kurzen Todes erleidet, sondern das Selbst, werde ich im

Folgenden bevorzugt vom Phänomen der *Selbstauflösung*, statt von *Ichauflösung* sprechen.

Außerdem zeigt das Phänomen der *Ichauflösung* überdeutlich, dass die Trennung zwischen dem Selbst (insbesondere dem Leibkörper) und der Umwelt tatsächlich nur eine phänomenale oder bewusstseinsinterne ist. In der *Selbstauflösung* wird zudem die radikale Einheit von Bewusstsein und (Um-)Welt auf besonders eindrückliche Weise erfahren: Das Subjekt wird hier gewissermaßen zur Welt oder präziser: zum ‚reinen‘ Subjekt der Welt.² Und dies kann es nur, so möchte ich betonen, weil es je schon welthaltig war. Nur erfährt es sich normalerweise als *Subjekt in der Welt* und damit als ein Ich-selbst, das vom Rest der Welt zwar nicht getrennt, aber doch klar unterschieden ist. Letzteres wird in der *Selbstauflösung* *phänomenal* negiert. Und dies ist es, was viele Menschen, die eine *Selbstauflösung* erlebt haben, positiv oder negativ buchstäblich existenziell erschüttert.

3. **Methodische Herangehensweise. Das Problem des Neuronalismus**

Es gibt im Rahmen eines phänomenologischen Ansatzes zwei grundsätzliche methodische Möglichkeiten, sich dem Phänomen der *Selbstauflösung* oder des Selbstverlusts zu nähern: Erstens, indem wir im Sinne „strenger Wissenschaft“ (Husserl) versuchen, alle ontologischen und anthropologischen Vorannahmen auszuschalten, um das entsprechende Phänomen möglichst vorurteilsfrei zu beschreiben. Dies möchte ich den ersten, grundständigen und radikalen Weg nennen, der jedoch eine ganze phänomenologische Anthropologie und Subjekttheorie zu entwerfen hätte. Denn das Phänomen der *Selbstauflösung* kann ohne eine solche adäquate Anthropologie gar nicht angemessen in den Blick kommen, da hier alles darauf ankommt, zuvor die entsprechenden phänomenologischen Beschreibungsbegriffe wie ‚Bewusstsein‘, ‚Ich‘, ‚Selbst‘, ‚Selbstbewusstsein‘, ‚Leib‘, ‚Körper‘, ‚Umwelt‘ etc., die in der Analyse zum Einsatz kommen, auf valide methodische Weise hinreichend zu klären.³ Ich würde sogar die generelle These vertreten, dass jede Phänomenbeschreibung nur auf Grundlage einer umfassenden und validen phänomenologischen

Anthropologie und Subjekttheorie gelingen kann. Und dies wäre der zweite Weg, der eigentlich nur eine Fortsetzung des ersten ist: Der zweite Weg hat den ersten Weg bereits beschritten und interpretiert das Phänomen der Selbstauflösung im Lichte einer bereits vorhandenen Anthropologie und Subjektkonzeption. Ich muss, schon aus Platzgründen, den zweiten Weg beschreiten. Dies ist allerdings dann kein Manko, wenn sich die entsprechenden anthropologischen Voraussetzungen direkt an den Phänomenen bewähren lassen und damit so etwas wie intersubjektive Nachprüfbarkeit und Falsifikation möglich wird. Dieser Punkt ist auch deswegen von Bedeutung, weil der oben angesprochene erste Themenkreis, der sich mit den neuronalen Grundlagen der Selbstauflösung beschäftigt, gewissermaßen ebenfalls eine ganze naturalistische und neuronalistische Weltanschauung und Anthropologie an die Phänomene heranträgt. Hiernach gibt es einen eindeutigen ontologischen Fundierungszusammenhang zwischen der neuronalen Ebene und den Phänomenen der Subjektivität oder kurz: zwischen Gehirn und Geist/Bewusstsein (brain – mind). Man könnte diesen Fundierungszusammenhang so umreißen: Es gibt keine subjektiven Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse ohne entsprechende neuronale Prozesse (die jene ermöglichen), aber es gibt durchaus neuronale Prozesse ohne Subjektivität. Man spricht zwar gerne von sogenannten „neuronalen *Korrelaten*“ von „mental Zuständen“. Aber damit ist in den seltensten Fällen gemeint, dass es sich hier um eine echte *Ko-Relation* handelt, bei denen beide Relata gleichberechtigt und gewissermaßen gleichursprünglich (im heideggerschen Sinne) sind. Millière bemerkt hierzu kritisch: „In the expression ‚neural correlates of the (sens of) self‘, the word ‚self‘ is no less ambiguous than ‚correlates‘. Indeed, the concept of self is extremely polysemious an wide-ranging, and there is no consensus on its meaning in cognitive neuroscience.“ (Millière 2017, 9) Es ist eine wichtige Aufgabe der Phänomenologie, beides zu problematisieren: den neuronalistischen Korrelationismus einerseits und die Verwischung des Unterschiedes zwischen Selbst und Ego andererseits. Und natürlich ist es eine bedeutende Aufgabe der Phänomenologie,

ein tragfähiges Konzept von Selbst (und Selbstbewusstsein) zu entwickeln.

Michael Pollan hat in seinem 2018 erstmals erschienenen Bestseller *How to change your mind* (dt.: *Verändere dein Bewusstsein* 2019) die neurologische These popularisiert, dass das sogenannte ‚Default Mode Network‘ oder Ruhezustandsnetzwerk (DMN) gleichsam unser Ich (Selbst) hervorbringt: „Wenn die Aktivität im Default Mode Network stark zurückgeht, verschwindet das Ich offenbar vorübergehend, und die üblichen Grenzen zwischen dem Ich und der Welt, zwischen Subjekt und Objekt, schmelzen dahin.“ Und: „Das Gefühl, in einem größeren Ganzen aufzugehen, ist natürlich eins der Kennzeichen einer mystischen Erfahrung; unser Gefühl der Individualität und Abgetrenntheit fußt auf einem beschränkten Ich und einer klaren Abgrenzung zwischen Subjekt und Objekt. Doch all das ist vielleicht ein geistiges Konstrukt, eine Art Illusion – so wie es uns die Buddhisten zu sagen versuchen.“ (Pollan 2019, 334 f.)

An der ‚Default Mode Network‘-These ist zwar deutliche Kritik geübt worden (s. Letheby, Gerrans 2017, 7), aber an der grundlegenden Hierarchisierung wird nicht gerüttelt: Es sind bestimmte Neuronennetzwerke, die nicht nur für die Selbstauflösung verantwortlich sind, sondern das gesamte In-der-Welt- und Zur-Welt-Sein, das Existieren, das Haben von Welt, das Körperhaben und Leibsein, das Bewusstsein von Welt etc. hervorbringen. Wenn jedoch das Ich oder das Selbst eine Illusion ist, dann ist alles eine Illusion – nämlich alles, was subjektiv erlebt und erfahren werden kann. Doch wer ist es, der erlebt und erfährt? – Das illusionäre Ego? Das Gehirn? Das DMN? Ich möchte hier lediglich auf die Folgen hinweisen, wenn man – wie üblich – das Gehirn zur Grundlage von Subjektivität und Welt- und Selbsterleben macht. Auch wenn man an dieses naturalistische und neuronalistische Weltbild und an seine vermeintlich unumstößliche Wahrheit fest glaubt, sollte man nicht vergessen, dass es genau dies ist: ein Weltbild und damit eine begründungsbedürftige Metaphysik und Ontologie. Nicht nur Geist und Bewusstsein müssen hiernach als Gehirnphänomene gedeutet werden, sondern auch der phänomenale Leib, der phänomenale Körper einschließlich des

phänomenalen Gehirns. Das Problem wurde bereits von George Berkeley erkannt und diskutiert und firmiert heute unter dem Problemtitle „Gehirnparadox“ (Vgl. Streubel 2021a). Ich kann hier zwar aus Platzgründen keinen Alternativvorschlag präsentieren, möchte aber darauf insistieren, dass der behauptete Fundierungszusammengang zwischen Gehirn und Subjektivität tatsächlich nicht alternativlos und jedem Zweifel enthoben ist. Der eigentliche subjekttheoretische Knackpunkt ist hierbei tatsächlich das Ego. Denn wer das Phänomen des bewussten Erlebens nicht gänzlich leugnet, gesteht meist auch zu, dass es eine Instanz gibt, die bewusst ist oder Bewusstsein hat, die also das Subjekt des Bewusstseins ist. Und was mich betrifft: *Ich* bin mir in der Tat gerade *absolut sicher*, dass *ich es bin*, der bewusst ist! Wenn es nun das Gehirn ist, das Bewusstsein hervorbringt, dann (so scheint es) muss das Gehirn diese Instanz sein. Doch dies ist keineswegs zwingend. Es lassen sich jedenfalls vier Möglichkeiten denken, wie sich das Verhältnis von Gehirn und Ich denken lässt: 1. Das Ego ist identisch mit dem Gehirn, 2. Das Ego ist (wie das Selbst und die phänomenale Umwelt) ein Konstrukt des Gehirns, 3. Das Ich ist eine vom Gehirn grundlegend verschiedene Entität oder 4. Das Ich ist das Ansich des Gehirns.

Ich selbst vertrete die letzte (postkantianische) Position: Es gibt ein reales (und nicht illusionäres) Ego als Subjekt des Bewusstseins und dies ist diejenige Instanz, die auf der Objektseite als Gehirn in (m)einem Körper unter Umständen zur Erscheinung gebracht werden kann. Es ist hier nicht der Ort, diesen schwierigen Fragen auf den Grund zu gehen. Nichtsdestotrotz kann uns eine Phänomenologie der Ichauflösung dafür sensibilisieren, dass der Neurologismus problematischer ist als es zunächst scheint. Denn wenn man das Selbst als eine (durch neuronale Prozesse hervorgebrachte) Illusion betrachtet, dann stellt sich natürlich auch die Frage, ob nicht auch das empirische Gehirn, ja der ganze Körper eine Illusion darstellt. Denn mein Körper ist nicht nur ein Inhalt meiner Wahrnehmung, sondern zudem ein wesentlicher Teil meines Selbst. Auf ihn zeige ich mit dem Finger, wenn ich auf *mich* zeige. Nur weil ich einen Körper habe, erscheine ich in der Welt und damit auch anderen verkörperten Subjekten. Unser

Körper ist unsere Sichtbarkeit für andere sichtbare (körperliche) Subjekte. Ist das Selbst eine Fiktion, eine Illusion, ein Hirngespinnst, dann ist es auch der Körper (als Teil meines Selbst) einschließlich des Gehirns (als Teil des Körpers).

Einer der konsequentesten philosophischen Neuronisten in Bezug auf die Frage nach dem Selbst ist m.E. Thomas Metzinger mit seiner „Selbstmodell-Theorie“, der übrigens mit seinem kürzlich erschienenen Buch „Bewusstseinskultur“ (Metzinger 2023) in das gleiche Horn bläst wie Garfield und Hampe: Das Selbst ist eine Illusion, die es mittels (östlicher) Meditationspraktiken aufzulösen gilt, damit die Menschheit die multiplen Krisen der Gegenwart und nahen Zukunft mit dem richtigen „Mindset“ bewältigen könne. Ich erwähne Metzinger hier nicht nur wegen der theoretischen Konsequenz seiner Überlegungen, sondern auch, weil dessen „Selbstmodell-Theorie“ prominent in der Forschungsliteratur zum Thema „Ego Dissolution“ vertreten ist. Ich erwähne ihn aber auch deswegen, weil er bezüglich des Selbst zu einem ähnlichen Ergebnis kommt wie ich, zumindest was den *einen* Punkt anbelangt, dass es *an sich* kein Selbst gibt. Im Unterschied zu Metzinger behaupte ich aber nicht, dass das phänomenale Selbst eine durch das Gehirn hervorgebrachte Illusion ist. Zudem unterscheide ich anders als Metzinger zwischen Selbst und Ego.

Nach Metzinger entwirft das Gehirn ein bewusstes Modell des Organismus und implementiert dieses in den Bewusstseinsraum, so dass das entsteht, was die Phänomenologie ursprünglich als ihr eigentliches Forschungsfeld definiert hatte: das Subjekt als *Subjekt von Welt* und als *Subjekt in der Welt* (s. Husserl 1962, § 53). Man könnte auch sagen: Das transzendente Feld der Erfahrung ist aus neurologistischer Sicht in Wahrheit ein (phänomenales) Hirngespinnst oder eine virtuelle Repräsentation des entsprechenden Organismus (der jedoch niemals phänomenal gegeben ist und insofern ein kantisches Ding an sich darstellt). Metzinger schreibt: „Zumindest für alle uns bekannten bewussten Wesen gilt, dass sie weder ein Selbst *haben*, noch ein Selbst *sind*. Was sie haben ist ein *Selbstmodell* – und dies ist letztlich ein komplexer

Gehirnzustand.“ (Metzinger 2009, 428) Mit „Selbstmodell“ ist hier wohlgerneht der empirisch erfahrbare Mensch in einer phänomenalen Umwelt gemeint, wobei Mensch und Umwelt als phänomenale Hirnkonstrukte interpretiert werden. – An dieser Stelle wird der Weltanschauungscharakter des Neuronalismus besonders augenfällig.

Was die Selbstmodelltheorie aber nicht zufriedenstellend erklären kann, ist die Tatsache, dass *ich* es bin, der gerade ein Bewusstsein von Selbst und Welt hat. Metzinger hat Recht, wenn er unseren Erlebnisraum so beschreibt, dass darin zwei Entitäten oder Bereiche vorkommen: Selbst und Nichtselbst. Aber das Phänomen des Bewusstseins und Erlebens ist *zusätzlich* dadurch qualifiziert, dass eben auch *jemand* bewusst ist oder Bewusstsein hat. Jemand und nicht vielmehr niemand („No One“) hat ganz unmittelbar ein Bewusstsein von (seinem) Selbst und Nichtselbst. Dieser Jemand kann aber nicht das Gehirn sein – und zwar nicht nur deswegen nicht, weil das Gehirn ein Etwas und kein Jemand ist, sondern weil dieser Jemand (nämlich: Ich) das spatiale Zentrum des Bewusstseinsraums bildet (was vom Gehirn beim besten Willen nicht behauptet werden kann: das Gehirn ist im Schädel und nicht im Nullpunkt des Bewusstseins lokalisiert). Und noch mehr: Wäre ich (das Ego) nicht als Subjekt des Bewusstseins und als unsichtbares Zentrum meines Erlebnisraums anwesend, könnte ich auch nicht sagen, dass dies *mein* Bewusstsein ist. In der Metzinger-Welt gibt es nur Organismen mit bewusstem Selbst- und Weltmodell. Doch in diesem Bild fehlt etwas Entscheidendes: dass ich nämlich selbst eines dieser bewussten Organismen bin; oder genauer: dass ich das Ich oder eigentliche Subjekt eines ganz bestimmten Organismus bin, der meinen Namen trägt. Metzinger kann nicht verständlich machen, warum ich dieser und nicht jener Organismus bin und warum dies und nicht jenes mein Bewusstsein ist. Dies kann man nur verstehen, wenn man die Existenz eines Egos anerkennt, eines Ich, mit dem ich streng identisch bin. Die Frage ist hier nicht: Warum ist jener Organismus Thomas Metzinger? Oder warum ist Thomas Metzinger Thomas Metzinger? Sondern: Warum bin ich *nicht* Thomas Metzinger, sondern Thorsten Streubel? Und warum ist

jemand anderes Thomas Metzinger? Warum ist das Bewusstsein von Thomas Metzinger nicht mein Bewusstsein? Und warum ist mein Bewusstsein *mein* Bewusstsein? Meine Antwort lautet: Weil ich ein vom Ich Thomas Metzingers unterschiedenes Ich bin. Dies ist der Grund, warum es nicht nur einen Thorsten Streubel gibt, sondern warum ich Thorsten Streubel bin.

Ich werde nun im Weiteren zunächst das von mir vertretene Selbstbewusstseinsmodell skizzieren, danach einen glaubwürdigen Erfahrungsbericht präsentieren und am Ende eine zusammenfassende Erklärung dieses Phänomens versuchen. Ich möchte betonen, dass ich hier eine rein *phänomenologische Erklärung* des Phänomens offeriere und die Fragen nach den neuronalen oder sonstigen metaphysischen Grundlagen aus methodischen und erkenntnistheoretischen Gründen ausklammere: Der Neuralismus und die problematische naturalistische Theoretisierung des Gehirn-Geist-Problems bedarf, wie gesagt, einer separaten und gründlichen phänomenologischen Kritik, die hier nicht geleistet werden kann (vgl. hierzu Streubel 2016).

4. Die Anerkenntnistheorie des Selbst-Bewusstseins

Ich denke, man kann anhand des Phänomens der Selbstauflösung demonstrieren, dass das Konzept des Selbst tatsächlich ontologisch prekär ist, ja dass nichts an sich ein oder gar mein Selbst ist. Anders gesagt: Ich bin *nicht* mit meinem Selbst streng identisch, zumal es dieses Selbst nicht an sich gibt. Mein Selbst konstituiert sich vielmehr allererst durch einen aneignenden Akt der Identifikation, den ich als ‚Anerkenntnis‘ bezeichne. Dieser konstitutive Akt ist ursprünglicher als jede intersubjektive und soziale Form der gegenseitigen Anerkennung (wie sie etwa von Fichte, Hegel und in den letzten Jahrzehnten von Honneth theoretisiert wurde). Aber dieser Akt der Anerkenntnis ist kein Erkenntnisakt in dem Sinne, dass ein Erkenntnisobjekt namens ‚Selbst‘ in seinem Ansichsein erkannt wird. Der Akt der Anerkenntnis erfolgt zwar ebenfalls in der Regel nicht willkürlich, sondern gewissermaßen evidenzbasiert. Aber er interpretiert bestimmte Phänomene (wie den Leib) auf eine

Weise, die diesen einen neuen Sinn erteilt: Sie werden erst im Akt der Anerkennung als Teile des Selbst anerkannt und damit zu Teilen des Selbst promoviert. Und dies geschieht auf Basis des Sichempfindens oder der Qualität der Meinigkeit, die den Leib wesentlich mitausmacht. Und wenn dieses Sichempfinden schwindet, verliert das Selbstbewusstsein als Selbstverhältnis seine evidentielle Grundlage und auch leibliche Verankerung und Basis. Und dieses Schwinden des Selbstempfindens bildet m.E. auch die Grundlage der Selbstauflösung.

Man könnte hier von einer zweistufigen Selbstbewusstseinstheorie sprechen:

1. Stufe: Die evidenzielle Grundlage bildet das gleichzeitige Erleben von ‚meinigem‘ Leib und nicht-meiniger Umwelt. Ich nenne diese Differenz die ästhetische Differenz. (Beispiel: Ich spüre mich in meiner Hand, aber normalerweise nicht in meinem Handy, auch wenn ich die glatte Oberfläche desselben durch Berührung taktil erfahren kann.)

2. Stufe: Aufgrund der genannten evidenziellen Grundlage kann der (egologische) Akt der Anerkennung stattfinden, der allererst ein basales Selbst-Bewusstsein konstituiert (ursprünglich und dann immer wieder – lebenslang).

Dieses zweistufige Modell lässt sich näherhin so erläutern.

Stufe 1: Vorreflexiv erlebe ich nicht nur einfach eine Umwelt, sondern das Erleben der Umwelt oder von Umweltbestandteilen wird begleitet von einem zentralen Sichempfinden, welches jedoch noch kein echtes Selbstbewusstsein im Sinne eines Selbstverhältnisses darstellt. Ich spreche auch von einem *zentralen* Sichempfinden und meine dies wörtlich. Im Zentrum meiner Welt empfinde ich gewissermaßen mich selbst. Man könnte auch alternativ davon sprechen, dass das mir unmittelbar Nächstgegebene der als ‚meinig‘ qualifizierte Leib ist. Es handelt sich bei der ‚Meinigkeit‘ tatsächlich um eine irreduzible Empfindungsqualität und nicht um ein Selbstwissen oder einen Selbstbegriff. Dieser meinige Leib ist mir erlebnismäßig gegeben, ohne dass ich dafür einen Begriff von ‚Ich‘, ‚Selbst‘, ‚Leib‘ oder ‚Meinigkeit‘ haben müsste. Jedes schmerzempfindliche Wesen hat einen solchen meinigen Leib, denn Schmerzen sind leibliche

Phänomene. Nur ich kann etwa meine Zahnschmerzen als meinige empfinden und erleiden.

Stufe 2: Diese phänomenale Zweiteilung des Erlebnisraumes in einen zentralen meinigen Leib und einer peripheren und konzentrischen Umwelt ist nun die Grundlage für die Ausbildung von Selbstbewusstsein. Und hier kommt das Ego ins Spiel. Das Ego ist dasjenige Subjekt, welches gewissermaßen beide Seiten überblickt, einfach deshalb, weil ihm beide Seiten anschaulich gegenwärtig sind. Das Erleben endet nicht an den Grenzen des Leibes. Und diese ‚aistische Differenz‘ (zwischen meinigem Leib und nichtmeiniger Umwelt) ist es, die es einem geistigen Ego ermöglicht, auf die Idee zu kommen, dass es selbst etwas von dem ist, was in seinem Bewusstseinsraum vorkommt: Es kann sich mit dem meinigen Leib *identifizieren*. Es ist zwar in Wahrheit gar nicht im ontologischen Sinne mit seinem Leib streng identisch. Aber es erkennt diesen gewissermaßen als sein Selbst an. Durch Fremd- und Selbstberührung, also durch taktile Erfahrungen, wird dieser Akt der Selbst-Anerkenntnis gewissermaßen noch ‚gepuscht‘ (ebenso durch Schmerzerfahrungen und Erschütterungen wie jäher Schreck). Denn hierdurch bekommt die Differenz zwischen Leib und Umwelt noch einmal eine ganz andere evidenzielle Intensität und Prägnanz. Aber das Sichspüren im Berühren oder Berührtwerden ist selbst nur eine Steigerung des Sichempfindens. Das Sichempfinden ist, wie gesagt, an sich noch kein Selbst-Bewusstsein. Dieses entsteht erst mit der anfangs vielleicht sehr dunklen Idee, dass von den Phänomenen, die mir anschaulich gegeben sind, eines Ich-selbst sein könnte, wobei auch die Idee des Ich-Selbst ursprünglich erst gefasst werden muss und nicht als eingeborener Begriff gleichsam nur (amnestisch) erinnert werden müsste. Das Konzept des Selbst wurde weder in einer vorgeburtlichen Schau erworben, noch handelt es sich um eine eingeborene Idee, sondern um einen Gedanken, der ursprünglich aufgrund von Erfahrung konzipiert, ja ich möchte sagen: *errungen* werden muss. (Vielleicht ist es ontogenetisch sogar das erste und grundlegendste Aha-Erlebnis.) Im Akt der Anerkenntnis identifiziere ich mich nun mit dem leiblichen Zentrum meines Bewusstseins. Ich anerkenne es als mein

Selbst. Und dieses Selbst, das streng genommen nur als Korrelat des Selbst-Bewusstseins existiert, kann dann gleichsam (ontogenetisch) erweitert werden: auf den phänomenalen Körper, auf das eigene Denken, Imaginieren, Wollen etc.

Hierdurch lässt sich nun verstehen, wodurch eine Selbstauflösung möglich wird: Durch eine starke Minderung des leiblichen Sichspürens bei gleichzeitiger Intensivierung der ‚Weltverschlossenheit‘ (also dem attentionalen Sein-bei-den-Dingen in der Umwelt oder Umgebung) kann es passieren, dass das Subjekt seine leibliche Verankerung und damit sich selbst verliert und mit der Welt erlebnismäßig eins wird. Das ist es, was im Falle der „Ego Dissolution“ oder Selbstauflösung m.E. passiert. Wir haben also einen Push- und einen Pullfaktor: Verlust des Sichspürens⁴ und eine hypnotische Attraktion durch die Umwelt. Beides zusammen *kann* zum Selbstverlust und zur Weltverschmelzung führen.

5. Erfahrungsbericht

Sehen wir uns hierzu einen Erfahrungsbericht an. Genauer gesagt handelt es sich um ein von mir durchgeführtes Interview mit einem phänomenologisch geschulten ‚Psychonauten‘, der im Verlaufe eines Magic-Mushrooms-Trips eine Selbstauflösung durchlebt hat:⁵

Interview:

Ich: Lieber A, Du hast mir berichtet, Du hättest vor kurzem zum ersten Mal in Deinem Leben eine sogenannte Ichauflösung erfahren. Kannst Du mir möglichst genau schildern, was passiert ist?

A: Gerne. Wir, M, ein Freund von mir, und ich, saßen an einem frühsummerlichen Spätnachmittag am See. Der bisherige Verlauf des Trips war buchstäblich nicht sonderlich berauschend gewesen. Wir blickten auf die gegenüberliegende Seite des Sees, an dem sich ein kleines goldleuchtendes Häuschen vor hohen Bäumen abhob. Ich hatte plötzlich den Eindruck, dass die ganze Szenerie von einer Sekunde auf die andere in intensiven Farben erstrahlte und fragte M, ob er das

auch so wahrnehme. M nickte und wir schauten wie gebannt weiter auf die andere Seite. Da erklang der Song „Bean“ der norwegischen Band *Orions Belte*, ein wunderbares sommerlich-warmes Instrumentalstück. Augenblicklich begann alles, wirklich alles in meinem Gesichtsfeld eine Verbindung miteinander einzugehen, sich gleichsam die Hände zu reichen, ja zunehmend ineinander zu verfließen. Alles wurde irgendwie eins, die Bäume, der See, das golden leuchtende Häuschen, alle Farben und die Musik, die die Energie hinter allem zu sein schien. Da hörte ich auf, zu sein und wurde zu dieser Einheit aus Farben und Tönen. Ich glaube, erst als der Song zu Ende war, erwachte ich wie aus einem unbeschreiblichen Traum. Ein Gefühl von großem Glück durchströmte mich und ich war doch auch völlig verduzt darüber, was hier gerade über mich gekommen war. Entschuldige bitte, wenn ich noch diesen Vergleich anführe: Das ganze hatte die Verlaufsgestalt eines männlichen Orgasmus, es war wie ein Orgasmus, nur fühlte es sich komplett anders an. Ehrlich gesagt, weiß ich gar nicht, ob es sich überhaupt irgendwie angefühlt hat. Es war eher die reine Ekstase; reines Bewusstsein.

Ich: Vielen Dank für diese eindrückliche Schilderung. Könntest Du mir noch mehr darüber sagen, was Du damit meinst, du hörtest auf, zu sein?

A: Ja das ist schwer in Worte zu fassen. Ich war irgendwie nicht mehr da.

Ich: Aber Du hast das Ganze doch bewusst erlebt und warst so gesehen dabei? Oder wurdest Du ohnmächtig?

A: Nein, ich wurde ganz und gar nicht ohnmächtig, sondern eher überwacht. Ich war dabei, insofern ich alles erlebt habe. Aber ich, als diese konkrete Person, war irgendwie nicht mehr da. Jedenfalls kann ich mich nicht daran erinnern, mich irgendwie selbst wahrgenommen oder gespürt zu haben.

Ich: Du hast also noch gesehen und gehört, aber was Du gesehen und gehört hast, war irgendwie eine große Einheit?

A: Ja, aber das ist zu schwach ausgedrückt. Ich war selbst eins mit allem. Ich war alles. Aber ich war zugleich nicht mehr Ich selbst.

Ich: Kannst Du mir noch etwas über die Rolle dieses speziellen Songs sagen?

A: Dieser Song hat etwas sehr Erhebendes und vermittelt ein Gefühl von Leichtigkeit. Er hat vermutlich wesentlich dazu beigetragen, dass ich gleichsam aus mir heraustreten konnte. Vielleicht war es sogar so, dass er eine Art Hochgefühl bei mir hervorgerufen hat, ohne dass ich sagen würde, dass ich es in diesem Moment als mein Gefühl erlebt oder erfahren habe.

Auswertung und Interpretation

Halten wir die wesentlichen Punkte fest: A hat das Bewusstsein nicht verloren, er war die ganze Zeit das Subjekt der Wahrnehmung. Trotzdem hat er sich kurz verloren und das ist es, was m.E. mit dem Terminus „Egotod“ bezeichnet wird. Nur ist nicht sein Ego verloren gegangen oder erstorben, sondern sein Selbst. Er, als leiblich-körperliches Selbst, war gewissermaßen kein gespürter Teil seines Erlebens mehr. Die Verankerung im meinigen Leib ging verloren und A konnte nun mit der Welt verschmelzen, die bereits seine ganze Aufmerksamkeit gefesselt hatte. Der Leib wurde tatsächlich auf ein reines Wahrnehmungsorgan reduziert, war aber als solcher weiterhin in Funktion. Denn A hat ja weiterhin gesehen und gehört.

Die perzeptive Umwelt ist immer ein Korrelat des leiblichen Wahrnehmens (außer im Schlaf und bei Bewusstlosigkeit) und somit ein integraler Bestandteil des Menschseins. Im Selbstverlust nimmt die Welt den ganzen Bewusstseinsraum ein, der Leib als Empfindung der Meinigkeit scheint zu verschwinden oder aus dem Bewusstsein verdrängt zu werden. Das Subjekt des Erlebens hat das ‚Gefühl‘, nicht mehr zu sein. Es hat die leibliche Verankerung durch das Selbstempfinden verloren. Das Ego, als letztes und eigentliches Subjekt der Wahrnehmung, ist aber stets dabei. Es ‚stirbt‘ nicht, sondern bleibt das Subjekt des Erlebens. Eine starke Gefühlskomponente scheint in dem geschilderten Fall – hervorgerufen durch die Musik – nichtsdestotrotz aufgetreten zu sein, nur scheint sich auch dieses Gefühl mit der verfließenden Welt und der Musik amalgamiert zu haben und konnte daher die leibliche Erdung, die den Selbstverlust normalerweise unterbindet, nicht aufrecht erhalten. Vielleicht

haben wir hier auch das seltene und seltsame Phänomen eines Gefühls vor uns, das – frei von der Qualität der Meinigkeit – als integraler Teil der Welt das ekstatische Welterleben wesentlich auszeichnet. Man darf auch nicht vergessen, dass das Phänomen der Selbstauflösung stets einem *lebendigen* Wesen zustößt und dass das ekstatische Weltwerden letztlich durch die Lebenskraft des Subjekts hervorgerufen wird.

Der ‚Mythos der Ichauflösung‘ besteht also darin, dass sich hier das Ego oder gar der ganze konkrete Mensch auflösen würde. Dies ist offensichtlich nicht der Fall. Nichtsdestotrotz wird mit dem entsprechenden Terminus ein ganz reales, wenngleich nicht unbedingt alltägliches Phänomen bezeichnet: nämlich das ekstatische Weltwerden des erlebenden Subjekts durch den Verlust des leiblichen Sichempfindens (welches wiederum die evidenzielle Grundlage des Aktes der Anerkennung und damit des Selbst-Bewusstseins ist). Es handelt sich aber um eine radikale subjektive Erfahrung, die das konkrete Menschsein des jeweiligen Subjekts (abgesehen vom Verlust des Selbst) intakt lässt. Das Subjekt ist als Körpersubjekt weiterhin ein potenzieller Wahrnehmungsgegenstand für sich und andere. Aus dieser Erfahrung lassen sich daher zwar durchaus subjekttheoretische, aber nicht unbedingt darüber hinausgehende ontologische und metaphysische Schlüsse ziehen (wie etwa: in Wahrheit sind wir nur reines Bewusstsein und alles andere ist bloßer Schein). Aus dem Phänomen der Selbstauflösung alleine lässt sich ganz sicher keine umfassende und phänomenologisch begründete Metaphysik ableiten. Aber dies bedeutet nicht, dass die Analyse des Phänomens der Selbstauflösung nicht dabei helfen kann, neuronalistische, idealistische und sonstige Voraussetzungen in Frage zu stellen.

Methodische Anmerkung: Ich habe bewusst auf eine Auswertung der vielen Erfahrungsberichte im Netz verzichtet, da sich die Validität dieser Beschreibungen in keiner Weise einschätzen lässt und diese z.T. den Eindruck einer überschießenden Fantasie, wenn nicht von Angeberei vermitteln.⁶ Es dürfte aber klar sein, dass der von mir oben wiedergegebene Erfahrungsbericht mit anderen glaubwürdigen

Erfahrungs-berichten abgeglichen werden muss. Es bedarf weiteres empirisches Material, um die hier präsentierte Theorie zu erhärten oder gegebenenfalls zu modifizieren. Auch wäre zu prüfen, inwieweit sich die substanzeninduzierten Selbstaufösungen und die durch eine langjährige Meditationspraxis hervorgerufenen gleichen oder differieren. Die methodenstrenge phänomenologische Forschung hat diesbezüglich gerade erst begonnen.

Fazit

Das Phänomen der Ichauflösung zeigt, dass man als Subjekt auch dann *bewusst* und *zur Welt* sein kann, wenn das Selbstbewusstsein und damit das Selbst sich auflöst und verschwindet. Selbstbewusstsein (als Bewusstsein des eigenen Selbst) ist somit keine notwendige Bedingung von bewusstem Erleben, sondern ein höherstufiges Phänomen, welches auch vorübergehend ausfallen kann.

Zugleich ist aber auch das Phänomen der Selbstauflösung ein bewusst erlebter Prozess, an den sich Subjekte mehr oder weniger gut erinnern können und der von einem letzten Subjekt erlebt wird. Dieses letzte Subjekt ist das Ego, das sich in der sogenannten „Ego Dissolution“ gerade nicht auflöst, sondern als Erlebnissubjekt durchhält. Es gilt also zwischen Selbst/Selbstbewusstsein und Ego streng zu unterscheiden. Und diese Unterscheidung behält unabhängig davon, wie man das Ego näher ontologisch bestimmt, ihre Gültigkeit. Historisch reichen die Bestimmungen des Egos vom Ich als „Weltauge“ (vgl. oben Fußnote 2) oder Gott über dessen Identifikation mit dem Gehirn bis zur Leugnung desselben. Ich verstehe das Ego als letztes Erfahrungssubjekt, welches auch noch bei der „Ego Dissolution“ *dabei* ist. Auch wenn ich dieses Ego nicht mit dem Gehirn identifiziere, muss ich die Frage nach dessen Natur bzw. nach dessen präzisen ontologischen Status hier offenlassen. Der entscheidende Punkt ist zunächst nur dieser: Jegliche Erfahrung, auch die der Selbstauflösung, ist *jemeinig*. Und *Jemeinigkeit* setzt jemanden voraus für den eine bestimmte Erfahrung eben jemeinig ist. Ich nenne diesen Jemand, dieses letzte Subjekt, welches Jemeinigkeit begründet (mit Husserl): „Ego“.

NOTES

¹ Leider fehlt ein einschlägiger Artikel zu diesem Konzept im *Historischen Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Ein konziser Übersichtsartikel findet sich aber in der *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (sowie ein etwas umfangreicherer in der englischen Wikipedia) unter dem Lemma „Ego-death“. Zum Begriff ‚fana‘ vgl. Schimmel 1985, 207 ff.: „Fana ist in seinen Anfängen ein ethischer Begriff: der Mensch entwirft seinen Eigenschaften, indem er Gottes Eigenschaften annimmt.“ (207)

² Interessanterweise beschreibt Schopenhauer die ästhetische Erfahrung als eine Art „Ego Dissolution“, wobei sowohl der Künstler als auch der Kunstbetrachter bei der gelingenden Schau der Platonischen Ideen ihre Individualität abstreifen und zum reinen Subjekt des Erkennens und gewissermaßen zur Präsenz der Idee selbst werden: Das Subjekt bleibt nur noch „als klarer Spiegel des Objekts bestehen [...] so dass es ist, als ob der Gegenstand allein da wäre, ohne Jemanden, der ihn wahrnimmt, und man also nicht mehr den Anschauenden von der Anschauung trennen kann, sondern beide Eines geworden sind“. [...] „[W]ir sind nur noch da als das eine Weltauage, was aus allen erkennenden Wesen blickt“ (Schopenhauer 1999, 244, 267).

³ Diese epistemische Zweistufigkeit ist eine entscheidende Differenz zum Zickzack-Verfahren, das Husserl in den *Logischen Untersuchungen* sich gezwungen sieht anzuwenden, da die „phänomenologische Fundierung der Logik [...] fast alle die Begriffe, auf deren Klärung sie abzielt, in der Darstellung selbst verwenden muss.“ (Husserl 1984, 22)

⁴ Psychedelika haben oft den Effekt, dass alle Sinne geschärft werden und die attentionale Weltverschlossenheit verstärkt, aber das Selbstempfinden vermindert wird. Die Tendenzen zum Selbstverlust sind also zwar meist gegeben, führen aber nur selten zur tatsächlichen Selbstauflösung.

⁵ Die interviewte Person muss natürlich anonym bleiben. Ich verbürge mich aber dafür, dass die Auskunft nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen erfolgte.

⁶ S. auch die Erfahrungsberichte in Metzinger 2023 b. Das grundsätzliche methodische Problem (auch in Bezug auf Metzingers Berichtesammlung und –auswertung sehe ich darin, dass die Verfasser dieser Erfahrungsberichte nicht mit einer gut begründeten Theorie in der Hand gezielt befragt wurden – so wie schon Kant es in Bezug auf die modernen Naturwissenschaften formuliert hatte: Die Naturwissenschaftler „begriffen, dass die Vernunft nur das einsieht, was sie selbst nach ihrem Entwurfe hervorbringt, dass sie mit Prinzipien ihrer Urteile nach beständigen Gesetzen vorgehen und die Natur nötigen müsse auf ihre Fragen zu antworten, nicht aber sich von ihr allein gleichsam am Leitbände gängeln lassen müsse“ (Kant 1787, B XIII). Und so sollte auch der Philosoph nicht einfach Erfahrungsberichte als empirische Ausgangsbasis seiner Analysen zugrundelegen, sondern als Interpretamente und voraussetzungsvolle Narrative. Man benötigt vielmehr (um methodisch sauber zu arbeiten) eine gut begründete Subjekttheorie,

mittels derer man das jeweilige Subjekt der Erfahrung kritisch befragen kann. Natürlich sollte der Subjekttheoretiker offen für Revisionen seiner Theorie sein, die durch diese Befragungen möglicherweise unumgänglich werden. Noch besser wäre es allerdings, der Philosoph könnte seine *eigenen* Erfahrungen (aus erster Hand) analysieren.

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The Art of Biblical Hermeneutics: The Story of the Canaanite Woman

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Abstract

Biblical hermeneutics is originally utilized as a theory, a methodology and a formal process through which the interpreter employs certain principles and methods in order to derive the author's intended meaning and comment upon the different shades that a religious discourse carries. Using Gadamer's (1977) hermeneutical framework, the study examines how the four techniques (literal/moral/allegorical/anagogical) of biblical interpretation are not enough within scholarship to channel broader understanding of biblical texts and maps out how these levels of interpretation relate to each other. The corpus, which consists in the narrative of the Canaanite woman in its Matthean form, is qualitatively and quantitatively explored. Personal and demonstrative references as well as naming strategies are identified in the corpus and are qualitatively studied using the deictic anchorage to unveil their shifting relevance. The quantitative analysis then qualifies how frames are constructed using Simple Concordance Software for the frequency of keywords. The results divulge that the prospological-pragmatic interpretation proves the literal and moral interpretations and overrides the allegorical and anagogical ones. The findings also show that biblical hermeneutics is an art of understanding rather than a proper science. The study findings may be used by exegetes and biblical hermeneutics researchers to consider the artistic and the discursive processes in biblical texts.

Keywords: hermeneutics, pragmatics, exegesis, literal interpretation, naming, reference, deixis, allegory, anagogical interpretation, prospology

Introduction

Since this study falls into the scope of religious discourse, I may first start by giving a plain definition of hermeneutics as stated by George (2020) that “[h]ermeneutics is the study of interpretation. Hermeneutics plays a role in a

number of disciplines whose subject matter demands interpretative approaches". Forster (2007) has already clarified that hermeneutics is "the theory of interpretation i.e. the theory of achieving or understanding of texts, utterances, and so on". Theologically speaking, the term 'biblical hermeneutics,' as George (2020) states, "concerns the general principles for the proper interpretation of the Bible". Though some scholars (Kimmerle 1977; Hahn 1997; Forster 2007; Zimmermann 2015) relate the term 'hermeneutics' to interpretation in general which "occurs in many fields of study and also in day-to-day life" (Zimmermann 2015), I may claim that it fits well the context of biblical studies and more broadly religious discourse. My view goes in line with Thiselton (2009) who suggests that hermeneutics "explores how we read, understand and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in a context of life different from our own". This view is maintained by the recent definition given by the Encyclopedia Britannica (2023) that hermeneutics "is the study of the general principles of biblical interpretation. For both Jews and Christians throughout their studies, the primary purpose of hermeneutics, and of the exegetical methods employed in interpretation, has been to discover the truths and values expressed in the Bible".

Having agreed on this claim, it becomes a necessity to refer to the work of Origen. However, I do not intend to give a detailed review of Origen's approach. Rather, I incline to build on his work by adding another angle of interpretation: the pragmatic one. Origen relied on four major techniques while developing his interpretations. Heine (2019) refers to them as "figurative interpretation (*tropologia*), allegorical interpretation (*allègoria*), anagogical interpretation (*anagogè*), and prosopological interpretation (*prosopon*).". Heine (2019) argues that the first three techniques are nearly similar "in that they all produce a meaning from a text that differs, sometimes quite strikingly, from what the literal words of the text say". Gadamer's (1977) model includes the "literal, moral, allegorical and anagogical" interpretations as the major types of biblical hermeneutics. Gadamer (1977), therefore, fused Origen's typology with Erasmus's. The latter "tended to limit the senses to three: literal, allegorical and tropological" (Mckim 1998). The

tropological is important for Erasmus as it is concerned with moral sense (Mckim 1998). Gadamer (1977) refers to literal interpretation as the “plain meaning conveyed by its grammatical construction and historical context”. Moral interpretation “seeks to establish exegetical principles by which ethical lessons may be drawn from the various parts of the Bible” (ibid). Gadamer (1977) minutely distinguishes between ‘allegorical’ and ‘anagogical’ interpretations by stating that the former “interprets the biblical narratives as having a second level of reference beyond those persons, things and events explicitly mentioned in the text” whereas the latter “seeks to explain biblical events as they relate to or prefigure the life to come” (Gadamer 1977). I find the second typology yielded by Gadamer more convincing as it offers a gradual interpretation of biblical texts knowingly that the reading of Scriptures transcends the surface level of understanding. Moreover, this typology avoids the overlap between the four layers of interpretation. Back to ‘prospological’ exegesis introduced by Origen, Heine (2019) displays that this technique “focuses on identifying who is speaking in a text and sometimes also to whom the words are addressed”. I will elaborate on this fourth technique by making it a pragmatic angle of interpretation while keeping the aforementioned techniques by Gadamer.

The literal interpretation of a biblical text might be absurd or it “conflicts with the doctrine of Christ or morality” (Mckim 1998). Therefore, I claim that allegorical and moral interpretations are necessary but not sufficient since “in modern theology, as in modern culture” (Bostock 1987) this type of interpretation “has become an unfashionable and indeed a discredited literary mode” (ibid). Bostock (1987) proceeds by stating that “[a]llegorical interpretations of the Bible, which were once considered normative, are now rejected by modern scholarship”. This rejection is still debatable and even Bostock ends up by confessing that allegory “is a means of indicating and discerning truths which are hidden in parables and extended metaphors. As such, it can take many forms and can be used by poets or by theologians. But in either case its primary function is didactic. It has its origin in the philosophical perception of a spiritual world and of the need to

reveal that world” (Bostock 1987). I find this claim convincing but still needs ‘meta-levels’ of interpretation to meet the ends of biblical understanding. What I mean by ‘meta-levels’ are the anagogical and the pragmatic-prospological interpretations. Anagogical interpretations “elevate the meaning of myths above the human and the mundane, explaining them in natural, astronomical, or ethical terms” (Berg 2022) whereas ‘pragmatic-prospological interpretation’ deconstructs hidden ideologies within the discourse and lays bare the tacit communicative events.

As demonstrated above, the five techniques of biblical interpretation suggested by this study are not covered in great depth within scholarship and little to no work has been done on how they relate to each other. Therefore, as I enter the scholarly discussion on the story of the Canaanite woman, I will highlight how my modified typology of interpretation will be insightful and will contribute well to the field of study.

Many scholars (Wainwright 1994; Saenz 1997; Levine 2001; Hare 1993; Dolto 1980; Mukendi 1997; Garland 1993; Young 2001; Jackson 2002) believe that the story of the Canaanite woman carries cultural, political, gender, economic and ethnic affinities. Hare (1993) considers that the Matthean Jesus is depicted in the story as a tribal messiah with a culturally-limited mission: converting the “lost sheep of Israel” (Matthew 10: 5-6). However, Hare (1993) shows that Jesus’ encounter with the Canaanite woman gave another perspective to his mission by making it universal. Wainwright (1994; 1998; 2001) views the story from a post-colonial angle and claims that “the Matthean Jesus confronted Roman imperialism and Israelite cultural and religious structures” (Wainwright 1998) along his journey of proselytizing. Even the Canaanite mother, by her silenced voice, incarnates what “goes on in a world filled with inequalities” (Wainwright 2001) because “[l]ike many colonized and marginal voices, the space to speak from is never peacefully negotiated, it is rather (re) claimed by means of resistance and insistence” (ibid).

The feminist view (Saenz 1997; Fiorenza 1992; Kitzberger 2000, Schumacher 2003; Ross 2004) considers that the Canaanite mother is doubly victimized, by her writer and

her reader, who “mistreated and incarcerated [her] in the oppressive boundaries of the text” (Saenz 1997). Fiorenza (1992) adds that “feminist biblical interpretation meets resistance when it seeks to enter scholarly discourses on equal terms. In recent years, feminist biblical interpretation has continuously sought to enter the ‘house’ of biblical criticism as an ‘insider’ to interrupt biblical criticism’s androcentric isolation and to challenge its prevailing discourses”. Regarding the story of the Canaanite woman, Fiorenza (1992) comments that the woman’s attempts “to enter the discourses of the discipline on equal terms often receive no response at all-‘but he did not respond to her word’ or they are met with the reaction of Jesus’ male disciples who wish to send the woman away because her voice is too loud and noisy”. Recently, Rukundwa and Van Aarde (2009) have interpreted the story from a psychoanalytic perspective by stating that the mother “seemed to be familiar with a known Judean liturgy” through her very simple and polite prayer. The psychoanalytic reading extends further with Dolto (1980) and Mukendi (1997) who claim that Jesus’ encounter with the woman renders him a savior and a messiah who transcends “cultural and religious barriers”. Dolto (1980) concludes by saying that “Jesus learned through these circumstances that he was to take care of all, regardless of their social-political and geographical provenance”. The social reading suggested by Levine (2001) claims that the Canaanite mother “provides a major means by which social hierarchies can, finally be broken down”.

The rough above-mentioned review of literature on the story of the Canaanite woman is meant to show the intricate nature of the story and how a one-sided interpretation does not suffice. This fact ultimately proves that there is an urgent need for a trans-disciplinary view of the Matthean story, specifically, and biblical studies in general. The former scholars previously dealt with might have followed the four steps of interpretation (literal/moral/allegorical/anagogical) in their biblical hermeneutics which led to such findings. However, I will add the pragmatic angle of interpretation and check if those findings remain valid or not.

1. Method

Though the narrative of the Canaanite woman is mentioned in the gospels of Mark (7: 25-30) and Matthew (15: 22-29), I will focus on the narrative “in its Matthean form, where Jesus’ negative attitude is more emphatic and harsher than in Mark” (Falade 2017). Another important variable in Matthew is Jesus’ confession of the woman’s great faith ‘O woman, great is your faith’ (Matthew 15: 28) which is not focused upon in Mark. This variable displays “how her exemplary faith compares with aspects of the disciples’ ‘little faith’ and the Jewish religious leaders’ lack of faith” (O’Donnell 2021). The interpretation will follow Gadamer’s (1977) typology with its four steps (literal/moral/allegorical/anagogical) as a first level of analysis since this typology synthesizes the pioneering works of Origen and Erasmus. The second level will encompass the ‘prospological-pragmatic’ perspective which merges the traditional view suggested by Origen (prospological) with a contemporary one (pragmatic) suggested by this study. The analysis of the corpus is mainly qualitative as it is “an analysis of the dialectic relationships between discourse... and other elements of social practice” (Fairclough 2003, 205) and it gives a thorough understanding of “the wider socio-cultural, political, ideological, institutional and historical context and structures surrounding the text” (Fairclough 1989, 26). The qualitative analysis will be validated by a quantitative analysis based on Simple Concordance software (version 4.05), for its easy manipulation, in order to list the words used in the corpus and their frequency and subsequently detect among them those that are supposed to construct the frame. Pragmatically speaking, I will highlight the shifting of pronouns as well as the use of demonstratives since ‘This’ means something which is ‘related to me’ while ‘That’ means ‘out yonder’ (Lakoff 1974, 352). Deixis, which is seen as a “human language activity” (Mey 2001, 8), is therefore deployed in the analysis to decipher the personal and demonstrative references. Naming is also deemed relevant in my analysis since it “is inseparable from the speaker’s own feelings towards the *delocuté* and is inevitably colored by them” (Triki 1989).

2. Results

This section deals with the major findings derived from the analysis of the corpus. It starts by the literal and the moral interpretations. Next, it sheds light on the allegorical and anagogical interpretations and finally suggests a new angle of analysis which is the pragmatic-prospological one.

A) Literal Interpretation

Sproul (1997) states that “the literal sense of the scripture was defined as the plain and evident meaning”. Based on this parameter, the story is interpreted as a Canaanite mother who has a demon-possessed daughter coming to Jesus and supplicating him to heal her daughter “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly” (Matthew 15:22). The way she addresses Jesus (Lord/Son of David) indicates that the mother is well informed about his prophecy and divine power. Her request seems meek, honest, humble and goal-oriented. However, this request is doubly rebuffed: through his silence and through the incitement of his disciples to ignore her “[s]end her away, for she keeps crying out after us” (Matthew 15:23). Jesus’ silence may denote deep thinking about whether the woman’s beseeching deserves help or not. Yet, his disciples’ negative response is twice approved by him when he says: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matthew 15:24) and “it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs” (Matthew 15:26). If Jesus’ response stopped at the level of verse (24), we might see things normal but the more the woman begs, the harsher his reply becomes. This confusing response to her request “toss it to the dogs” literally means that the woman is impure and unclean. Dogs in Jewish culture symbolize the starving and sickly dogs rummaging streets and garbage. References to dogs as such are used throughout the holy scripture as in (Luke 16:19) where “Lazarus’s miserable plight is made even more wretched by the dogs that would lick his sores” (Mel 2009). The word ‘dog’ is also used pejoratively by Paul (Phil 3:2) to show how dogs are unclean scavengers and to depict heretics and false teachers (Mel 2009). The woman’s

third intervention “Yes it is Lord. Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table” (Matthew 15:27) literally means domestic pets living with their masters and being close during eating times. It may also refer to street dogs which approach people at eating places to be fed. But in general, the woman’s boldness and persistence strike Jesus who cries out saying “Oh, woman. Your faith is great” (Matthew 15:28) and on the spot her daughter is healed.

If we sum up the story, we will be ending with a ‘ping pong’ encounter where the woman starts by approaching, kneeling and finally uttering wise words. Jesus’ response is also gradable as he keeps silent, gives a harsh answer and then decides to be cooperative. We do not have a preacher and a listener. Rather, there is a balanced dialogue where the supplicant terminates by overwhelming her counterpart.

B) Moral Interpretation

Gadamer (1977) argues that moral interpretation “is necessitated by the belief that the Bible is the rule not only of faith but also of conduct”. Given as such, the story of the Canaanite woman is replete with moralities as in her words of supplication which are full of ritual and salvific meanings. The lexical field that she utilizes (Lord/Son of David/master/mercy) is a sign of putting pride aside in favor of humility while addressing a holy spirit. Her words apply to the church at present or the kingdom of heaven in the future. Another moral lesson that might be drawn from the disciples’ response is that many people are selfish since they do not consider the burden of others. Their reply “[s]end her away, for she keeps crying out after us” (Matthew 15:23) denotes that the woman is not entitled to the miracle because of her identity. The fact of being a gentile (non-Jewish) puts her on the margin. “If Jews were ‘in’ and gentiles were ‘out’, if men were ‘in’ and women were ‘out’ in Matthean’s church, then gentiles were probably the most marginalized” (Jackson 2002). However, her ethnic belonging does not hamper her from believing in the super and divine power of Jesus which so many Jews do not recognize. This implicit comparison between gentiles’ faith and non-gentiles’ teaches us that faith is not granted on the basis of race or

ethnicity. Rather, it transpires that God pays attention to recurrent prayers by people who do not get distracted by what others think of them. The reference to Jesus as “Son of David” signals that the Canaanite woman is conscious about the gentile genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1:2-5/ Genesis 38) and she is in the course of reminding him. These reminiscing words have double effect on Jesus: forcing him not to forget his origin and urging him to lend a helping hand. Depicted as “the lifeblood of this story” (O’Day 2011), this Canaanite woman’s persistence despite the insult shows her intention to create a thriving life for her and for her daughter in a culture that “marginalizes living with experiences we might understand today as complicated behaviors or disorders” (Bogocius 2002).

The focal moral lesson that I derive from this story is a submissive woman who asks for “crumbs”. The fact of demanding portions from a ‘main course’ tells acceptance, on her part, of second-class citizenship and gratefulness of a ‘dog’ though being kicked away. This may imply that sacred texts are questionable as they can advocate and re-inscribe patriarchal power-relations. So, are we in front of a misogynist scripture that is presupposed to give moral sense for all? Do gentiles need all this submissive behavior to be counted by Jews? Is this the appropriate way of instructing people to behave well? Is moral interpretation sufficient to get an insightful understanding of the Bible?

C) Allegorical Interpretation

“If the moral sense was that which instructed men how to behave[,t]he allegorical sense revealed the context of faith” (Sproul 1997). The moral interpretation as I argued above (section 3.2) still needs more angles of interpretation to be validated or overridden. Kister (2013) assures that “biblical narratives are given a non-literal, symbolic interpretation of a sort rather rare in (but not absent from) rabbinic literature and more akin to what might be labeled allegorical interpretation”. The bone of contention in the narrative mainly revolves around the words ‘dogs’ and ‘bread’ I guess. Does Jesus mean ‘loaves of bread’ or ‘basic food’ or ‘sustenance’? This question is legitimate since the story, I believe, cannot be separated from the general

context of the bible where Jesus in (Matthew 6:11) says “give us today our daily bread” or when the Lord said to Moses in (Exodus 16) “I will rain down bread from heaven for you”. In so doing, Jesus may mean that he is the ‘bread of life’ and his mission is solely designated to the ‘lost sheep of Israel’. The fact of saying “it is not right to take the children’s bread” may be explicated as follows: “these people, to whom I am sent, are lost children and I am their savior and protector”. If we go further within this context, we may end up by claiming that “these are parentless children who need a holy father to be saved”. All the remaining people are not included in this mission. However, is this exclusion of the gentiles based on God’s recommendations or Jesus’ choice or the disciples’ unwillingness? The first and the third claims, I reckon, do not apply since Jesus confessed his great impression towards the woman’s faith but we are still in a dilemma because without the woman’s boldness and righteousness Jesus would never choose to heal her daughter and highlight her ‘great faith’. This allegorical interpretation would suffice if the wording ‘dog’ is not mentioned in the story. So, why ‘dogs’ specifically? I argued in section (3.1) that dogs are symbols of impurity and uncleanness in a Jewish culture but what about Greek, Canaanite and Syrophoenician cultures? Mel (2009) claims that “[t]he woman’s Greek culture may also have given her an appreciation of the positive quality of dogs” and Dufton (1989) “postulates that Jesus’ Jewish background gives the word ‘Kynaria’ the sense of ‘dogs outside’, while the woman’s Hellenistic culture brings an implication of ‘dogs outside’”. Dufton (1989) proceeds by stating that the “Jews were not pet lovers. To them, dogs were dirty, unpleasant and savage animals....Everyone knew that the Greek had a special fondness for dogs...Only a gentile, perhaps only a Greek, could have spoken the memorable words about dogs eating the scraps under the table, for no Jew would have followed dogs to be there”. Ami (2016) dives more into biblical metaphors and considers that the “Hebrew word for ‘Canaan’ comes from the root of the verb ‘to buy’ and even today we can hear the expression ‘I don’t buy it’ when some idea or explanation is rejected”. Ami (2016) concludes that “a Canaanite is a person who will ‘buy into anything’ and ‘accept any teaching’ just like a

dog will accept and eat almost any type of meat with equal enthusiasm”.

These claims, somehow, seem convincing but this interpretation remains allegorical as we do not have any sign about references to one’s culture from any of the speakers. From another side, there is also no record that Jesus treated with disrespect the supplicants during his healing encounters. Even if we consider that Jesus explains a family affair to the woman and reminds her that she is an outsider, it becomes unethical not to invite a ‘guest’ for food especially that this guest is wretched.

Allegorical interpretation, therefore, may lead us to other horizons of research about putting Jesus’ reference to ‘dogs’ and his ‘disrespectful’ response in the entry of ‘prophets’ hamartia’. Therefore, other perspectives of interpretation are still needed to deconstruct these biblical messages.

D) Anagogical Interpretation

Back to Gadamer (1977), anagogical interpretation “seeks to explain biblical events or matters of this world so that they relate to the life to come”. So, if we look at the narrative from this scope, we might touch futuristic promises on the part of Jesus to the woman. His reply that his mission does not include gentiles denotes that other prophets will be sent to you and the way of salvation is never closed. This may comfort her if she is a true believer in the life to come. If not, the end of the story assures that she got indulgence through Jesus’ confession that her faith is great. Recently, Felecan (2018) has shown the anagogical layers of the story by saying that the “last verbal intervention of the Savior sheds light on His behavior throughout the encounter-He postpones, delays the verdict in order to offer attendants an instance of faith that is more treasured precisely because it was professed by an outsider. The reward matches the trials to which the woman was subjected”. It is, thus, an implicit teaching, by Jesus, of how help is granted to non-believers which will be disseminated, through the woman, to others during future courses. The woman’s faith is gradually boosted and in this way she should behave within her community. She is given the responsibility of

expanding her community's imagination and guiding them to the right path. The refusal of Jesus to give his children's bread to others unveils that 'charity begins at home' and affirms that the notion of family has to be strictly preserved. However, the woman's plea confirms the reverence of all human differences: whether physical, psychological or financial. Anagogically speaking, her call for her demon-possessed daughter is a universal call for more passion within our human family and brotherhood. It is a call for more equity, compassion and self-denial so that peace will propagate and love will be maintained. The woman is also "symbolic of the struggle of gentiles and women for participation within the life of new Christian communities" (Fiorenza 1992). So, this story "may reflect the catalytic influence of women in enlarging the ethnic boundaries of the early Christian community" (ibid). Despite the thoughtful claim given by Fiorenza (1992), I may say that our anagogical interpretation allows us to compare between the contemporary western cultural context and the ancient one (Jesus' time). My focal point here is the wording "woman" which sounds weird and cold in our modern culture. Nevertheless, there are other women whom he addressed in this manner like Jesus' mother "(at Cana, John 2:4; at the Cross, John 19:26), Mary Magdalene (at the tomb after the resurrection, John 20:13-15), a crippled woman who was healed (Luke 13:12), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:21) and the adulteress saved from stoning (John 8:10)" (Mell 2009). None of these has overtones of cold or misogynist address; rather, it was the norm at that time. Therefore, the anagogical interpretation refutes the feminist claims at this level and in so doing the story delves into considerable insights. Another instance that maintains this view is Jesus' response to the great faith of the woman. Although the Israelites are the sole target in Jesus' ministry, exceptions occur and display that Jesus "is more concerned with matters of the heart than with ethnic boundaries" (Mel 2009). The radical change that happened to Jesus shows that the redemptive plan, firstly targeted to Israel, could at any time be altered regardless of ethnicity. If we consider that Jesus is the 'word of God', we may land on the interpretation that the Matthean Gospel evokes a new tradition which is arguing with

God and demanding interference. The woman seems submissive but powerful at the same time. This ‘smooth power’ is striking as it succeeds in turning one’s negative opinion into a welcoming one. The anagogical interpretation, therefore, is replete with spiritual and eschatological dimensions as I consider the woman an exemplary monk who does believe in a divine power. Even Jesus’ response unveils his unwillingness to let a non-Jewish faith be not redeemed since his mission is primarily eschatological.

E) Prospological-Pragmatic Interpretation

Who is speaking to whom about what or whom and in what social capacity? This would be my paramount concern in this section so that we get a more perspicuous interpretation of the Canaanite woman narrative. I will shed light here on personal and demonstrative references in an attempt to figure out the discursive processes within the story.

If we focus on verses (26-28) where Jesus refers to ‘dogs’ and the woman refers to ‘crumbs’, we have a third person human ‘Them’ replaced by a third person non-human ‘the dogs’. Strikingly, the speaker addresses multi-addressees. He is apparently speaking to the woman in front of him while addressing the others, i.e., the gentiles in general. He is also addressing his disciples who are listening to him at the time of speaking. The third person pronoun ‘They’ replaced by ‘children’ is meant for the speaker’s fellows and all the others who belong to them while ‘They’ replaced by ‘dogs’ is targeted toward the woman asking for a solution and her fellows who are absent at the time of speaking. Thus, there is a shift from a second person pronoun ‘You’ to a third person non-human. In this case, there is dehumanization of the addressee by the speaker. However, the woman answers by taking a third person non-human to describe herself ‘dogs’ and a third person human to refer to the addressee ‘their master’s table’. Using a third person pronoun when speaking to someone is meant to belittle the speaker and elevate the addressee. The woman doubly distances herself. On the one hand, she refers to herself by a third person non-human pronoun and, on the other hand, she refers to the addressee by a third person plural pronoun. A

close look at deixis and especially at the use of personal pronouns depicts a privilege shown to Jewish people and an underestimation of the gentiles. Person deixis always shifts towards the side of the “Lost sheep of Israel” (Matthew 15:24).

Naming the woman or referring to her as Canaanite or Syro-phoenician is very telling as it shows that she does not have a real name, in other words a clear identity. Throughout the story, she is deprived of a name which labels her as a human being in society. It is even harder for her to hear Jesus referring to her as a “dog”. Dogs are seen as unclean, much like pigs in Jewish culture as argued before. Jesus displays to her that God’s election of Israel as the ‘Chosen People’ is still valid despite Israel’s unfaithfulness. The reference to her as a gentile bluntly puts her as an enemy to the people of Israel. The book of Genesis reads that Canaan is the land promised by God to the patriarchs (Genesis 12:50). The book of Judges and Joshua mention the conquest of the land and consequently the settlements of the Israelites in Canaan are meant to fulfill God’s promise. The Canaanites, therefore, are depicted as Israel’s enemies and the pagan opponents who are doomed to be expelled from the land that is promised by God to Israel. So, the Canaanite woman in the story is referred to as a Canaanite, then as a dog and finally as a woman. The successive rebuffs towards her by Jesus Christ added insult to injury. As Meier notes: “the woman has three strikes against her before she even starts: she is a woman; she is the mother of a demoniac; and worst of all she is a pagan Canaanite, a member of the ancient enemy of Israel” (Meier 1986, 399). Nevertheless, Jesus is referred to as a ‘Lord’ and ‘Son of David’. The woman clearly displays her meekness and humility expressed by her acceptance and affirmation of her second order status as a gentile. Jesus deepens the woman’s inferiority when he refers to his people with the wording “sheep”. The latter symbolizes peace, kindness and submission since a sheep is a pet which is guided by a shepherd. It is an animal which is always seen as a prey by other animals. Jesus uses an ethnic slur ‘dogs’ to designate the gentiles among whom the Canaanite woman is (Levine 1988). The metaphor of the puppies was frequently used in Orthodox and Judaism to refer to the gentiles.

Wainwright comments about the issue by claiming the “commonly accepted position is that ‘dogs’ was a derogatory term used by the Jews to speak of gentiles. There is no doubt that it was intended as insulting or degrading, as the use of the term in scripture suggests” (Wainwright 1991). I may seem here redundant as I have gone through the multiplicity of references to ‘dog’ in the previous sections. However, this prosopological-pragmatic perspective functions as a sharp reminder that the reference to dogs cannot carry other interpretations in Jewish culture but the so mentioned.

I can shed more light on this view through the analysis of demonstrative reference through this sample: “A Canaanite woman from that area came and cried out” (Mathew 15:22). The woman referred to is viewed as someone coming from a far, unknown and mysterious place. Her native town is distanced from the speaker’s sphere in order to declare that the woman spoken of does not belong to ‘Us’. Rather, she is regarded as the ‘Other’ who represents oddness, non-accountability and even threat. My view could be validated through a quantitative analysis of the frequency of personal references and negative connotations. The overall word count of the story is 140 words. Twenty words out of them have submissive, pejorative and negative meanings which could not pass by in silence and which could not be considered as non-remarkable.

Table 1. Frequency of Keywords related to supplication and negativity

| Mercy | Demon | Bowed | Crying | Fall | Horribly | Throw | Dogs | Out | Eat |
|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|----------|-------|------|-----|-----|
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 |

| Begged | Crumbs | Healed | Help | Canaanite | Lost | Away | Suffering | Knelt | Toss |
|--------|--------|--------|------|-----------|------|------|-----------|-------|------|
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

All these key words depict the wretched situation of the woman and her urgent need for a safer place to land on. The preposition ‘out’ is repeated 3 times to signal that she is out of ‘the house of Israel’. The Canaanite woman is depicted as a woman who is dramatically rebuffed and cast from the territory of ‘the house of Israel’. The categorization of words shows that most of the vocabulary used is about her miserable and wretched situation even though she is viewed at the end as

having great faith. She refers three times to Jesus by calling him ‘Lord’ and ‘Son of David’. Thus, she varies her ways of supplication before saying wise words in order to make Jesus pity her. However, Jesus refers to her as ‘woman’ and even the scripture twice refers to her as such. The table reveals that nearly all the lexis related to her is negative. The focus is put on her wrong side more than on the positive one. The general lexical field obscures her great faith and foregrounds her misery and loss. If I am more accurate I should say that the real number of words, after omitting prepositions and pronouns, in the story is 59. So, words which have negative connotations towards the Canaanite woman approximately constitute 30% of the total words which renders the story a contentious one knowingly that it is included in a holy-sacred Scripture. It is a Canaanite woman-based story and this transpires from the frequency of personal pronouns in the following table:

Table 2. Frequency of Personal Pronouns

| His | Her |
|-----|-----|
| 1 | 4 |

The person pronoun ‘her’ is used 4 times while ‘his’ is only used once. The story turns around the gentile woman who constantly asks for salvation. She begs Jesus four times and she is rebuffed because of four reasons. She is a Canaanite, a woman, an outsider and a demon - possessed. She is put in a frame of loss and by so doing, I may wonder: is this the right strategy to test one’s faith? Shouldn’t be glad to find a person led astray seeking help and conversion? Doesn’t he/she deserve redemption and salvation on the spot?

3. Discussion

This story is really controversial and “it is necessary for the exegete to be trained in the biblical languages, grammar, rhetoric, history and other secular disciplines” (Mckim 1998). I do not claim that I am an exegete of Scripture but as a discourse analyst, I intend to contribute to the scholarship of biblical hermeneutics. I totally side with Hanson (2002) who

criticized Origen of making “biblical hermeneutics into a true and proper science and in this sense conditioned in a decisive manner all successive Patristic exegesis...even that of his adversaries”. The old debate over whether biblical hermeneutics is a science or an art is no longer valid, I guess, since biblical texts as it transpires from my analysis of the Canaanite woman narrative are elusive and do not abide by scientific norms or scientific commitment. Similarly to Gadamer (1977), I assure that biblical hermeneutics “is above all a practice, the art of understanding”. We cannot use this term or confine it in a pure technical context. The biblical text, as other holy texts, is a multi-layered text that carries different shades. The mundane interpretation intermingles with the spiritual, eschatological and philosophical interpretations. The recent study of Heine (2019) proves my thoughts on how scriptural exegesis is a theological contemplation on ‘sacred history’. This is a nicely- put metaphor by Heine because holy texts need spirit, soul and reason. In other words, they need an artistic vision so that we do not feel chained by pure scientific regulations which hinder our deep understanding. It is a transcendental reading that we need, above all ecclesiastical and ethical limits.

My second point flashed within this study is the extent to which Origen’s and Erasmus’ ancient typologies of biblical hermeneutics are still valid nowadays. Mckim (1998) clarifies that Erasmus “combined a philological with a spiritual (allegorical and tropological) approach to scripture. The philological method is concerned with textual, literary and historical criticism [whereas the tropological] can be accommodated to the moral sense”. Erasmus built on the work of Origen and both of them, ultimately, highlight the literal, figurative and spiritual sides. These sides are really important for our understanding but I argue that the discursive-pragmatic side is also insightful and urgent to get a thorough view of the matter. The fact of manipulating demonstrative and personal references, the resort to a given strategy of naming and even the analysis of speech acts and politeness forms, though they are not dealt with in this study, cannot be put on the margin. Van Dijk (2006), for instance, states that “people are being

acted upon against their fully conscious will and interests, and that manipulation is in the best interest of the manipulator” (Van Dijk 2006, 361). The structural manipulation, despite its subtlety within the story, is important in validating or overriding previous claims.

The prospological-pragmatic angle that I deployed in my analysis validates the feminist and the post-colonial interpretations. Fiorenza “highlights intriguing connections for Christian women to ponder, for in connection with the struggles of contemporary women within the church and the academy to have their voices heard, the Canaanite continues to be a powerful symbol” (Gench 2004). Apart from gender, the prospological-pragmatic analysis also sheds light on the dichotomy of ‘Us vs. Them’ (Van Dijk 2006) which still exists in modern time, and coincides with the post-colonial findings. The social context in which the gentiles found themselves was a context of negation, torture and stereotyping. Their group identity is devalued and blurred. Their fatal mistakes and wrong beliefs are much focused on. Consequently, they are rendered deficient and are viewed as ethnic minorities who deserve vulnerable positions. Stereotyping them makes them people of “another kind” rather than “our kind” (Liff & Wajcman 1996; Kirton & Greene 2003). At that time, the Torah’s prohibition of intermarriage with the seven Canaanite nations was not due to a fear of contracting ritual impurity through physical contact with a gentile but, as Epstein (1942, 158) noted, but it was based on the fear that intimate contact with Canaanites will lead Israelites to imitate their idolatrous and immoral ways. Klawans (1995, 292) states that “though not inherently impure, gentiles are inherently profane. It is for this reason that gentiles were ultimately excluded from the sanctuary”. The gentiles came at a time when a new religion was emerging and when a prophet was preaching all over the holy lands. The Israelites, themselves, were not on the right path which necessitated care for them at the expense of the gentiles. The latter had to be distanced in order to build the union and unity of Israel. Jews had to be pure from any stranger who might render them impure “thus said the Lord: let no alien, uncircumcised in spirit and flesh, enter My

sanctuary – no alien whatsoever among the people of Israel” (Ezekiel 44: 9). Stereotyping perpetuates oppression against dominated groups. Therefore, a discourse of racism occurs when talking about the gentiles in order to show the supremacy of Jews. It is this racial supremacy that emerges: “In praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Matthew 10).

The prospological-pragmatic interpretation, thus, validates the literal and the moral interpretations as discussed above and overrides the allegorical and anagogical interpretations since they are considered as manipulative justifications seeking to shatter the readers’ understanding. Figurative interpretation remains figurative and replete with insinuations. The literal interpretation, despite its directness, seems to be the most convincing one because the discursive patterns that emanated from my prospological-pragmatic analysis prove it. The same applies for the moral interpretation as the pragmatic angle lays bare all the communicative events within the story and in so doing we deconstruct hidden ideologies and get the real moral sense of the story.

4. Conclusion

I may close my thoughts on the story through a nice quote by Gench (2004) who suggests that the “the Canaanite woman’s story invites us to ponder the ways in which ethnic, gender, and socio-economic differences and prejudices continue to be reflected in our own human experience. Moreover, the story invites us to ponder the role of human initiative and persistence in challenging and overcoming differences and prejudices”. This universal thought of Gench is much better than anti-Semitic or racist views because I also call to ponder Jesus’ response. The fact that his response is inhuman and disrespectful does not mean that we do not believe in his divine power and prophetic message. Rather, we should daringly ponder the claim that whether this is the original version of the Canaanite woman narrative or not? And whether the Scripture was distorted or not.

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The Analogy between the Infinity of the World and the Infinity of Mathematics in Relation to the Absolute

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Abstract

To analyze the infinity of the world and its cardinality and to show an analogy to the mathematical concepts of infinity, first, the metaphysical models which identify the world as infinite and describe it with the transfinite of mathematics, are examined. The reasons for their identification with the transfinite are pointed out and the cardinalities of these infinities are analyzed. It is then shown that the infinities of the transfinite are not sufficient to capture the cardinality of the infinity of the world. On the basis of the history of mathematics, the structuring of the infinite in set theory, its predecessors and extensions are described in order to show the connection between the world and mathematics and the arbitrary constructability of sets and classes. In both cases, the consistent application of the fundamental ontological principle of the relationship between *being* and entity results in absolute infinity, which in turn gives rise to the necessary foundation of *being*, both for the world and for mathematics.

Keywords: absolute infinity, absolute space-time continuum, infinity of the world, infinity of mathematics, reality of mathematical objects, philosophy of mathematics

1. Introduction

The aim of this text is to analyze the power of the infinity of the world and to show an analogy to the different concepts of infinity in mathematics. In more recent metaphysics, the transfinite of mathematics is used to capture the size and objectivity, but also the openness and contingency of the world in a new realistic ontology (Badiou 2005, 2019; Gabriel 2015b, 2015a; Meillassoux 2010). This ontology is described as continuous to the outside, without a primary

substance or a primary system. This is attributed to the fact that every substance and structure, every entity, i.e. every uniformly combined whole, requires a determining background so that it can exist by separating from it. Heidegger already described this as the fundamental ontological necessity of the relation between every entity and its *being* (Heidegger 1989, 2010), from which the infinity of the world also followed for him (Heidegger 1967, 431). Examples of these recent metaphysics are the New Realism (Gabriel 2015b, 2015a), the Speculative Realism or Speculative Materialism (Badiou 2005, 2019; Meillassoux 2010), which have taken this principle as their basis. Since every 'ultimate' substance would need to have a defining background itself, it cannot constitute the ultimate all-defining substance. This means that standardizations such as: everything is matter, energy, consists of 'strings' or the 'quantum field' cannot represent the ultimate fundamental definition of the world. Any background can only function and exist as a background if it has itself the same existential relation to a wider background. These are the references of *being* as Heidegger described them and made them the basis of his fundamental ontology and its extensions (Heidegger 1975, 1989, 2000, 2010). However, the nature of *being* itself is not fully determined, since the references in space, time and possibilities are unlimited. That is, *being* itself is not an entity. The references that are made in *being* are always references to other entities in *being*. Thus, existence is not a property that is inherent in an object, but rather a property that we must always assume *a priori* in order to be able to consider an object at all. The resulting infinity of the world and its power (or cardinality) was deliberately described by Heidegger in an open way (Heidegger 1967, 431). This existential relationship is fundamental not only to existence in the world, but also to all operations in mathematics. We will consider the consequences arising from this relationship systematically in this text.

2. The necessity of different references of *being* - in extension, contingency and time

In mathematics, we can describe this need for the defining background with some results from set theory and the

set operations within it. Suppose there is a set that should contain everything. 'Everything' becomes the elements of the infinite set. Then the set itself is also an element, which in turn is not included in the original set (Russell's paradox). Therefore the set cannot contain everything since it does not contain itself. Analogously, this argument is described as the impossibility of a closed world, because its seclusiveness requires a background against which it could be closed. This result is known as the fact that each power set of a set (i.e. the set of subsets of a set) is more powerful than the set itself. Since mathematics is the discipline that throughout its history has structured the infinite more and more deeply, we will use it to analyze the infinity of the world (or the infinite number of worlds) and its cardinality, after having identified the different necessary areas of *being*.

Let us first consider infinity in space and the expansion of objects in space. When we determine objects in their relation to their backgrounds, we run the risk of imagining these backgrounds as spatial and exclude time from this consideration. For convenience only, we will consider the connection between time and space later. In perception, an object is separated from the spatial background in order to distinguish it from it (figure-ground separation) and thus to recognize it as this object. But, all objects (also imagined ones) also have an extension in space itself, i.e. in order to recognize objects in perception (and imagination) *areas* have to be separated from each other. From the existentially necessary references of every entity to its *being*, i.e. from the delimitation of the areas from each other, it follows that these areas (of entities and *being*) must not only be delimited outwards but also inwards. The required plurality of structures and substances, as described above, initially suggests that they all exist in a parallel way, forming interrelated fields that determine each other, but that would result in a pattern that excludes the respective (additionally possible) structures and substances at individual areas, since they are only assumed next to the areas. Then again, we would receive, though chaotically, a form of structure, that has restrictions in the spatial forms of the individual areas. Hence, we must allow

structures, forms and substances in each possible spatial area, no matter how small the area. Second, *being* does not only determine in a spatial way. Now, besides all possible areas, inside and outside, that form backgrounds against which we can let our recognized figure emerge, each one defining characteristics of the figure in its own way, we cannot exclude the realms of time and contingency, i.e. different possibilities. Otherwise we would again draw boundaries - like the world as the ultimate total object, or atoms, strings, quantum units as the ultimate building substance - of which it would be required that they are not defined by anything else. As a first result, we can state that the existing infinity of any realm is an actual infinity, it is a material continuum without any smallest or discrete particles or substances, and possibilities and time have to be combined with spatial extension. One objection could be that it makes no sense to look at things below the Planck length. Rudy Rucker describes in his 2019 edition of *Infinity and the Mind*:

"One hears that it's meaningless to speak of space at levels smaller than 10^{-35} meters. And some even say that space itself is tessellated into indivisible lumps. Ah, the myopic fear of infinity! First comes a call for finitistic austerity, then a grudging admission that granular space doesn't quite make sense, and then comes the lilting injunction: 'Be happy! The universe is incomprehensible! How wonderful!' To me, incoherence isn't wonderful. It means your theory isn't done. Reality comes first. Theories come second. The world arises on its own, and our opinions don't limit what the cosmos can do. Brave words, but how am I going to preserve our absolute continuum in the face of quantum mechanics? Well, let's suppose that the quantum level is like an interzone, or a glitch, or a rumble strip. We can trundle right through it. And beyond, or beneath, the quantum layer we enter what I like to call the subdimensions. According to the viewpoint I'm describing, our physical space has subquantum, subdimensional levels that allow space to be an absolute continuum." (Rucker 2019, xi)

That means, physical immeasurability does not result in ontological impossibility. On the contrary, the ontological,

existential necessity results in an incompleteness of physical theories. Let's consider these consequences of the necessary areas in a closer analysis. From the impossibility of the smallest particles a homogeneous absolute continuum (homogeneous not in the sense of complete uniformity, but in the sense of an actual continuum, i.e. without any discrete particles) follows, where even in the infinitesimal areas of any point of consideration everything possible is contained. There are no previously (in shape, size or texture) defined elements. The division of the continuum can be continued beyond the infinitesimals, whereby we obtain the hyperreal and surreal numbers (Rucker 2019, chap. 2), similar to the construction of increasingly powerful infinities outwards. With regard to the cardinality of the class of surreal numbers, it is possible that they even elude well-ordering and cannot be measured at all (Rucker 2019, 10). But, if we didn't have contingency and time (change), there would be a determinism for the quality and position of every entity, which would give us an object again, a kind of world-pattern without any further existential backgrounds in the directions of time and possibilities. This would require a rule to define this determinism, thus again a connected area of all areas. This means that every point in the material continuum must contain every cardinality of time (since there is no single time lapse, as we will see below), possibilities, forms, objects, etc. Sizes are only proportions in space, the nature regarding form and size can change arbitrarily through contingency and time. We consider the concepts of sets and cardinality in more detail through the history and philosophy of mathematics and the paradoxes that have arisen in connection with the consideration of infinity.

3. The history of infinity in mathematics

In our formation of (linguistic and other forms of) concepts, most concepts in direct communication describe closed objects, due to the fact that most terms are intended to describe properties of objects, which represent a selection from a larger set of possible properties (Mühlenbeck and Jacobsen 2020). This creates definitions, i.e. the distinction of objects from others, which in turn presents the objects as units and the properties

as elements. This separation in units correspond to our current concept of the infinite in mathematics, which was established by Georg Cantor. As we compose the world from objects in our intuition, we compose sets from elements. Intuitively, the world is structured and formalized, and since the foundation of mathematics on modern set theory also in a strictly mathematical way. However, the division into elements was not always the conventional approach to analyzing reality. Before the systematization of set theory, continua were considered, also in mathematics, to be homogeneous. Conceiving the continuum as a set and excluding the original, undefined (or unformalized) continuum from the use of mathematics was not a necessity but a decision that was made with the emergence of modern set theory (Bedürftig and Murawski 2010, 275, 278-279). By identifying the continuum with the real numbers, the infinitesimal calculus was ruled out together with a naturalness to consider the infinitely small (Bedürftig and Murawski 2010, 279). The division of the continuum into discrete elements, and their identification with it, has also caused various paradoxes (e.g. Zeno's paradox) which cannot be solved within structured set theory. In contrast to the division into elements stays the consideration of the continuum by Aristotle, in whose consideration Zeno's paradox did not appear because the continuum could only be infinitely divisible and no identification with discrete points was assumed (Bedürftig and Murawski 2010, 161). But since, during that time, mathematics was part of the everyday surrounding world Aristotle wanted the actual infinity to be excluded from it and only the potentially infinite was permitted, which led to new problems and was no longer sufficient for mathematical applications. Therefore, Cantor's discoveries of actual infinities, and the subsequent extensions, fundamentally revolutionized and advanced mathematics. However, the division into elements raised the question of the cardinality of the continuum (the continuum identified with \mathbb{R}), which is the present continuum hypothesis, which in turn is based on the assumption that the continuum is a set, a division into elements (Bedürftig and Murawski 2010, 156). Problems arise in both perspectives, the classical homogeneous continuum of Aristotle's time and the

contemporary continuum of set theory, which is identified with \mathbb{R} . In the first, the continuum is homogeneous and transcends contemporary paradoxes. Aristotle concluded from the paradoxes a strict restriction to the potentially infinite (Bedürftig and Murawski 2010, 162) and excluded the actually infinite by exclusively considering the human acts of division, which can only be potentially infinite due to the limited lifetime (Aristoteles 1829, 193 b 22 ; Tengelyi 2014, 496-497). But, the paradoxes also dissolve in the homogeneous, actual continuum through the movement of different areas on different size relations. The potentially infinite is not necessary for this and, on the contrary, has the problem that it cannot exist without an actually infinite background, because at any point in time, by excluding the actually infinite background, it consists of finiteness without a background. In the case of the second, we have the actual infinity, but due to the division into elements, we also have discrete points that are not divisible themselves and are therefore supposed to form a final limit that itself is not defined by a background (Bedürftig and Murawski 2010, 186; Mühlenbeck 2018, 2020, 2021). In order to be able to correctly describe the cardinality of the space-time continuum of the world, it must no longer be identified with discrete elements, as it is the case in mathematical operations. As described, even there, this identification was just a decision being made, not a necessity. And Gödel's incompleteness theorems (Gödel 1995, 30; Rucker 2019, Excursion Two), his work on the arbitrary constructability of sets (Gödel 1990, 254-270), but also on the extension of classical set theory (Cantor and Zermelo) through the introduction of classes (Gödel 1986, chap. 'On completeness and consistency') also show the inexhaustibility of the continuum in a mathematical way. Together with the work of von Neumann and Bernays, the von-Neumann-Bernays-Gödel set theory (NBG set theory) was developed, which solved old contradictions in the properties of sets through the development of classes and made it possible to form new proofs of consistency (Bedürftig and Murawski 2010, chap. 4.3.2). In this inexhaustibility of the (space-time) continuum lie the transfinite and infinitesimal sets, newer constructions such as the hyperreal and surreal numbers (Rucker 2019, 85) of

mathematics, but also all possibilities and times (not as a linear time frame, but as all possible time-forms), which was also already described by Gödel (Kovač 2012). Gödel identified the universal class, which is the universe of all sets in NBG set theory, with absolute infinity, due to its unattainability (Wang 1997, 280-285) and put this principle of identifying the universal class with absolute infinity as the first fundamental axiom to the foundation of set theory (Wang 1997, 282-283). This leads to a synthesis between the infinity of the world, mathematics and the absolute, where they can all be identified with an absolute continuum, the absolute infinity, in which the formalized infinities of the mathematical set constructions are only approximations.

4. The absolute infinity of the world and of mathematics

In order to establish this synthesis, the homogeneous continuum, which was dominant in the mathematical view before Cantor, must be combined with the discrete actual infinity of the transfinite (including the classes) and the infinitesimals up to the hyperreal and surreal extensions. In addition, contingency and time must necessarily be included in the consideration of the cardinality of the world and our mathematical concept formations, i.e. the reality of mathematical objects and our ability to recognize absolute infinity must be examined. We will deal with each aspect sequentially.

The actual infinity: through the development of set theory, the systematization of sets and the study of their cardinalities, Cantor established not only a way to reveal the depth and size of the continuum, but also to overcome the potentially infinite. The systematization of sets and power sets as actual infinities has emphasized that these must be present everywhere, because the infinitely many levels of them each define necessarily existing domains in which mathematical operations take place. These domains must exist as actually infinite value sets, as otherwise the operations would be undefined, which is also known as Cantor's domain principle (Cantor 1932, Abschnitt VII, S. 410 f). In addition, Cantor's

theorem states that the extension of domains is never complete, so the number of levels of infinities is itself infinite. The range over which a variable, even infinite, quantity varies must always be a well-defined range. We have already seen above, with regard to the problem of the potentially infinite, that every potentially increasing object, in every momentary consideration, would be a limited object, of which the exclusion of the actually infinite would require that it was not limited by anything else, but which contradicts the definition of limitation. Thus, Cantor recognized the potential infinity as no real infinity and the actual infinity as a necessary condition for the potential one. With this argument, the ontological potential infinity is also resolved in contradiction. The potential infinity is only a potential one in our consideration, since only in this we walk along a sequence.

Absolute infinity inwards and outwards: since objects not only need outer but also inner realms of *being*, infinity must continue outwards and inwards. They occupy space and thus also consist of space in their inner direction. Since we can divide the inner space into any number of elements, for which the same principle must apply, the inner space must also be homogeneously continuous. The reason is that the assumption of discrete, smallest particles, of which all objects should consist, creates a kind of uniform substance, which itself cannot exist, since the particles themselves are not supposed to have their own background. They are supposed to constitute the objects, but not to be constituted themselves. Discrete points, \mathbb{R} , cannot fill the homogeneous continuum. They pop out of it randomly when they are looked at, but can not cover it, or as Gödel described: "rather the points form some kind of scaffold on the line" (Rucker 2019, 82; Wang 1974, 86). In addition, the position and definition of foreground and background, i.e. what is entity and what is *being*, is not defined in advance. A constituting background is itself the object or entity of other backgrounds. And also the operation with infinitesimals, like any quantity consideration, is only a tool for approaching the depth of infinity. Therefore, the homogeneous continuum is also not conclusively covered by them. Further constructions of realms of numbers arise (hyperreal, surreal numbers, and

maybe more in the future). Space-time areas are arbitrarily representable by transfinite sets and classes or by the infinitesimal, hyperreal, surreal, etc. (Bedürftig and Murawski 2010, 175). This means that the infinity of the outer and inner domains of an object does not differ, the power or cardinality is the same. It also follows from the domain principle described above that the homogeneous, i.e. absolute, continuum is also necessary within mathematics as a basis of *being*, because the elements of \mathbb{R} and those of the infinitesimals behave like points placed in the absolute continuum. These points themselves need areas of *being*, by which they are constituted, because otherwise they would not exist and therefore could not constitute any further objects. "The (intuitive) continuum, it is shown here also mathematically, corresponds to an inexhaustible 'continuous space sauce'¹, as Brouwer described it (Brouwer, quoted from: Becker 1954, 346). But this 'space-sauce' is not an indeterminate something (from which for example the different views of nihilism would follow), it is neither determined by a rule nor undetermined, because there would have to be a criterion also for indeterminacy. Instead, it is over-determined - *over* in the sense of infinitely determined. The homogeneous characteristic of the continuum, is not a 'homogeneous mass' or uniform materiality, but heterogeneous infinity. What is homogeneous is only the equality of each point of space with respect to its divisibility. All possible divisions in the continuum correspond to an infinite divisibility instead of an infinite dividedness.

Contingency and time: arbitrary possibilities (contingency) and change (time) form further necessary backgrounds, because without them every object would have a defined position on a certain place with certain conditions and temporal appearances. By the exclusion of time and possibilities there would be a determinism in quality or condition. However, time is not to be understood as a given independent time frame, as already described above. A linear time lapse, which creates an equally independent frame of reference for all objects, would be a structure, which would have to exist independently of space and entities, and in addition would be undefined itself. Also, time cannot be

separated into discrete points, or restricted to one form or a somehow ordered structure, for the same existential reasons. The alteration of objects (entities) is included in the objects just like the space they occupy. Space and time form coherently and relatively, within the things, an absolute continuum. In this absolute continuum we do not receive one single time lapse as an actual realization, but in any point absolute infinitely many times (as equivalent to 'no time'), with all possibilities and spatial forms (Gödel 2023). Gödel described this as a consequence of his logical and cosmological models (Kovač 2012, 331). Through the necessary temporal and contingent actuality it is implied that every area contains everything else, also the alteration towards all other forms. Size relations are not predefined spatiotemporally, whereby every area, no matter how small, offers place for every imaginable universe: "I'm supposing that space is an absolute continuum, jam-packed with surreal numbers. And never mind about atoms or quantum mechanics—you can go on down and down. And sure, there might even be superclusters of galaxies down there—why not! There's room for everything amid the cascading levels of alefs." (Rucker 2019, xiii) By projecting the transfinite in all interior directions, we can re-relate all size ratios arbitrarily. Gödel's description of the actual existence of timelessness (i.e. actual existence of all time-forms) and of all possibilities was analogously described by Heidegger as a component of *being* through historical thrownness (Heidegger 1967, 135). Through time, qualitatively new things come into being, with different possibilities in *how* they alter, but without increasing or being added to. The new things are already part of the previous things. The success of Cantor's development of set theory (and later extensions) made previous ways of looking at things, such as the homogeneous continuum or the infinitesimals, obsolete without integrating them. Cantor's revolution consisted in grasping the mathematically actual infinity, the transfinite, by dividing it into elements. For him, as for almost every contemporary mathematician, there was a separation between the actual infinity of mathematics, the world and the absolute, i.e. the absolute infinity (Bedürftig and Murawski 2010, 70). According to this view, the infinity of mathematics and that of

the world was present in the absolute infinity, but separate from it. As we have seen, however, every mathematical operation, every worldly object and every conceptual consideration needs absolute infinity as their necessary realms of *being*. Moreover, the absolute infinity is only truly absolute when it has no limitations in any respect. Therefore, this separation between world, mathematics and absolute does not exist. Rather, due to the described existential necessity it is more difficult *not* to consider absolute infinity than to assume it in every point of space, in spite of the irritating consequences.

5. Conclusions

From the above considerations we receive the following results regarding the infinity of the world, that of mathematics, their analogous relationship to the absolute and the possibility of their knowledge. When we can describe the world and its structures mathematically, what is the reality of mathematical objects and structures? As we have seen above, even within mathematics its structures are not ultimately determined, but always require further domains to constitute them (Rucker 2019, chap. Excursion Two). Mathematical structures successfully represent interrelationships of reality. But, structures in the world, like mathematical structures, are not the ultimate reality, as a radical form of Platonism assumes. Any structure or relation is only one possibility among many, including the possibilities arising additionally from contingency and time. From this for any structure, that describes the world, it follows that it cannot be the ultimate structure, but is part of its respective space-time and has emerged and will change together with it. Evolution is the consequence of the power and temporality of *being*. Even if we can recognize and reveal mathematical structures (Platonistically) as abstract entities, there must be a realistic connection between the world and mathematics, and thus also between Platonism and Realism, since mathematics is a natural science in addition to its structural-scientific property (Maddy 1988). Thus, mathematical structures have an abstract and formally describable reality as the relations between the things and even between superordinate structures, but they cannot be conceived

as an independent structure themselves, since they are part of the respective space-time domains. The only thing that does not change is the fact that things interrelate with each other. The form of the relations, thus of the mathematical structures, is changeable. From the boundedness of mathematical structures, the conclusion is usually drawn that we cannot recognize or describe absolute infinity, because mathematical structures never exhaust the continuum, or because we cannot follow an infinite series in our perception (Aristoteles 1829; Kant 1966; Kreis 2015). This is invalid because in every finiteness we have already recognized it as a necessary condition. It is clear that, in consideration, going through a potentially infinite sequence we would never reach the infinity of the absolute continuum, because it also corresponds to a division into discrete elements. But instead, we can form open concepts that elude an elementary division. This is then the realization that any structure (like \mathbb{R} or the infinitesimals) and any object is a contour within all possible realms of *being* of the backgrounds and foregrounds of the continuum. That means, with every cognition of a finite object or a finite structure the absolute infinity is recognized as a necessary component inevitably inclusive, because within it the figure of the object is separated from the ground. If we separate, in our observation, a figure from its ground, we cannot extrapolate from the finiteness of this act of intuition to a finite ontology, as e.g. Kant did in his Cosmological Antinomies (Kant 1966), or Aristotle in the potential infinity of the act of division in consideration (Aristoteles 1829, 193 b 22 ; Tengelyi 2014, 496-497). The things themselves do not contain any limitations in their *being* and the *being* is not bounded by our selection in intuition. Instead, objects can be viewed arbitrarily in different relations of *being*. Thus, we receive a metaphysical and concept theoretical pluralism that dispenses with presupposing uniform theories, ontologies or metaphysics and thus offers a maximally open access to reality that maps the cardinality of the infinity of the world and of the universal class in set theory and identifies both with absolute infinity.

NOTES

¹ Translation by the author. Quote in the original language: „Das (anschauliche) Kontinuum, so zeigt sich hier auch mathematisch, entspricht einer unerschöpflichen ‚kontinuierlichen Raumsoße‘“ (Brouwer, zitiert nach: Becker 1954, p. 346).

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A Phenomenological Reading of Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato si'* through Jean-Luc Marion's Account of the Saturated *Phenomenon*

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Abstract

This essay identifies and articulates some phenomenological thoughts implicit in Pope Francis' celebrated encyclical on nature *Laudato Si'*. Careful attention to the nuances of Francis' statements on nature reveals layers of multi-disciplinary ideas, including phenomenology. Thus, it inferentially establishes his thoughts' proximal connection to the phenomenological tradition. However, I do not claim that he directly engages with phenomenology. However, it is not an impossible conjecture. Using Jean-Luc Marion's account of the saturated phenomenon, I try to show that some of Pope Francis' articulated views resonate with Marion's phenomenological insights. It leads me to infer that the encyclical's discursive scope is first broader than what has been thought. Second, in this more general scope, we find in Francis a well-informed multidisciplinary 'thought train' that leads him to engage in a meaningful dialogue with various disciplines within and outside theological-religious discourse. Third, it shows that Marion's saturated phenomenon is wide-ranging beyond its identifiable niche in phenomenological inquiry, like Francis's thoughts in his encyclical on nature.

Keywords: phenomenology, saturated phenomenon, integral ecology, *Laudato Si'*, eco-phenomenology

Introduction

The deadly COVID-19 virus struck us. The pandemic brought countries around the globe into crisis. Yet, others consider the crisis an opportunity to forge and wield power over the most affected and afflicted. Some believe the virus came from bats or pangolins, while others think it was from a lab

experiment.¹ Whatever the case, one thing is profoundly apparent, i.e., the infinite urge of humans to overpower nature and us. We see the inhumanity and the perniciousness of human beings. Ironically, despite human beings' desire to control, manipulate, and dominate nature, the devastating effects of the COVID-19 virus show the limits of human power and control. Weak and unsophisticated intervention and highly advanced technology could not afford to mitigate the problem right away. Armin Grunwald (2021, 280) observes that even advanced technological solutions proved ineffective. The issue concerning technology and its ethical dimension is one of the salient points of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* – the only encyclical that addresses the ecological issues and concerns as to its main interest.

The encyclical has gained enormous attention among experts from different human and natural sciences disciplines for six years. From theologians to natural and social scientists, it receives a positive reception outside the entrenched fortress of the Catholic worldview. An environmental philosopher, Dale Jamieson (2015), considers the encyclical “the first really important environmental text of the twenty-first century,” which “explicitly invites conversation, with both believers and non-believers” (19-20). Perhaps this observation from an outsider like Jamieson qualifies the view of Lorenzo Orioli (2016, 933) that the encyclical bears an “absolute novelty” because it is the first time that an entire social document solely reflects and dedicates itself to environmental issues. Various issues and topics directly and indirectly articulated in the encyclical have emerged. This is partly due to the multidisciplinary ideas infused in the text. As Celia Deane-Drummond (2016, 392) puts it, the primary aim of the entire document is to interact with various discussions on the said issues.

For Anna Rowlands, the encyclical finds Francis's ideas “frankly excoriating about the state of contemporary life” (2015, 418). Wolfgang Sachs, on the other hand, describes the encyclical as a mark of a new discourse on development because it “covers a lot of ground, spanning from the destruction of creation to the unjust global order to the individual

responsibility that each of us bears. Can one classify the Pope's sentiments under the heading of Post-Development?" (2017, 7). For Jacob M. Kohlhass and Ryan Patrick McLaughlin (2019, 501), the encyclical concerns environmental ethics. The encyclical explicitly resists an anthropocentric temperament. Instead, it tries to articulate a theocentric perspective of nature that is more inclusive and hospitable, according to Steven C. van den Heuvel (2018, 53).

I bring these varied perspectives here to emphasize how the encyclical draws diverse, critical, and charitable perspectives from inside and outside the Catholic Christian perspectives. So far, I have yet to find anything that tries to read the encyclical using a phenomenological framework. However, this does not mean no extant literature on understanding Pope Francis' thoughts on this philosophical view. One interesting essay by Kristof Oltvai (2018) highlighted Pope Francis's views as contiguous with the current French phenomenological enterprise led by Jean-Luc Marion.² On this note, I want to follow up on a similar inquiry. But mine is to concentrate on another document, the *Laudato Si*.

The essay will first give a general overview of the encyclical, emphasizing the crucial points that are veneers of phenomenological ideas when closely examined using the lens of the saturated phenomenon. The second part is an explication and elaboration of Jean-Luc Marion's style of phenomenology. It focuses on delineating his account of the saturated phenomenon, its cognate concepts, and its usefulness as a paradigm of ecological reflection. It hopes to shed light on Pope Francis' implicit, if you may, eco-phenomenological thoughts. It indirectly shows that Marion's insights can enrich the phenomenological approach to environmental philosophy. Finally, the third section articulates the relation of the extracted insights from the encyclical to Marion's phenomenological thoughts on the saturated phenomenon.

Pope Francis and the *Laudato Si*'

It has been nine years since the first encyclical of Pope Francis dealing with the environment was published.³ It is one of the most important social documents of the Catholic Church

on the environment. As mentioned, no single social document of the Catholic Church gave a full-length reflection on the environmental questions and issues. The unprecedented historical document emerged when Pope Francis had just begun his stint as the Roman Catholic Church's new Pope. He was elected the 266th pope on March 13, 2013. The first pope elected to the Petrine office from Argentina, South America – considered a far-flung country by Western standards and known for its Marxist movements and liberal theology. For his critics according to Massimo Borghesi in *The Mind of Pope Francis*, Francis is “a populist, an Argentine ‘Peronist’ who lacks the ability to understand the subtle distinctions of liberal, modern Europe” and “lacks the theological and philosophical preparation to handle the Petrine office” (2018, 27) though without solid evidence to support these assertions. He is a radical pope to his supporters and sympathetic to Francis’ papacy. But this radicalism in Francis, as Ivereigh warns, must “not be confused with progressive teaching or ideology. [He] is radical because [he] is a missionary and mystical,” and he is “instinctively and viscerally opposed to ‘parties’ in the Church...[and] will not compromise on the hot-button issues that divide the Church from the secular West” (2014, 386). One of Francis’ friends attests to the pontiff’s mysticity, describing his personality as possessing “a mystical dimension, of which I saw several signs. His books and encyclicals deal with human behavioral problems: poverty, ecology, slavery, and so on, and his pronouncements are direct and very clear.” (Storka 2018, xii) The pontiff is known for his being straightforward in his language. As explained by Borghesi (2018), “[i]t is simplicity that is rooted in long reflection and evangelical simplicity, not in any limitation of expression” (31-32). It is because Pope Francis’ model is Jesus Christ, who rarely speaks in sophisticated language. Francis follows his “way of thinking and acting” from Christ. Skorka (2018) explains, “rarely does he [Francis] adopt an intellectual attitude using cerebral sophistication because he has an internal world which is far from a purely intellectual formalism, a mystical world which can only be expressed in the very special language of simple words, silences, and many gestures.” (xii) Despite some

unfavorable observations from his critics, it cannot be denied that his many remarks on various occasions are pretty evident, impressive, and have a strong charismatic and pastoral appeal to many. He is clear when articulating his views that most people can easily discern the message of his statements.

Faithful to his pontifical name, he began his pontificate with an encyclical that centers on the pressing concerns and issues of the environment and extends further beyond this sphere. As Naomi Oreskes, describing Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'* says, "While it has been billed as an encyclical on the environment, the letter covers virtually every important topic in contemporary life" (2015, 8). Similarly, Clemens Sedmak (2016, 946) comments that the *Laudato Si'* "talks about the inner situation of technology, economics, and politics" and "should be read in light of Francis's pontifical agenda: pastoral and missionary conversion." (Schlesinger 2018, 339)

The *Laudato Si'*

The encyclical is one of a kind as it is the only encyclical that devotes all its pages to reflecting on God's creation and nature's condition today. Pope Francis surveys existing documents that shed light on the Church's position concerning nature, from *Pacem in Terris* of John XXIII, *Octogesima Adveniens* (Apostolic Letter) of Saint Pope Paul VI, *Redemptor Hominis* (Encyclical) of Saint John Paul II, down to the *Caritas in Veritate* of Pope emeritus Benedict XVI. All these documents speak fleetingly about nature. Many readers, believers or not, of the *Laudato Si'* are impressed by it. Leonardo Boff, cited by Alexandre Martins (2018, 410), quips, "It is the first time that the papal ministry has addressed ecological issues deeply and extensively. The Pope realizes the risks that the life-system and the earth-system are facing." Aside from the overall theme that directly discusses environmental issues and concerns, more to it makes this encyclical quite unprecedented and novel.

For one, the encyclical deviates from the traditional perspective that informs the Church's environmental position. The Pope tried to resist the anthropocentric paradigm if not

entirely abandoned it. As Schlesinger (2018) argues, in Francis's decision to adopt a new approach to creation, "[h]umanity is decentered, meaning that we must look not just to our own desires and machinations in terms of our priorities. Instead, the Creator's agenda is in the center of our concerns." (343) Such an approach is theocentric. But Kohlhass and McLaughlin (2019, 503) call it "relationcentric" in "which relationships themselves, rather than persons or other beings, occupy the locus of theological concern." Another reason is the inclusive textual tonality of the encyclical, which signals and invites friendly but critical conversation with all concerned peoples and institutions.

What is more remarkable and unprecedented is that Francis, following Deane-Drummond, considers the natural sciences and related environmental issues in a manner unparalleled by other official, authoritative statements (2016, 414). In this sense, the text shows its successful attempt to step out of its fortress to see greater horizons coming from various points. In this manner, Francis would like to gather everyone at one 'huge table' to discuss a common issue and cause. The encyclical "makes an uncommon pivot from its calls to conversion toward a call for pluralist dialogue," according to Willis Jenkins (2018, 446). This inclusive or hospitable attitude is felt in the textual tone of the encyclical—the reason why it attracts more experts to engage in a friendly and critical conversation with the church.

Francis employed a familiar framework known to many Catholic theologians as the see-discern/judge-act. He first presents the current ecological situation and what the Church's social teachings say about it. Then, it provides an illuminating, multi-disciplinary analysis of the current ecological crisis's actual and possible causes and effects on peoplekind and the earth. Lastly, he offers lines of approach and action that he thinks are sustainable, inclusive, and open to all, especially to those responsible leaders and institutions who are directly accountable for affecting changes to the state or condition of our environment.

The first two chapters of the encyclical lay down the context of the ecological scenario and how the teachings of the Church offer guiding points of what to think about the said issue. Francis identifies some ecological or environmental problems today. They are intimately connected with moral and social concerns. These environmental problems include pollution, climate change, water problems, and biodiversity loss. These problems are correlated with social issues of global inequality and the decline in the quality of human life.

Consequently, these endanger society to the point of a breakdown. These twin problems result from what Pope Francis (2015, 22) calls “throwaway culture, which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish.” He proceeds to explain specific concerns on pollution, such as carbon emission (which calls for universal solidarity) and water ethics – questioning the control of water consumption. He argues against the privatization and management of water distribution by emphasizing the inviolable and inherent right of all people to have “access to safe drinkable water” as “a basic and universal human right since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.” (ibid., 30) The problem of water distribution, consumption, and access is “an educational and cultural issue” because people must be aware of the value and use of safe water. The universal access to it must be fully known to people. The pontiff sees the water problem as a cause of “great inequality.” He also takes up the issue of biodiversity. The problem arises from “short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce, and production” (ibid., 34), which caused havoc on nature’s biodiversity. It is partly due to the intense degree of “human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism.” (ibid) Next, he speaks about the decline in the quality of human life as seen in the “disproportionate and unruly growth of many cities” and the “privatization of certain spaces” only for the consumption of the few and so are signs of “real social decline” and the “silent rupture of the bonds of integration and social cohesion.” (ibid., 46) Francis emphasizes the value of habitable urban greenspaces. Cities should be well-

designed to avoid excluding or neglecting those on the margins. Another contributory factor to the decline of society is the role that media and the digital world play. Since media is ubiquitous, “their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously.” (ibid., 47) Such biting characterization of media reminds us of the Frankfurt School's critique of the culture industry and mass communication.⁴ Critical theorists believe that media and technology reduce culture into an “industry” where capitalists profit by persistently and subtly developing false consumer consciousness and transforming them into mere desiring machines. In *The Culture Industry*, Adorno explains that culture as an industry “refers to the standardization of the thing itself...and the rationalization of distribution techniques” (2001, 100). Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), a groundbreaking polemic on the corrosive effects of media, especially television, observes that we can no longer think independently of what is being fed or subtly dictated to us by the media. As Fr. John Culkin, S.J. said, “We become what we behold. We shape our tools, and then our tools shape us.”⁵ That is why for Pope Francis, “Efforts need to be made to help these media become sources of new cultural progress for humanity and not a threat to our deepest riches” (2015, 47).

All these problems intertwined with the ecological concerns led Pope Francis to assess whether our responses so far are enough to contain or at least can give a long-term solution to these problems. In his view, the responses are relatively weak for several reasons: first, “lack of culture needed to confront” the crisis; second, lack of “leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present”; third, “techno-economic paradigm” which for him is one-dimensional – the reason why many things were left out crucial to the salvation of creation or nature (Pope Francis 2015, 53).

The Pope emphasizes the value of the Church's teachings about today's ecological problems. He clarified that any 'tyrannical anthropocentric' view of nature has no theological basis. He writes, “The Bible has no place for a tyrannical

anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures” (2015, 68). Instead, the Church teaches this conviction: “Everything is interconnected, and genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice, and faithfulness to others” (ibid., 70). Therefore, he tries to dismiss the misconception that the kind of anthropocentrism the Church espouses is tyrannical. He pointed out that ‘dominion’ does not mean controlling or manipulating other living beings.

On the contrary, it should be interpreted as “responsible stewardship.” Pope Francis, therefore, did not deny anthropocentrism per se but clarified its sense. In a way, it addresses the issue of some environmental critics of Christian teachings being complicit in promoting anthropocentrism. For instance, Lyn White Jr., in “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” (1967), argues that “Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion in the world has seen...not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploits nature for his proper ends” (1205). As understood by Patrick J. Dobel (1977), what White implies is that Christianity, therefore, “must accept most of the ‘blame’ for the unique ‘Western’ perspectives which have led to the present state of affairs” (906-907). But Dobel, in response to White’s criticism, argues that “The attempt to discover historical roots is a dubious business at best, and in this case, it borders on the ludicrous” (1977, 907). What the Christian critics failed to consider is the complexity of the issue according to Dobel, they “consistently underestimate the economic, social and political influences on modern science and economy;” and “ignore the rise of the secularized nation-state from the decay of ‘Christendom, yet these new government regimes provided much of the impetus to maximize the exploitation of resources and the discovery of new lands” (ibid).

As Pope Francis says, we do not possess nor own the earth and its living beings because “[t]he ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward and through us towards a common point of

arrival, which is God” (2015, 83). But this does not mean subscribing to a Taylorian view of egalitarianism, biocentrism, or ecocentrism (see Taylor 2011). Contrariwise, his main point is that the Church recognizes the value and dignity of other living beings. It condones any form of “ecological fascism” (Aldo Leopold 2001) that treats nature and other living beings as simply instrumental. Another salient point is the distinction between 'nature' and 'creation.' The Pope identifies 'nature' as a system, reducible to an object to be “studied, understood and controlled” (2015, 75) while 'creation' is understood as a gift—“an order of love.” (ibid., 76) It is also essential to add that 'nature' is not just a 'mere' system. It is a 'living' system. Perhaps there is a profound meaning to what Christians believe: that we are made of earth (Adam) and shall return as earth. Our relationship with nature is so intricate and intimate that we share our resources and are interdependent. One way of putting this is how Curt Stager, in “You Are Made of Waste” (2013), aptly describes in his article that we are made of waste.

Furthermore, Pope Francis proceeds by evaluating the ecological crisis today. He raised two essential points. First is his view of science and technology as a hegemonic one-dimensional paradigm that “exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object.” (2015, 105) This view leads to the second main point: the exaltation of the subject and its mastery over nature. Francis reminds us that this results from what Hegel (1988, 35) calls the “cunning of reason.” Enlightenment promises to secure man a firm or stable foundation, managing to reduce everything according to the conditions set by human reason. It gets its highest expression in technology – the subject's central power resource or, in Heidegger's terms, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (1977), “machinations.” The power of human logic reduces everything to scientific understanding and authenticates science and technology as the only legitimate “epistemological paradigm” par excellence. The effect of this, according to Francis, is the weakening and “deterioration of the

environment – a sign of a reductionism which affects every aspect of human and social life.” (2015, 107)

Francis also argued that “technological products are not neutral (ibid.)” It means that they “create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interest of certain powerful groups (ibid.)” This view affirms the belief that technology as an extension of man has inherent and derivative value, at least based on its impact. Such an idea contradicts the belief that technology is neither good nor bad but simply a tool (Vogels et al. 2020). However, Pope Francis (2015) says this is not the case. It can be seen how the impact of technology conditioned life in general, where “life gradually becomes a surrender to situations conditioned by technology itself viewed as the principal key to the meaning of existence.” (110) The technological meaning of existence is made possible because technology is not a neutral tool. It colonizes our consciousness (*via* Habermas) and life's activities according to its own rules. It is this technological phenomenon that Francis (2015) tries to point out when he says that “technology...is presented as the only way of solving these problems, in that proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others” (20). That is why finding real solutions to the crisis cannot depend solely on what science and technology can offer. Instead, Francis insists that to have a real and long-term solution to the crisis, “openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, [will] take us to the heart of what it is to be human.” (2015, 11) He urges us to “continue to wonder about the purpose and meaning of everything,” which we cannot do when we allow ourselves to be enslaved by technology. We cannot rely solely on technology. We need a new way of thinking in treating the crisis, a “distinctive way of looking at things.” (ibid.)

Another thing that Francis wants us to overcome or at least avoid is the widespread relativism as an effect of the technological paradigm. Following his predecessor, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, a rabid and staunchest critic of

relativism, Francis warns us of the dangers of “practical relativism.” One of which is the corruption of culture. For Pope Francis, “When the culture itself is corrupt and objective truth, and universally valid principles are no longer upheld, laws can only be seen as arbitrary impositions or obstacles to be avoided.” (2015, 123) Such a sinister view perpetuated by relativism further contributes to the ecological problem. That is why Francis highlights the value of integral ecology. Two crucial points need to be emphasized here. First is the role of culture as a “living, dynamic and participatory present reality” in finding an integral solution to ecological problems. In this context, understanding local cultures and communities' active participation is necessary for “studying environmental problems, favoring a dialogue between scientific-technical language and the language of the people” (2015, 143). Second, integral ecology requires “intergenerational solidarity,” which is less vital without it. Such a form of solidarity is a question of fundamental justice. Therefore, ecological crisis managers and planners must consider the future generation to solve the crisis.

One of the ways to mitigate and address the crisis is to take what the Church thinks to be a more comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to the ecological crisis. First, such an approach requires higher stakes such that all parties involved must negotiate under the “global common good” rubric instead of their “national interest.” Second, the “magical conception of the market” must be rejected “where profits alone count” without thinking “about the rhythms of nature, its phases of decay and regeneration, or the complexity of ecosystems that may be gravely upset by human interventions” (Pope Francis 2015, 190). Third, we need a politics entirely divorced from economics, a “far-sighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis” (ibid., 197). Such politics is possible when it will allow itself not to be dictated by impulsive economic power. Fourth is “cultivating sound virtues,” which is an unconditioned demand to all ecological citizens to be “able to make a selfless ecological commitment” (ibid., 211). Finally, it

can be made possible if we, according to Francis, make a “profound interior conversion” (ibid., 217).

What can we make out of this text? The overall theme is guided by an essential principle, which Pope Francis stated, “Without anthropology, there is no ecology” (2015, 12). This means that the reflection on the ecological crisis is grounded and informed from a Christian anthropological point of view. Although one can sense that Francis has focused heavily on the effects of science and technology, it still boils down to the question of man's mastery over nature – an invention of the modern anthropological view, which Francis wanted us to overcome. We remain modern in this sense. But many believe that we are now in a postmodern stage. From a postmodern perspective, the subject no longer positions itself as the center of everything. The human subject no longer possesses the superlative power to control everything. If Pope Francis is correct in his analysis, perhaps we can say we are still modern, and postmodernism is a bad joke. Perhaps he agrees with geologists in describing our geological epoch as an epoch of the Anthropocene. It is a geological term that describes an age where a single species – humans – is increasingly dictating Earth's future. If the old forces of nature like meteorites, mega volcanic eruptions, and plate tectonics were the significant causes of changing the Earth's geological makeup, this time, it is humans. Human actions have transformed the Earth into a new geological period in which human impacts on the planet's ecological systems reach a dangerous limit. The Anthropocene, therefore, symbolizes a future of superlative control of our environment.

It may be said that the Anthropocene is a height of hubris, the profane revelation of our mastery over nature. This is what Francis wants us to overcome or urges us to resist by correcting our view of ourselves as no longer masters of nature or the sole Subject while the rest are mere objects to be controlled and manipulated. Francis clearly states that the “world is a sacrament of communion.” The world is not “a problem to be solved; the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise” (2015, 12). This view of the world defies

the principles of human reason or metaphysics. It requires a new way of thinking – a thinking that is not technological, hence, calculative but meditative or poetic, following Heidegger. A kind of thinking that does not stop us from wondering. This view of nature or creation as a mystery to be awed and enjoyed resonates with what Marion considers a saturated phenomenon. What is this saturated phenomenon? How does nature fit into this kind of description? These questions try to show the phenomenological overtones of the encyclical. The profundity of Pope Francis' insights and views in the *Laudato Si'* may not manifest without careful reading and attention to our collective experience of nature. The richness of the human experience enriches and nourishes the encyclical. With this view, phenomenological insights are evident, if not axiomatic.

Jean-Luc Marion's Saturated Phenomenon

Jean-Luc Marion is one of the leading French phenomenologists today. He belongs to the new generation of phenomenologists – the so-called 'new phenomenology.' (see Simmons & Benson 2013). As Steven Delay (2019, 74) puts it, referring to Marion, "today's most pioneering phenomenologist...innovative reader of Descartes, and imaginative theologian". Marion is well-respected and well-known as Descartes' expert and commentator. He wrote a triptych on Descartes' thoughts and philosophy. In theology, Marion follows the theological persuasions of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Louis Bouyer, Jean Daniélou, Henri de Lubac among others (Horner 2016, 3).

One may think that in our time, it is not easy to be well-versed in theology and philosophy, which are seemingly far apart. But it seems that to use Emmanuel Falque's expression in *Crossing the Rubicon* (2016), Marion has crossed the 'Rubicon' – a sign of a 'great crossing' that was so difficult to do in the last two centuries. Such crossing is due to Marion's attempt to re-open the doors of both disciplines to a dialogue that was dormant for a long time. Through his brand of phenomenology, Marion appears to make philosophy, specifically phenomenology and theology, allies rather than hostile to one another. As Thomas Carlson puts it, "his [Marion]

theology and phenomenology inform one another more” (2001, xv). Marion considers phenomenology an important resource for theology. But he comments in an interview that, “Real theologians...what they need is an adapted methodology that reaches far beyond a mere readaptation of what they call metaphysics or philosophy. They need to use a phenomenological strategy” (Dika and Hackett 2016, 59). In this case, Marion is trying to overcome people's stereotypes of philosophy and theology. Instead, he shows that these seemingly opposing disciplines are, at their core, showing isomorphic relations. It is demonstrated in Marion's works that are, in the view of Gschwandtner, “all characterized by a desire to overcome metaphysics: whether ascertaining the nature of metaphysics in Descartes, whether attempting to free the divine from the idolatry of being and onto-theology, or whether extending phenomenology into new realms of possibility” (2007, xiii). What binds these works together is Marion's interest in the phenomenological understanding of self, love, and the divine. He is known for his phenomenological concept of the saturated phenomenon. Essential to this section is how Marion's account of the saturated phenomenon resonates with Pope Francis's ecological/environmental thinking.

Marion describes the saturated phenomenon as an experience or event where the person can no longer reduce such experience to mere concepts. In short, one's experience is saturated with intuition to the point that putting intuition into the concept is no longer possible. Marion wants to challenge the view of Kant regarding our understanding of experience as experience regulated both by sensibility and understanding. These two conditions for Kant make our experience or “knowledge of *an* object possible” (Marion 2008, 28). Sensibility refers to our capacity to receive intuitions through our internal and external senses, while understanding is responsible for organizing such intuitions through and into concepts. As Kant said, “intuitions without concepts are blind.” But this does not mean that the concept precedes or overpowers intuitions.

On the contrary, for Marion, “in the realm of the phenomenon, not the concept but intuition is king.” (2008, 28-29) Kant may agree with this when he explains that “intuitions, in general, through which objects can be given to us constitute the field or the entire object of possible experience” (Kant 2017, A96). The reason is that there could be no concept without intuition, even if, for Kant, “all cognition requires a concept, however imperfect or obscure it may be” (Kant 2017, A106). A concept without content (intuition) is empty and so unnecessary. While it is true that, according to Marion, “phenomenon is thought through the concept,” it does not mean it is primary over intuition. He justifies the primacy of intuition by saying, “intuition without concept, although still blind, nevertheless already gives matter to an object, whereas the concept without intuition, although not blind, nevertheless no longer sees anything, since nothing has yet been given to it to be seen” (Marion 2008, 28). Marion contends that “in order to be thought it must first be given; and it is given only through intuition” (ibid., 29). Despite the primacy of intuition over the concept in terms of its function, Marion believes that intuition remains finite or limited in the Kantian sense. It leads him to think that the I constitute any knowledge we have of objects, so “the phenomenon must be reduced to the status of finite objectivity.” (ibid., 31) Marion's point is that there are phenomena that escape from our act of constituting because we limit our understanding of our experience to an experience of an object and that, according to Marion, “some actually given intuition in general...finds itself assumed, framed, and controlled by a concept, playing the role of a category” (ibid., 119). That is why we failed to acknowledge and recognize that there is more to what we constitute as an object. This leads Marion to develop, in *Being Given*, one of his phenomenological principles: “so much reduction, so much givenness” (2002a, 14). It captures his attempt to release phenomenality from the Kantian restriction of intuition as finite. The main point is that if intuition is unrestricted and allows itself to appear absolutely without our intentionality that limits it, it will appear that reduction “grants access to absolute givenness and it has no other goal but this.” (ibid., 14) There is so much excess that

saturates our experience. The question is, how do we characterize the saturated phenomenon, which cannot be reduced to a mere object through concept?

Marion uses the Kantian categories to hinge the saturated phenomenon's essential features: it is *invisible* according to quantity, *unbearable* according to quality, *absolute* according to relation, and *incapable of being looked at* [irregardable] according to modality. In his book, *In Excess*, Marion (2002b) elaborates on these features using the following modes of the saturated phenomenon: the *event* for quantity, the *idol* or *work of art* like painting for quality, *the flesh* for relation, and *the face of the other* for modality. He uses a lecture hall as an example of a mode of the event. He explains that other than its “objective availability” of the hall, i.e., physical characteristics or appearance and the like, which everyone can enumerate, is its “unexpected fact, unforeseeable, coming from an uncontrollable past” (2002b, 32). The lecture hall as a mode of the event shows the inexhaustible character of the event. Marion explains, “The event of the ‘hall’ of the lecture hall allows a phenomenon to rise up for us in full light that not only does not proceed from our initiative, or respond to our expectations, and could never be reproduced” (ibid., 34). As such, a locus of an event of lecturing gives excessive intuition that one could not afford to constitute. It is a banal experience when one enters a lecture hall that cannot absolutely describe what the hall is with our perception of it, its connection to our previous experience, and so on. In this case, our experience saturated with too much intuition cripples our ability to conceptualize such experience.

A similar experience happens when one sees a painting with awe. When one is captivated by the radiance of a painting, it reveals the painting’s exuberant and abundant intuition, which can render one in a frenzy. In short, when one marvels at a painting, one is overwhelmed by its intuition to the point that one cannot fully grasp the meaning of the painting. Every time the painting is seen, it opens new horizons. Marion explains, “We cannot see a painting once and for all. Unlike the objects of

the world that – if one knows enough about their structure, their purpose, and their use – it suffices to see once in order to be able to use them daily and no longer have to come back there *to see*.” (ibid., 70)

The *flesh* reveals a similar mode of a saturated phenomenon because it is irreducible. Our experience of the *flesh* is inseparable from oneself. Any scientific description escapes one's experience of the flesh. It is not the physical body, to be sure. Phenomenologists like Heidegger, Michel Henry, and Marion, among others, would distinguish the flesh from the body. The body can be examined using medical technology to determine its state or condition, but the flesh is something else. It is lived and felt rather than objectified. In this sense, the *flesh* escapes or eludes our attempt to characterize it, to name it objectively. As Marion puts it, the *flesh* “eludes all relation – my pain, my pleasure, remain unique, incommunicable, unable to be substituted – in an absoluteness without compromise, without anything like it or equal to it” (ibid., 100).

According to Marion, the *face* or the icon “shares the privilege of flesh” (ibid., 113). It remains invisible, and no signification can reveal the ‘who’ of the *face*. I am powerless before the *face* of the other. I am reminded of the injunction, ‘Do not kill.’ The *face* of the other remains a mystery despite my witnessing and experience. I cannot reduce the other to my categories since doing so makes the other no longer other but the same me. The face, for Marion, becomes an icon “addressing a call, in short, envisaging me” (ibid., 119). I cannot constitute the *face* since it watches me. The *face* overwhelms or paralyzes my ability to constitute it. The *face* is not an object for me but an infinite subject beyond my determination.

Given all these modes of the saturated phenomenon, Marion intends to show that our understanding of experience is limited and equivocal. The saturated phenomenon, for him, is an example of how we have failed to realize that there is no single and universal meaning of experience. It is not true for Marion that “we do not have any experience of what passes beyond the

conditions for the possibility of experience” (2008, 121). Against this view, Marion introduced the idea of the saturated phenomenon. He explains, “The entire question of the saturated phenomenon concerns solely and specifically the possibility that certain phenomena do not manifest themselves in the mode of objects and yet still do manifest themselves” (ibid., 122). Not all forms of experience are reducible to objects of the human constitution. There are modes of experience that cannot be understood within the realm of an object or being. Marion explains, “The saturated phenomenon refuses to let itself be looked at as an object precisely because it appears with a multiple and indescribable excess that suspends any effort at constitution” (ibid., 43). The question is, does this view relate to nature in that our experience of nature is saturated? If affirmative, does this view connect or resonate with Pope Francis’ views in the encyclical?

Saturated Phenomenon and its Resonances with Pope Francis’s Ecological Thoughts in *Laudato si’*

A careful examination of Marion’s works reveals that he rarely comments about the environment or nature, more so on the saturated phenomenon and its application to nature or the environment. If he speaks about nature, it aligns with his view of technology and humanity. For example, in *Believing in Order to See*, he comments about the condition of nature and his idea of nihilism and humanity. He says, “What is the point of the humanity of humans, the naturalness of nature, the justice of the city, and the truth of knowledge? Why not rather their opposites, the dehumanization of humans for improving humanity, the systematic bleeding of nature in order to develop the economy?” (Marion 2017, 9). Others are allusions to his discussion concerning technology or technical objects.

However, inferentially, it is easy to show how the saturated phenomenon may apply to our experience of nature, especially when we look at our experience of natural things in nature. Given the characteristics of the saturated phenomenon as having an “unforeseeable character,” “incommensurable, not measurable (immense), “disproportionate,” “exceeds the

categories and the principles of understanding,” “produces amazement,” “unbearable,” “bedazzling,” and overwhelming, we may infer that these attributes resonate with our experience of natural things in the environment. Take biotic systems such as forests, mountains, seas, rivers, or an anthill. Our experience of nature through them shows their being ungraspable. Seeing the clouds on a mountain's peak, ocean blue waters, or rock formations on the hill and the like exudes feelings that cannot be put into words. We cannot fully constitute such natural phenomena. It is true that they also become technical objects being studied by natural science. However, such activity remains inadequate. It is precisely this kind of reductionism or naturalism that eco-phenomenology is trying to resist. As Charles S. Brown and Ted Toadvine (2003, xii) describe, “Phenomenology suggests alternatives to many of the ingrained tendencies that limit our inherited perspectives: our myopic obsession with objectivity, our anthropocentric conceptions of value, and other legacies of Cartesian dualism.” Natural scientists tell us why there are sunsets and different seasons in a year, but they cannot explain how the same phenomena give depth to our experience (Gschwandtner 2014).

People are drawn to places where they find a beautiful sunset; others visit the Scandinavian country to witness the Northern Lights, while others are fascinated with anthills, rice fields, hills, and trees. Feeling the traces of the sound of raindrops, the wind blowing on your face, the sun's heat on your skin, the chirping of the birds in the morning, or the smell of the coffee tree flower gives temporal and spatial depth to our experience of them. It provides the person with an overwhelming and bedazzling feeling. These kinds of experiences escape our constituting of them as objects. All these suggest saturation for Marion. For example, the human interaction with the landscape or a garden of whatever kind shows how it is being experienced as saturated. This means that the landscape is not merely an object we can constitute at will but gives a much richer intuition, as in Marion's account of the lecture hall as a mode of the event. St. Francis's experience

in his garden when talking to birds and plants can be described as a saturated phenomenon.

Granted that nature or creation is a saturated phenomenon, it leads us to infer that first, looking at nature as saturated refrains us from giving a one-dimensional solution to our current environmental problems. As Francis asserts, technology, a byproduct of scientific knowledge, is “the only way of solving these [environmental] problems.” But then, we fail to realize that it “in fact proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others.” (2015, 20) This statement resonates with Marion’s account of saturation in that it speaks about the irreducibility and excess of our experience when we encounter things in nature. Technology, for Marion, is a product of thought and human calculation. Technology determines and constitutes its objects with certainty and accuracy. Unfortunately, we tend to rely so much on the narrative of natural science regarding the best possible solution to environmental problems. It is because we have given too much premium to the objectivity of its results and the efficiency of its solutions. That is why Pope Francis tells us to think creatively about the issues. By that, he means to listen to as many narratives as possible. Aside from fostering inclusivity, such a strategy allows a more nuanced and in-depth view of the issues, fostering universal or ‘intergenerational solidarity.’ The overwhelming experience of the adverse effects of climate change or global warming, giant floods, and super typhoons puts our capacities into question. It humbles us when all our efforts are insufficient to mitigate such horrendous calamities. Pope Francis describes this attitude as our “irrational confidence in progress and human abilities.” (ibid., 19)

Second, if our experience of some biotic systems is saturated, it enhances our sensitivity toward nature and fosters emphatic feelings as we relate to natural things. Our saturated experience of them makes us think and contemplate what an appropriate ethical or moral response should be. It reminds us of Pope Francis’ call for integration and solidarity with nature,

condemning a kind of anthropocentrism that is fascistic, oppressive, and destructive. Integral ecology values a holistic approach to pressing issues and concerns such as the environment. Aside from it “calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology.” (ibid., 11) Also, this line of action presupposes relationality with nonhuman living beings. It promotes life-centered values instead of human-centered values.

Pope Francis's invocation of St. Francis' life is a fitting reminder of how we should treat and understand creation as a gift born out of God's unconditional love (ibid., 76). This view resonates with Marion's phenomenological treatment of gift and charity. The gift must be understood not as an object but as a phenomenon that defies the logic of exchange. Contrary to Derrida, Marion (1999) insists that the gift is possible. Its possibility is seen in how the gift cannot be returned. Likewise, it is the same if we consider creation a gift. It is freely given an act of gratuity.

Third, considering nature or creation as a saturated phenomenon enlarges our perspectives and understanding of our role as human beings, just like what Marion describes when we see a painting, we are bedazzled by the superabundance of intuition that nature shows us to the point that we find nature as a mystery – something that cannot be comprehended, grasped, or aimed at. Nature remains elusive and invisible. If we keep looking at it objectively, it hides more. Nature is like the face of the other. We are reminded of its irreducible subjectivity – that it is inexhaustible and infinite. In this sense, we are pinned down by a nonhuman living other. With this, we are transformed by nature, not vice versa. It reminds us of Pope Francis's thought that the world is not an object to be measured and controlled but “a sacrament of communion” (2015, 12).

Conclusion

The essay shows that identifiable phenomenological thoughts are articulated in Pope Francis' celebrated encyclical on nature, *Laudato Si'*. Careful attention to the nuances of

Francis' statements on nature reveals layers of multi-disciplinary ideas, including phenomenology. The phenomenological view of nature is thus seen. Thus, it inferentially establishes Pope Francis's proximal connection to the phenomenological tradition. The encyclical has shown that some of Pope Francis' views resonate with Marion's phenomenological insights through Jean-Luc Marion's account of the saturated phenomenon as a framework. It leads us to infer that the encyclical's discursive scope is first broader than what has been thought. Second, in its more general scope, we find a well-informed multidisciplinary perspective in Francis, which leads him to engage in a meaningful dialogue with various disciplines within and outside the ambit of theological-religious discourse. Third, it shows that Marion's saturated phenomenon is wide-ranging beyond its identifiable niche in phenomenological inquiry. It can provide a paradigm to deeply understand and reflect on our moral or ethical perspective toward nature or the environment.

NOTES

¹ "Coronavirus History," <https://www.webmd.com/lung/coronavirus-history>; "Coronavirus cause: Origin and How it Spreads," <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/coronavirus-causes>; WHO, "Origin of SARS-CoV-2," (March 26, 2020), https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332197/WHO-2019-nCoV-FAQ-Virus_origin-2020.1-eng.pdf; Mallapaty 2021.

² In fact, this article gives me an initial drive to explore the possible resonances of Francis's thoughts in the *LS* with that of Marion's account of the saturated phenomenon as a framework.

³ The publication came months before the Paris Climate Conference in December 2015. According to Mark Graham, whether it was intentional or incidental, its release "was critical for creating the political momentum necessary to forge a substantive international agreement on reducing greenhouse gas emissions – an agreement that was sorely needed!" See Graham (2017, 57).

⁴ Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) first used the expression "culture industry" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. In the "Preface," they explain that the culture industry "shows the regression of enlightenment to ideology which is graphically expressed in film and radio." (2002, xviii)

⁵ This statement often mistakenly attributed to Marshall McLuhan. Reading McLuhan's works one could not simply find this statement anywhere.

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Ethical Challenges in Designing a Machine Learning System

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Abstract

Machine learning is a specific type of artificial intelligence (AI), a machine or software that can learn based on statistical analysis of data, pattern recognition and prediction. Some machine learning systems (i.e. those used in preventive policing and justice, banking, employment, child abuse prevention, etc.) have a degree of autonomy in decision-making and action. However, as Josh Simons (2023) argued, the computer scientists who design and develop these systems lack the requisite knowledge to fully comprehend the nuances of decision-making as experienced by social workers, police officers, and judges (the experience gap). Moreover, they are often unable or unwilling to justify their design choices to the citizens whose lives they shape (the accountability gap). Furthermore, the professionals who will use the predictive tools lack the requisite technical expertise to fully comprehend computer science terminology (the language gap). Consequently, the task of designing an efficient and ethical predictive tool is quite difficult. And, even if we leave aside the aforementioned problems, we can observe that the process of machine learning itself raises some serious ethical questions. It involves moral and political choices in the design of the tools which are using data to generate predictions. These choices are about values, goals and priorities, and have the potential to reinforce social injustice. A typical response would be that we should try to avoid these risks by embedding a set of ethical rules in the design of the predictive tools (ethics by design). However, I will argue that this approach has to face other significant ethical challenges.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, AI Ethics, Machine Learning, social injustice, moral agency

Introduction

It is obvious for any attentive observer of the latest developments in computer science and communication technology that artificial intelligence (AI) has become one of the

most important topics of investigation. It has become a buzzword¹ not only for the experts in the aforementioned fields, but also for those who are specialized in the contemporary philosophy of technology and, in particular, for authors who are concerned with the ethical and political consequences of this process².

But what is “artificial intelligence” and which are the main ethical issues related to it? In his recent and influential book, *AI Ethics*, Mark Coeckelbergh provides us with a very clear and concise definition: “intelligence displayed or simulated by code (algorithms) or machines” (2020, 64).

As Joanna Bryson argued in her paper *The Artificial Intelligence of the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence* included in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of AI*, the field of AI has developed from the effort to accomplish two different objectives: to improve the understanding of computer science by using the results of psychology, but also the other way around (Bryson 2020, 3). Consequently, the comparison between human intelligence and computational power has constituted a fundamental presupposition of this scientific endeavour.

In her view, intelligence should be defined only as a capacity to do “the right thing at the right time” and as an “ability to respond to the opportunities and challenges presented by a context” (2020, 4). She adds that we should *demystify* the concept of intelligence by underlining that it is merely a special case of computation, understood as a physical transformation of information, and that information itself is physically manifested in energy (sound of light) or materials. Hence, the term “artificial” is only a qualifier which refers to the fact that it has been made through a human process. Moreover, she believes that the definition of intelligence is only complicated by the reference to notions like sentience, consciousness or intentionality. Furthermore, according to her view, intelligence is essentially connected with responsibility: the capacity to perceive and maintain account of actions and consequences. But, responsibility has nothing to do with human biology. It is not a fact of nature. Consequently, in her opinion, our responsibility will be only enhanced by the development of digital technology and artificial intelligence. AI is an artefact

that can be used for the purpose of maintaining the social order. Therefore, it plays a similar role as the one associated with the law system (2020, 4-5).

In line with this conception regarding the nature and the role of AI, there are many contemporary contributions on the topic of the ethical and political issues related with the advancement and implementation of AI systems. In Coeckelbergh's view, there are two main perspectives regarding AI ethics. The first one is concerned with deep but highly speculative philosophical issues regarding the alleged development of *superintelligence* and *transhumanism* and the apocalyptic scenarios about the fate of humanity (Coeckelbergh 2020, 12). The main concern expressed by the representatives of this approach is to signal the danger of building something like Skynet or Frankenstein's monster. In this sense, they use two key concepts: *Intelligence explosion*, a notion which refers to the possibility of AI that will be capable of recursive self-improvement (machines that will design and produce even more intelligent machines), and *technological singularity*, which is supposed to be a moment in the history of technological progress involving a radical change that will be beyond human comprehension and control. *The second* perspective, on the other hand, has to do with the urgent ethical issues associated with AI that is already available and implemented. And, it includes AI used for self-driving cars, weapons, chat bots, search engines, image analysis, for the internet of things, for financial transactions, for justice and public policies and so on (2020, 12-13).

Another distinction, which is very similar to the aforementioned one, is that between *strong AI* and *weak AI*. *Strong or general AI* is a type which is supposed to simulate and even surpass human intelligence and carry out tasks that humans are capable of doing. This kind of AI is not yet available and it is a controversial matter if it will ever be. *Weak or narrow AI* is a type of artificial intelligence which can perform specific cognitive task only in some particular domains (2020, 66).

The focus of this article is the investigation of the ethical controversies related to this second type of AI that is already

available and implemented, especially in machine learning, which is based on algorithms (sets and sequences of instructions) and statistical analysis of data, on prediction and some kind of autonomous action.

1. What is machine learning?

In his book, *Algorithms for the People. Democracy in the Age of AI*, Josh Simons defines this notion as follows: “Machine learning is a collection of techniques and methods for using patterns in data to make predictions: for instance, what kinds of allegations of child abuse turn out to be serious, what kinds of people tend to reoffend, or what kinds of advertisements people tend to click on” (2023, 3). For example, the COMPAS system used in USA courts to predict who is likely to reoffend, the Allegheny Family Screening Tools (AFST) which predicts the risks of child abuse, the AI systems used by Google and Facebook in order to predict which content will be more likely to be accessed by specific users, those used by banks and financial institutions in the process of selecting their creditworthy clients or by employers for choosing the best candidates for a job and so on³.

He believes that machine learning systems are implemented mainly because they promise to bring *efficiency* and *fairness* to the decision-making procedures. They could bring efficiency in the process of optimizing the distribution and consumption of resources in the private and public sectors of the economy, in the process of solving the most complex social and political issues and so on. And, it is said that they can bring more fairness by eliminating the unreliable human factor from the decision-making process (2023, 15-16).

But what are the steps for building a machine learning system and how is it supposed to work? In Simon’s view, a model representing the process of building a decision-making procedure which uses machine learning looks like this:

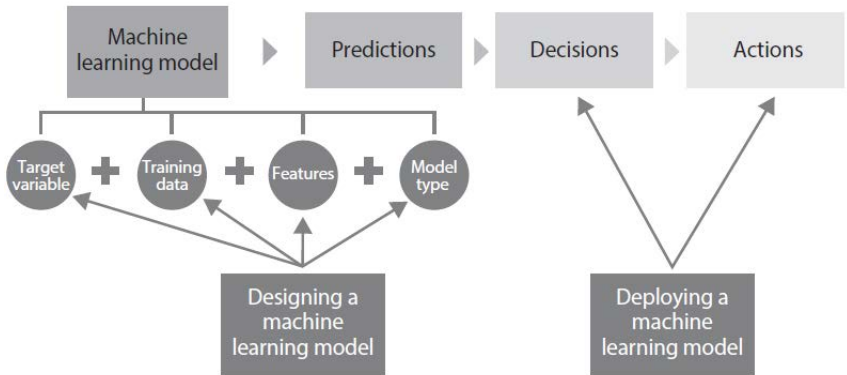


Fig.1. A model of building a decision-making procedure that uses machine learning (Simons 2023,18)

The target variable and proxy features

So, the first step in designing a machine learning model is to establish the *outcome* that the model will learn to predict: ex. who is likely to reoffend, who is creditworthy, which email is spam, which candidate will be a good employee etc. However, these variables cannot be measured directly. That is why the analysts must define a *proxy* for the outcome that will be quantifiable, measurable and predictable: features associated with creditworthiness, good employees, spam email etc. Of course, they will avoid taking into consideration “*protected features*” like race or gender. But, other features like income, conviction, and education can act as proxies for these protected features and can lead to discrimination (2023, 24). As Simons argues, these features are not objective concepts, they do not capture something out there in the world (2023, 19). These are concepts *defined* by banks, employers etc., based on their choices, values, interests, and priorities. For example, a good employee might be defined as someone who makes the most sales, stays in their job the longest, contributes to the team ethics etc. And, it is obvious that the results predicted by the AI will be very different in each case. Moreover, it is clear that the definition can be used to discriminate against some other types of employees (ex. on average, men tend to stay longer on a job).

The training data

A similar observation can be made about the set of data that are used in order to train the AI to learn how to recognize patterns and make predictions. The data do not reflect objective features of reality; rather, they reflect the *human choices* about what to measure and how. Such data sets represent subjective *judgments* and not objective facts. For example, AFST was trained on data measuring poverty and the juvenile justice system. Consequently, the data set tended to overrepresent low-income and African American families and to exclude wealthier and white families. As a result, the predictions based on this data will reflect historic and current prejudices and patterns of injustice. (2023, 21-22).

The model

Simons affirms that the final choice in designing the machine learning procedure is the selection of the decision model: “logistic regression models,” “decision trees,” “K nearest neighbour (kNN) classifiers,” “random forest models,” and “gradient boosting algorithms” etc. (2023, 25). Once the decision-making procedure based on machine learning will be developed, it will be implemented and used in order to support human decisions or to replace them (ex. to rank and automatically invite the best candidates for a job). Finally, the decisions will lead to *action*. If the decision is taken by the model, the conditions for the transition to action must be *previously programmed* (ex. by setting a minimum score for those who will be invited) (2023, 25).

2. Is machine learning political?

As it is obvious from the previous section, it is highly improbable that the computer scientists who are developing machine learning systems will be able to keep their promise and provide us with a fairer decision-making procedure. Moreover, Josh Simons argued that the process of machine learning is not as objective and value-neutral as many of its defenders claim and that it is distinctively political (2023, 4).

But why should this process be labelled as political? Because, in his opinion, it involves moral and political choices in the design of the tools which are using data in order to generate predictions. These choices are about *values, goals* and *priorities*, and have the potential to *reinforce social and racial injustice* (2023, 4). For example, the Allegheny Family Screening Tools (AFST) which predicts the risks of a child suffering abuse tends to subject poorer and African American families to unwanted and often unnecessary supervision. So, they tend to replicate patterns of economic and racial inequality (2023, 1).

Moreover, he affirms that, because these predictions are “cloaked in a veneer of scientific authority”, the resulting patterns of inequality *seem inexorable* and even *natural* (2023, 6). And the *scale* of their influence is increasing. For example, Simons claims that Facebook’s and Google’s machine learning systems are now a part of the infrastructure of the public sphere and have a considerable influence on how we relate, access information, organize and make collective decisions (2023, 7).

In his opinion, the aforementioned problems are intensified by three gaps. The first is an *experience gap* between those who build and those who use the predictive tools. For example, computer scientists know very little about what is like to make decisions as a social worker, a policeman, a judge, a content moderator and so on. The second is an *accountability gap* between those who held positions of authority and those who designed the tools. That is why the abovementioned political choices are often left unjustified. The third is a *language gap* between the same people. Those in positions of responsibility are unable to understand the language of computer science even if they are disposed to support the cause of social justice (2023, 2).

Consequently, there will be a good chance that the decision-making instrument won’t be able to perform, as promised, in an efficient and fair manner. Firstly, it would lack the profound and detailed knowledge possessed by a human specialist in the field. Secondly, its decisions would not be the result of the expert evaluation which takes into account the

professional and legal responsibility associated with that decision. And, thirdly, even if the computer scientists would try to consult the professionals, neither of them will be able to understand the terminology used by the other party.

3. A possible solution: ethics by design

The most frequently mentioned solution to the problem presented in the previous section is to incorporate capabilities for political and ethical reasoning in the design of machine learning systems. For example, this solution is mentioned by Virginia Dignum in her paper *Responsibility and Artificial Intelligence* included in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of AI*. She argues that AI will affect the lives of all of us and, therefore, its development must ensure inclusion and diversity and the concern for safe, beneficial and fair use of AI technologies. And she defines the concept of *ethics by design* as follows: “the technical/algorithmic integration of ethical reasoning capabilities as part of the behaviour of artificial autonomous systems” (2020, 216).

Moreover, in addition to the concept of ethics by design, she also speaks about *ethics in design* and *ethics for design*. The first of the two additional concepts refers to “the regulatory and engineering methods that support the analysis and evaluation of the ethical implications of AI systems as these integrate or replace traditional social structures” (2020, 216). The second concept has to do with “the codes of conduct, standards, and certification processes that ensure the integrity of developers and users as they research, design, construct, employ, and manage artificial intelligent systems” (2020, 217).

Josh Simons supports a similar idea by pleading for a responsible AI developed by people with multidisciplinary backgrounds, including expertise in ethics and politics. They will be able to design and regulate the technology of predictive tools by understanding that the choices of the computer scientists are embedded in this process, and they depend on the institutional, social and cultural context in which they are made. But, in the same time, they will be able to shape that context by law and regulation. Moreover, they should be

transparent about the values and interests built into the AI and confront their ambiguities and limits. And, in his view, this process would result not only in building a more responsible AI technology, but also in reanimating and reenergising our democracy (2023, 10-12).

An important objection against this thesis states that the nature of moral judgement is fundamentally linked to the internal experience of the human mind, which encompasses not only reasons, argumentation techniques and evaluations, but also emotions, memories, interests, values, attitudes and other factors that are inextricably linked with the functioning of the human mind. As Bartenek et al. argued in their volume, *An Introduction to Ethics in Robotics and AI*, “the main difference between humans making moral decisions and machines making moral decisions is that machines do not have ‘phenomenology’ or ‘feelings’ in the same way as humans do” (2021, 22). And they add that machines also lack moral intuition, acculturation or consciousness.

In his book *Ethics for Robots: How to Design a Moral Algorithm*, Derek Leben insists that this issue is better articulated in terms of the distinction between moral anti-realism and moral realism. According to him, the defenders of the first conception are convinced that there are no objective and mind-independent answers to moral questions. Therefore, ethics is not about reality. It is “about a set of psychological responses and cultural traditions” (Leben 2018, 3-4). And, he adds that none of these answers and cultural traditions would be better or worse than the other, none could be labelled as “right” or “wrong”. Therefore, if software engineers would incorporate in their artificial intelligence systems the moral answers specific to their culture, they could be justly accused of promoting their own biased version of morality and ethics would be nothing more than “a kind of identity politics” (2018, 4).

On the other hand, if the representatives of moral realism are right, then morality has evolved in response to a practical problem and “there might exist an objective and mind-independent set of solutions to this problem” (2018, 4). According to this view, which was also assumed by Derek

Leben, some solutions are objectively better than others. Therefore, in his opinion, moral problems are very similar to engineering problems and their solutions are transcendent of cultures. He even compares them to practical problems like the one of building the best bridge over a river. Moral intuitions and theories are goal-directed, meaning that they are designed in order to accomplish practical goals. And, he also developed a theoretical framework, called *Contractarianism*, based on John Rawls' *Maximin principle*, which he believes can be used for solving cooperative and non-cooperative moral problems. Moreover, he is convinced that this framework can be incorporated into the design of ethical autonomous machines which will prove to be very useful (and even surpass humans) in domains like transportation, saving lives and keeping the peace (2018, 5-6).

However, as it was pointed out by Michael Wheeler in a study dedicated to the autonomy of AI, there are significant problems related to the process of designing autonomous decision-making machines that will benefit from build-in ethical capabilities. Autonomy and ethical reasoning are complex procedures and they are notoriously difficult to implement in AI systems. As was demonstrated by the fatal accident involving an Uber self-driving car in Tempe, Arizona, in March 2018, or by instances of autonomous weapon systems erroneously identifying friends as foes or exhibiting unpredictable behaviour, these systems are capable of making fatal errors in their "judgements". It is very difficult to design the capabilities for a decision-making AI that would be efficient (for example, a self-driven car that would not use the emergency break even when a pedestrian is just passing on the sideway) and, in the same time, will be free of any critical risks. He even compares this problem with the classical trolley dilemma, with the trolley becoming the self-driving car and the lever becoming its programming (2020, 353).

One possible solution would be to use machine learning and deep learning systems that would be capable not only of recognizing patterns but also of building hierarchical representations of reality by distinguishing between higher-level and lower-level features. Nevertheless, this technology has

been shown to have limitations when it comes to multitasking. For instance, although a system may demonstrate remarkable proficiency in learning to play a game or in learning to play different games in a sequence, it has been demonstrated that when it learns a new game, this results in the catastrophic forgetting of the previous games. And, even if we would assume that they will overcome this technological limitation, another difficulty will persist: the problem of the *adversarial exemplars*. Following Christian Szegedy et al., he mentions the case of a deep learning neural network which was given the task of categorising different images as cars or not cars. When some images of cars were subjected to insignificant modifications at a pixel level, the system categorized them as not cars. And, in Wheeler’s opinion, this phenomenon demonstrates that these networks will at times make distinctions and decisions that diverge from our human moral behaviour, rendering them very challenging to comprehend and predict (2020, 354-356).

4. Ethical challenges in machine learning: an overview

From the argumentation of the previous sections, it can be concluded that the task of designing an ethical decision-making instrument based on machine learning is considerably more difficult than its proponents are willing to acknowledge. In this section, I will present an overview of the most significant ethical challenges against the advancement of this ambitious project.

The problem of moral agency

As was previously stated in the second section, machine learning represents a collection of techniques and methods for using patterns in data to make predictions and it involves a degree of autonomy in decision-making and action (Simons 2023, 3). Therefore, the first ethical problem concerns the fact that any machine learning tool designed to act autonomously, would lack an authentic *moral agency* understood as the ability to evaluate and to act in a free and responsible way, in accordance with a coherent set of moral values and principles.

In his paper, *Artificial Agency, Consciousness, and the Criteria for Moral Agency: What Properties Must an Artificial Agent Have to Be a Moral Agent?*, Kenneth Einar Himma has provided the following characterisation of moral agency: “The conditions for moral agency can thus be summarized as follows: for all X , X is a moral agent if and only if X is (1) an agent having the capacities for (2) making free choices, (3) deliberating about what one ought to do, and (4) understanding and applying moral rules correctly in paradigm cases” (2009, 24).

In their study *The Ethics of the Ethics of AI* included in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of AI*, Thomas Powers and Jean-Gabriel Ganascia distinguished between the *philosophical* and the *technical* conception of agency. From a philosophical perspective, an agent *intends* its actions (upon reflection). Therefore, according to this explanation, an artificial agent does not possess agency. From a technical perspective, an agent does nothing more than to implement a “function that maps percept sequences to actions”. And, they add that: “Within this definition, the structure of actions is reduced to their mechanical consequences, while their objectives—the goals the agent pursues or, in more philosophical terms, the intentions—are not specified. Those are given from outside, which means that artificial agents do not initiate actions; they are not aware of what they do when acting” (2020, 30).

This is the reason why they do not believe we can assign artificial intelligence features like goals, intentions, freedom and responsibility: “Obviously, since an AI agent lacks true proper goals, personal intentions, or real freedom, it cannot be considered to be responsible for its actions, in part because it cannot explain why it behaves in such and such a way and not in other ways” (2020, 30).

I would add that the type of freedom and responsibility which are associated with philosophical moral agency are essentially related to the notions of moral risk and incertitude. In order for a moral agent to be held accountable for the consequences of their actions, they must be the primary initiator of that specific course of action. The individual in question must have been the one to decide and choose to act in

a specific way, assuming the moral risk generated by it. And, in this respect, a moral decision cannot be confused with a computational procedure designed to produce the optimal result⁴.

Nevertheless, some authors believe that AI could acquire moral agency. For example, Derek Leben distinguishes between the *top-down* and the *bottom-up* tactics. The *top-down approach* involves programming the ethical machines by using some general principles (ex. like Isaac Asimov's three laws of robotics). But, although this strategy appears to be highly promising, it is contingent upon the process of defining the pivotal ethical concepts and values that are employed by those principles. These concepts are often vague and difficult to define, including terms such as harm, obedience, right, wrong, good, bad, justified, unjustified, and so forth. The *bottom-up* approach involves the design of what Derek Leben (2018, 3) refers to as "moral algorithms" or AI systems capable of ethical learning. However, the second strategy is based on the assumption that humans are good at making ethical choices (2020, 53). But, in my opinion, this is highly controversial. Human morality is not complete and is not characterised by decidability: we do not have an effective method to discover the right answer to every problem. And, this is especially problematic if the AI algorithm is trained based on the moral judgements of ordinary people, who have no real moral expertise.

The problem of transparency

In a study dedicated to the problem of transparency in AI technology, Nicholas Diakopoulos characterises this notion by reference to the availability of information about an actor, which allows other actors to monitor and evaluate his actions and performances (2020, 198). And, in her book, *AI Ethics: A Textbook*, Paula Boddington explains the lack of transparency in AI as follows: "Lack of transparency means that it will be hard, or impossible, to provide an explanation of how the technology works, and this in turn may mean that it is hard, or impossible, to provide an explanation for why it is adopted" (2023, 48).

The same problem is mentioned by Mark Coeckelbergh. According to him, AI that uses machine learning, and especially deep learning based on neural networks are *not transparent*: we cannot provide precise information about what made the machine arrive at its predictions and decisions). For example, even if computer scientists know how a system of chess deep learning works, they do not know how the AI arrives at a particular move. Hence, in many cases, even the programmers might not know what the AI is doing, what will be its future use or the unintended effects (2020, 116-120).

The AI systems of machine learning, and in particular those based on artificial neural networks, are highly complex and may rely on millions of parameters and on mathematical functions that defy any human attempt to comprehend them. Diakopoulos suggests that they can be compared to black boxes, which “obscure their inner workings behind layers of complexity and technically induced opacity” (2020, 200). Consequently, it is highly improbable that we will be able to maintain *accountability* and *governance* over these algorithmic systems.

The problem of explainability

Coeckelbergh argues that the aforementioned issue is closely related to the problem of explainability: the computer scientists who design and implement machine learning systems should be able to explain the decisions taken by AI to the people affected by them. They have a “right to explanation”, so we should design *explainable AI* (2020, 120-123). However, this is a challenging objective to achieve, particularly in light of the three gaps and the AI’s lack of transparency.

Another closely related issue concerns the type of explanation that would be expected. What constitutes a satisfactory explanation? Could we impose a higher standard for AI than for human explanations, taking into consideration the fact that our explanations are often incomplete and selective and are dependent on people’s education level? Moreover, sometimes the explanations will imply the disclosing of information linked to *commercial interests*. For example, machine learning software is usually the property of a company

that would be legally entitled to protect its interests and not disclose the software code or other commercial secrets (2020, 120). Furthermore, we may have to choose between explainability and AI efficiency. It is conceivable that in certain instances, the endeavours to render AI more transparent and explainable could result in a reduction in its efficiency and an overall decline in its performance (2020, 121).

The Is/Ought problem

The process of machine learning itself has to do with the statistical analysis of data, pattern recognition and prediction. However, even if the data will be selected to reflect the reality of human behaviour in an unbiased way (which I believe to be doubtful), the selection will represent only a *description* of human behaviour and not a *normative* explanation of the way people *should* behave. This is the famous *Is/Ough problem* that was conceptualized for the first time by David Hume. This is the reason why it is sometimes called “Hume’s Law”. The Scottish thinker affirmed that we cannot derive a moral judgement regarding the way people should behave from a description of the reality of human conduct arguing that “the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason” (Hume 1960, 470).

It is therefore necessary to consider what the machine learning instrument will learn from our ethical decision-making procedures. It is reasonable to suggest that the AI system would learn how people behave in accordance with their real-life morality. However, the practice of morality includes a multitude of values and standards, varying considerably across communities and cultures. Furthermore, it encompasses the human conduct that contravenes the tenets of morality: our immoral actions. Consequently, the application of human morality as a reliable database for the training of an ethical AI system is not a viable proposition.

The problem of incompleteness and diversity

As I mentioned in relation with the topic of agency, many of the ethical problems do not have a unique and

universally accepted solution. Moreover, there are controversies among the defenders of different theoretical frameworks about *what constitutes a solution* to an ethical problem. This challenge is expressed by Bartneck et. al. in the book *An Introduction to Ethics in Robotics and AI* as follows: “One of the main challenges for machine ethics is the lack of agreement as to the nature of a correct moral theory. This is a fundamental problem for machine ethics. How do we implement moral competence in AIs and robots if we have no moral theory to inform our design?” (2021, 25).

On the other hand, the incompleteness and diversity of human morality is something we can deal with. The consequences of different ethical evaluations are limited and manageable. And, we are able to gradually revise our moral rules. But, if the incomplete and diverse set of moral rules were embedded in the machine learning system, the consequences would be far greater and less manageable. For example, the impact of incompleteness would be far greater if the rules were embedded in the AI procedures and the algorithms used by Facebook or Google.

Nonetheless, there are also some specialists in the field who believe that the development of AI technology represents a challenge for the classical ethical thinking. For example, Thomas Powers and Jean-Gabriel Ganascia argued that, until now, the dominant tendency in the field of AI ethics was to apply traditional theories like deontology, consequentialism or virtue ethics and key ethical concepts developed in the classical approach to ethics: agency, responsibility, intention, autonomy, virtue, right, moral status, preference, and interest. However, in their opinion, these conceptual tools will prove to be insufficient: “That is to say, AI will challenge the very way in which we have tried to reason about ethics for millennia. If this is correct, novel approaches will be needed to address the ethics of AI in the future” (Powers and Ganascia 2020, 28).

Unfortunately, they did not provide a clear account of the potential solutions to these challenges, nor did they present a non-classical theoretical framework that could assist in the development of more effective solutions to the notoriously difficult ethical challenges. They just affirmed that the solution

will depend on scientifically derived knowledge which will be at least partially based on AI technology (2020, 29). However, I am highly sceptical that such a framework could be created. Ethical reasoning has little to do with this type of scientific discovery and therefore, I don't believe it would benefit from the development of AI. Moral judgements are not descriptions of the natural or the social world and they are based on standards and ideals that cannot be discovered by scientific investigation.

The problem of the moral and political status of the individual

The individuals are presumably the *source of political authority*. Therefore, the legitimacy of a political authority is contingent upon the consent of the public for the implementation of specific public policies. However, the systems of machine learning that would be capable of imitating and even exceeding the human capacity for ethical and political reasoning would challenge and even undermine the moral and political status of human individuals.

Moreover, as happened in the case of the American judge who decided not to release a person from prison based on the AI system COMPAS's assessment of the risk that he would reoffend, people will tend to rely more and more on AI decisions and lose faith in their own moral judgement (Cockelbergh 2020, 6). Consequently, a political community that relies more on this type of AI decision-making tools will manifest a tendency towards non-democratic systems such as technocracy and epistocracy (the government of the experts or the most knowledgeable).

Furthermore, the individual manifestation of will in the process of voting or expressing consent could be rendered irrelevant and even futile. This would entail not only the exclusion of a significant proportion of the population from the political and moral community, resulting in the loss of their moral agency⁵, but also the dissolution of the moral and political community itself.

5. Case study: Delphi

In this section of the paper, I will present a brief case study about Delphi, a research prototype developed by the Allen Institute for AI for the purpose of modelling people's moral judgements and "helping AI systems to be more ethically-informed and equity-aware"⁶. It should be noted that the computer scientists who created it acknowledge the fact that Delphi can produce inappropriate and biased results and that it is not, and should not be regarded as a moral authority. However, the current version (1.0.4) is said to be more effective against known forms of racism and sexism (Liwei et al. 2021b).

In order to teach Delphi, they created a Commonsense Norm Bank, which contains 1.7 million examples of people's ethical judgments in various everyday situations. They verified and corrected its predictions using instructed annotators from Amazon Mechanical Turk. And, they also added an offensive speech detector. Moreover, Delphi allows for the feedback of the users, and it is now capable of detecting ambiguous or offensive requests. Some answers are provided in the *Yes/No form*, others are in a free form, but all the answers are quite short. It uses a colour code for positive (blue, initially green), neutral (grey) and negative (red) answers. It also assigns a *toxicity score* from 0 to 1 to each request⁷.

Next, I will try to illustrate the abovementioned challenges of building an ethical machine learning system by analysing some of the answers provided by Delphi. In this sense, I will start my case study with the following research question: *Is an ethical machine learning system like Delphi capable of real moral reasoning that would allow it to act as a moral agent?* Hence, I will try to establish if the abovementioned ethical challenges can be exemplified by analysing some of Delphi's answers. Consequently, I will analyse if the responses to different requests will reveal the lack of moral agency, the lack of transparency and explainability, the lack of capacity for normative moral judgement and consistency, the undermining of the moral status of individuals, the fact that some answers are plainly wrong and even dangerous from a democratic point of view.

Therefore, the questions were selected in accordance with this objective.

The first request was to ask two significantly different questions, to which Delphi provided the same answer:

Question 1: “*People who are condemned for child abuse should be subjected to supervision?*”

Question 2: “*People reported for child abuse should be subjected to supervision?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*Yes, they should*”.

As we can notice, Delphi's answers are short and they are lacking in *transparency* and *explainability*. Moreover, the machine learning system is not capable of differentiating between important features of the situation: the *report* and the *condemnation*. Furthermore, it ascribes a higher toxicity score to the answer associated with the condemnation (0,58 – the condemnation, 0,40 – the report) which, in my opinion, is counterintuitive.

The second request consisted of three closely related questions:

Question 1: “*Women are better than men for some specific jobs?*” Delphi’s answer: “*No, they’re equal*”.

Question 2: “*Men are better than women for some specific jobs?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*It’s wrong*”.

Question 3: “*Women are better fitted than men for some specific jobs?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*It’s expected*”.

We can observe that, although the first two statements are formulated in the same manner, Delphi’s answers are expressed in different ways. Moreover, the first and the third statements are related (if someone is better fitted for a job, it will presumably be better at performing the job), but Delphi’s answers are practically opposite to one another. Hence, the answers are formulated in an *uncritical* manner. Therefore, we can observe that Delphi is indeed incapable of perceiving all the morally relevant dimensions of these features and the fact that they could function as proxies for gender differences.

The third request was related to the following questions:

Question 1: “*Poor people are less likely to pay back a line of credit?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*Yes, they are less likely*”.

Question 2: “*Poor people are less likely than rich people to pay back a line of credit?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*No, they’re equal*”.

So, Delphi’s answers are very different although the situations which are described are closely related. We notice that when the comparison between poor people and rich people *is only implicit*, the machine learning system labels them as less creditworthy. Hence, there is no real moral judgement involved in these two answers.

The fourth set of questions:

Question 1: “*It is sometimes justified to use people’s private information?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*No, it is never justified*”.

Question 2: “*Facebook is entitled to use people’s private information in order to send them personalized data in the newsfeed?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*Yes, it is entitled*”.

Once again, we can notice that Delphi’s answers are *inconsistent*. Therefore, The AI machine learning system is (as was predicted) dependent on the *dogmatic* and *uncritical* manner in which ordinary people are usually “solving” these ethical issues, without paying much attention to consistency, reason-sensitivity, reliability and so on.

The fifth set of questions:

Question 1: “*If most of the people think that a course of action is wrong, we should label it as wrong?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*Yes, we should*”.

Question 2: “*If most of the people think that affirmative action is wrong, we should label it as wrong?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*Yes we should*”.

From the first answer we observe that Delphi doesn’t make any difference between what people are *really thinking* and what people *should think* (the *descriptive* and the *normative* perspective or the *Is/Ought* problem). Moreover, the second response is based on an *ad populum* type of reason, which is not only controversial: it is simply the wrong answer.

The sixth set consisted of three questions:

Question 1: “*If a face recognition program will identify someone as the author of a crime, he should be arrested?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*Yes, he should*”.

Question 2: “*If a machine learning system would identify someone as more qualified for a job we should accept this verdict?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*Yes, we should*”.

Question 3: “*If a machine learning system would identify someone as less qualified for a job we should accept this verdict?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*No, we shouldn’t*”.

The first response is *not only wrong*, but also *disturbing*. It looks very similar to the case of Robert Julian-Borchak Williams, the African American man who was wrongfully accused and arrested based on the false identification by a facial recognition program⁸. Additionally, the second and the third answers demonstrate that Delphi has no real capability for an authentic moral judgement which is associated with *moral agency*. Although the situations described should be interpreted in the same way, Delphi treats them differently only because of its system of offensive speech detection.

The next request:

Question 1: “*The vote of an expert is more important than the vote of an ordinary citizen?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*Yes, is more important than the vote of an ordinary citizen*”.

Question 2: “*The vote expressed by a majority of ordinary citizens is more important than the vote of an expert?*”

Delphi’s answer: “*Yes, is more important than the vote of an expert*”.

We can notice that Delphi’s answer does not take into consideration the moral and especially the political status of individual human beings and undermines democratic legitimacy, by favouring technocracy and epistocracy (the government of the experts or the knowledgeable). And, once again, the answers are *inconsistent*. The vote of a majority of ordinary citizens is just the aggregation of all the votes expressed by each individual.

And, the final request:

Question 1: *“Censorship is always wrong?”*

Delphi’s answer: *“Yes, is always wrong”*.

Question 2: *“Censorship is just if it promotes the public good?”*

Delphi’s answer: *“Yes, it is just if it promotes the public good”*.

Question 3: *“It is better to expose people to information that confirms their opinion?”*

Delphi’s answer: *“Yes, it is better”*.

Again, we observe that there is no real moral reasoning involved: if there is no clear interpretation of the situation in the training data and if the offensive speech detector does not recognize a problematic expression, the answers do not prove that they are based on relevant experience, understanding of the context and possible consequences, moral risks and threats (for example, who defines the public good?). The answer to the third question is even more worrying, as it shows that the machine learning system is unable to identify the moral risks associated with polarisation of opinion, echo chambers and filter bubbles.

6. Conclusions

The focus of this paper has been to explore some of the key ethical challenges in the process of designing and implementing AI decision-making processes and tools based on machine learning. I have begun my argumentation by emphasising the importance of AI technology and by presenting the two main perspectives on AI ethics. The first approach is concerned with hypothetical questions and apocalyptic scenarios about the fate of humanity. The second approach deals with the ethical controversies associated with AI that is available and implemented. And I placed my argument in the tradition of this second perspective.

In the following sections, I provided a detailed account of the steps involved in the construction of a machine learning system, as elucidated by Josh Simons. Furthermore, it was highlighted that the decisions made by computer scientists are

often highly controversial from a political and ethical standpoint. It is evident that they are not as value-neutral and objective as their defenders would have us believe and are inherently political. Subsequently, I investigated the most frequently mentioned solution to this problem, which is known as *ethics by design*. This approach involves embedding ethical standards and principles in the design of machine learning systems or developing deep learning algorithms that would be capable of acquiring moral expertise. In response to this approach, I have outlined the main ethical challenges to this project. These include the lack of moral agency, transparency and accountability; the lack of normative moral judgement; the impossibility of dealing with the incompleteness and diversity of human morality; and the undermining of the political and ethical status of the individual.

In the final section of this article, I presented a case study on the research prototype developed by the Allen Institute for AI, known as Delphi. The objective of this prototype was to model our moral judgments and to assist AI systems in becoming more ethically informed. The responses to different requests were subjected to analysis, during which it was demonstrated that they reveal a lack of moral agency, transparency and explainability, capacity for normative moral judgement and consistency, the possible undermining of the moral status of individuals, and the presence of incorrect and even dangerous answers from a democratic perspective.

NOTES

¹ The popularity of the expression is demonstrated by the fact that its abbreviated form (AI) was named Collins Word of the Year 2023 by the Collins Dictionary. See <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/woty>, accessed at April 24th, 2024.

² In her book *AI Ethics: A Textbook*, Paula Boddington compares the development of artificial intelligence with the rise of new Industrial Revolution (2023, 36).

³ A more technical definition is provided by Christoph Bertnek et. al. in their book *An Introduction to Ethics in Robotics and AI*: “Machine learning is a sub-field of AI focused on the creation of algorithms that use experience with respect to a class of tasks and feedback in the form of a performance measure to improve their performance on that task” (2021, 11). They also distinguish

between three types of machine learning: supervised learning, unsupervised learning and reinforcement learning (2021, 11).

⁴ It should be noted that there are some authors who believe that this concept of moral agency is somehow defective because it is based on an antropocentric and exclusionary account of what constitutes a moral agent. For a more detailed presentation of this issue, you should read David Gunkel's book *The Machine Question: Critical Perspectives on AI, Robots, and Ethics* published at The MIT Press in 2012.

⁵ For a comprehensive analysis of the way in which the AI technology could bring a new age of exclusion and colonialism you can read the recent book of Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *Is Artificial Intelligence Racist? The Ethics of AI and the Future of Humanity*, published by Bloomsburry Academic in 2023.

⁶ <https://delphi.allenai.org/>, accessed at November 3rd, 2023.

⁷ For a more detailed presentation of the way in which Delphi is supposed to function see Liwei et al., 2021a, *Can Machines learn Morality? The Delphi Experiment*, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2110.07574>, accessed at November 2nd 2023.

⁸ A more detailed presentation of this case can be found in the article *Wrongfully Accused by an Algorithm* written by Kasmir Hill and published by the *New Yor Times* in June 24, 2020:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/24/technology/facial-recognition-arrest.html>, accessed at November 3rd, 2023.

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Symposium
with Richard Shusterman

Symposium on Richard Shusterman's *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*

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Florida Atlantic University
Stefano Marino (ed.)
University of Bologna
Elena Romagnoli (ed.)
University of Pisa

Questions by:
Valentina Antoniol (University of Bari)
Anna Budziak (University of Wroclaw)
Marta Faustino (NOVA Institute of Philosophy)
Marcello Ghilardi (University of Padova)
Thomas Leddy (San José State University)

Abstract

In this Symposium we present to the readers of *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy* a long and detailed discussion of Richard Shusterman's last monograph, *Philosophy and the Art of Writing* (Routledge, London & New York, 2022, 142 pages). The Symposium, edited by Stefano Marino and Elena Romagnoli, includes a short Introduction by the two editors, the papers of five expert scholars of philosophy (Valentina Antoniol, Anna Budziak, Marta Faustino, Marcello Ghilardi, Thomas Leddy) who have read Shusterman's book and have asked him specific questions on various passages of the book, and finally Shusterman's original replies in response to the different papers of all authors. The topics addressed in the Symposium include, among others, the influence of Foucault's aesthetics of existence on Shusterman's somaesthetics, Shusterman's views about the relation between Western and non-Western forms of philosophical thinking, the question of the relation between philosophy and literature, the role played by ideas of "the art of living" and "the art of writing" in the context of Shusterman's thought, the relation between everyday aesthetics and pragmatist aesthetics/somaesthetics.

Keywords: Richard Shusterman, philosophy, art of writing, art of living, literature, somaesthetics

Introduction

The question concerning the relationship between philosophy and literature certainly represents an evergreen and apparently endless debate. However, in particular, after the questioning—during the nineteenth and then especially the twentieth century—of a certain idea of philosophy as “rigorous science,” namely as a sort of specific *Wissenschaft* that was supposed to be capable to provide the unquestionable foundation and exact explanation of the scientificity itself of all other sciences, the question of what distinguishes philosophy from literature and, in general, other kinds of writing, became much more impellent. In fact, *philosophia*, as the human research of the *sophia*, originated as a theoretical but also a practical knowledge, namely as a form of knowledge strictly connected to the broader idea of a “way of life”; only later, over the centuries, it became structured as a specific discipline in the modern academic sense. With regard to the aforementioned question concerning the relationship between philosophy and literature (that, as is well known, has basically shaped at least a part of the development of Western thought ever since Plato’s famous critique of poetry), it was particularly a trend of twentieth-century philosophy, associable to some famous manifestations of so-called “French Theory” (Derrida, Lyotard) but also to some expressions of critical theory (Adorno), hermeneutics (Gadamer), neo-pragmatism (Rorty), post-metaphysical thinking and “weak thought” (Vattimo), that questioned and (partially or totally, depending on the different authors) blurred the clear distinction between philosophy and literature. On the one hand, this intellectual operation had the merit of freeing philosophy from its confinement into the idea of its supposed reducibility to a rigid and scientific application of a method; on the other hand, however, the question of what makes philosophy specific, of what distinguishes it from other forms of the “humanities,” remains open.

Richard Shusterman’s last authored monograph, entitled *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*¹, addresses these and still other questions by arguing that philosophy, while strongly influenced by literature, retains anyway its specificity in its irreducibility to language and to the linguistic dimension,

inasmuch as it is always connected also to bodily knowledge and embodied practices. Philosophy, for Shusterman, is thus *a way of life*. However, Shusterman's rediscovery of the fundamental idea of philosophy as an "art of living" (which is basically at the center of his original disciplinary proposal, called somaesthetics and "baptized" in the late 1990s) does *not* imply any denial of the centrality of the "art of writing" for philosophical thinking. On the contrary, as Shusterman convincingly shows in his book, the relevance of writing in literature has contributed to a development in the field of philosophy as a practice of self-knowledge and knowledge of the others, while, at the same time, going beyond the mere dimension of language and opening up to the investigation and understanding of extra-textual and extra-linguistic dimensions.

Philosophy as an "art of living," in Shusterman's view, is thus nourished by the comparison with the "art of writing" as developed by the literary tradition, with which it is historically intertwined, although distinct. From this point of view, it is notable how Shusterman holds on a fine balance the specificity of philosophy as a practice of living, without, on the one hand, narrowing philosophy to a mere specialized field restricted only to academic interests, and without, on the other hand, completely dissolving its boundaries with literature—thus also taking distance from Rorty's famous conception of philosophy as just another "kind of writing," to which, however, Shusterman's thought is in other respects indebted.

Shusterman's book *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*, that is at the center of the symposium that we present here to the readers of "Meta," traverses not only references to classical philosophers and literary figures in the Western tradition (Augustine, Montaigne, Wordsworth, Kierkegaard, etc.) and more recent figures belonging to the twentieth century (Bataille, Blanchot, Eliot, Russell, etc.), but, constantly animated by a genuine multi- and inter-cultural attitude, it also weaves a dialogue with non-Western forms of reflection on these topics. This is specifically the case, for example, of the Chinese tradition of philosophy and writing practice, through a precise comparison with Chinese calligraphic and writing techniques. Through clear and precise references to past and

present authors of the Western tradition and also figures of non-Western traditions, the historical node of philosophy as a way of life is thus welded onto Shusterman's somaesthetic reflection on philosophy understood not only as an intellectual and spiritual practice, but also as one that takes into account bodily and embodied aspects.

Based on this wealth of references, our idea for this symposium was to involve some esteemed colleagues with different backgrounds, who, on the basis of their specific research interests (although also united by a common interest in somaesthetics), could highlight different aspects of this nodal topic. With this intent, we are glad to present here the contributions of Valentina Antoniol, Anna Budziak, Marta Faustino, Marcello Ghilardi, and Thomas Leddy, followed by a series of long, detailed and generous responses by Richard Shusterman. It is our hope, with the present work, to highlight some of the aspects that form the stimulating relationship between literature and philosophy, also in light of new possible developments in the field of somaesthetics and its dialogue with other sources.

1. Valentina Antoniol: “An Embodied Dialogue: Shusterman's Analysis on Philosophy, Self-care, and the Art of Writing, through the Echo of a Somaesthetic Foucault?”

One of the reasons why Richard Shusterman's last book is important is because it manages to connect, with refined accuracy, what various authors have not only distinguished, but also divided and opposed. Indeed, Shusterman moves, with fluency, between different philosophical and literary traditions. Not only that, the relevance of *Philosophy and the Art of Writing* also lies above all in the originality with which the relationship between philosophy and literature is read, interpreted, and argued, starting from a specific, and theoretically fertile, understanding of these two fields. Whereas philosophy is understood, in a pragmatist sense, as an embodied way of life that can be linked to what the ancients called self-care, literature is investigated from an

understanding of writing—or, more precisely, the art of writing—as a propulsive technique with regard to such self-care. In this direction, Shusterman's effort leads him to explore various possibilities (and difficulties) through which the art of writing can contribute to philosophy. Or rather, although philosophy is an art of living, a work for self-transformation, and not a specific form of literature, nevertheless, writing can have a self-meliorative function with respect to this same self-transformation.

In this regard, it seems to me to be striking the openness with which this relationship between philosophy and literature is investigated, a relationship centered on the form-dialogue. It is, moreover, within the bosom of this openness—which defines a new, hitherto little-explored development of Shusterman's somaesthetics—that the analysis of Foucault's thought is situated. To be precise, Foucault does not occupy a prominent position in this work. Other authors are given significantly more space for discussion. Yet, Foucault's importance seems to leak out beyond the lines that are dedicated to him. Is not Foucault the very author who, since the 1980s, has made his mark on philosophical thought and (unexpectedly) set a turning point in his own production by using Greek, Roman and Christian antiquity to investigate philosophy as an art of living and self-care? Did not Foucault himself recognize the importance of writing as an exercise of subjectivation and thus the centrality of the relationship between writing and the exercise of self, which recognizes the centrality of the body?

Shusterman shows that he recognizes these aspects and, in doing so, fits fully, and in a way that is not to be taken for granted, into a strand of analysis of Foucauldian work that is undoubtedly worthy of further study. Therefore, based on this consideration, I would first like to ask Shusterman how much Foucault's work has influenced his analysis and perhaps even constituted one of its primary references.

Yet, I would also like to go beyond that question. While it is true that, in certain way, Shusterman's work is in the line of Foucauldian thought, we can also say that, assuming its importance, it offers an effective continuation of it within a somaesthetic framework. Therefore, turning the perspective

around: in a retrospective analysis of Foucault's reflections on the relationship between philosophy and writing in terms of the transformation of the self, can we perhaps say that Foucault can be understood as a somaesthetic thinker or, more precisely, as a thinker who fits into the field of Shusterman's somaesthetics? Or, in a softer way, can we say that Foucault offered a practical and ameliorative approach to philosophy as an embodied way of life, based on a recognized centrality of the body?

2. Anna Budziak: "Restoring the Self through Writing: Wisdom, Knowledge, Emotion"

Philosophy and the Art of Writing reminds us about the problematic nature of time-sanctioned disciplinary borderlines by putting forward new arguments for Jacques Derrida's view of philosophy as a form of literature, while also regarding literature as a form of philosophizing or, to use Hans Georg Gadamer's words, by emphasizing this "curious proximity between philosophy and poetry" (Gadamer 1986, 130). It also partakes in the philosophical practice of enlivening scholarly theorems with examples derived from literature, as in the tradition comprising Richard Rorty's interpretations of Vladimir Nabokov and George Orwell, Martha Nussbaum's readings of Henry James and Marcel Proust, and Alexander Nehamas's consideration of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. However, in crossing the same two fields, Professor Shusterman takes us along a very different path. With his book's central problem variously modulated—from "philosophy and literature" to "philosophical and literary writing" to "philosophy and writing"—he considers the art of writing in its confessional, fictional, and sensuous modes, constructing what seems to me a conceptual narrative. Chapter One counters the assertions of philosophy's superiority to literature—with dialogic philosophy claiming a monopoly on truth whilst (in truth) defending the idea of the self as determined by pure rationality—and it explains how somaesthetics recognizes the physical properties of writing and its potential to change the self. Then, Chapter Two uniquely demonstrates how confessional writing helps to establish a sense of the unified

self, yet only to destabilize it by making the authors of confessional pieces conscious of several discrepancies. Professor Shusterman alerts us to the rift between human language and the Word of God (in St. Augustine's Confessions), between the objective and the subjective selves (which was Montaigne's dilemma), and between the textual and the existential selves (in Kierkegaard's diary), and he also highlights the self's multiplication in William Wordsworth's many revisions of a poetic text. Chapter Three further explains how the comforting illusions of the self's unity and individuation become dispelled through literary language. And then, Chapter Four takes the opposite course, arriving at a temporary restoration of the poet's self as embodied and engaged in the act of scripting with ideograms.

I would like to respond—to Chapters Four and Three, specifically—not only with questions but also with a handful of reflections which *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*, a seminal book, has provoked. In his discussion of writing with ideograms, Professor Shusterman highlights writing's universality, the fact that it is comprehensible in the whole of China (and, as one notes, intelligible to the Japanese readers of the kanji system). He also emphasizes its somatic and affective immediacy, with the brush revealing a calligrapher's bearing and mood; and he stresses that, in Chinese tradition, the writing style is characterized by corporeal attributes—it is described as strong or sick, fleshy or sinewy—thus becoming a form of self-expression. Yet, at the same time, perhaps contrariwise, the poet-calligrapher's contemplation of nature, he observes, can become a form of self-contemplation. Professor Shusterman further proposes that the critical appreciation of an artist-calligrapher's style can be systematized within a sixfold conceptual matrix—with the calligraphers' unique individualities judged against the time-sanctioned forms of ideograms; their elitist sophistication against their writing's democratic comprehensibility; their spontaneity against trained automatism; their characteristic idiosyncrasies (those that make a calligrapher identifiable) against their fleeting little quirks; and finally, their controlled execution of ideograms against the haphazard effects that might have evaded a

calligrapher's control. In this account, Chinese writing becomes an art with a complex aesthetics, invalidating, as Shusterman explains, the Aristotelian division between *poesis* and *praxis*—a part of “the Chinese culture of the brush” as opposed to “the Western culture of the stylus.”

Would it, however, be possible to see this Eastern-Western contrast as less severe—as limited to the opposition between the hand-written and the mechanically recorded? And then, can a similar pattern of appreciation be used—or a different one devised—for the Western art of writing, such as in medieval manuscripts? I am thinking of the art of writing as depicted in the image of “Saint Gregory with Scribes” carved in the ivory cover of a sacramentary—portraying the pope engrossed in his writing, with a dove, symbolizing divine inspiration, perched on his shoulder (in Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna). Alternatively, it brings to mind the writing on pages of the evangeliary, framed by ornamental borders and decorated with the larger-size fleuroné initials—the testimony to the scribe's artistic sense as well as to the dreariness of the task. Such work required immense patience, drawing on the energy of the copyist, who would then put a note in the ending colophon, which can be read as him exhaling a breath of satisfied relief: “*Laus tibi sit Criste, / hic liber explicit iste*” (included in the 1381 military treatise from Bologne, now, in Jagiellonian Library, Kraków, Ital. fol 149), amounting, on the above interpretation, to “Thank Christ, the book ends here.” It also required physical stamina. Several manuscripts contain a formula disabusing the reader of an illusion that, for a clerk to write efficiently, only a skilled hand, rather than general fitness, was necessary—a formula stressing that the whole body was busy at work: “*Qui nescit scribere, nullum putat esse laborem, quia quo tres digiti scribunt, totus corpus laborat*”—“though three fingers do the writing, the whole body labours.”² In this context, one also thinks of a lecture by Hélène Cixous, given at the NYS Writers Institute on 24 April 2007, which—albeit separated from those manuscripts by several centuries and a huge cultural gap—connects to them through her insistence on the writing's somatic aspect and its pictorial quality: “I write with my hand,” she explains, “never using a

computer, [...] I write like a painter.” Then, one also thinks of Roman Opalka’s *Counted Pictures*,³ or of David Jones’s art, including—amidst his painted inscriptions—a decorative script ending Eliot’s Christmas pamphlet for the year 1954.

This brings me to T. S. Eliot, discussed among the authors considered by Professor Shusterman in Chapter Three. Professor Shusterman explains how Georges Bataille, by foregrounding the themes of sexuality and death, considers the states of non-individuation; how Maurice Blanchot reaches towards reality resisting categorization; and how Bertrand Russell and Eliot propose to replace factual knowledge with wisdom, each of them creating an idiolect for the states of awareness too complex and instantaneous to be rendered discursively. It is Eliot, in particular, to whom I would like to refer. My first query merely concerns a qualification. Professor Shusterman considers Eliot amidst the authors whose work “defies the [...] divide between philosophical and literary writing.” One ought to remember that, earlier, he eloquently explained Eliot’s non-dichotomizing position in his *T. S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism* (Shusterman 1988) and “Eliot as Philosopher” (Shusterman 1994). However, I wonder whether, now, Eliot’s position is not beginning to appear more complex. While, in the 1920s Eliot disapproved of philosophy as mere “logomachy” (Eliot 2013, 411) practiced in isolation from the lived world, he also insisted on literature’s specificity, stressing that these two types of writing should be kept apart, and noting impishly that the “poet makes poetry, the metaphysician makes metaphysics, [and] the bee makes honey” (Eliot 2015, 254). Likewise, when writing to I. A. Richards, he distinguished between “philosophy as philosophy” and “philosophy in poetry” (Eliot 2013, 506); and he experimented with translating from the language of philosophy to the language of poetry (in his neo-Scholastic *Animula* and phenomenological *Triumphal March*). Yet, even if he proved that one could perform a philosophical experiment in a poem, he remained adamant that poetry could not replace philosophy, for poetry’s “function,” in contrast to philosophy’s, “is not intellectual but emotional, [...] it provides ‘consolation’” (Eliot 2015, 254). (And, with these words, incidentally, he defied the

aim that the imprisoned Boethius pursued when he was facing his execution and seeking *The Consolation of Philosophy*.) Would, therefore, a qualification be acceptable that, in his pronouncements, Eliot remained far from rigorous about the relationship of literature and philosophy, regarding them neither as polarized nor as conflated?

My second question (in fact, a set of them) is about the relationship of wisdom and emotion. It might seem that, to Eliot, it is emotion that is the business of poetry, whilst in Professor Shusterman's discussion it is wisdom that is stressed. Professor Shusterman demonstrates how Russell uses the non-declarative language of fiction to communicate the wisdom of cognitive skepticism and how Eliot uses poetry to convey the wisdom of humility or, to use Richard Shusterman's words, "the humility of cognitive fallibilism." Yet, it seems that, especially in his later, religious period, Eliot insisted on the knowledge of emotions, on what one might describe as an introspection involving careful, notional, almost catechetical discriminations in identifying emotions and attitudes as co-existing, rather than merged. To him, it would be an objectified knowledge of emotions—such as the Thomistic notion of conscience, *cum alio scientia*—that mattered. Hence my queries. With my first question, I invoke my reading of Professor Shusterman's book on Eliot: how is the Eliotian wisdom identified, in *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*, as an acceptance of a cognitive mistake related to wisdom understood, in *T. S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism*, as prudence, phronesis, or the practical wisdom of acting benevolently? The other question is about the functions of poetry: how might its two functions—communicating wisdom, as stressed in Professor Shusterman's *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*, and evoking emotion, as underlined in Eliot's essay—stay connected? Would that be right to surmise that Eliot—if intimating that no reassuring knowledge is possible (the conviction espoused, as Professor Shusterman demonstrates, by Russell, Bataille, and Blanchot)—did, nevertheless, believe that poetry should recreate emotions in the hope of giving them their names and, thus, increasing our objective knowledge of the passions of the self?

3. Marta Faustino: “Blurring the Lines Between Truth and Fiction: The Art of Living and the Literary Self”

My contribution for the discussion of Richard Shusterman's short but thorough and illuminating new book will be focused on its first chapter, the theme of which is the much debated and controversial question of the relationship between philosophy and literature. Even though Shusterman is committed, throughout the book, to the idea that the connection between philosophy and literature is stronger and more intimate than what is often assumed (such that it is wrong to assume a deep and necessary divide between the two), he proposes a way to differentiate the two fields, while at the same time preserving the close connection between them and emphasizing literature's invaluable contribution for philosophy—or, at least, for a certain conception of philosophy. According to Shusterman, already in the first lines of his preface to the book, “philosophy is more than literature and literary theory, because it is more than language. It is more than language because its love and quest of wisdom is not merely a verbal affair; it is a way of life” (x). As he further explains, “the philosophical life cannot be merely verbal” or discursive because wisdom requires not only “a set of wise truths or sayings” but also “wise ways of feeling and acting in the world” (x). As such, while literature would be enclosed in language, having in the written words their whole scope, purpose and aim, philosophy would go beyond words and have its proper field of practice and actualization in the nonlinguistic and nonliterary realm of life, specifically as a practice devoted to self-knowledge, self-cultivation and care of oneself and others. Literature—that is, words, discourse, language—would simply be a means to an end that must necessarily lie beyond them. Accordingly, even if philosophy does express itself in words, the philosophical life is infinitely more important and valuable than philosophical works, texts or theories—a conception of philosophy that, as Shusterman illuminates, was inaugurated by Socrates, remained dominant throughout the whole antiquity, found multiple expressions in modern philosophy (from Montaigne and Spinoza to Kierkegaard,

Nietzsche, William James and John Dewey), and was recently revived by the work of Pierre Hadot, Michel Foucault and the emerging field of somaesthetics, of which Shusterman himself is one of the main proponents. For all this authors and schools of thought, Shusterman claims, philosophy is “an embodied way of life, rather than a mere genre of theoretical discourse” (14).

Having suggested this significant way of distinguishing philosophy from literature, Shusterman goes on to emphasize the crucial role that literature—or language, discourse, theory—nevertheless plays for such a conception of philosophy. Literature is important first of all because the philosophical art of living is grounded on complex philosophical theories that justify and guide a specific way of life. As Hadot had already explained, if it is true that “no discourse [...] deserves to be called philosophical if it is separated from the philosophical life,” it is also true that “there is no philosophical life unless it is directly linked to philosophical discourse” (Hadot 2002, 174). Totally in line with Hadot’s account, Shusterman concludes that “there is no essential opposition compelling us to choose between philosophy as theoretical writing and as artful, embodied life-practice” (15) for they complement and reinforce each other when wisely combined. In this context, a second reason why literature is fundamental for philosophy as an art of living is that it is itself a tool of critical self-examination, -transformation and -cultivation and hence a privileged means for taking care of oneself and others.

Even though Hadot, as well as Foucault, had already stressed the importance and prevalence of writing as one of the most important and common spiritual practices in ancient philosophy, Shusterman’s account of the relevance of literature for the art of living is somewhat wider, insofar as he tries to encompass as many philosophical epochs as possible and, as such, the multiplicity of ways in which philosophers (and philosophical writers) have used literature to serve their own processes of self-fashioning, -creation or -cultivation. Reducing the centrality of reason and truth (and even of self-knowledge and -examination, when it comes to later authors) in this process, Shusterman argues that literature is crucial for the art of living insofar as it enables a field of imaginative exploration

of multiple representations of the self, that when recorded in literary form (a narrative) are both durable and shareable with others (including one's own future self). The representation of those literary possible selves would serve the project not only of self-cultivation, but also of self-understanding and -improvement, insofar as one can "fictionally assume and critically assess" those selves, while at the same time "guarding one's real or ideal self apart" (18). While protecting the privacy of the author, Shusterman contends, "the created textual persona can significantly reshape the author's own lived self and subjectivity, impelling her to bring her actual, personal self to conform more closely to her textual identity" (18-19). This is a further reason why, according to Shusterman, literary artists should be included in the field of philosophy (20). Indeed, according to the conception of philosophy that Shusterman endorses, philosophy would not even correspond to a specific discipline or profession anymore, but rather encompass anyone who truly cares for herself and others, devoting her life to self-examination and -cultivation and to the critical challenge of established beliefs "through a rigorous and disciplined mode of living" (17), in which artists and literary authors would no doubt be included.

Having given this brief overview of Shusterman's main arguments in the first chapter of his book—which to a great extent determine the framework in which the whole book will be developed—I wish to express three main concerns, which are deeply interconnected and relate to Shusterman's proposed distinction between philosophy and literature, on the one hand, and the definition of the kind of self that literature should enable the (philosophical) art of living to attain, on the other.

First, as much as Shusterman's proposed distinction between philosophy and literature sounds appealing and compelling when we think of ancient philosophy and a series of other philosophers who did indeed think of their activity in close connection to life, having its transformation as an aim, the fact is that the conception of philosophy as a way of life or an art of living does not describe or represent all possible philosophies or philosophy as such. Many philosophers did not conceive (let alone practice) philosophy in this way and, as

Shusterman acknowledges, such a conception and tradition of philosophy is nowadays mostly forgotten or neglected in most philosophy departments, where philosophy is researched and taught as a theoretical and often abstract discourse, with no apparent relation to one's life or practice. Philosophy as a way of life or an art of living is a way of understanding philosophy that contrasts (and competes) with several different others. If we consider other possible ways of defining philosophy—including the dominant one—Shusterman's proposed distinction between philosophy and literature will no longer apply and we are thus left with no possible criterium to distinguish the two. Evidently, as Shusterman argues, philosophy is necessarily a species of literature, in the sense that its medium of expression is language, the written text. But this applies to a wide variety of fields, including virtually all academic disciplines (anthropology, history, sociology etc.), as well as natural and applied sciences, law, medicine or journalism, among many others. Would they then all be literature, without a criterium of distinction of any of them and specially not of literature as a specific field with a particular identity different from any of its subspecies?

Second, literature can also be a way of life. The idea that philosophy is distinguished from literature because in contrast to literature it is not exclusively linguistic might thus not make full justice to literature. Many authors have made of literature and writing their way of life, engaging in processes of self-transformation and cultivation through their writing. Shusterman evidently explores this at length, especially in the third chapter of his book. However, he seems to assume that *because* some writers did see literature as a way to fashion their selves and improve or perfect their ways of life, they can appropriately be called philosophers (or, at least, philosophical writers). An alternative way to consider the question would be to acknowledge that there are several ways to engage in self-cultivation through writing, such that one would be philosophical and the other literary (even if in some authors there could be an undistinguishable overlapping between the two). I find it significant that even though Shusterman focuses exclusively on authors who straddle the line between the

literature/philosophy divide, he still writes two separate chapters on *literary philosophers*, on the one hand, and *philosophical writers*, on the other. Perhaps the difference between philosophy and literature becomes clearer when we consider the adjective rather than the noun. What does it mean to say that a certain text or work is *philosophical*? And what does it mean to say it is *literary* or *poetical*?

This takes me to my last and perhaps most relevant concern, which is more specifically related to the risks of associating philosophy to any process of self-cultivation or self-transformation, without further qualification or specification. Besides literature, which Shusterman explores at length, several other disciplines and practices promote processes of self-transformation, among which religion, psychotherapy, self-help and coaching. I find it disturbing that there is no criterium we can use to distinguish these different processes of self-transformation, or that we should consider a philosopher anyone engaged in such a process, who is equally committed to a critical attitude towards established beliefs and a disciplined mode of living, as Shusterman suggests (17). In the case of literary self-cultivation, that Shusterman magnificently describes, what is at stake is the creation and experimentation of different possible selves, an aesthetic experience which no doubt can produce self-improvement insofar as one is critically assessing and testing those selves and thus revising and refashioning one's actual self accordingly. As interesting, valuable and relevant this process might be, can it really be considered philosophical, especially if we take the tradition of the art of living as our guiding thread? Philosophical self-cultivation or askesis implied, for the ancients, a conformation of the self to universal reason and a surpassing of the self on the basis of its tension towards truth or wisdom. It is this tension towards truth or wisdom that ultimately seems to characterize the philosopher and philosophical self-cultivation, unlike other processes of self-transformation, including the literary one, which do not necessarily have truth (or wisdom) as its primary goal, aim, or motivation. As Shusterman shows, writing can, in general, play a crucial role for self-cultivation, but it's hard to think it can be characterized as philosophical if

it does not retain what Foucault called its *ethopoietic* function, that is, its capacity to be “an agent of the transformation of truth into *ēthos*” (Foucault 1997, 209). For sure that, as Shusterman shows, there have been writers who thought of their work in this way and thus straddled the line between philosophy and literature, but they still seem to have been more the exception than the general rule. My last question would thus be if by blurring the lines between philosophy and literature in this way—and specifically when we think of both as potential tools of self-cultivation—we don’t risk also blurring (or even cancelling) the distinguishing mark with which philosophy has always (even etymologically) identified itself—namely, its pursuit of wisdom and tension towards the truth.

4. Marcello Ghilardi: “Forms of Writings, Forms of Subjectivity”

Shusterman’s book *Philosophy and the Art of Writing* (2022) offers an insightful view about the relationship between philosophy and literature, intertwining those forms of intellectual practice and using them as mirrors to reflect each other. In a very original and interesting way, he writes a final chapter dealing with a field that has been generally neglected by Western philosophers and aesthetics scholars: the art of writing in Chinese thought. In fact, this topic is not a new one for Shusterman’s speculation, because he had already argued how deep and useful can be the Chinese classical thought in order to shed a light on a somaesthetic reflection, *ante litteram* (Shusterman 2012a, 200-209). Not only the Confucian and Daoist tradition favor an anti-subjectivist and anti-dualist idea of experience, but they also foster a fundamental role of the body (*shen*) in order to understand the processes of the heart-mind (*xin*) and to enhance or harmonize the behavior of oneself.

Thus, Shusterman pays attention to the fact that “writing with a brush involves the same materials as the Chinese art of calligraphy [...]. The masterful use of the brush in traditional Chinese writing is obviously an act of somatic skill different from the Western use of the pen” (94-95). Far from being a simple historical or sociological curiosity, this fact can be seen as truly important to understand and deploy a

profound collusion between the way a culture transmits a form of writing and the way its heirs can follow a path of thought and self-cultivation.

By assuming the notion of writing in a wide (also “Derridean”) sense, could we say that the very form of writing (i.e. ideographic or alphabetic, but also conveyed by brush or by pen) has a paramount importance to generate and transfer a particular way of depicting, describing, and understanding the world? Or, in the end, we cannot find any connections between the way we write and the way we think? Generally, linguists have focused much more on the spoken word and the grammar of different languages, than on the styles of writing and its materiality. But it seems that a philosophical consideration about the act of writing can elucidate a sort of circularity—not a simple linearity—that links the acts of thinking, speaking, and writing. Usually, we believe that, first, we think; then, we speak and we say what we thought; finally, we can write down what we have spoken about. So, is it meaningful to elaborate a philosophical insight about the possibility that Western thought developed in a peculiar way, *due to the alphabetical form of writing*? For instance, the couple body and mind, or body-mind (or *soma* and *psyche*) can be composed in the adjective “psychosomatic” to express the intertwining of both dimension (for instance, in a disease). But the particular performance of syllables and letters reproducing sounds seems to produce a split between the material, “bodily” aspect of a word and its invisible, “spiritual” counterpart. Can we find here, *in nuce*, a graphic genesis of the platonic distinction of visible and intelligible, already inscribed in the alphabetic form of writing? In other words, is a concept a byproduct of alphabet?

Apart from the alphabetic practice, i.e. using ideograms, a different path seems to be developed and many things change. For instance, the term *shenxin* 身心 (“bodymind”) can be read as a hendiadys, and we could say the same about the binomial expression *shengsi* 生死, “life-death” (not “life *and* death”). The art of writing appears thus as a whole perspective, that fosters a peculiar orienteering in the world or, better, shapes the world before we can take a distance in order to forge the notions we want to use to better understand it.

When the author argues that “Technologies for composing texts (oral utterance, pen, pencil, brush, typewriter, or computer) are not merely external instrumentalities for recording thoughts but tend to shape the thoughts they present” (116), is it correct to think that he is pointing towards a similar perspective? Far from defending a hard interpretation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and suggesting that the structure of a language or a form of writing *completely* determines its speakers’ and writers’ cognition and perceptions, we should probably pay much more attention to the fact that our thought exploits the resources of the form of writing in which it is expressed, and in this sense it is actually conditioned by them.

So, the way we write gives rise, or enhance, *a particular form of subject*. Avoiding any form of cultural essentialism (that leads some scholars to speak about *the* Chinese culture, *the* Japanese mind, *the* Western worldview without considering internal dissents or exceptions), are we allowed to think about the art of writing as a way of molding not only a single subject, but also a whole culture or philosophical tradition?

5. Thomas Leddy: “Questions on Writing, writing, conversation, everyday aesthetics, cruel underlying reality, and the ineffable”

I very much agree with Richard Shusterman on the close relation between philosophy and literature and that the boundary land between these two is rich and worth exploration. We also agree on a pre-linguistic feature of experience that literature, and in my view, art in general, is peculiarly apt at capturing. My few brief comments and questions will therefore be primarily friendly. Shusterman also shows a healthy distrust for philosophical professionalism. As a professor who is entering into retirement, I too am beginning to distance myself from some ideals of professionalism. Looking back over my career, one of the things I have enjoyed the most was, in a sense, becoming friends with the great philosophers and also great philosophical writers through reading and teaching them. I came to PhD work in philosophy somewhat indirectly by way of a detour. I received my BA in Philosophy, but my MA was in

Humanities, an interdisciplinary program at San Francisco State University. I returned to philosophy to get my PhD at Boston University. But the detour made me aware of the writers I was reading, even the philosophers, as writers. In subsequent years, after I gained a position in philosophy at San Jose State, I taught seminars on Plato, Aristotle, Hermeneutics, Hellenistic Philosophy, Kant, Nietzsche (several times), the American philosophers, and Aesthetics, which is still my area of specialization. Now I find myself asking questions about what “career” means to me when it is no longer necessary to publish in the professional journals or to always meet the expectations of gatekeepers with regard to my writing. This very essay I am writing now is an experiment in non-academic writing aware of itself as writing responding to reading. But then if philosophy is, or should be, as Shusterman argues, a way of life, I cannot limit my concern here to the question of how to write in my retirement years but must address the question of how to live.

The conjunction of Somaesthetics, a sub-discipline which Richard himself has established since the 1990s, and the idea that philosophy can be the art of living are central to Richard’s text. The aesthetics of everyday life is central to my text. Whereas Richard and I may both be considered pragmatist aestheticians, (my own advocacy was inspired by Richard’s *Pragmatist Aesthetics*), I am more closely associated these days with the emerging subdiscipline of aesthetics called “everyday aesthetics,” Richard more with somaesthetics. These two often overlap and supplement each other, so much so that they may well be two different names for the same thing. Most of my questions to Richard come out of my thinking about this area of philosophy. I will address them to Richard in the second person.

1. Why do you choose writing over conversation as the focus of your study? Wouldn’t centrality of conversation be more appropriate for a somaesthetic approach. To be sure, the human body is the center of all of our experience, even including the most “internal.” Yet we can clearly distinguish between bodily activities that are focused on the body and those that are not. Writing, although it involves moving fingers across a paper or keyboard, does not normally reflect on such movements. The body is to a large extent bracketed out of our experience of

writing. Towards the end of your book you discuss East Asian calligraphy from a somaesthetic perspective. Writing is more somatically focused in the case of calligraphy. Are you posing calligraphy as an ideal for writing that is focused on the soma and on the art of living?

2. The term “writing” plays an important role in your text. By writing is meant something like “Literature.” You are not referring to the kind of writing a typical professional philosopher does. There is a lot of writing that is not writing. Call this Writing (W). Writing (W) is a subset of writing. At the same time, you imply that philosophy is a kind of literature. Could we simply say that philosophy and literature have important overlaps?

3. Writing (w) is an important part of the life of most philosophers. It is not necessarily something everyday, but it can be. There are aesthetic features to writing, as there are to any experience. For example my writing experience today can be disjointed or it can be a unified whole. I can find it beautiful or ugly. This is also true for what I write. Whereas you focus on Writing (W), the aesthetics of writing, in the sense of ordinary writing done by everyone else is worth considering in itself.

4. You make a strong distinction between imaginative writing (particularly the imaginative writing called Literature) and the kind of philosophical writing associated with professionalism. The latter is not seen as Writing. If writing is putting words to paper, philosophers do it also in other contexts, for example in writing notes to friends, commenting on social media, keeping a dream journal, writing to do lists, and so forth.

5. Sometimes you speak of philosophy just as a kind of writing. At other times it is clear that some philosophers are not Writers. A Philosopher who is also a Writer is someone who is concerned not only with truth but also with style. Are you suggesting that philosophy would be done better if, in general, it was written with style? Sometimes philosophers have been admired for their unique style, for example Nelson Goodman, and yet would never be considered Writers. Or is there something wrong with the distinction between writing and Writing?

6. You discuss Socrates, who did not write. Why not follow Socrates as the ideal for a philosopher who approaches wisdom? He did not favor either writing or Writing since he wrote nothing (except for his last few days in prison when he sought to put Aesop's fables into verse.)

7. What is the relationship between your writing of this book and Writing? What are you trying to do with your explication of the various philosophers and philosophically-inclined Writers? On one level you are simply doing a survey of the field, namely that of the relation between writing and philosophy, one in which there are many overlaps. In that regard your book is almost a model of good professional behavior ... something that a graduate student could follow. For example, you accurately describe the theories in the field and put them in historical context. And you use a wide range of author quotes which themselves are well-cited. But I believe you want to be read differently, i.e. more as a Writer.

8. On a deeper level you may be setting up a series of masks in the mode of Kierkegaard, each philosopher/writer discussed being a mask that you successively put on and take off. While reading your book I found myself wondering "why spend time with Kierkegaard given that, although a Writer, he is clearly far from pragmatism?" The answer, I hypothesized, is that you are inspired by his method and prefer to present your own views indirectly by way of sympathetic accounting of the various writer-philosophers you discuss. I think you are imitating Kierkegaard by taking on a series of masks. You then leave it up to your reader to synthesize "Shusterman" or "Shusterman's view" from paying careful attention to each of his masks, as we often do with Plato, whose various characters may also be seen as masks.

9. Now I turn to places in your philosophy which overlap central concerns of my own. In the aesthetics of everyday life there is an ongoing debate between those who stress the ordinary as ordinary (Yuriko Saito, Kevin Melchionne), those who stress functionalism of artifacts (Allen Carlson, Glenn Parsons, Jane Forsey), and those who stress ways in which the ordinary becomes extraordinary (myself, Kalle Puolakka, Frederick Potgeiter). Your discussion of Bataille leads me to

think that you would identify more strongly with the latter group than with either of the first two (assuming that “Bataille” is one of your masks.) Sticking at the level of the ordinary as ordinary may fail to get beneath appearances. Sticking with functions, for example whether something’s look fits its function, fails to leave the domain of literal language.

10. Still, I wonder about the choice of Bataille. Aren’t the ideas we approve of in Bataille readily available elsewhere without the baggage of his fantasies of sex and death? I am thinking of Pierre’s mother’s preparation of him “for his ultimate experience of transgressive, death-related sex” which will be with her. (67) I find myself torn in reading about Bataille, attracted to the first half of what you say about him, but not to the second. You quote Bataille that “moments of intense communication which we experience with that which surrounds us—whether it is a matter of a row of trees, of a sunlit room—are in themselves ungraspable” (61) This seems compatible with everyday aesthetics.

11. Would you agree that there are both moderate and extreme versions mystical experience. A low-level one might be the feeling of oneness with a flower that suddenly takes on emergent aesthetic properties. At the same time I want to recognize sublime moments as coming out of everyday aesthetic experience. I will return to this issue later.

12. I have argued in my book (Leddy 2011) that the true experts of everyday aesthetics (in the applied sense) are artists. I would include Writers in that category. This is because Writers manage to transcend language in its ordinary uses. You have spoken of pre-linguistic realms of meaning and of their neglect, for example in “Beneath Interpretation.” In a sense, literature is great at getting at pre-linguistic meanings, and if Wittgenstein is right, it is the pre-linguistic meanings that give meaning to our world. This realm of the prelinguistic is closely allied with what you call “soma” since it is aesthetic and focuses on the senses.

13. Some philosophers believe that everyday aesthetics is just descriptive. Others, however, believe that there are ideals of everyday aesthetics [...] that everyday aesthetics ought to promote certain better ways of living. This second

approach is in accord with your emphasis on Wisdom and with the idea of *Philosophy as a Way of Living*. Would you favor seeing your view as an ideal of everyday aesthetics?

14. You note that Eliot and Russell, as well as Bataille and Blanchot, thought that the deeper level of reality revealed by literature was horrifically dark, cruel, and unfathomably senseless. (59) Assuming that you are using these authors as masks, what are we to take of your own view of this deeper level of reality? Doesn't it conflict with an Eastern sense of underlying reality as found in Taoism or Zen Buddhism?

15. Your last two chapters pose a dilemma. With regards to "Expressing the Ineffable" the ineffable as understood by the four writers/philosophers seems particularly dark [...] Schopenhauerian, even. This is especially true for Bataille and Blanchot, as I have already suggested, but could also be said for Eliot and Russell. Although the first two are professed Nietzscheans they are perhaps not Nietzschean enough. Nietzsche encourages us to say "yes to life" to our embodied selves. Although he might be seen as Schopenhauerian when he writes his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, and thus deeply pessimistic, he later becomes much more optimistic. Nietzsche notoriously associates the denial of life with Christianity. Bataille writes novels in which he promotes a kind of extreme sinful behavior as though we is over-reacting to Christianity while still deeply under its influence. By contrast, your last chapter, dealing with Daoist and Confucian attitudes towards calligraphy, exhibits a much more positive attitude to life. There is nothing particularly dark about following the Dao or following the path of the ancient sages. The Chinese escaped this dilemma because they, for the most part, escaped Christianity and the concept of sin. I would think your last chapter would be in opposition to the four Westerner's approach to the ineffable. The Chinese philosophers you discuss accept the ineffable but do not portray it as your Western thinkers do. For every Yin there is a Yang. There is a sweet side to the ineffable as well as a dark side. It may be necessary for Writing in the West to frequently deal with the dark side (this, for us, gives rise to the sublime), but something is lost in missing the sweet side. It is not always lost by the West, as can be seen in

the Western fascination with beauty and love as much as with ugliness and death. It can be seen in Plato, Montaigne, Shelly and Wordsworth, among your authors.

16. Let me suggest that an appropriate slogan for a Nietzschean everyday aesthetics/somaesthetics would be “Carpe Diem.” If we live for today then we cease to worry overmuch about our past mistakes and our future fate. Our ordinary world exists between two extraordinary and paradoxical kinds of event: birth and death. In one case something seems to come from nothing, and in the other nothing from something. Although both kinds of event are extraordinary, our ordinary lives are conditioned by their necessity. Christianity seeks to deny this necessity in denying that we will ever die.

6. Richard Shusterman: “Philosophy and the Art of Writing: Responses to a Meta Symposium”

Before addressing the five symposium papers discussing my book *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*, I am pleased to make two preliminary points. First, I express my thanks to Elena Romagnoli and Stefano Marino for organizing the symposium and to the authors for their attention to this book. Second, for readers interested in further enlightening critical perspectives on the book, I note the symposium devoted to it in *Metaphilosophy* 54 (2023), containing papers by Eli Kramer, Charles Johnson, and Randy Auxier, followed by my response. Having two symposia in two journals whose names begin with “Meta” could be a cause for confusion, but I am grateful for them both, particularly because my book concerns key metaphilosophical issues. My response in this symposium will discuss the five papers in the alphabetical order of their authors’ names.

1. Valentina Antoniol is kind to call the book “important,” and right to recognize that the book’s core theme of philosophy’s use of writing to do more than words can do, to help one live a philosophical life, is a theme that can usefully connect philosophers and writers who are rarely connected. Such thinkers struggle with the same constellation of capacities and limitations of philosophy as a textual practice that serves a

more than textual vision of philosophy, that serves philosophy as fully embodied way of life. She is also right to see that Foucault's work on the philosophical life is central here, although he is not one of the eight authors who get detailed individual study. The book was contracted for a series that severely limited its length. If I had had more space, I would have liked to include Foucault and Nietzsche and William James and Wittgenstein.

Dr. Antonioli, who is an accomplished expert on Foucault, asks "how much Foucault's work has influenced [my] analysis" and whether I think Foucault can be understood as a somaesthetic thinker." I suspect she already knows the answer but I am happy to have the opportunity to reassert here (what I have frequently claimed before) that Foucault has been an extremely important influence on my vision of philosophy as a way of life and on my idea of somaesthetics. I first introduced somaesthetics in the context of Foucault's idea of philosophy as an aesthetics of existence, and I described him, along with Dewey, as one of the paradigmatic prophets or progenitors of somaesthetics. He deserved that praise because he worked significantly in all three branches of somaesthetics: the analytic (descriptive and theoretical), the pragmatic (melioristic methodologies), and the practical (actual body practice) (Shusterman 1997, ch. 6; and Shusterman 1999).⁴

One could say that Foucault was even more influential than Dewey in my work on somaesthetics and philosophy as a way of life. My somaesthetic study of sex obviously owes an enormous debt to Foucault. Dewey's discussions of sex and gender were very limited and did not treat sexual practice as a significant factor in shaping the self and its subjectivity (Shusterman 2021b). It was Foucault who demonstrated the importance of the sexual dimension in one's aesthetics of existence, in one's shaping and care of the self as an ethical and aesthetic project. I could have never written *Ars Erotica: Sex and Somaesthetics in the Classical Arts of Love* without the model of Foucault's four-volume *History of Sexuality*. My *Ars Erotica* book was an attempt to complement Foucault's project by treating cultures and topics that Foucault neglected and by

correcting some errors he made with respect to Chinese sexology (Shusterman 2021a).

Of course, I also bring to my study of eroticism a different sensibility than Foucault's. Despite my appreciation of experiential intensities and transgression, I am more appreciative than Foucault with respect to the aesthetics of tenderness and ordinary pleasures. My sexual experience has been for the most part heterosexual, and I imagine I have spent more time understanding and listening to women than Foucault did. Marriages (but also divorces) encourage such listening. Despite my military past (or perhaps because of it), I have spent more than a decade on a project of performance art with the Man in Gold that works to deconstruct the image of masculinity along with the logocentrism of philosophy. He is the philosopher without words. Born in France through collaboration with a Parisian artist, Yann Toma, the Man in Gold is the protagonist of adventures that are described in a bilingual book published in Paris (Shusterman 2016). I wish I could have discussed the Man in Gold with Foucault, and I very much regret that I never met Foucault, who died before I read any of his texts. In 1984, the year he died, I was still a hardcore analytic philosopher of the Austin and Wittgenstein analytic tradition, who had an Oxford doctorate supervised by Austin's literary executor (J.O. Urmson) and whose moral tutor was the renowned Wittgenstein scholar Peter Hacker. Ironically, it was my work on these analytic philosophers that prompted my engagement with French theory. Bourdieu, who admired those philosophers, liked my use of their ideas, and invited me to his center in Paris for the year of 1990.

Recognizing that my work somaesthetics is "an effective continuation" of Foucault's line of thought, Antonioli further asks whether I see Foucault as a somaesthetic thinker. My foregoing remarks show the answer is evidently yes. Somaesthetics is a pluralistic field of research that studies somatic theories and practices, including those that the particular somaesthetic researcher does not practice or endorse. Somaesthetics argues for such pluralism because it recognizes that persons are different—in sex, gender, age, ethnicity, tastes, capacities, and limitations. One size does not fit all.

Foucault and I offer different orientations within the somaesthetic field, and mine is more explicitly pluralistic than his, both with respect to aesthetic tastes and with respect to the role of reflective consciousness, physiology, and neuroscience in somaesthetic perception. My somaesthetics also differs from Foucault's somatic theory by having a detailed, ramified structure or architectonic that is articulated into three branches, each having three dimensions, whereas Foucault's "aesthetics of existence" does not have that structural aspect. Another way where my somaesthetics differs from Foucault's embodied aesthetics of existence is that he works with the concept of *body* rather than *soma*. Foucault locates subjectivity and agency in the self or subject, not the body, per se, which is, for him, mere material for shaping. In other words, borrowing terms from German phenomenology and philosophical anthropology, Foucault sees the body as *Körper*, a material thing rather than *Leib* (the living, purposive, sentient body) but also rather than the soma, a concept that embraces both *Leib* and *Körper*, that is, both embodied, subjective, perceptive agency and a material object in the world among other material objects. The soma resembles Spinoza's dual aspect notion of body, but somaesthetics gives that notion a new name (namely "soma") to distinguish it from the usual concept of body as mere object, as mere material for the shaping powers that society exercises in creating subjects (Shusterman 2011; and Shusterman 2020).

2. Anna Budziak's article makes no mention of Foucault but ranges impressively over the book's four chapters and its multiple key authors. A distinguished T.S. Eliot scholar, she generously calls this book "seminal" while kindly recalling my early book on Eliot, who is the major focus in her comments and challenging questions. However, she also raises an important question about the contrast between European literature and the Chinese literati tradition of writing with its three perfections (poetry, calligraphy, and painting). Professor Budziak is surely correct to point out that some forms of Western writing involved a visual dimension, and she gives the example of an illustrated evangeliary as an example. I have long argued for the importance of the visual element in Western

writing, for example in “Aesthetic Blindness to Textual Visuality” (Shusterman 1982). But we have no European tradition like the Chinese writing tradition of three perfections as forms of self-knowledge and self-cultivation. The monks who were illustrating the gospels were focusing on the words of God, unlike the Chinese literati, who were focusing on their own mortal poetry; and the monks were doing their illustrating to serve God, not primarily for self-knowledge and self-cultivation.

If Budziak wishes to blur the distinction between European and Chinese writing, then she conversely wants to bolster the distinction between philosophy and literature in T.S. Eliot’s work. We can and do, of course, make such a distinction. We can point to his poetry and then contrast it to his philosophy doctoral dissertation on F.H. Bradley and his early academic philosophical writings in *The Monist*. They are obviously different genres with different styles. But what I maintain is that Eliot’s writings do not suggest a dichotomous divide between philosophy and literature but rather a continuum with a considerable area of overlap, especially in Eliot’s texts in literary theory or philosophy of criticism. As I write in *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*, “Despite the vagueness and porosity of their borders, this book argues for a distinction between philosophy and literature (including literary theory), while conversely arguing for literature’s priceless contribution to philosophy” (x). Part of what I meant in affirming that Eliot’s work “defies the presumption of a dichotomous divide between philosophical and literary writing” (58) is that he wrote in both genres, though his strictly academic philosophical writing was confined to early in his career. Eliot, as argued in the earlier book I devoted to his critical thought, took a very pragmatic view of distinctions; he claims they should not “be taken too seriously, as final psychological or philosophical truth, when they are merely analyses of pragmatic validity, to be tested by their usefulness” (Eliot 1957, 189). Of course, he recognized a distinction between poetry and philosophy, just as he recognized a distinction between literary criticism and philosophy. But these distinctions too were pragmatic rather than absolute, and the different practices were deeply intertwined. If Eliot was

criticized by John Dewey for not maintaining a strict distinction between philosophy and literature by claiming “the ‘truest’ philosophy is the best material for the greatest poet” (Dewey 1987, 323),⁵ then he also famously asserted that literary criticism, though distinguishable from other fields because it is “an activity which must constantly define its own boundaries; also it must constantly be going beyond them,” into other fields, mingling with and absorbing them (Eliot 1957, 215).

Budziak is surely right that for Eliot, as for most lovers and theorists of literature, emotions are crucial to the function of poetry. My book insists on this important function, which Eliot explains through poetry’s giving us the language for better understanding and feeling emotions that are still inadequately felt and expressed. Through their verbal and affective skills, poets create “the capacity of the language to express a wide range, and subtle gradation, of feeling and emotion” (Eliot 1957, 22–23 and 37–38). The poet develops language through “an attempt to extend the confines of the human consciousness and to report of things unknown, to express the inexpressible” (Eliot 1957, 169). Poetry educates our emotions; it expands our affective knowledge. Perhaps Budziak’s surprising question of whether I reject such knowledge derives from her misunderstanding of what I mean by “cognitive fallibilism.” She seems to assimilate it to skepticism, whereas it is the Peircean contrast to skepticism, its pragmatist answer to Cartesian doubt. Cognitive fallibilism does not deny that we know things, but merely asserts that our knowledge is fallible in the sense that it can, in principle, turn out to be wrong. Human humility with respect to knowledge is not that we are miserably ignorant but that we cannot, as humans, achieve the absolute certainty of the Gods-eye view of the universe. For Eliot, then, as I read him, it is human wisdom to recognize the fallibility of our knowledge (and action); and it is faith in the divine that can redeem the hope for eventually achieving higher perfection in knowledge and feeling than we can currently achieve in our mortal, sinful state.

I heartily agree with Budziak’s conclusion that connects wisdom and emotional knowledge. As I assert in the book, “For Russell, as for Eliot, wisdom requires a ‘comprehensive vision’

that includes ‘not only intellect but also feeling’ (83). Sharing their view, I believe that an important part of the wisdom that poetry can provide should include an education in emotions. This means gaining a better understanding of our own emotions and a better sympathetic understanding of the emotions of others (whose lives and feelings may be very different from our own). But it also means learning to recognize and to master the proper emotions that generate proper actions and attitudes for the different contexts and conditions of life.

3. Marta Faustino’s article highlights my book’s linking wisdom and emotions. She notes how I emphasize this connection right from the outset. I quote from her, quoting me: “philosophy is more than literature and literary theory, because it is more than language. It is more than language because its love and quest of wisdom is not merely a verbal affair; it is a way of life” (x) [...] [and] “the philosophical life cannot be merely verbal” or discursive because wisdom requires not only “a set of wise truths or sayings” but also “wise ways of feeling and acting in the world” (x).

Dr. Faustino correctly notes that the book’s project was largely inspired by the work of Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault on the philosophical life, a topic on which she has done excellent research. Her text emphasizes the Hadot influence, which I indeed happily acknowledge, although my sympathies are closer to Foucault’s account of the philosophical life because he highlights its distinctive aesthetic and somatic dimensions. She also appreciates that my account of the uses of literature for the philosophical life is “wider” than Hadot’s and Foucault’s because it covers more cultures and historical ages. Their center of attention was ancient Western culture, including early Christianity, where the philosophical life was extremely central to the idea of philosophy. But it is important to recognize that Hadot and Foucault also studied the continuing traces of the philosophical life as manifested in modern times and as expressed beyond the narrow framework of academic philosophy, for instance in literary artists like Goethe and Baudelaire.

Faustino raises three interrelated concerns about the way the book explores the philosophy/literature distinction

through its focus on the idea of the philosophical life. First, she points to the obvious fact that there are other ways of practicing philosophy which are not so essentially embodied and expressed through one's bios as the models that Hadot, Foucault, and I study and privilege. Well aware that I recognize that "such a conception and tradition of philosophy is nowadays mostly forgotten or neglected in most philosophy departments, where philosophy is researched and taught as a theoretical and often abstract discourse, with no apparent relation to one's life," she surely grasps that Hadot and Foucault know this too. We all realize that philosophy is an essentially contested concept that comprises different methods and practices, and (as I stress in *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*) also includes many different literary genres. Philosophy as a way of life is only one of those practices. But it is the one that most attracts me, because I find it the most challenging, authentic, and meaningful direction for my own life as a philosopher. It is also the practice of philosophy that seems to provide the clearest most pragmatic way of distinguishing philosophy from literature, because philosophy as a way of life is more than words and writing.

Faustino misunderstands me if she thinks the motivating aim of my book was to provide a firm distinction between philosophy and literature. The aim was rather to show the ways that writing functions in philosophy as a way of life, because that is the form of philosophy that I practice in my own life; and it is useful to see how writing can serve such a life by examining the lives and writings of distinguished thinkers who belong to the broad "philosophy as a way of life" tradition. I sought to explore through this book how writing can contribute to my philosophical life and to others who wish to live a philosophical life. My aim was not to insist on a sharp distinction between philosophy and literature.⁶ I hoped the Preface of my book had made this clear, when I wrote "Committed to the philosophical life, in theory and practice, I acknowledge this book belongs to that life" (xii). Perhaps Faustino fails to appreciate the main thrust of my book because she focuses only on its first chapter, which deals with the issue of distinction.

The second issue concern Faustino raises also concerns the philosophy/literature distinction. “Literature can be a way of life,” she remarks. This is certainly true in the way that nursing, painting, athletics, connoisseurship, or politics can be a way of life. Such lives do not have the same millennia-long, thematized, and theorized tradition that the philosophical life has; and some of these life-callings or lifestyles were probably influenced by the ideals, models, and values of the ancient influential philosophical life tradition. Foucault, for example, claims that in modern times both artists and political revolutionaries continue in different ways key elements of the philosophical life tradition, essentially by bravely manifesting their alleged, often unconventional truths through the way they live (Foucault 2011). However, I would also claim that the ancient philosophical life borrowed or continued key elements of the warrior life ideals (such as brave heroism and endurance) which were central to Greek culture and expressed in the most ancient and most formative masterpieces of Greek literature that predate the discipline of philosophy. The job of giving a neat classification and precise definitions and individuating distinctions for the lives we differently label philosophical, literary, artistic, revolutionary, religious, sagely, soldierly, etc. does not seem a fruitful exercise for my own philosophical life. In this I am following ancient tradition. Advocates of the ancient philosophical life would describe the job of making those fine distinctions and definitions as more an exercise in grammar or philology rather than the demanding practice of real philosophy as pursuing and manifesting wisdom in the conduct of one’s life.

So here again, we return to the essentially pluralistic and contested nature of philosophical practice. It certainly includes the field of philosophical grammar, a field to which I have not been ashamed to contribute. In fact, I proposed a philosophical grammar for the concept of the philosophical life, suggesting that it should be seen as gradable range concept rather than a clearly bound categorial concept. I treat this issue in detail in *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (1997). Permit me to cite below a passage from that book which also addresses Faustino’s third concern,

namely that my emphasis on melioristic self-examination, self-cultivation, and self-transformation does not do justice to the connection of philosophical life to “the pursuit of wisdom and tension toward the truth,” even though she quotes passages from my book where I characterize philosophy in terms of truth and wisdom: “its love and quest of wisdom is not merely a verbal affair; it is a way of life’ [...] because wisdom requires not only ‘a set of wise truths or sayings’ but also ‘wise ways of feeling and acting in the world’.”

In *Practicing Philosophy*, after examining the philosophical lives and writings of three great contemporary philosophers (Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Foucault), I faced the question of defining the philosophical life. I argued that just as philosophy is an essentially complex and contested concept, so

“the concept of philosophical life is likewise essentially complex and contested,” and not only in its requirements of what it reads and writes.

Philosophical life is further complex and contested in having dimensions apart from writing, which, as we saw, can be exemplified in rival ways and different degrees by different philosophers. Complex, contested “range concepts” like that of art or democracy are more usefully treated with a logic of gradations than of categorical “Yes-No” demarcations. Futile debates about whether a particular government is really democratic can be transformed into more specific, answerable questions like: “Is it more or less democratic than some other regime and with respect to which dimensions of democracy?” The gradable approach thus directs us to more fruitfully concrete questions of how to render the problematic government more democratic.

In thinking about philosophy and the philosophical life, such a gradable approach makes more sense. I can imagine someone who worked on philosophical theories of truth, meaning, or personal identity but did nothing about relating this work or any other disciplined thinking to the project of self-improvement. [...] By the gradable approach, undertaking a philosophical life would not suddenly turn him into a *real* philosopher but simply into *more* of a philosopher; while leading that life with greater scope and devotion would make him still more of a philosopher. In this sense, one might consider Wittgenstein more of a philosopher than Frege or Quine, even if not a better or “truer” one. (...)

The gradability of a multidimensional range concept also accommodates the fact that though the practice of philosophical life is open to everyone, those with more knowledge of philosophy's tradition can, *ceteris paribus*, practice it more fully and richly.

Prizing useful pliability, pragmatism favors the gradable approach in preferring projects of melioration to rigid demarcation. Precisely defining the philosophical life (and its aesthetic model) is less useful and interesting than exploring strategies for practicing philosophy as ameliorative, aesthetic self-realization (Shusterman 1997, 63-64).

I hope this long citation helps relieve Faustino's concerns. If I devoted more attention to her comments than to those of the other contributors, it was because her comments were more extensive and critical.⁷

4. As Faustino focused on the book's first chapter, so Marcello Ghilardi concentrates on the final one, which he finds "very original and interesting" in the way it introduces the Chinese art of writing into the study of the philosophical life, whose tradition is generally defined and studied as a distinctively Western philosophical genre. But self-knowledge, self-cultivation, and self-transformation in the pursuit of wisdom also runs deep in Asian cultural traditions. Dr. Ghilardi understands how the book's study of the Chinese literati tradition continues my earlier work on Chinese philosophy as inspirational for the project of somaesthetics, citing my use of Confucian and Daoist thought regarding the somaesthetics of perception and action in my book *Thinking through the Body* (Shusterman 2012b, 197-215). I wholeheartedly agree with his view that we should be wary of essentialist generalizations about Asian cultures because they are often very different. Even if East Asian cultures developed through the strong influence of China, those cultures often significantly differ from China's (which is also pluralistic rather than uniform). Recently I illustrated these national divergences with respect to chopsticks and eating styles. Although China, Korea, and Japan all use chopsticks as the key eating utensil, these cultures differ distinctively in the style of their chopsticks and their eating styles with them, sometimes even to the point of strongly criticizing the eating style of these other cultures. For example, the Japanese sometimes characterize the Korean eating style as primitive and dog-like because Koreans do not use their hands to raise their rice bowls near to the mouth when eating with chopsticks (as Japanese do), but instead leave their bowls on the table. The Japanese critique this Korean

failure to hold and raise one's bowl in eating as similar to the way dogs eat from bowls by lowering their heads. Koreans critically reply by analogizing the Japanese raising of the rice bowl to the gesture of begging with a raised bowl (Shusterman 2023, 139-151).

Ghilardi is correct that I think that our language shapes our philosophical concepts and views. That is one reason why I introduced the term *soma* in developing somaesthetics, rather than speaking of "body-mind" as John Dewey did to combat the powerful dualistic tradition in Western philosophy that runs from Plato through Descartes and still thrives in contemporary thought. Claiming he did "not know of anything so disastrously affected by the tradition of separation and isolation as is this particular theme of body-mind," Dewey complained that "we have no word by which to name mind-body in a unified wholeness of operation" that characterizes human life. He therefore appealed to locutions like "body-mind" or "mind-body" to assert their oneness. But the duality of words remains; and although the hyphen connects the terms, it also visually separates them, suggesting residual distinction rather than fused unity (Dewey 1984, 27). The term "soma" escapes this difficulty by avoiding the terms "body" and "mind" that are indelibly marked or defined by dualism.

Ghilardi's remarks on language's influence on thought are mostly directed to the question of how the Chinese language or way of writing influences philosophical thought. He wonders whether the Chinese use of ideograms in writing instead of the Western practice of writing by phonemes could have had an important influence on Chinese thought. In particular, he speculates whether its use of ideograms frees Chinese thought from the Western, phonetic style of writing which creates "a split between the material, 'bodily' aspect of a word and its invisible, "spiritual" counterpart. Can we find here, *in nuce*, a graphic genesis of the platonic distinction of visible and intelligible, already inscribed in the alphabetic form of writing?" I tend to agree but would describe this differently. Western language and writing prioritize the phonetic or sound but recognize that, for the most part, the connection between a word's sound and its meaning is altogether arbitrary; This

leads Western thinkers to ground the meaning of a word by appeal to an idea in the mind that is associated with and evoked by the phonetic sound that represents it. Here is the source of our representational theories of language, knowledge, and mental life more generally. This centrality of the idea (as immaterial and located in the mind) supports the traditional mind/body dualism.

The primacy of the image in its writing further frees Chinese theory from our Western tendency to distinguish sharply between language and painting. Chinese ideograms are not what Ghilardi calls an “alphabetic practice” but more a painterly writing practice based on bodily action, because the characters are formed not simply in terms of a visual form but more importantly in terms of the order and direction of strokes of the brush. As there is no Chinese alphabet, traditional dictionaries were ordered by how many strokes the ideogram contained; and when characters had the same number of strokes, they were ordered in terms of the ordered primacy of particular strokes, beginning with the horizontal stroke (from left to right) that signifies the number 1: i.e., –. There are other ways in which Chinese language differs significantly from Indo-European languages and that find expression in different tendencies of philosophical outlook and doctrine than those predominant in Western thought. Chad Hansen provides a rewardingly detailed study of these topics (Hansen 1992, 30–54).

5. Thomas Leddy’s contribution is the final text that calls for response in this symposium. Professor Leddy correctly claims our philosophical views have a great deal in common, and he generously notes that his advocacy of pragmatism was inspired by my book *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, published in 1992. I happily recall that Tom has been a friendly and insightful critic of my work even before that book. Consider, for example, his paper discussing my treatment of organic wholes, which he published in 1991, when he was more a Nietzschean than a Deweyan (Leddy 1991). Because we are friends, and because he seems fed up with academic philosophical writing and considers himself (by “entering into retirement”) no longer bound by its professional norms, Tom felt free to write his text in an unconventional form for a philosophical essay. He does this

explicitly, avowing: "This very essay I am writing now is an experiment in non-academic writing aware of itself as writing responding to reading." His text is a combination of personal confession and a list of sixteen questions addressed to me personally and directly, using the second person "you."

I am glad that Tom feels comfortable in addressing me and my book in that informal way because it demonstrates his recognition of the pragmatist pluralism and open-minded tolerance that I believe we share. However, some of his sixteen questions are very complex, some seem repetitive reformulations, and some of them are not at all clear to me. To clarify and answer all of them in my published response would be too long, tedious, and otiose for readers of this journal, so I will not address them all nor discuss them one by one in the order Tom lists them. Instead, I confine my comments to where Tom's remarks are clear to me and where my reply seems most helpful. I'm sure that Tom will graciously understand, and readers will be grateful.

Tom admits that his questions are largely motivated by his interest in everyday aesthetics, and he notes the overlap between somaesthetics and everyday aesthetics. I appreciate Tom's work in everyday aesthetics, and I believe his approach to the topic in his fine book *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* is superior to the alternative approach that instead highlights the ordinary as ordinary. In fact, my studies of the powers of mindfulness to reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary (through examples from Zen life in Japan) take the same approach as Tom's (see, for example, Shusterman 2008; and Shusterman 2012b, 288-314). For that reason (and taking up another of Tom's questions), I would also prefer an approach to everyday aesthetics that is more than simply descriptive. The pragmatist impulse is meliorative. Description may be the first step (and is often a necessary first step) in the task improving our experience of everyday activities. We need to know what we do and how we do it in order to see how we might do it differently and better. But I don't see how we can be satisfied with our everyday activities and our ordinary experience as truly described in our largely unhappy world, a world where the everyday lives of too many

people suffer from too much poverty, pain, injustice, oppression, and war. Pragmatism has the melioristic ideal that our everyday experience should be better and that philosophy can help by enabling us to see and understand things better, which includes perceiving more clearly our problems so that we can address them with more intelligence. For this reason, discomfort is an important factor in somaesthetics; it serves as a stimulus for improvement.

Along with the considerable overlaps between somaesthetics and everyday aesthetics there are some differences. One is a difference in scope. Somaesthetics, as Alexander Kremer and others have argued, is not just a sub-field of aesthetics; it is a broader philosophy (Kremer 2022). In fact, it is an interdisciplinary research field that extends beyond the discipline of philosophy, for example in the field of Human-Computer Interactive Design (see Höök 2018). This implies that while there are overlaps between somaesthetics and philosophy, the two fields are not the same. In any case, *Philosophy and the Art of Writing* concentrates on writing and the philosophical life rather than on somaesthetics per se, which comes into focus only in the final chapter. The book's concentration on writing aimed to complement the way the tradition of the philosophical life emphasizes nontextual ways of displaying one's philosophical views and art of living through one's behavior and appearance. Consider, for example, the way Diogenes the Cynic (as Foucault describes him) displays the truth of his philosophy by his scandalous behaviour and primitive way of life, or the way I have experimented nontextually with the askesis of self-transformation through the performance art of the Man in Gold, the philosopher without words.

I now turn to some of Tom Leddy's other questions. Why did I focus on the philosophical use of *writing* rather than on *conversation* (which is more like everyday discourse), and why did I not take Socrates as the philosophical ideal? On the first issue, *Littera scripta manet*. Unlike conversation, the written word remains, so writing can better preserve and sustain philosophical ideas, even if, as Plato argues in the *Phaedrus*, dialogue is better for clarifying issues. In fact, Socrates became

what he is for philosophy through the written testimony and creative interpretations of him in the writings of Plato, Xenophon, and others who immortalized him in textual tribute. Writing is undeniably central to the tradition of philosophy and even to the tradition of the philosophical life. That is why writing is the focus of my book.

Tom draws some hastily articulated distinctions between what he calls writing and Writing or writing and literature. I find those distinctions too vague and confusing to address them with any clarity. What I can say is that I see a continuum between writing that is more literary and writing that is more philosophical, just as there is continuity between literature that is more factual and literature that is more concerned with imaginary worlds. As I argue in the book and as many others have shown before me, fictionality does not adequately distinguish the literary from the philosophical, because there are philosophical fictions and masterpieces of literary nonfiction. I also maintain that a philosopher should be concerned with good writing rather than merely with truth. There are at least two reasons why good writing is important for philosophy. First, the philosopher should not only care about her own knowledge of truth but should want to share those truths unselfishly with others, convincing others why those truths are true and how they could beneficially guide our conduct. Good writing is more attractive and more persuasive than bad writing. Second, if philosophy is understood as a critical meliorative art of living, then working to improve one's writing is a form of working on oneself, an askesis or perfectionist discipline, "a form of spiritual practice" in the painstaking struggle and rigorous critical revision of one's writerly expression. That is how the prizewinning novelist Charles Johnson understood my approach in *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*: "Where else in life do we get the chance—the privilege and blessing—to lovingly selflessly go over something again and again until it finally embodies exactly what we think and feel, our best expression, our vision at its clearest, and our best technique? (Johnson 2023, 408).

Good writing, as I understand it, includes good style. But there are a variety of good styles, including good

philosophical styles. I cannot pretend here to outline their variety. This is partly because style, as I have argued elsewhere, is not a matter of superficial cosmetics or external covering that we simply add to something given, here philosophical content. We sometimes distinguish between substance and style in writing, but we cannot fully separate the two. Good style goes deeper than mere surface ornament and partly shapes the content it stylizes. I would affirm, however (to answer another of Tom's paper), that the writing of professional philosophers would be better, *ceteris paribus*, if it had better style. It would be more attractive, more communicative, and thus (*ceteris paribus*) more persuasive. Style is something one can usefully learn from writers with whom one disagrees, even when those disagreements (in substance and style) are severe. We learn as much from bad examples we choose not to follow as from the good examples we emulate. As Confucius put it long ago in the *Analects*: "When I walk along with two others, they may serve me as my teachers. I will select their good qualities and follow them, their bad qualities and avoid them" (Legge 1893, 66).⁸

This point leads directly to another complex issue that Tom's questions raise: the *meta*-issue concerning the relationship of my writing in this book to the kinds of writing that the book studies in the various authors it explores. Tom writes: "What is the relationship between your writing of this book and Writing? What are you trying to do with your explication of the various philosophers and philosophically-inclined Writers? On one level you are simply doing a survey of the field, namely that of the relation between writing and philosophy, one in which there are many overlaps. In that regard your book is almost a model of good professional behavior [...] something that a graduate student could follow. For example, you accurately describe the theories in the field and put them in historical context. And you use a wide range of author quotes which themselves are well-cited. But I believe you want to be read differently, i.e. more as a Writer."

These questions strike me as problematically misinformed. They presuppose a sharp distinction between (what Tom calls) writing and Writing, but this distinction is

foreign to my thinking. I instead see a continuum of writing styles, ranging from the very literary, imaginative, or personally poetic way of expressing philosophical ideas and questions all the way to the very impersonal style of rigorous, linear philosophical argumentation. Along that continuum I see examples of attractive and unattractive writing. Near one end we find Montaigne as an example of very personal, confessional writing that has poetic grace and wit but that addresses very serious philosophical questions and critically surveys some of the traditional answers to them. On the other end, there is Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, which, although a work of rigorous, linear argumentation devoid of literary ornament, is nonetheless an example of attractive writing that powerfully expresses through its very austerity the personal poetic and philosophical attitude of its author.

I also would not favor a dichotomizing distinction between professional philosophical writing and writing that reaches an audience beyond academic philosophy, even if there seems to be a clear distinction of style between texts in professional journals of philosophy and texts in typical trade publications. Sometimes, however, we find interviews in scholarly journals or books that have a direct, conversational style that one finds in nonprofessional writing. In any case, I do not find it distressing that my "book is almost a model of good professional behavior," although I wish Tom would have told me what it lacked to become a genuinely or fully good model. I am happy to be read as a good professional philosopher, because I think the best professional philosophers should be good writers. My book notes that the hardcore analytic philosophy professor Bertrand Russell won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Even if the Prize was likely the result of his popular essays, there was a continuum in his writing between the popular and the more scholarly, which we can see in his bestselling *A History of Western Philosophy* and in his epistemological work, *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*, which was based on his 1914 Lowell lectures, given to the general public. Tom is right that my book points to the limits of conventional professional practice with its tendency to focus only on reading

and writing philosophy rather than more fully practicing philosophy as a deeply embodied art of living. But I also value the professional practice of philosophy in its conventional textual forms. I would not be here without it, and the thrust of my critique is melioristic rather than condemnatory. For that reason, some commentators have considered me too nice in my critique of the profession and instead prefer to condemn its elite as “assholes” (Auxier 2023, 403-424).⁹ That is not my literary or philosophical style of meliorist critique and pluralistic, tolerant open-mindedness. I think less brutal means are more effective for genuine persuasion through careful analysis; a transformation of views and attitudes that comes from attraction rather than crushing attack.

Because he fails to fully appreciate my pluralism and fails to see that my book’s core topic was not writing per se but the role of writing in philosophy as a way of life, Tom also fails to understand my interest in Kierkegaard. “While reading your book I found myself wondering ‘why spend time with Kierkegaard given that, although a Writer, he is clearly far from pragmatism?’”. Advocating pragmatism was certainly not the aim of the book. Its aim was instead to explore the use of writing in philosophy as a way of life. Kierkegaard was not merely a master of writing; he also lived an inspiringly singular and paradigmatic philosophical life. John Dewey also provides an inspiring model of philosophical life, one that is very different from Kierkegaard’s and that I analyze along with Wittgenstein’s and Foucault’s as different contemporary paradigms of the art of living.

Tom, however, suggests an explanation for my interest in Kierkegaard: “you are imitating Kierkegaard by taking on a series of masks,” with “each philosopher/writer discussed [in the book] being a mask that you successively put on and take off... You then leave it up to your reader to synthesize “Shusterman” or “Shusterman’s view” from paying careful attention to each of his masks, as we often do with Plato, whose various characters may also be seen as masks.” Tom’s remarks here are insightful but also misleading. His genuine insight is that this book reflects my own personal views on how to live a philosophical life, but does so only indirectly through my

commentary on the views and lives of the authors I discuss. *Philosophy and the Art of Writing* offers no apology or analysis of my own *bios* in philosophy, something that I've occasionally attempted on a very small scale with respect to certain dimensions of my life (Shusterman 1997, 179-195; and Shusterman 2002).

Tom's remarks, however, are misleading in using the notion of mask to define this indirect approach. I am not trying to hide anything in the way that Kierkegaard tried to hide his very personal beliefs and his existential religious agonies. Nor am I trying to win over converts by painting a romantic picture of what I write and who I am, although I know that dramatizing a philosopher's life can attract readers to that philosopher's texts. There is a powerfully long tradition of philosophical heroism that we can trace back to Socrates and the idea of *parrhesia*.¹⁰ I admire courage and have a taste for romance. However, as announced in the book's Preface: "Above all, as a philosopher and a writer, I seek to be honest" (xii). I acknowledge that honesty, in writing and in life, is not always easy, even when it does not require impressively dramatic heroism.

NOTES

¹ Shusterman's book *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*, being the object itself of the present Symposium (and thus the text constantly taken into consideration in the Introduction and in all the papers), has not been cited in the Bibliography. The quotations from *Philosophy and the Art of Writing* are simply indicated by the page numbers in brackets.

² As brought to my attention by Barbara Salij-Hofman. For the first inscription, see Sosnowski and Tylus (2012, 158); see also Łanuszka (2020). On the second inscription, see Klint (2019, 22).

³ As brought to my attention by Ilia Huniak.

⁴ The connection between Foucault and my philosophical thought is explored in Antonioli and Marino (2024).

⁵ I am citing from Eliot (1930, 601). In the same essay, Eliot suggests that "we terminate our enjoyment of the arts in a philosophy, and our philosophy in a religion—in such a way that the personal to oneself is fused and completed in the impersonal and general, not extinguished, but enriched, expanded, developed and more itself by becoming more something not itself" (Eliot 1930, 599). Here we see Eliot's flexibility of distinctions, even between the fundamental contrast of self and other.

⁶ Such attitudes preoccupied with asserting philosophy's distinction reflect a traditional macho philosophical hubris, which I find increasingly disturbing, and which may have originated from the initial Socratic-Platonic drive to have philosophy replace the cultural hegemony of poetry in ancient Greece.

⁷ Faustino's text derives from an even more extensive discussion that she delivered at a symposium (containing also four other papers) on *Philosophy and the Art of Writing*, held at the Culture Lab of the Nova Institute of Philosophy of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa on 26.4.2023

⁸ The Ames and Rosemont translation of the passage (which they number instead as 7:22) goes as follows: "In strolling in the company of just two other persons, I am bound to find a teacher. Identifying their strengths, I follow them, and identifying their weaknesses, I reform myself accordingly." Ames and Rosemont (1998, 116).

⁹ My more gentle approach in critique and persuasion is noted by the Italian philosopher, Salvatore Tedesco, where he explicitly contrasts my style to Nietzsche's by describing it as "a technique recalling Chinese acupuncture rather than Nietzschean hammering." See Tedesco (2013, 5)

¹⁰ I discuss the tradition of philosophical heroism and *parrhesia* in two recent papers, Shusterman (2024a) and Shusterman (2024b). I have learned from my own publishing experience that in cultures where the marketing of philosophical books deploys newspaper and magazine articles as means of promotion, those articles often highlight interesting features of the philosopher's *bios* almost as much as the philosophical content of the book reviewed.

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