Ageing, Aura, and *Vanitas* in Art

Greek Laughter and Death

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Beginning with the representation of age *in extremis* in the *nature morte* or still life, a depiction of aged artifacts and representations of *vanitas*, artistic representations particularly in painting associate woman and death. Looking at artistic allegories for age and ageing, raising the question of aura for Walter Benjamin along with Ivan Illich and David Hume, this essay reflects on Heidegger on history together with reflections on the 'death of art' as well as Arakawa and Gins and Bazon Brock, both as artists 'at your service,' as Brock would say, contra death, and including a brief discussion of *wabi sabi* and *kintsugi*. The 'ageing' of art includes a review of the (ongoing) debate concerning Michelangelo's forging of the Laocoon as well as ancient views of age together with contemporary philosophic reflections (Simone de Beauvoir and Michel de Certeau). The figure of Baubô in ancient Greek sculpture and cultic context can make it plain, as Nietzsche shows (as Sarah Kofman follows him on this), that laughter and death are connected (along with fertility cults in antiquity). Satire preserves the Greek tradition of laughing at death and the essay closes with Swinburne. | *Key words: Allegory, Nature morte, Aura, Demeter/Iacchus, Sculpture*

Doch uns ist gegeben,
Auf keiner Stätte zu ruhn,
Es schwinden, es fallen
Die leidenden Menschen
Blindlings von einer
Stunde zur andern,
Wie Wasser von Klippe
Zu Klippe geworfen,
Jahr lang ins Ungewisse hinab.
– Hölderlin (1799) *Hyperions Schiksaalslied*

1. Allegories of Age and the nature morte

One may, so goes cliché, count off four ages: infancy, adolescence, maturity, senescence. Shakespeare adds time in his *As You Like It*, to increase the count in his "All the world's a stage" soliloquy: "And one man in his time plays many

parts/His acts being seven stages." Nietzsche keeps his count to the classic *three* intervals in *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, a book dedicated to contemplating the proximity of death. Nietzsche excludes infancy, the ideal of childhood he also challenges: "The happiness of the child is just as mythical as the happiness of the Hyperboreans of whom the Greeks tell" (1980, vol. 2, p. 666). Himself an early starter and professor by the age of twenty-four, Nietzsche counts off the 'Ages of Life' (*Lebensalter*):

> the twenties are … the *summer* of life. The thirties, by contrast, are its *spring*. … Finally the forties: … that is the *autumn* of life. (Nietzsche, 1980, vol. 2, p. 669)

So ends the aphorism. For the Nietzsche who died in his mid-fifties, that would prove to be all there was: exhaustion of vitality and overdrawn finances as metaphors for the end of life.[1]

Art, particularly pictorial art in the West represents the ages of the human, usually the ages of a male human. Although Shakespeare counts seven, the ideal of three ages is classic, matching, numerically speaking, Nietzsche's parsimonious rhythm. And in art history, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl (1926) read *Titian's Allegory of Prudence* (Fig. 1) in terms of the reference to old age (lupine) and its regard for the past, backward looking (citing Macrobius "which is devoured") and mature manhood's present (leonine) and front-looking sensibility (which, according to Macrobius, is always acting, or poised to engage) for the sake of the whelp, the forward looking youth, and thus the future (canine) possibility, "of which hope," so Macrobius, "though uncertain, always gives us a pleasing picture" (Panofsky, 1955, p. 153).[2]

Fig. 1 Titian (1488-1576), *Allegoria della Prudenza* (1565-1570). National Gallery, London. Public Domain.

1 See on this, the conclusion to Babich (2022, p. 603). In addition, with respect to the theme of art, Ariadne in antiquity is associated with the theme of mortality (Ariadne is commonly featured with her husband Dionysus on carved sarcophagi). Online, see Babich (2022).

2 Cf. for another account, Erin J. Campbell (2003, p. 261) and Philip McCouat (2013).

Art historians who have trouble with Panofsky, quite apart from issues of attribution which today's scholars cannot always follow, tending to find it difficult to parse symbols as their significance has fallen out of common knowledge (but these are not mysteries and were common in the renaissance and in antiquity). Another issue may be Panofsky's attention to age.

If it is not typically disputed that Titian's old man (Fig. 1) seems to be a self-portrait, given Titian's age at 77 when he began painting this triptych, the elderly figure fades into obscurity: his aquiline features and red hat as distinctions where the dominant figure is the central figure of maturity but thereby the viewer's eye turns to youth. By contrast, Giorgione's *Lezione di canto* (Fig. 2), similarly known as *The Three Ages of Man*, and likewise painted in the last decade of the painter's life, sets youth in the centre, offset with relatively young maturity in profile on the right, offering advice and judgement. The two figures of youth and maturity occupy the larger portion of the painting, highlighting the pair of them, side-lining the old man who is excluded from their exchange, even as he looks obliquely over his shoulder, but directly at the viewer — Foucault has told us why[3] — with no authority for the present or future.

Fig. 2 Giorgione da Castelfranco (1477-1510) *The Three Ages of Man* (*Lezione di canto* [Reading a Song]), ca. 1500-1510. Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence. Public Domain.

This irrelevance, coupled with the formless red of the old man's cloak (Fig. 2) contrasts with the orange bordered detail of the boy's student cap and purple robe, the necklace at his throat or even the detail of the mature man's embroidered green cassock with white cuffs, and this too is part of the destiny of ageing (Pierre Bourdieu, we will return to this below, assesses the judgement of age as the virtue of *phronesis* when it comes to artistic taste/

[3] See for a discussion, Gary Shapiro (2003, p. 245f) as well as his chapter, *Toward an Archaeology of Painting* (2003, p. 265f). Cf. too, with reference to Gibson and Gombrich, and hence apart from Foucault, F. David Martin (1978, pp. 287-292).

valuation in his *Distinction* (1984, pp. 466–484).[4] It adds to this irrelevance of the aged that the title of the painting is 'reading a song,' as this is what the boy and the man are doing, minus any contribution from the point of view of age (which has a certain musical salience when it comes to the interpretation of popular music or what we today call 'covers'). The painting is thus about the very social rank or status of music or 'mode' (Barilli, 2004).

As Walter Horatio Pater contrasts Titian and Giorgione's *Concert*, it is hard to read this 'lesson' scientifically, that is in terms of art history, art science [*Kunstwissenschaft*], quite to the extent that when it comes to Giorgione, attribution is "from the first uncertain" as Pater emphasises in his influential "School of Giorgione" (1910, p. 143). Nevertheless, one might wish to argue that just this painting, Giorgione's *Lezione di canto*, exemplifies Pater's concern with

> the principle of music; music being the typical, or ideally consummate art, the object of the great *Anders-streben* of all art, of all that is artistic, or partakes of artistic qualities.[5] (1910, p. 135)

For Pater, "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (*Ibid*). Pater is describing ambition but also a didactic element as part of the 'school' of Giorgione and one can advert to the pointing finger of the mature man, understanding maturity as a certain voice, owned as such [*Mündigkeit*], instructing youth. One might also refer to the relation between age and music by way of exception, to parallel age and youth as I discuss this elsewhere with respect to Johnny Cash's 'cover' of Trent Reznor's *Hurt*.[6] Thus Alex Howlet (2019) maintains, not without reason I would agree, that Cash "deepens" the Nine Inch Nails' song. In addition, the gesture of the mature man in Fig. 3 makes the case for a particular tact, or counting (and here we should add Nietzsche once again), of time. Thus the music historian, Jane Hatter argues:

> In many Venetian paintings, especially those by Giorgione, Titian and their followers, music, often indicated or reinforced by the performance of *tactus*, can also represent the passage of time. (Hatter, 2011, p. 6)

The 'ages' of 'man' are not generic even as the motif attests to a genre.[7] In addition, representations of aging do not apply across the genders.[8] For woman, the three ages of youth, maturity, and old age is truncated to just young and old, leaving out maturity: as we may quote Nietzsche's offensive proverb, one of seven he lists "for women" in *Beyond Good and Evil*, in one of Walter Kaufmann's better translations: "Young: a cavern decked about. Old: a dragon sallies out" (1980, vol. 5, p. 174). Nietzsche who keeps the connection with learning as we saw above in connection with Pater,

4 See too, likewise drawing on Bourdieu, Alex Dumas and Suzanne Laberge (2005, pp. 183–205), as well as the reflections on ageing with respect to body aesthetics in Barbara Ehrenreich (2018, pp. 51-70).

5 Cf, for 'acoustic' discussion, Andrew Eastham (2010).

6 See Babich (2018, p. 397).

7 See for a survey account, Heta Kauppinen (1991).

8 See for an account limited to (specifically) 'feminist art,' Michelle Meagher (2019).

emphasises here that "learning transforms us" and yet he argues that when it comes to man and woman, there is something that cannot be unlearned: 'indicators of the problem that we are," that is to say, "the great stupidity that we are." Expressly incorrigible, the "*unteachable* 'down there,'" [*Unbelehrbar*, '*da unten*'],[9] Nietzsche proceeds to unburden himself of his opinions on women, including his clearheaded insight that to match the fantasy of the 'eternal feminine,' women also have their own (imaginary) ideal of the "*eternal masculine*" (1980, vol. 5, p. 175).

Hans Baldung's *Die drei Lebensalter und der Tod / Three Ages of Life and Death* (Fig. 3a) gives us woman under three species, with a young woman at the centre, obliquely confronted with a mirror, a sign of vanity, held up to her by an old woman behind her, blocked out by the edge outside the frame, we only see part of her body, with a baby at their feet, playing with the threads of Clotho's spun web of life — Clotho/Κλωθώ was one of the *Erinyes* or Furies or the Fates, and as such one of the *dramatis personae* along with Hermes and Charon in Lucian's dialogue, the *Downward Journey* — with a 'fourth', masculine, ghoulish, figure of death looming over the figure of the young woman, grasping the gossamer threads of life with one hand and, with the other, a red hourglass held over her the young woman's head. The aged woman with the mirror in her right hand, vainly tries to stay the hand of death with her left.

Fig. 3a
Hans Baldung Grien (1484-1545)
Die drei Lebensalter und der Tod 1509-1510. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien. Public Domain.

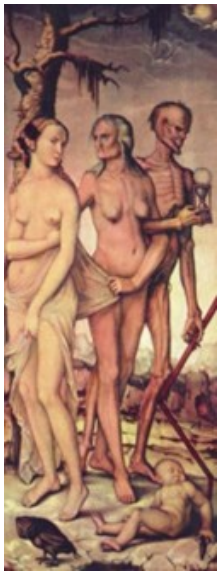

Fig. 3b
The Three Ages of Man and Death, ca. 1540-1543. Museo del Prado, Madrid. Public Domain.

[9] There are many who write on Nietzsche and woman and there is a wide field of scholarship in feminist readings of Nietzsche, but see with specific respect to art, Babich (2000).

The focus is not a little misogynist and Baldung's 1517 painting of *Der Tod und die Wollust/Death and Lust* (not shown here) is usually translated — with romantic serenity — as *Der Tod und das Mädchen/Death and the Maiden* which shows us death carting off what is identifiably the same young female figure by her long hair.

Baldung's later painting of the same name: *Die Lebensalter und der Tod* (shown: Fig. 3b), gives us the same four figures, complete with an hourglass now at chest level as the skeletal figure of death escorts the old woman who looks back at youth. Death carries a crooked stick grasped by the infant lying awkwardly placed at their feet with a dark owl with the features of a drachma, set at the infant's feet, facing in the opposite direction, and staring ominously at the viewer.

Born of woman and, sheerly metonymically, as being born, thrown into this world, one is underway to death. Thus woman is the proximate cause as source of life and thus as source of death quite as Baldung's paintings illustrate (Figs 3a and 3b above).[10]

As a genre of art, the still life or *nature morte* represents the Judeao-Christian value of *vanitas*, art turned on itself. As the literary theorist, Norman Bryson defines it:

> Still life is unimpressed by the categories of soul, consciousness, achievement, grandeur, or the unique. The human subject that it proposes and assumes is a bodily, material entity on a par with anything else in the material field. It is severed from value, greatness, and singularity. (Bryson, 1989, p. 229)

But just this, on Bryson's account, also allows or tolerates or invites various elements of desuetude, 'decay.' For this reason Bryson can argue, using Pompeian still life — Davidson (1999) elaborates on related kinds of still life in his *Courtesans and Fishcakes* — that the liminal comes to light to argue for an edge condition:

> In Pompeian painting, still life is the genre where shadows freely appear, and the link between still life and *trompe l'oeil* is as old as the legend of Zeuxis and his still life of the grapes, so lifelike that the birds came to eat from the painted vine. (Davidson, 1989, p. 229)

In this way, the ancient Greeks faulted the vanity of age, as modern Judaeo-Christian predispositions incline to moraline readings, including mockery of the erotic (key to Plato's *Phaedrus* and which also finds expression in the *Republic*), likewise has to do with a failure of σωφροσύνη or 'prudence.' This must be understood hermeneutico-ethnographically as this irreverence and hilarity can seem to be at variance with today's understanding of age and death.

[10] There is, of course, literature on this theme: see Holger Jacob-Friesen (2019), in addition to Larry Silver (2021), well as Margaret A. Sullivan (2000). On the iconic 'power' of the fourth, see Brandt (2015).

Fig. 4 Arent de Gelder (1645-1727) *Self-Portrait as Zeuxis Portraying an Ugly Old Woman,* 1685. Public Domain.

Thus if artists, fond of channelling Apelles or Zeuxis, as in the case of Arent de Gelder's mocking self-portrait (Fig. 4), sharing his derision with the viewer (and not with his middle-aged subject [Fig. 4]), as de Gelder, like Giorgione's old man (Fig. 2 above), directs his gaze to the viewer beyond the picture plane. Here, we attend to the crucial distinctions made with respect to laughter and death in antiquity, important as the story of Zeuxis is also the story of the artist's death as Zeuxis is said to have perished thereby. If his death is typically read as nemesis, the price exacted for his hilarity at the expense of his subject, for the ancients, death can also be a reward, especially if it involves some accession to the divine (think of Kleobis and Biton, whose mother's prayer of gratitude when they brought her to celebrate Hera's rites, was answered, the very next morning, with the death of her two sons).[11] Zeuxis had painted the goddess Aphrodite 'as old,' as a feigned, aged aspect was associated with Demeter, as we read in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* that grieving Hades' rape of her daughter and thus inconsolable, Demeter took on the appearance "of an old woman" to the daughters of Keleos of Eleusis (Meyer, 1987, p. 23), an aged woman being a disguise for a goddess no one would suspect, setting up the mystery reveal after the child's mother, Metaneira, violently interrupted the gift of immortality Demeter sought to offer Demophon, the child in her charge. Manifest as the goddess she was, Demeter chided them for their ignorance but promised conciliation, if they built a temple in exchange, dedicated to "Demeter, the venerable":

[11] I give a reading of Nietzsche's famous posing of himself along with his friends Paul Reé and Lou von Salomé in a cart, setting Lou in the position of the Kleobis and Biton's mother, in Babich (2011, p. 182), arguing that it is modelled on an altar relief of Kleobis and Biton drawing their mother in a chariot from the Museo delle Terme di Diocleziano, Rome Italy.

> With these words, the goddess altered size and form and sloughed off old age; beauty wafted about her. A lovely fresh smell radiated from her gown and the radiance from the skin of the immortal goddess shone from afar. Her blond hair flowed down over her shoulders, and the sturdy house was filled with light like a flash of lightning. (Meyer, 1987, p. 26)

Understanding the role of laughter in antiquity is challenging. The hymn can be read as suggesting elements of transfiguration as scholars also read this as part of the cult of death and immortality.

The seventh century BCE lyric poet, Pindar insisted (instancing Archilochus[12] whose famous ire is held up as a cautionary tale to qualify the so-called 'Castor song' in the 2nd Pythian ode), that youth — in this case Hieron of Syracuse — tended to misjudgement, needing the arbitration of one of the judges of the damned to sort out: Rhadamanthus as Pindar names him. Today, approaches to age and death do not tend to include, at least not deliberately, the practice of laughing at either. In Greek antiquity, the opposite was true and in the case of art may allow us to understand some of the figures we are confronted with and what their purpose might be, if we permit ourselves to consider that that purpose might be other than our current conventions allow. Thus I consider Nietzsche's discussion of Baubo (and Iacchus) as well as his complex reflections on Archilochus in addition to the more social ethnographic reflections of Lada Stevanović's insightful *Laughing at the Funeral* (2009).[13] In connection with reflections on aesthetic taste, David Hume spent his deathbed reading on Lucian's *Kataplous/Downward Journey* which features the poor shoemaker (poverty being crucial to the jest in the dialogue), Mycillus, who arrives willingly and laughing by contrast with the "fetters" of the tyrant Megapenthes (1915, p. 5, 33). Mycillus was eager to depart, chasing after Charon's barque and insisting on being taken aboard, even though there is no room which means he has nowhere to stand but on the neck, so Hermes directs him, of the tyrant who had in life lived across from him (1915, p. 39). Laughing at the moment of death for the Greek must be matched to the apotropaic significance of laughing *at* death. Adding to the crucial value, as Nietzsche emphasises this, even of the sacrificial animal victim's assent, Stevanović argues that laughter is more than apotropaic. Crucial to the cycle of "the death-and-rebirth pattern in all its conceivable forms," as Richmond Hathorn also argues in his source overview of Demeter (1977, p. 94) , for Stevanović, given the ancient Greek belief in morphological conservation (here one might add a parallel with Augustine), i.e.,

> that the dead in the Underworld keep the same form as in the moment of burial, and, linking this with the laughter in the moment of death, shows that such laughter is not only a sign of a good mood, but actually the most powerful manifestation of life, which accompanies the dead on their way to the world

[12] If Archilochus wrote misogynist invective that would endure beyond two millennia (thereby passing time test for genius, in addition to Nietzsche's reminder that the Greeks set him parallel to Homer), age for Archilochus was the counter-conditional par excellence and he attacked women especially for this offence (although I argue elsewhere that no small part of this may have been inspired by his own ageing condition, quite as he gives the details of his own impotence); see Babich (2019).

[13] On Iacchus/Iakchos, and a more complex account of Demeter/Persephone, see Ivanov (2012, p. 94f.)

> beyond. Thus, if the dying person has the ability to laugh at the moment of death, this capability will exist ever after. Adding to this is a picture of the underworld in which no laughter exists, and so it follows that laughter, as an antidote for death, in the very moment of it, provides immortality. (Stevanović, 2009, pp. 190-91)

One needs a material reflection, all the resources of ethnography and object philology, as I elsewhere try to raise this complex question with respect to Greek bronze (Babich, 2008), to begin to understand the role of – key to reading Jean-Pierre Vernant (1991) – the image or icon as *eidolon*.[14]

What is a mirror? What were Greek mirrors and what is the polish used to give their statues a mirror finish (what was that composed of? what qualities did it lend?).[15] I have argued that it made a material difference to consider the effect of oxidation on metal in order to understand Aristotle's insistence that mirrors that acquire a red cast when used by menstruating women would have to be, as specifically necessary for the claim he is making, "new"?[16] But what is the reflective surface of a Greek mirror and exactly what is reflected? A truth to life? A dark image? Is the life reflected this life or the next life, deities or demons, etc., is this a kind of scrying — not meant to mirror or represent but descry what is otherwise not to be seen as opposed to a true to life, correspondence of the kind we, of our 'pictures are windows' variety, are well used to? Hans-Georg Gadamer challenges this as a conviction or prejudice having only recently been overcome, permitting us to 'read' mediaeval art (1986, p. 8), but what will we need to imagine a Zeuxis, any Zeuxis (we have no originals) not to speak of his last painting? For when it comes to these paintings of Zeuxis, of Apelles, in every case, we make it up: all our images are, *faute-de-mieux*, ekphrases. As Nietzsche says with respect to the copies we cobble together of things seen and never seen, it is the rule when it comes to "paintings" (but also when it comes to people as that is the point of his comparison) that of us "prefer the copy to the original" (1980, vol. 2, p. 239). We prefer the modern reconstruction: it looks 'more authentic' to us.

2. Auras and Age

An aura is a sign of 'age.' Benjamin scholars read his notion of aura variously,[17] but signifiers of age such as patina are also claims to

[14] See for further references and discussion: Stevanović (2009, p. 55f). Cf. too David Leeming (2013) in addition to, in the context of art history, Reiner Mack (2002), as well as the contributions to Joachim Whaley (1981).

[15] As Nikolaus Dietrich (2021) contends (and there are issues one might wish to take with this contention but for many and complicated reasons, as on the surface of it, he is correct in at least part of his claim if not the causal attribution alone and as such): "we have been deprived of the high polish which was responsible for the mirroring effect." Dietrich despite the nuances of his analysis is not attending to the complicated question of the substantiality of the mirrors themselves, as it were, perhaps as he is largely concerned, as this is true of today's mirrors, of the overlay that makes mirrors mirrors, in this case the specific polish as such as well as the specificities of its application. See my note (and reference) below.

[16] See, for loci and further references, Babich (2008, p. 174f.).

[17] There is no disputing the value of aura from the vantage of the critic despite critical reservations: "[T]he past seven decades have shown that almost none of Benjamin's central predictions have proven to be right." Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Introduction" to *The Work of Art in the Digital Age* (2003, xiii-xiv). The aura has not disappeared, but conquered even the field of art's technical reproduction as film has not developed along the lines Benjamin indicated into a critical medium for the "masses," etc. But cf. Jae Emerling (2009).

'authenticity.'[18] As Benjamin explains here, "The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity" (1969, p. 220).

This 'presence' is a reference not to a subjective judgement, as Heidegger will also specify the 'presence' of the past object, but the substance of the work, sometimes certified as such by this or that authority, 'the' touchstone of value. For Benjamin, "Chemical analyses of the patina of a bronze can help to establish this, as does the proof that a given manuscript of the Middle Ages stems from an archive of the fifteenth century" (*Ibid*).

Thus on 'authenticity' and aura we read:

> The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.[19] (Benjamin, 1969, p. 221)

In consequence "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition" (*Ibid*). What falls away is the aura: "that which withers in the age of technological reproduction is the aura of the work of art" (*Ibid*).

Age in the sense of enduring through time is what David Hume proposes as the proof or 'standard of taste' as he argues for the literary or poetic work of art:

> The same Homer, who pleased at Athens and Rome two thousand years ago, is still admired at Paris and at London. All the changes of climate, government, religion, and language, have not been able to obscure his glory. Authority or prejudice may give a temporary vogue to a bad poet or orator; but his reputation will never be durable or general. (Hume, 2019, p. 29)

For Hume, the capacity to age (which for Hume can include flexibility and change, *ceteris paribus*) characterises "real genius" and thus "the longer his works endure, and the more wide they are spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with" (*Ibid*).[20] There are parallels with wine as Hume famously illustrates.[21] Steven Shapin (2017, p. 130f), after recalling the complex history of debates concerning taste and any hope for a 'standard,' explains that social reflex will be crucial in understanding (and Shapin quotes Kuhn on) "connoisseurship" in order to remind us that what is at stake is not "taste objectivity but taste intersubjectivity" (2017, p. 135).

Hume — and Shapin — acknowledge that access to such a narrow cadre will not be without challenges but at stake is the need to find or establish a means of discerning, as it were, in advance of the proof of age, works that are estimated as likely, thus Hume's principle anticipates Darwinian selection, to 'survive.'

18 See on patina and age, Randolph Starn (2002).

19 See further and conventionally, following the impetus of Lukacs, György Markus (2003).

20 Cf. Förster and Huchel-Haus (2009).

21 See Babich (2017, p. 15; cf. p. 4).

With Hume, the parallel with wine futures is clear: what is critical is to judge the fortunes of art (or wine) in advance. And Hume complicates matters as he notes the tastes of different stages of life, allowing for youthful or beginner's foolishness in addition to the superior assessment of age over the course of an individual lifetime. Estimating which work of art is likely to endure will also have to take account of changing societal mores and market contingencies (2019, p. 37), gauging "art futures" (Babich, 2017, p. 15). To this extent, for Hume, ageing well exemplifies the work of art as a work for the ages and the ability to advance judgement on the likelihood of this durability is the 'brass ring' of aesthetic valuation.

For Benjamin, the connection with distance may be added to age or time:

> The concept of aura which was proposed above with reference to historical objects may usefully be illustrated with reference to the aura of natural ones. We define the aura of the latter as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch. (Benjamin, 1969, pp. 222-23)

The key, and here we note a convergence with Hume's claim, is the creation of demand, as value expressly tied to delay, crucial for desire. Thus ageing enhances value: "One of the foremost tasks of art has always been the creation of a demand which could be fully satisfied only later" (*Ibid*.). Anticipating elements of pop art in his analysis of Dadaism, Benjamin pointed to the challenge of the rare (and to this extent today's hopes for NFTs correspond to the same point), explaining that:

> In recent years, such barbarisms were abundant in Dadaism. What they intended and achieved was a relentless destruction of the aura of their creations, which they branded as reproductions with the very means of reproduction. (Benjamin, 1969, pp. 237-38)

In "Unpacking my Library: A Talk About Book Collecting," Benjamin evokes the age of the books themselves along with "the disorder of crates," specifically, "the dust of wood," recounting "the relationship of a book collector to his possessions" (1969, pp. 59-60). For Benjamin, one has only

> to watch a collector handle the objects in his glass case. As he holds them in his hands, he seems to be seeing through them into their distant past as though inspired. So much for the magical side of the collector — his old-age image, I might call it. (Benjamin, 1969, p. 61)

For Benjamin's collector: "the acquisition of an old book is its rebirth. This is the childlike element which in a collector mingles with the element of old age" (*Ibid*). For her part, Rebecca Comay (2013) muses, adding tactical precision: "every acquisition in the collection is strictly the next-to-last acquisition." By definition informed by the same sense of volatility and vulnerability, ageing infuses Benjamin's reflections on his collector who ages himself as he acquires his books, merging the collector with the consumer:

> A relentless drive to accumulation is sustained by the secret knowledge that the object is destroyed in the moment of possession. As the object enters the

> collection, I take stock of it, I index it, I name my mastery over it, I miniaturize it, and in this very moment I concede its irretrievable disappearance. Hence my unappeasable need for more and more. I take an imprint of the thing, as if making a death mask, and in this way I surreptitiously take leave of it without quite having to relinquish it. Every collection may be seen in this light as an act of impossible or interminable mourning: I destroy what I acquire and assume perverse ownership of what I relinquish. (Benjamin, 1969, p. 61)

Benjamin's 1931 reflection repeats Heidegger's 1927 *Sein und Zeit* concerning "the book we have used" which Heidegger 'unpacks' as having been "bought at So-and-so's shop and given by such-and-such a person" (1961, pp. 153-54/118).[22] There is a hermeneutico-phenomenological haunting acquired books as Benjamin reflects that "inheritance is the soundest way of acquiring a collection" (1969, p. 66). Thus Benjamin observes that the collector's books are phenomenologically *constituted*

> within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them. Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of his property. (Benjamin, 1969, p. 60)

This property is visceral, or bodily 'having', as Benjamin's cousin, Günther Anders would say. Thus Benjamin invokes *physiognomy* as Adorno does:

> In this circumscribed area, then, it may be surmised how the great physiognomists — and collectors are the physiognomists of the world of objects — turn into collectors of fate. (Benjamin, 1960, p. 60-61)

Thus the reference to authenticity also refers to 'property' and the proprietary participatory dynamic, "Writers are really people who write books ... because they are dissatisfied with the books which they could buy but do not like" (1969, p. 61).

Fig. 5a
William Michael Harnett (1848-1892) *Still Life with Pipe*, 1883. Mount Holyoke. Public Domain.

Fig. 5b
Evaert Collier (ca 1640-1710), *Vanitas*, 1663. National Museum of Wesern Art, Tokyo. Public Domain.

This is an academic, scholarly ethos and, typically, the collector's domain articulates a masculine aesthetic – like brandies and cigars, and Benjamin's books, mostly – if not only, applicable to men, not women. This too

[22] The second page number, also indicated in this volume, refers to the pagination of the German original, *Sein und Zeit*.

bears on the art of ageing and in another study one might attend to the population of still life tableaus especially those including books but also pipes and pocket watches, and abandoned musical instruments set not in domestic counterpoint but the closed genre of still life, as *vanitas* (Figs. 5a and 5b may thus be multiplied *ad libitum*).

We speak of "the odor of sanctity," a phrase, as Ivan Illich, priest and theoretical activist, reminds us, associated with atmosphere and aura, not as such holiness or deity *per se* (although we may here recall the sanctified smell Homer associates with Demeter's revealed divinity), but death.[23] Thus in the case of aged brandy, the process of ageing refines. In the case of old leather, ageing adds character (and friability) to which may be added the smell of the elderly, a smell that is "not necessarily offensive" (Jabr, 2012).

Illich also talks about aura in the more complicated circumstance of the cloaca of ancient Rome as of the tenacity of the South American favela in his *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* (1985) and his essay on "Dwelling" (1992). Illich does not allow the reader the privilege of remaining in the well-heeled disposition of the 'collector' of Benjamin's aura, no matter whether collecting Klee's paintings or valued books and the like or the speculator estimating art 'futures' as part of an investment portfolio, but takes us instead to the immediacy of the personal, one's own *body* quite in the way that Anders speaks of the "having" of a body.[24]

For Illich (2002), the aura is something one can smell:

> To sense an aura, you need a nose. The nose, framed by the eyes, runs below the brain. What the nose inhales ends in the guts; every yogi and hesichast knows this. The nose curves down in the middle of the face. Pious Jews are conscious of the image because what Christians call "walking in the sight of God" the Hebrew expresses as "ambling under God's nose and breath." To savor the feel of a place, you trust your nose; to trust another, you must first smell him. (Illich, 2002, p. 237) [25]

Illich is attuned to the complex of ageing in his reading of a very specific Japanese term drawn from the Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō: *fûdo* which, telling us that it is linguistically and affectively untranslatable, Illich integrates into his Bremen Peace lecture, relating his earlier, 1980 peace lecture in Yokohama on the collision of bodily sensibilities between two cultures, East and West. *The Smell of Rain on Dust*, a self-help reflection on death and loss (Prechtel, 2015), conveys aspects of *fûdo* as does *Wind und Erde*, the title of the 1992 German translation of Tetsurō.[26] For Illich, *fûdo*, here he repeats his Japanese teacher's definition, recollects the atmosphere, the milieu, of the earth: "the commingling of a particular soil with the

[23] See for a discussion of Illich on the elements of air and breath, Babich (2023, p. 207f.).

[24] See on Anders and having, Babich (2023b).

[25] I discuss this further with reference to the smells of the afterlife in Babich (2021 [2022]).

[26] Watsuji Tetsurō, *Wind und Erde. Der Zusammenhang zwischen Klima und Kultur* (1992), in English (1961 [1935]), and in French (2011).

appropriate waters" (Illich, 2002, p. 239). Thus Illich, invokes water as metaphor for the cycle of life in the phrase taken to title *The Rivers North of the Future*, in conversation with David Cayley at the end of Illich's life.[27]

Illich's concerns might seem distant from ageing in art but he is talking vulnerability. Like Benjamin's focus on the consumer (whether, as we recall the collector, of 'originals' or of reproductions, mechanically, that is more precisely to say *technologically* reproduced), Hume's classic appeal to the dynamic 'durability' of the work of art, "the poet's *monument more durable than brass*" (2019, p. 38), in the face of the changing customs of the age, is a precisely venal concern and those who invest in art as *'Kapitalanlage'* assume this.[28] Art can (or art can fail to) appreciate in value. This is age as rarity and conservative valuation that also risks devaluation, as 'dated' (Ripplinger, 2016) and this outdatedness is another side of age in art.

Like handicapping a race, the goal when it comes to investment and speculation is prediction. Thus, in addition to normative ideals,[29] the 'science' of aesthetics, like the 'science' of wine values,[30] might be supposed to predict what art is most likely to 'age well' as opposed to the devaluing of the 'dated' that is doomed to disappear from memory.

On the level of tactical art, gaming appreciation includes style books for the aged.[31] In this way, Pierre Bourdieu begins his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* with an epigraph from Paul Claudel, reminding us of what Bourdieu will go on to name "social capital," the entitlement resulting from an 'education' in taste, having "built up an intellectual stock in trade: doesn't it belong to him, as if it were a house or money?"[32]

3. Cultural Antiquities and the 'Presence' of the Past

In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger reminds us that the past persists as present as it logically must, phenomenologically speaking, or we, in the present where we happen to be, would not be able encounter objects that are regarded as remnants "of the past." If we encounter such past objects, hence the conundrum, qua present, such objects are not in the "past." Apart from the inherently destructive element involved in all archaeology and all museum restoration,[33] contemporary efforts at 'restoring' or 'preserving' objects of the past are subject to the constraints of current taste as the historian Herbert Butterfield analyses this issue in his *Whig Interpretation of History* (1931) and which today's scholars, wishing to spare themselves the hermeneutic

27 See again, "Reading Ivan Illich on the Elemental Body."

28 See further, Judith Benhamou-Huet (2001), Horst Wagenführ (1965) and Marc Shell (1995).

29 See Andrej Démuth and Slávka Démuthová (2019).

30 See again, Shapin (2017).

31 Denise Boomkens (2021). This is more a book about the author's art than the self-help book it can seem to be.

32 Paul Claudel, *Le soulier de satin*, day iii, scene ii. Cited in Pierre Bourdieu (1984, p. 1).

33 For a defensive account, see Edward C. Harris (2006).

subtleties of Butterfield's historical exigence, call 'presentism.'[34] Butterfield's point is relevant as curators seek to restore what they judge or assume to have been the 'look' of antiquity — Nietzsche discusses just this in his inaugural Basel lecture on Homer — a point that returns us to Benjamin's auratic look and feel, (typically) as it is supposed the art object once was, *wie es eigentliche gewesen*, whatever that may have been (and conscientious efforts at conservation take some care to raise this question responsibly).[35] But Heidegger emphasises (his *Being and Time* is not coupled with time for nothing), that, "the past"

> has a remarkable double meaning; the past belongs irretrievably to an earlier time; and in spite of that, it can still be present-at-hand 'now' — for instance, the remains of a Greek temple. With the temple, a 'bit of the past' is still 'in the present.' (Heidegger, 1961, p. 430/378)

For Heidegger

> 'antiquities' preserved in museums (household gear, for example) belong to a 'time which is past'; yet they are still present-at-hand in the 'Present.' (Heidegger, 1961, p. 431/380)

To reflect on this double meaning, Heidegger draws on the signifiers of age mentioned above in discussing patina. The household artefacts or equipment preserved in a museum have "become fragile or worm-eaten 'in the course of time'" (1961, p. 432/380). The question for Heidegger does not concern this ontic "*Vergänglichkeit*" but focuses on the hermeneutico-phenomenological, as this recurs at the conclusion of his later essay "On the Origin of the Work of Art," presented three times,[36] where he returns to the 'what' of the temple work. Earlier, in *Being and Time*, he had asked, "What, then, is past in this equipment? What were these things which today they are no longer" (Heidegger, 1961, p. 432/380)?

Heidegger offers us in preliminary fashion (and, as *Being and Time* is a torso, his reflections remain preliminary) a distinction highlighting ageing:

> The antiquities which are still present-at-hand have a character of 'the past' and of history by reason of the fact that they have belonged as equipment to a world that has been — the world of a Dasein that has been there — and that they have been derived from that world. (Heidegger, 1961, p. 432/381)

In his lectures on *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger emphasises the relevance of the 'world' ("of a Dasein that has been there") and its complicated relation to 'earth.' There are discussions of ageing in art and the recognition that art has aged as a referent no longer current allows us to speak of 'classical' and mediaeval and modern and postmodern and contemporary art.[37] Post *l'art pour l'art*, art as such, as Gadamer speaks of this in his *Die Aktualität des Schönen/The Relevance of the Beautiful* (1986), 'art' can seem tired of itself, here

[34] See for a discussion, Adrian Wilson and T. G. Ashplant (1988) along with, contra critics, Richard A. Cosgrove (2000).

[35] See for a discussion, Adrian Wilson and T. G. Ashplant (1988) along with, contra critics, Richard A. Cosgrove (2000).

[36] See for a discussion of the difference between these versions, Jacques Taminiaux (1993).

[37] Patrick L. McKee and Heta Kauppinen (1987) as well as the more sociologically literal: Scott Herring (2022), and the Hollywood problem that goes along with the ageing of movie stars,

to quote Jean Clair/Gérard Régnier (2000) on Duchamp:

> Duchamp was one of the rare [onlookers] to acutely grasp that which others were refusing to admit: art — art such as we knew it, the art of painting, with its rules, techniques, and enslavement to style and schools, art with its status, social recognition, academies, salons, glory — had no reason to exist any longer. Art, an invention of the XV th century, had had its day…

Donald Kuspit (1995) argues that one might read Duchamp as "imposter artist," to the great irritation of art critics who are differently minded, and to this extent qua exemplar of art impotent/incompetent. Nevertheless, the 'death of art' is a metaphor for ageing in art to be added to the others named above and for Clair (2000) (and other theorists of an 'after art,' after the Hegel-infused death of art),[38] post art, Duchamp, contra Kuspit, is a paragon,

> the first to understand that he belonged to a world 'without art,' in the same way one speaks of a world "without history." When he began his work, the death of art had taken place. In this respect, Duchamp is a survivor, not a precursor.

The Fluxus artist, Bazon Brock who organised exhibits on 'the power of age,' *Die Macht des Alters: Strategien der Meisterschaft* (1998), and vociferously follows the theory of "reversible destiny" associated with the conceptual architects, Arakawa and Gins,[39] calls for banning death as such (Fig. 6), circa 1969:

> *Der Tod muß abgeschafft werden. Diese verdammte Schweinerei muß aufhören. Wer ein Wort des Trostes spricht, ist ein Verräter.* [Death must be abolished. This cursed indecency must stop. Anyone who utters a word of comfort is a traitor.]

Fig. 6. Bazon Brock (1484-1545) *Der Tod mußabsgeschafft werden*. 8 June 2005. Sophie-Gips-Höfen, Berlin. Public Domain.

the flip side of Adorno's critique of the shop girl, Timothy Shary and Nancy McVittie (2016) which can be matched with the self-chronicling memoirs of Stanley Cavell (2010).

38 See in addition to Kuspit (2005), Karsten Harries (2009) and Arthur Danto's (and other) discussions of the death/end of art, Gary Shapiro (1986, 1992), in addition to my own discussion, in the context of a discussion of the contemporary, including a discussion of Danto (Babich, 2019).

39 See the review of Arakawa and Gins' 1997 retrospective *The Mechanism of Meaning*, Matthew Shen Goodman (2018).

Beyond the death or end of art, the material of art itself is subject to ageing. In Asian art and literature, this has a complex sensibility associated with *kintsugi* and *wabi sabi*.[40] Ontically speaking, a certain presentation, a certain 'look,' is key. Thus, and this the ancients also knew, there is the look of age which correspondingly entails that a work can be deliberately aged so as to appear aged: a dealer's technique — this also has an echo in Benjamin — as dealers in art and antiquities specialise in producing the 'look' of age. Hence the historian Randolph Starn reminds us that

> art historians have traced traditions and recipes for a patinated look produced by varnishes and glazes, beginning with no less a painter than Apelles. That patina might be a tribute or a burden of time or an artist's trick is a useful reality check on the usual insistence that it must be one or the other. (Starn, 2002, p. 86)

More than a matter of a prejudice in favour of patina, cultivated or, per contra, 'de-mystified' or disabused,[41] no lesser artist than Michelangelo was celebrated for (and, arguably first 'became,' Michelangelo by) 'ageing' his own sculptures. Vasari tells us that after making a St. John figurine for Lorenzo di Pier Francesco de Medici, Michelangelo

> immediately began to carve a life-size figure of a sleeping Cupid. When this was completed, Baldassari del Milanese showed it as a beautiful piece of work to Pierfrancesco who agreed with Baldassari's judgement and declared to Michelangelo: "If you buried it I am convinced it would earn much more than by selling it here." (Vasari, 2008, p. 423)

Fig. 7. *Laokoon in der Antike. Laocoon reset.* Humboldt University Berlin. May 2017. Photograph: Babette Babich.

To this day, art historians argue back and forth as to whether this same gift of 'ageing' statues muddles the attribution of the Laocoon (Fig. 7), at the excavation of which quintessentially ancient sculpture, Michelangelo 'happened' to have been present.[42]

40 See Babich (2015) and for a self-help parallel, Céline Santini (2018).

41 See Thiery Lenain (2012).

42 Lynn Catterson (2005). See for discussion, Kathryn Shattuck (2005). See too: Margarete Bieber (1943). I discuss this, with additional references, most recently in Babich (2020).

Fig. 8. *Laokoon in der Antike. Laocoon reset.* Humboldt University Berlin. May 2017. Photograph: Babette Babich.

Excavated, the Laocoon is in pieces. At issue is the question of how to 'reset' or put the Laocoon together again — see Fig. 8 for a recently 'curated' depiction of the original find.[43] The happenstance that Michelangelo was present made all the difference in the initial restoration quite apart from any questions of ageing or 'faking' statues.

Issues of restoration, whether with respect to archaeological finds and thus the creation of the canonic work is crucial to the Laocoon as Richard Brilliant (2000) argues in discussing the history of the reception/reconstruction of the Laocoon as the difference between a defensive or outstretched arm,[44] important to ensure value. To this day, genuine antiquities are coveted and the museum/culture industry silences reports of the 'faking' of antiquities. Thus although these debates go back for centuries in archaeology, in classical philology, and the science of art history, museum culture has a vested interest in forgetting just such details.[45]

43 See the catalogue for the exhibit: Laocoon Reset, Susann Muth (2017).

44 I discuss the Laocoon and its reception history in my several essays on "Greek Bronze" as the Laocoon is a Roman copy in marble — hewn from a single stone — of a Greek bronze.

45 See Michael Kimmelman (1991). Nor is this limited to Greece as most if not all of the Coptic sculptures in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum seem to be faked, a discovery which is itself grist for an exhibit: Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculpture, see for a journalist's report: Ritsuko Ando (2008). See too, still more recently experts challenged a purchase of a statue which was originally defended by the Getty museum, arguably one of the worst offenders (the museum deals with such challenges by restricting access and downplaying reports where possible). But see Isaac Kaplan (2018). For a different issue concerning the use of fragments for reasons of avoiding other restrictions, see a recent journalistic account: Tom Mashberg (2023). Cf. Anna Mykoniati (2018).

Fig. 9. Barberini Faun, Glyptothek, Munich. July 2018.
Photograph: Babette Babich.

Age is opposed to traditionally, youthful heroic ideals, as pop assessments of antique sculptural art variously focus on sex, specifically: 'gods behaving badly,'[46] e.g., popping boxer shorts on the Barberini Faun, and another tradition of authors explores the literal 'love of statues,'[47] with one scholar describing the faun in the title of her paper, note the licit irreverence: a 'sexy beast' (Herring, 2016). The faun itself (Fig. 9), so I have argued, would have influenced Nietzsche thus the title image of my recent *Nietzsches Plastik* (2021), explores Nietzsche's reflection on object beauty in Zarathustra as I read Nietzsche's seeming ekphrasis of this statue (pp. 239ff.), iconic and specific: "laying his hand over his head, so should the hero rest" in "Of the Sublime."[48]

In addition to depicting the beauty of youth, however, the ancients also give us sculptures depicting age in some 'realist' detail, some more stylisedly dramatic than others.[49] Thus the black marble statue of Seneca (Fig. 10a) depicting the old philosopher in his bath, at the hour of his (forced) 'voluntary' death, epitomises the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius in the Stoic tradition, specifically the reflections on ageing and aesthetics, as does, although, headless the seated statue of an old man, usually said to be of Chryssipos (Fig. 10b) — and supplementing a head (of the curator's choice), to match.[50]

46 I quote the title conceit (of course this is more advertisement than 'conceit') of Marie Phillips (2007).

47 I discuss some of the literature on agalmatophilia in my 2005 lecture "Like Unto Life," published as "Greek Bronze: Holding a Mirror to Life" (2006), in German (2008), and (updated) in (2021, pp. 55-114).

48 See for discussion, Babich, "Zarathustras Statuen" in Nietzsches Plastik. (2021)

49 See the contributions to Susan B. Matheson and J.J. Pollitt (2023) as well as, more generally, M. I. Finley (1981), as well as, as this was often gendered, Jan Bremmer (1987 [1984]), as well as, classically comprehensively, Bessie Ellen Richardson (1933).

50 Instructively, the recent Yale University art gallery collection by Susan B. Matheson and J.J. Pollitt, in a chapter authored by Pollitt, features a "Reconstructed Portrait of Chrysippos" (2023, p. 126). The fact that the head is added on to the headless statue —

Fig. 10a
Sénèque mourant, 2nd Century CE. Louvre, Paris. Photograph: Marie-Lan Nguyen. Public Domain.

Fig. 10b
Vieillard assis. 2nd Century CE. Louvre, Paris. Photograph: Jastrow. Public Domain.

One may contrast this depiction of Stoic ageing of old men (Figs 10a and b), specifically the sage, with that of old women in various poses of unrestraint which also match the depiction of Baubo and Iambe,[51] although Iambe is not always emphasised with respect to her age, but similarly featured in *The Hymn to Demeter* (190–205), where Demeter herself, as already noted earlier in this essay, appears in the disguise of an old woman. To this extent, we may also need, borrowing a bit from the hermeneutico-phenomenological method, to 'bracket' our own sensibilities with respect to these statues — and there are several

Fig. 11a
Die trunkene Alte (1 C. CE Roman copy of a Greek original, 3-2 C. BCE Glyptothek, Munich. Photograph: Saint Pol, April 2007. Public Domain.

Fig. 11b
Marble statue of an old woman, 14–68 CE. Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Public Domain.

likewise a Roman copy and the author is well aware of its location at the British Museum in London as he features it in an earlier chapter, "Attitudes toward Old Age in Classical Literature" (p. 34) — does not hinder Pollitt, a professor of classical archaeology and history of art from including the head in his description of the seated statue, emphasising "the importance of the body in creating the total effect of the portrait. Chrysippos's balding head, the wrinkles on his face and neck" (p. 127).

51 See Andrea Rotstein's discussion of Iambe (and Baubo and ritual or cultic mockery) in (2009, pp. 167-182). And see too Donald Lavigne (2016, pp. 74–98) and, as Nietzsche's reflections are not considered, this is unfortunately routine for classicists, Babich (2019).

versions[52] — of a "Drunken Old Woman" (Fig. 11a) as well as an "Old Market Woman" (Fig 11b) the latter excavated in 1907 and on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.[53] One of the points raised above with respect to Nietzsche's Baubô (and it is instructive that modern readers find it easier to follow Sarah Kofman's "Baubô,"[54] as contrasted with Nietzsche's more esoteric but no less emphatic references), concerns the status of these representations, are they simply representations of age or do they serve another function in the context of a culture that is as foreign to us, so Nietzsche argues, as the Greeks? What is the function of risible old age in a funerary context? Here again, one might recall Stevanović's observations as she for her part argues, alas without a single reference to Nietzsche (although she does draw on the work of Nietzsche's friend Erwin Rohde), that:

> The laughter, jokes and obscenities that are characteristic of the Dionysian festivals and processions are understood by the author not only as a principle of rebirth and renewal (as this may be interpreted using the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin or Olga Freidenberg), but also as having an apotropaic function against the Dead. (Stevanović, 2009, p. 246)

The Stoic, Marcus Aurelius refers to the cracks on the surface of a loaf of bread as it bakes, an aesthetic reflection, but also to beauty in maturity in nature and in ageing humanity:

> We ought to observe also that even the things which follow after the things which are produced according to nature contain something pleasing and attractive. … And the ears of corn bending down, and the lion's eyebrows, and the foam which flows from the mouth of wild boars and in an old woman and an old man he will be able to see a certain maturity and comeliness; and the attractive loveliness of young persons he will be able to look on with chaste eyes; and many such things will present themselves, not pleasing to every man, but to him only who has become truly familiar with nature and her works. (Aurelius, *no date*)

This is no incidental reflection on the part of the aged Emperor writing to himself — and Nietzsche also picks up on the metaphor of 'ripe figs' (1980, vol. 4, p. 109) and of bursting open – as Marcus Aurelius continues his analogies:

> And again, figs, when they are quite ripe, gape open; and in the ripe olives the very circumstance of their being near to rottenness adds a peculiar beauty to the fruit. (Aurelius, *no date*)

Importantly, Marcus Aurelius' reflections echo in contemporary culture, just dated a century or so ago, in comedy in Gilbert and Sullivan's light opera, *The Mikado* as Katisha sings: "There is beauty in the bellow of the blast, / There is grandeur in the growling of the gale, / There is eloquent outpouring / When the lion is a-roaring, …", continuing the paraphrase of Marcus Aurelius in her duet with Ko-Ko, her unhappy intended: "There is beauty in extreme old age — / Do you fancy you are elderly enough?" The point, for all its mockery and arguably owing to this comedic force, has a serious side. One must take

52 See for further references and discussion, Rosemary Barrow (2018).

53 See for a then-contemporary report: E. R. (1909). See too, more broadly, the recent contributions to Frima Fox Hofrichter and Midori Yoshimoto (2021).

54 See Sarah Kofman (1988).

account of an imperialism already influential in ancient literature quite with respect to the Latinization of Greek sensibilities that already begins, so Nietzsche argues, before the ascension of Christian values (it is no accident, politically, that Christianity has its seat in Rome).[55] Nietzsche argues that it is challenging to understand the Greeks, particularly Greek tragedy, just given the mocking diminutive of the *Graeculus, "der von jetzt ab als gutmüthig-verschmitzter Haussclave* [henceforth as the good-natured-cunning, house-slave]" (1980, vol. 1, p. 76).[56] The figure has hardly vanished, minus an express connection with the Greek, for example, in the figure of Dobby, the house-elf (and slave) in J.K. Rowling's Harry *Potter: Chamber of Secrets*. I hardly need to say that Dobby, although fans explain that he is in his late twenties, is depicted as small, thus the *Graeculus*, bald and wizened, i.e., 'old,' and wearing what is effectively and roughly 'classically,' a Greek chiton.

4. Aging and the Artist's Depiction of the Death of Death

Elsewhere I argue that life-sized ancient Greek bronzes, as polished as Plato tells us they were and as numerous as Pliny tells us they were, were literally *reflective* surfaces in antiquity: a 'mirror' of life.[57] To illustrate Rilke's *Archaic Torso of Apollo* and the role this plays in Hans-Georg Gadamer's *The Relevance of the Beautiful*,[58] I drew a parallel with my old friend, Paul Feyerabend (1924-1994), citing his recollection of his own experience of ageing, failing to recognise himself (and de Beauvoir analyses a related phenomenon, phenomenologically, writing about women and mirrors), in Feyerabend's experience of himself as anti- or counter-exemplar. Thus Paul regarded a dishevelled figure with some contempt only to realise, with the dissonance of 'recognition,' of self as other, that the figure was his own mirrored image.

Ageing is only part of what is at issue. When it comes to mirrors, the paradigmatic text for self-recognition for psychologists, what we 'recognise' in the mirror is not a directly sensed correspondence between our proprioceptive sense of ourselves, facial features, say, and the mirror-image before us. We recognise an 'other.' This other is the self, our face as we remember or recognize this mirrored image, having seen it *before*. Ageing too as a social construction is a problem in this respect, absent proprioception.

Simone de Beauvoir points out in *The Second Sex* that men and women experience ageing very differently. It is not that men mind it less and it is also not true that they age more slowly, apart from valuation and regard for their (quite comparably aged) appearance. Men, de Beauvoir argues, continue to be valued in age and such is not the case for women as de Beauvoir emphasises:

55 Cf here: Pierre Hadot (2001) and cf., on the Greek influences as these permeate classical Latin literature up to and beyond Augustine, Hadot's account, with specific reference to Pierre Courcelle, (1995).

56 This is a theme, oblique but key for Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* and repeated in *The Gay Science* where Nietzsche contends that the problem with today's society and democratic ethos, corresponds to "American-faith that is increasingly wants to become a European-faith" that anyone can do "just about anything, capable of nearly any role," complete with self-experimentation, improvisation, etc. (1980, vol. 3, p. 596). For Nietzsche on the challenges of being an actor, which he expresses with regard to women and their gift at role-playing and illusion, see Babich (2000).

57 See, again, Babich (2006).

58 Cf. Babich (2008) and Gadamer (1986, p. 40).

> she is still relatively young when she loses the erotic attractiveness and the fertility which, in the view of society and in her own, provide the justification of her existence and her opportunity for happiness. With no future, she still has about one half of her adult life to live. (Beauvoir, 1989, p. 575)

De Beauvoir's observations remain relevant as is her contrast between the experience of men for whom "the passive qualities of an object are not called for, the changes in his face and body do not destroy his attractiveness" whereas, well before she is, as de Beauvoir underlines above, in any sense *old*, woman is already "haunted by the horror of growing old" (*Ibid*). In her study of ageing, *La force de l'age*, de Beauvoir explores the differences and dissonances across the board while retaining the force of her original analogy between women and blacks, adding the aged as a yet more disadvantaged group especially when it comes to women.[59]

Detailing the revulsion expressed in literature and convention specifically contra old women, de Beauvoir reads Villon's painful verse on the decay of age, pointing out that lurid as it is:

> This is not an allegory; it is a precise individual portrait, yet it is one that has reference to all of us. The whole human condition, the whole of man's estate, is called into question in the person of this decayed old woman. (1973, p. 219)

Without discounting the insights Anders offers as noted with respect to the 'having' of a body, Heidegger may be read in terms of his understanding of human (including, *pace* Anders), *sexual* care. This understanding of care, concern, solicitude, *assistance*, is complex because in Heidegger it is mostly *negative*, as "care" for Heidegger is commonly expressed by the active doing that is what we, very actively, *do not do*.[60] At the same time there is for Heidegger, as any reader of his correspondence with Arendt will have noted, a masculinist distinction between feminine and masculine.[61]

In art, to return to the art of allegory, as we began with a classical, renaissance example, the masculine can rule. Thus we explored the leonine aspect of Titian (via Panofsky) but woman seem to be the generic subject of age, a preoccupation that may be a matter of magical thinking or projection.

Hence Batoni's allegory of *Time* — depicted as a winged figure of an old man leaning on his scythe — *directing 'Old Age'* — depicted as a threatening old woman — *to ravage 'Beauty'* — depicted as young woman, with the bloom of youth on her cheeks — (Fig. 11) is not as heavy-handed as the moral lessons in physiognomy explored in Charles Le Brun or William Hogarth.

59 Thus de Beauvoir reprises: "It has been said that the Negro problem is a white problem; and that of women, a masculine problem: yet women are struggling for equality and the blacks are fighting against oppression; the aged have no weapons whatsoever, and their problem belongs strictly to the active adults. It is the adults who decide, according to their own interests, practical and ideological, the role that can most suitably be given to the aged" (1973, p. 133).

60 See for discussion of Heidegger's 'negative' solicitude, Babich (2018b).

61 See for discussion and further references, Babich (2019c).

Fig. 12 Pompeo Batoni (1708-1787) *Time orders Old Age to destroy Beauty.* 1746. National Gallery, London. Public Domain.

Social Darwinism, an unchecked moralising conviction, had consequences that led to eugenics in political expressions in the past (Nazism) and, as the past three years highlighted prejudice with respect to the aged, such convictions are still with us.

Fig. 13 William Hogarth (1697–1764) *The Analysis of Beauty, Plate 1* (1753). Public Domain.

If the physiognomic traits of Johann Caspar Lavater or, famously, Hogarth pointed to moral dissolution and could be assigned to vice as a plea for health and virtue, age is another category. Nevertheless, the mathematical, geometer's ideal of beauty in Hogarth's allegory of *The Analysis of Beauty* (Fig 12), includes sexist overtones,[62] presented as calculatedly necessary, and contractual, as we recall Peter Greenaway's 1982 film, *The Draughtsman's Contract*.

62 See for a discussion of Hogarth, Abigail Zitin (2016), and see, for example, Andrej Démuth and Slávka Démuthová (2019).

I cited Bourdieu above, who reminds us that specifically 'social ageing' (assuming one is able to avoid some of the seductions of *vanitas*), corresponds to nothing other than a

> slow renunciation or disinvestment (socially assisted and encouraged) which leads agents to adjust their aspirations to their objective chances, to espouse their condition, become what they are and make do with what they have even if this entails deceiving themselves as to what they are and what they have, with collective complicity, and accepting bereavement of all the 'lateral possibles' they have abandoned along the way. (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 110-111)

Bourdieu *describes* rather than *prescribes* even as he summarises this 'slow renunciation.' In his film, Greenaway overskips contemplation of ageing *per se* (there is no greater taboo than depicting age, as Adorno argues using the example of the shop girl and "the old woman who weeps at the wedding services of others, blissfully becoming aware of the wretchedness of her own life"),[63] chronicling aspects of death and decay (film is an ideal medium for this as Greenaway does in his 1985 *Zed and Two Noughts*).[64]

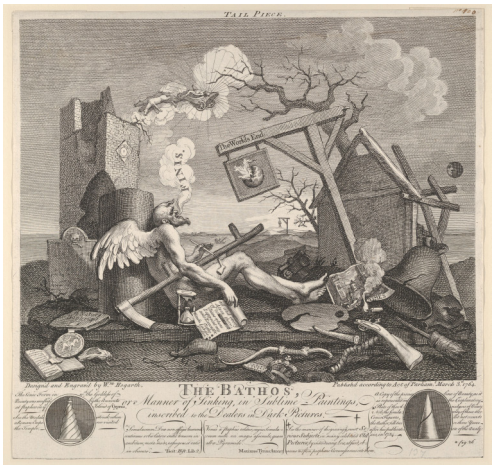

Fig. 14 William Hogarth (1697–1764) *Tailpiece, or The Bathos etching with engraving,* 1764, on laid paper. Public Domain.

Death is beyond age and a final allegory may serve to recall the mockery and irony we began with by citing Nietzsche who stops the count of ageing when one reaches one's forties. Thus overdetermined, Hogarth's final illustration

63 The full quote is helpful: "Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley may be dream factories. But they do not merely supply categorical wish fulfilment for the girl behind the counter. She does not immediately identify herself with Ginger Rogers marrying. What does occur may be expressed as follows: when the audience at a sentimental film or sentimental music become aware of the overwhelming possibility of happiness, they dare to confess to themselves what the whole order of contemporary life ordinarily forbids them to admit, namely, that they actually have no part in happiness. What is supposed to be wish fulfilment is only the scant liberation that occurs with the realisation that at last one need not deny oneself the happiness of knowing that one is unhappy and that one could be happy. The experience of the shop girl is related to that of the old woman who weeps at the wedding services of others, blissfully becoming aware of the wretchedness of her own life. Not even the most gullible individuals believe that eventually everyone will win the sweepstakes. The actual function of sentimental music lies rather in the temporary release given to the awareness that one has missed fulfilment" (Adorno, 1941, p. 41).

64 Michael Walsh (2006) adverts more to the political undercurrents than the sexism in Greenaway's films.

(Fig. 12), executed as a 'last work,' entitled *The Bathos*, but also (Hogarth is a satirist): "Tail Piece" or else, as the fallen Time himself expires, with the word Finis on his lips — Hollywood kitsch *avant la lettre* —, a jumbled depiction of mess and ruin, more chaos than drama, to match the exact bathos, elegiac, of the closing lines of Algernon Charles Swinburne's 1878, *Forsaken Garden*:

> Here now in his triumph where all things falter,
> Stretch'd out on the spoils that his own hand spread,
> As a god self-slain on his own strange altar,
> Death lies dead.

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