The Slovak Journal of Aesthetics

Reframing Beauty
Body, Environment, Art

Vol. 12, **No 2**
December 2023

Reproduction:
Adam Macko
Vertical Tree Cutting, 2017-2018

ESPES - Vol. 12/2 – 2023
The Slovak Journal of Aesthetics

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University of Prešov, Slovakia & Society for Aesthetics in Slovakia.

ISSN 1339 - 1119

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Guest editor
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Reframing Beauty: Body, Environment, Art – An Introduction

Andrej Démuth – Lukáš Makky

What is beauty? This is probably the most enduring question in the history of aesthetics, one that remains unsatisfactorily answered even after 300 years of modern aesthetic research. Despite attempts by some theoreticians to classify it (Scruton, 2009; De Clerque, 2013; Zangwill, 2013), we lack a generally acceptable and unambiguous definition of beauty. Why it is so? The answer is not straightforward; every period, theoretician, and phenomenon has its own criteria and position based on the 'situation' of art, society, and culture.

More complex answers are suggested in the papers composing this issue of *ESPES. The Slovak Journal of Aesthetics*. They prompt related and equally important inquiries, such as the relevance of this question today, the necessity of defining beauty, its role in aesthetics and everyday life, and what insights current scientific research offers on beauty. However, readers familiar with the development of aesthetic thought in the 20th century may wonder about the significance of this return to the issue of beauty, not just the category of beauty itself, but the notion and the attempt to define/reframe beauty in the 21st century after the so-called 'century without beauty'.

Probably due to the decline of modernism and postmodernism, which minimized the importance of beauty in art, and the attempts to base (neuro)aesthetics on scientific foundations (Chatterjee, 2015; Ramachandran and Hirstein, 1999; Zeki, 1999), beauty was brought once again to the forefront of aesthetic research at the end of the last century. Examples of this rehabilitation of beauty can be found in Danto (2003), Sartwell (2004), Nehamas (2007), Scruton (2009), Figal (2010), and others. Their works revealed that the classical concept and understanding of beauty required intense revision and reframing (e.g., Mothersill, 1984), akin to Derrida's deconstruction. Theorists found it necessary to go back to the source

of the issue and phenomena, analyzing it step by step. Danto (2003) pursued a similar approach but ultimately failed to find new criteria of beauty or reframe beauty itself, lingering in the past while attempting to replace beauty with a different category.

The last decades have witnessed a growing interest in beauty, evident not only in the aesthetics of everyday life (e.g., Parsons and Carlsons, 2008; Saito, 2017), environmental aesthetics (e.g., Berleant, 1992; Sepanmaa, 1993; Carlsons and Lintott, 2008; Lehtinen, Kuisma and Mäcklin, 2019), and somaesthetics (e.g., Shusterman, 1999) but also in empirical research within empirical aesthetics (e.g., Menninghaus et al., 2019) and many other areas.

The convergence of new approaches and acceptance of different aesthetic phenomena prompts further questions: Are we prepared for a re-evaluation of beauty – a reconsideration of the role of beauty in art and everyday life? Is the topic of beauty still relevant and attractive in aesthetics?

The first serious question addressed in this issue of *ESPES* is whether we are truly aware of what the common yet aesthetically compelling concept of 'beauty' signifies. Although we intuitively know its meaning, a closer reflection reveals that the concept is multi-layered, ambiguous, and sometimes even unclear and indefinite. It is one of those 'strong' notions, according to Ricœur (1974), i.e., notions which mean too much and therefore they mean nothing or mean too many things at the same time, resulting in conflicting applications.

The presented studies in the journal problematize the concept of beauty among philosophers, aestheticians, or art theorists, as well as in the everyday language of art-untrained users. The papers contemplate what this 'umbrella concept' refers to and how its various semantic dimensions can be mapped. Do we designate the same thing with this term? Is there a way to verify it? The question arises whether such a conceptual understanding of the concept of beauty is necessary at all. The need for a pragmatic use in linguistic approach is also highlighted, for its crucial role in our understanding and use of a given notion, not restricted only to theoretical discourse alone – non-theoretical uses also influence, from a pragmatic perspective, the use of the notion as such (see e. g. Mandelbaum, 1970).

Even after considering the linguistic/analytic/terminological approach, the notion of beauty is still not charted in its complexity and opens new questions, as the 'reframing' of beauty is not fulfilled. Is beauty a matter of things, of their objective qualities and forms? Or is it rather a property relating to our perceptions, judgments, and experiences? Is it something empirically real, or is it 'just' an idea, a concept, or an entity of our thinking and experiencing? Does it exist independently of us, and does it make sense to think about it only through the perspective of the beholder? Is it necessary to learn to perceive it, or is it instinctively obvious? Is there a universal beauty, or are there countless diverse and incomparable types? How do the idea and ideal of beauty change over time, and how do political, social, cultural, and other geopolitical factors influence them?

Some phenomenologists (e.g., Heidegger, 1985, p. 242) believe that beauty opens the possibility for us to see concealed aspects of reality – that beauty attracts and unveils 'knowledge' about things that would otherwise remain hidden from us. It is thus an initial, transitional station toward understanding things in their unhiddenness. However, Gadamer (1960, p. 481) argues that beauty reveals itself to us without the need for any conceptual pre-understanding. Beauty is visible, evident in itself, and immediately accessible through contemplation. Its value does not need to be illuminated by concepts. This allows it to simultaneously claim, in a Kantian sense, its general validity and obligatoriness. According to these phenomenologists, beautiful things assume they are beautiful for everyone and not just subjectively pleasing to somebody. Beauty, therefore, only needs to be shown, and those who are not blinded by it can (must?) perceive it. But is it truly so?

It seems that the most common way to think about beauty is through its ostentatious presentation – encountering it significant examples. Literature, museums, galleries, or concert halls are spaces where we often confront what other people generally consider beautiful. These are places where beauty can be glimpsed, sometimes in its timeless form and other times as a reflection of the contemporary and contextual perception, but always in the most concentrated form and in its evident presence. However, understanding beauty extends beyond grand concert halls and exhibition spaces to encompass every kind of aesthetic reality.

Beauty is part of our everyday life. We surround ourselves with it, seek it out, beautify ourselves (Davies, 2020), and our dwellings (ESPES 11/2, 2022), and choose things based on whether we like them or not. This happens in partner selection, fashion, the media industry, architecture, utility design, and more. Beauty has always influenced and still influences (Davies, 2020), our preferences even where we might not expect it (Schellekens, 2008).

On the other hand, this everyday and often common beauty becomes banal or less visible due to its obviousness. Compared to it, we seek extraordinary 'high' or conversely 'deep' beauty that shakes, touches, and moves us. It is this kind of beauty that Scruton describes as an experience of transcendence, the perception of the value of Being (Scruton, 2009). It is precisely this extraordinary beauty that we seek from time to time.

Despite some theorists suggesting beauty may have somewhat disappeared from the center of artistic production, beauty remains an important part of our existence and may have even evolved and taken new forms. We believe – and the following papers may illustrate this claim sufficiently – that with an increasing saturation of other life needs, beauty is once again coming to the forefront of our interest and desire. It is only natural that with changes in the world, the forms of beauty we produce and long for, as well as our understanding of ourselves and our needs, are changing. With new knowledge and possibilities, the need for a reassessment of beauty and its meaning to us arises.

The approach to review and reframe beauty can focus on three areas: 1/ The notion of beauty as a linguistic form (Démuth and Démuthová), 2/ Aesthetic properties of an object or phenomena that make it beautiful (Focosi and Corvino, Furia, Kirwan, Kišoňová, Nacif, Raccanelli), 3/ A special kind of experience necessary to experience beauty (Furia, Kirwan, Kolditz).

In the current issue, all three areas are present. The issue begins with the paper by James Kirwan, titled *To What Does the Word 'Beauty' Refer?*. He starts with a short but crucial comment: we need to focus on the aesthetic properties of objects considered beautiful and perceive them through aesthetic experience. According to him, beauty is not something causing an aesthetic experience. This position is important in the understanding and critical evaluation of later papers, for example that by Brit Kolditz. In defining beauty, Kirwan tries to base his analysis not on common features of beautiful properties (as is customary in finding necessary and sufficient conditions) but on different characteristics of aesthetic properties. He builds his essay on the idea that "although an aesthetic property exists only in attribution, what property is attributed will depend on the presence of certain objective properties: properties that are necessary, though not sufficient, to arouse a particular feeling about the object." His paper is a complex contribution to the discussed issue that disputes the need for a universal formula of beauty and comments on the issue of beautiful objects, e.g., a human face.

Andrej Démuth and Slávka Démuthová contribute to the issue with the paper *On the Indeterminacy of the Concept of Beauty and the Reasons for its Use*. The ambiguity of the notion of beauty is the central issue of the paper, creating a paradox in its usage. The aim of the paper is to find reasons for using the notion despite the lack of valid and clear rules of applying the word itself. The authors proceed from a linguistic-semantic (epistemological, semantic, conceptual) and empirical analysis of the connotations of the concept of beauty to uncover evolutionary, existential, and transcendental reasons for applying the category of beauty.

A case study about one possible conception of beauty is proposed by Fillipo Focosi and Pier Francesco Corvino in their paper *Another look at Jared S. Monroe's Comprehensive View of Beauty*. At its core, the paper is not a historical analysis aimed at re-interpreting one text from a different point of view. Even if it provides an overview of the 1942 paper *Beauty as Harmony* by Jared S. Moore, the main reasons both authors choose this piece is Moore's understanding of classic theories, which he finds defective. Both authors view Monroe's approach as a modernization of the classic theory of beauty and, therefore, as an actualization and reframing of the concept itself. This reframing could be inspiring even for the present time and deserves more attention. Focosi and Corvino understand the analysed paper as a modernization of the formalist account of beauty, narrowing the notion to help define the class of beautiful objects.

Another methodological yet thematic piece, the first paper in the field of environmental aesthetics is present in the paper *Beauty Between Space, Place,*

and Landscape: Recovering the Substantive and Normative Character of Beauty by Paolo Furia. The central idea of the paper is "that the geographical concepts of space and place are the locus of a possible recuperation of the relationships between the beautiful and the good". The interchangeable use of the notion space and place is criticized, with a focus on the importance of beauty. Both terms are discussed not only from an aesthetic point of view but also from the position of spatial theory, with the aesthetic approach, through the category of beauty, being crucial. The leitmotif of the paper, yet not the final conclusion, is that beauty is a determinant responsible for a change of space into place. This argument is later developed in the context of the environment.

A second, slightly unconventional contribution to environmental aesthetics (or atmosphere discourse) is offered by Brit Kolditz with his paper *Focusing on the Loss of the Sky-Blue Environment*. This paper is implicitly more environmentally focused in the meaning of the engaging approach used, but the category of beauty is used comprehensively, placing the beauty of the blue sky at its center. The central issue of this paper are the changing aesthetic properties of the blue sky, possibly escaping our perception. Kolditz wonders why the sky is not a part of broader discussions and realizes that we are only able to it from a distance and not directly participate in it. This may be one of the reasons why this huge, visible part of our everyday life is not also to this extent present in the aesthetic discourse. The main focus of the author is to create an inspirational paper intended 'to stimulate aesthetes and aestheticians to have their own lived experiences and to look up to the sky', and at the same time, to stimulate further aesthetic thoughts.

Laura Raccanelli brings a critical-based analysis in the paper *Varnishing Facades, Erasing Memory: Reading Urban Beautification with Critical Whiteness Studies*. It is a contribution to urban aesthetics, but at the same time, it could be classified as a contribution to postcolonial discourse. Her aim is to demonstrate the role of visibility in the spatial organization of stigmatized neighborhoods of cities, with an emphasis on the racist configuration of urban space. This paper focuses on understanding how top-down beautification operations, masking processes of racial discrimination, mitigate the symbolic and structural violence inherent in aestheticization operations. Beauty, in her account, is clearly understood as a canon, a social outcome or fact, that is able in its normativity to have a negative effect, influencing the form of regulation of life and potentially becoming a tool of discrimination because beauty is a discursive construction. She puts urban beautification in connection with discrimination and addresses it from the perspective of 'neocolonialism'. Beauty and beautification are, therefore, understood as something dangerous when implemented without the knowledge of a special and complex context.

Reacting to Kirwan's example of the beauty of the human face is Renáta Kišoňová's paper titled *Beauty of Human Face in Contemporary Interdisciplinary Discourse*. The paper focuses on the analysis of facial beauty in the context of contemporary interdisciplinary research (especially contemporary cognitive science, neuropsychology, and evolutionary biology). It explores reasons for preferences towards some faces, delving into the mechanism of evaluating

faces and the evolutionary determination of facial beauty perception. The author proposes three parameters for measuring facial beauty according to Anjan Chatterjee (2015): averageness, symmetry, and sexual dimorphism, completing them with the 'straight profile' aspect. This paper is mainly a general analysis of contemporary discourse, offering valuable insight into a complex but informative contribution.

The thematic section of this issue of *ESPES* concludes with a short paper, *Hiroshima's Bag Lady: Increasing the Parameters of the Real* by Luciana Nunes Nacif. Her focus is on fashion designer Rei Kawakubo and her 1981 Paris collection, with the intention "to question one of the axioms of Western culture: the French monopoly of elegance…" (Vinken, 2023, p. 20) and therefore, the monopoly of beauty in the fashion industry. Nacif identifies three aspects of Kawakubo's work that are crucial for the issue of beauty: negative aesthetics, the 'hack' of the fashion system, and the concept of deconstruction in fashion. This deconstruction is visible in the new search for beauty, in the search for a 'new' beauty and the establishment of a novel relationship between beauty and fashion. Despite its brevity, this contribution clearly shows the evolving understanding of beauty based on a conceptual and deeper understanding of phenomena.

The editorial board of *ESPES* and guest-editor Andrej Démuth aspired to foster a new discourse on the concept of beauty, contemplating it in new situations and uncovering fresh perspectives. While the endeavour may have been ambitious, part of this initiative was to find and identify a 'new beauty'. The papers in this thematic issue can be divided into two categories: a) methodological papers about beauty (Kirwan, Démuth and Démuthová, Focosi and Corvino), b) discussions and discoveries about new areas of beauty (Furia, Nacif, Kišoňová, Kolditz, Raccanelli). While the papers did not yield a definitive definition of beauty for the 21st century, some similar (although partial) conclusions emerged about the normative nature of beauty. Humans remain central to understanding and defining the properties of beauty, with as much diversity identified in people as in the beautiful objects of everyday life or in art.

Ultimately, determining whether the issue fulfilled the expectations of the editorial board of *ESPES* is a challenging task. The evaluation of this theoretical contribution lies in the hands of other theoreticians and readers of the journal. As editors, we are convinced that some degree of reframing occurred. We hope that this issue will serve as at least another catalyst for future discussions on the subject.

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Andrej Démuth
Comenius University
Šafárikovo námestie 6
810 00 Bratislava 1
Slovakia
andrej.demuth@uniba.sk

Lukáš Makky
University of Prešov
17. novembra 1
080 01 Prešov
Slovakia
lukas.makky@unipo.sk

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10473720

To What Does the Word ‘Beauty’ Refer?

James Kirwan

Beauty is a particular kind of aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience can be divided into various categories according to the kind of aesthetic property (beautiful, sublime, elegant, cool, profound, etc.) that is attributed to the object. The phenomenal bases of these different properties are the objective qualities shared by the objects to which the category is attributed. That is, objects that are, for example, perceived as sublime can be shown to have certain objective qualities in common. This holds true of all nameable aesthetic properties except for beauty. Even within the same class of objects, there are no discoverable common objective qualities that are necessarily present in every attribution of beauty. This lack of *content* to beauty has led to the word being used informally as a blanket term for aesthetic value. However, where this use has entered aesthetics (as the philosophy of art), obfuscation has resulted. | *Keywords: Beauty, Definition, Aesthetic Experience, Aesthetic Categories, Art*

The word ‘beauty’ primarily refers to a *kind* of aesthetic experience. An aesthetic experience is the experience of perceiving an object or idea to possess a certain type of property: the property, for example, of being beautiful, pretty, graceful, elegant, charming, dainty, exquisite, cute, glamorous, cool, picturesque, exotic, gorgeous, sublime, grand, noble, majestic, solemn, profound, witty, and so on. Of course, I do not wish to suggest that such a list, however far it might be extended, would be a list of aesthetic properties that are somehow primitive. In any particular culture, that is, in any particular place at any particular moment, any two or more of the categories in this list might overlap to create what is recognized as a separate basic category (so that the distinctions I have made might appear too nice); alternatively, any one of the categories in the list might easily be divided, even here and now, into recognizable sub-categories (the internet’s abbreviation of what counts as a generation has resulted in a stream of such, often short lived, aesthetic terms, but they have always been a staple of slang); alternatively again, what appears a sub-category from the point of view of my list of ‘basics’ might itself be perceived, at some time in some place, as basic. Moreover, there could be

some aesthetic categories so alien to the tradition upon which this list depends that they could not possibly be constructed from any subdivision or combination of its items.

Nevertheless, there are characteristics any such property would have to have in common with the items on my list for it count as an instance of aesthetic experience. For example, none of the terms on the list denotes an objective property of the object to which the property is attributed. Rather, such an attribution is made on the basis of a feeling in the observer (in the same way as a joke is funny, an event sad, or an action morally wrong). The feeling itself is experienced as pleasure, or at least some form of reward, in the very perception of the property *in itself* (that is, independently of the satisfaction, or promise of the satisfaction, of any conscious interest). In the case of the aesthetic experience of an artwork, it may be that a specific, nameable aesthetic property such as appears in the list above, may occur only as a local affect or, indeed, that no such property is present at all. (It can even be that, in terms of local effects, negative aesthetic properties – for example, ugliness – predominate.) Nevertheless, the overall aesthetic effect of the work is positive – one is glad to have had the experience, *for its own sake*[1] – even if the only 'aesthetic property' that could be attributed to the work turns out to be peculiar to one's experience of that work and, therefore, nameless.

An aesthetic property, then, is a value. It is a characterization of the way objects appear to us when we feel a certain way about them. This is why I began by defining aesthetic experience as the perceiving of objects to possess certain properties, rather than simply the experience of certain properties. Nevertheless, it is customary to divide aesthetic experience according to the nature of the objects of the experience – the beautiful, cute, sublime, profound, and so on – and to describe the object as 'pleasing in itself'. It seems quite natural to speak of the 'aesthetic qualities' of a thing: just as if the aesthetic property we attribute to it was really an intrinsic property of that object. We ask questions like 'What are its aesthetic qualities?' or 'Does it have aesthetic qualities?' Given, however, that an 'aesthetic quality' is an aspect of an 'aesthetic object' and an object is only an 'aesthetic object' to you if it is the occasion of your aesthetic experience, it must be that an 'aesthetic quality' is such only for one who sees the object as an "aesthetic object". You may point to this colour, this curve, this angle, the expression of this thought, the relationship between this and this, and so on, in attempting to show me why the object has the aesthetic property you attribute to it, but, if I see all these things and still do not feel as you do, they are simply not 'aesthetic qualities' for me. I might equally say that you cannot *see* that the object does not possess the aesthetic property you attribute to it. It is a matter of taste.

However, let us turn now from what all aesthetic properties have in common, to what distinguishes them from one another. We are, after all, in search of the peculiar referent of one such property: 'beauty'. Although I have characterised

[1] The disinterest of aesthetic experience is, of course, only a matter of appearance. However, I am here concerned only with the classification of such experience, not with its cause, which I have dealt with elsewhere: see Kirwan (2019).

the aesthetic experience very crudely as a *pleasure* in the perception of an object or idea, the affective tone of each property, and even each instance of any property, is actually distinct. (Indeed, I have suggested that the aesthetic property the spectator may attribute to an artwork may be unique to that experience of that artwork.) For example, some properties, such as the pretty or the graceful, may appear as simply immediate 'visual pleasures' (as if the eye itself were pleased), while others, like the profound or the sublime, may appear almost constituted by, or at least inseparable from, a sense of ineffable meaningfulness. However, there is no pressing need in discourse to characterise the affective tone of each aesthetic experience. Since we attribute our own aesthetic responses purely to the characteristics of the object before us, simply describing the object as pretty, graceful, profound, sublime, and so on, is sufficient to convey what we are feeling. (Though, as mentioned already, there will be instances, and not just with art, where no such shorthand aesthetic vocabulary is available, and, of course, the matter may become more problematic when it comes to translating synchronically or diachronically.)

Aesthetic experiences, then, are most intuitively divided from one another according to the kind of perceived property that arouses them, by the perceived *finding* of an object to be thus or thus. Indeed, if a property has a discrete identity within aesthetic vocabulary – a name – it will be because there is a general agreement on the common objective conditions that are likely to lead to the attribution of that property. Therefore, even though it is by no means given that any particular person will find any particular kitten cute or any particular volcano sublime, it is true that more people are likely to attribute cuteness to a kitten than to a volcano, and sublimity to the volcano rather than the kitten. Similarly, it is possible to be aware of the intention to produce an object that will be sublime or one that will be cute, without actually attributing sublimity or cuteness to the respective objects.

In order to demonstrate what is distinctive about beauty, I shall here briefly describe the common objective conditions that are likely to lead to the attribution of three other, randomly chosen, aesthetic properties: the sublime, the graceful, and the cute.

The characteristics of objects likely to be found sublime, and the quality of the experience of sublimity itself, are generally agreed (Kirwan, 2014). The feeling is one of uplift and potency, a sense of rising above one's mundane self, and is generally taken to be precipitated by the mind's extrapolating from a perception the continuation of quantity to that point where it can no longer be imagined (as with the sight of vast buildings, mountains, immense caverns, wide expanses of water, clouds, the starry sky, great cities, or armies, or the thought of inconceivably long lapses of time, universal principles and general theorems in science, etc.), or by a vivid impression of the *potentially* lethal consequences of the object perceived (storms, raging seas, torrents, volcanoes, precipices, ferocious animals, war, the thought of the end of time, etc.), or by a sense of unlimited potency arising from a perception of the apparently insuperable distance that separates our own potency from that displayed (the idea of God, heroic deeds, great fortitude or magnanimity or self-command,

evidence of contempt of death or power or honours, great intellectual abilities, etc.). It is because we can discern certain principles at work in the generation of the feeling that we can predict likely candidates to precipitate that feeling – volcanoes, not kittens – though, of course, an object that is sublime to one person might be frightening, bombastic, or a matter of indifference to another.

Likewise with the graceful: it appears relatively easy to discern the phenomenal conditions for its presence, to see the reason why the same property is attributed to disparate objects, even if it is more difficult to characterize the feeling perceiving gracefulness gives us – at least without waving our arms about. Gracefulness is attributed pre-eminently to motion: one rises gracefully to one's feet, one dives gracefully, one dances gracefully, and so on, or to passive motion that mimics such activity (the swaying of branches). It can also be attributed to static objects where the lines (and, therefore, the movement of the eye between one point and another) imply such a motion: *contrapposto*, the arch of a bridge, cursive script, and so on. This notion of easy movement, or economy of effort, is also to be found in what sounds graceful: the same passage is more likely to strike one as graceful when played legato rather than staccato, and unlikely to sound graceful at all if it includes sudden extreme shifts in pitch, key, or volume. Gracefulness, then, is the property attributed to an object when it is perceived to *conspicuously* express economy of force in motion, or the perfect expression of intention in execution, either within the organic realm or in a form that is reminiscent of the way in which this dynamic is expressed within the organic realm. Again, as with the sublime, what is graceful to one, say baroque ornamentation, may be simply fussy to another, but this does not mean that there are not some objects more likely than others to have gracefulness attributed to them. We would be highly surprised to hear the movement of a piston or the contours of a Brutalist tower block described as 'graceful'.

I will end this brief sample of aesthetic properties with one that will perhaps serve as a striking contrast to sublimity: cuteness. As with the sublime, cuteness has a recognized set of easily identifiable characteristics likely to arouse the feeling. These characteristics, at least insofar as they belong to real or imaginary creatures, tend to mainly reproduce the differences in form between the typical human infant and adult: they are predominantly (though not exclusively) signs of neotony. The cute figure possesses a large head in relation to the body, eyes set relatively low in a round face, a soft rounded body with foreshortened limbs, and so on. The movements of the figure are awkward or clumsy: like the imperfect imitation of mature movement patterns. However, potentially cute characteristics are to be found not only in infants, but also in the young of other animals (puppies, kittens, ducklings, etc.) and even in the adult form of others (koalas, pandas, sloths, etc.). Therefore, it appears to be the quality of sentient vulnerability, rather than simply neotony that is cute. Indeed, the human infant is not the most reliable stimulus for the experience of cuteness, nor is the cuteness of other things directly proportional to the extent to which they remind us of human infants. (Limbs without digits, floppy ears, and fur are all reliable elicitors of the feeling

of cuteness.) This vulnerability can be found in exaggerated/stylized form in such prototypically cute figures as Miffy or Hello Kitty. In general, then, there is a perception of cuteness where the object is perceived as *by nature* vulnerable (small, weak, etc., though not fragile), harmless, inarticulate (to the extent of lacking a discernible mouth), good-natured, and guileless. Moreover, the momentary impression of the possession of such a character, even in an inanimate object, can produce an impression of cuteness in the absence of the formal/physical characteristics listed above.[2] Moreover, as with the sublime and the graceful, despite the ease of characterizing the objective properties that arouse the feeling that a thing is cute, finding any particular thing cute is still a matter of taste. To find a thing cute is not simply to perceive these qualities; it is to experience them as somehow attractive, as arousing a feeling of affection – the thing is adorable, lovable, dear – that *feels* rooted in a desire to protect, though there may be no practical orientation to this 'desire'. Indeed, just as what is sublime or graceful to one, may be a matter of indifference (or terrifying or affected) to another, what is cute to one may be a matter of indifference (or infantile, maudlin, or even grotesque) to another. 'Winsome' can denote a negative reaction, as, indeed, for some people, can 'cute' itself.

One could go on with analyses of other aesthetic categories, but the point is, I think, established: although an aesthetic property exists only in attribution, what property is attributed will depend on the presence of certain objective properties: properties that are necessary, though not sufficient, to arouse a particular feeling about the object.[3]

It may seem odd to have spent so much space outlining the objective characteristics of things that are likely to lead to the attribution of sublimity, gracefulness, and cuteness when our topic here is a different aesthetic category: beauty. I have done so, however, to emphasize a fundamental point: that it is not possible to undertake a similar analysis in the case of beauty. This is what is distinctive about beauty: it does not have the kind of *content* that the other items in our list of aesthetic properties have. With those, as we have seen, there are common abstract properties that cut across the categories to which the specific object belongs. This is what makes it possible for a storm, a vast ruin, or the idea of God to all be potentially sublime, and a dance, a bridge, or an apology to all be potentially graceful. In contrast, what unifies the experience of beauty is not any such set of abstract properties but rather simply the feeling itself that leads to the attribution.

Indeed, attributions of beauty cut across types of objects and ideas too disparate – a face, the sea, a patch of light, a line of poetry, the smell of newly-turned earth – to have anything in common apart from their beauty to some particular perceiver. When a dancer is compared to a gazelle, it is possible to point to common objective characteristics of the two that are to be found in

[2] Schiller's description of naivety illustrates how it may also be instantiated by behaviour, regardless of appearance (Schiller, 1795, pp. 182–189).

[3] This is markedly the case with enduring public objects, such as works of art, often leading to the illusion that the aesthetic experience of them is, somehow, not a matter of taste.

every instance of the perception of gracefulness. In contrast, it is only where the beauty of an object is conventionally assumed, that it is possible invoke it as a comparison with the beautiful object to hand; as Shakespeare compares the Fair Youth to a summer's day, or the *Thousand and One Nights* describes a woman being as beautiful as the moon shining on the sea. One would look in vain for what unites these things, beyond the attribution of beauty.[4]

Nevertheless, could there not be a specific content common to attributions of beauty to members of the same class: necessary features of natural beauty, the beauty of music, human beauty, and so on? Levinson, for example, arguing for "the irreducible variety of visual beauty" proposes the existence of "at least six fundamentally different properties of visual beauty": "*abstract beauty, artistic beauty, artifactual beauty, natural beauty, physical beauty, and moral beauty*, the last two being modes of *human beauty*" (2011, p. 193). His objection to positing visual beauty as a single category (despite the seven instances of the same word in his sentence) does not come from a conviction that there may not be a single property – beauty – "supervening" on the different subvenient classes he lists, but rather from his rejection of the idea of a single formal property that they might all have in common: a formula for objective properties that makes all beautiful things beautiful (2011, pp. 190–191; 205–206). Clearly, the rejection of such a formula, despite the historical popularity of such formulas, is fully justified, even within the realm of visual beauty, let alone when we come to consider non-visual beauty. However, Levinson does not completely relinquish the idea of intrinsically beautiful properties. If there is no universal formula for the qualities that make a thing beautiful, there are, he claims, appropriate class-specific sets of properties: in effect, formulas for what is likely to lead to the attribution of beauty for each of his six fundamental categories.

However, it seems prima facie unlikely that there is a specific beauty peculiar to classes of objects, if only because, as we have seen, where aesthetic responses do obviously depend on a certain content, the vocabulary to describe what is being responded to will coalesce into a specific term: sublime, graceful, cute, elegant, profound, cool, and so on. Yet this is not the case with 'beauty': there are no class-specific names for the beauty of different classes of objects (unless, of course, one uses 'beauty', as many have, to mean aesthetic value in general). Moreover, one does not need a universal formula to justify or explain the use of 'beauty' across the unlimited range of objects to which it is attributed: the attribution of beauty signifies a certain kind of feeling about the object, and this feeling depends upon the meaning of that thing for a particular subject at a particular moment.[5] In short, while the attribution of beauty will, of course, depend on characteristics of the object, what makes

[4] Of course, this has not stopped people from trying to do so. However, none of the formulas put forward – the *kanon*, the golden section, symmetry, uniformity amidst variety, and so on – has ever achieved general acceptance, though, like the hypothesis of a flat earth, they are perennial.

[5] I will not here be analysing the grounds of this feeling. I have done so at length in my *Beauty* of 1999. The full text of that work, now out of print, can be downloaded from my webpage: https://jameskirwan.org/.

those characteristics beautiful for you is, ineluctably, a matter of you. There is no need to posit the existence of *objectively* beauty-making properties in the object at all.

Nevertheless, let us take what is probably the most discussed class of potentially beautiful objects – the human face – and see if there might not be a specific objective content equivalent to those found in instances of sublimity, gracefulness, cuteness, and so on.

The notion of a certain symmetrical proportion being the 'key' to the content of beauty inherits a venerable tradition. For Plato, it is measure and symmetry which are eternally and absolutely beautiful (1997, pp. 441; 454). Later, for the Stoics, *symmetria* or proportion is absolutely beautiful, beautiful in itself, and, later still, Augustine distinguishes between the appropriate (*aptum*, *decorum*), an apt and mutual correspondence between design and use that is relative to each thing, and the beautiful (*pulchrum*), which is an order, rhythm, and harmony within objects themselves (1961, p. 83). This passes into the idea of "uniformity amidst variety" that is orthodox in the eighteenth century, and still finds an echo in the highly influential formalism of twentieth-century aesthetics' adaption to the avant-garde.

There is, notionally, an ideal form of the human face, in the sense that the face implies symmetry, and a norm (depending on ethnicity, sex, and age): an average implied by the actual range of deviations in such things as the relative proportions of different areas of the face. Moreover, perceptions of beauty are demonstrably related to closeness to this norm (Naini, 2011, pp. 158–164; Langlois and Roggman, 1990). (Indeed, the primary function of cosmetic surgery is the correction of "*abnormal* craniofacial morphology", that is, the reconstruction of the face to make it more closely approximate the average.[6])

However, while the symmetry and proportion implied by closeness to the norm appears to be a necessary for a face to be perceived as not deformed (which perception would preclude beauty), this does not actually mean that beauty is directly proportional to closeness to the norm, with the perfectly average face being, presumably, inevitably beautiful. No human face possesses perfect bilateral symmetry. Unsurprisingly, then, 'normal' asymmetry is generally found more attractive, at least at present, than perfect symmetry, which is generally perceived as abnormal (Langlois, Roggman, and Musselman, 1994, p. 217). That is, there are limiting factors to how close one can come to the ideal implicit in the norm before there is a negative aesthetic affect. Bacon was right to claim that "There is no Excellent *Beauty*, that hath not some Strangenesse in the Proportion" (1625, p. 252). Nevertheless, we might still ask if these beauty-making deviations, this "strangeness", can be quantified.

Indeed, there are some divergences from the ideal proportions implied by the norm, that are often present in faces perceived to be beautiful. For example, the likelihood that a face is perceived as beautiful increases with departures from the norm in the direction of exaggerations in neotony (such

[6] The expression comes from Naini (2011, p. 123). The emphasis is mine.

characteristically juvenile features as relatively large eyes, full lips, or a rounder face) and sexual dimorphism (features that constitute the differences between the norms of femininity or masculinity). However, these perhaps predictable departures from the real average are still not decisive. It may be precisely a *marked* departure from the norm (high cheekbones, the beauty spot, unusually deep set or prominent eyes, an overbite, gap teeth, and so on) that constitutes the beauty for the perceiver. The presence of an upper eye lid crease, for example, is demonstrably admired in Japan, where it is uncommon, while its absence might likewise be considered beautiful where its presence is common.

However, departures from the norm in the direction of neotony, sexual dimorphism, or exoticism are only the crudest of factors that may be operative in the perception of facial beauty for any particular perceiver. There is also the matter of association, as is clearly demonstrated by historical changes in the consensus on what is ideal. At any moment in time, there appears to be an ideal, that is partly a matter of biological norms, partly a matter of the degree of exaggeration of neotony, sexual dimorphism, and exoticism, partly a matter of divergence from the previous ideal of the relation between these things, and partly a matter of cultural context. This context may be a matter of such relatively enduring elements as associations with class, to such fleeting phenomena as the fame of exemplars of a type. Thus, the ideally beautiful face of any milieu may be far from the implicit norm for faces within that milieu. This can be manifest in a number of ways: for example, in the implausible similarity between faces in an era's portraiture, in the family resemblance between the acknowledged 'beauties' of an age, in trends in cosmetics, or in the algorithms of face-altering computer applications.[7] Yet even if one were to derive a set of proportions from the specific ideal of an era, so that one could predict what that era would find beautiful, not only would that be meaningless in a different milieu or a different place, but it is also still possible for a face to be widely perceived as beautiful (and sometimes create its own ideal) despite its marked departure from the prevailing ideal of the milieu from which the ideal emerged (as happened, for example, with Irene Papas, Sophia Loren, and Julia Roberts). Finally, none of this even touches on the matter of personal association, which is at once decisive and yet completely obscure in its workings.

The pursuit of a geometrical formula for facial beauty, a desire to uncover the 'secret' of beauty, appears to be always with us, from the notion of the *kanon* to the latest article on how scientists have finally 'discovered' it. The latter often include computer-generated images of the ideal implicit in the choices of their test subjects, or a photograph of the model/actress found to most closely conform to the average facial proportions implied from a consensus on contemporary 'beauties', thus helpfully demonstrating the risible nature of the entire procedure, at least considered as a revelation of the objective conditions

[7] Hence, Leonardo da Vinci's advice for creating a beautiful face: "Look about you and take the best parts of many beautiful faces, of which the beauty is established rather by public fame than by your own judgement" (2008, p. 209).

of facial beauty per se. For, there is, of course, no facial beauty per se; there is only the beauty of this face, now, in your feeling that it is beautiful, and no way to say how it is so beyond pointing to characteristics that, in another time or place, or even to a contemporary, would be a matter of indifference.

It might be argued that this does not make it different to, for example, the sublimity of any particular view of a volcano, or the cuteness of Hello Kitty. Not everyone will find that view sublime or Hello Kitty cute. The difference lies in the fact that, if a person does find them so, we can point to the qualities of the object that are likely arousing those feeling and offer a plausible account of how those qualities are at play in those feelings. By contrast, in the case of the beauty of a particular face to someone, we can say nothing of the qualities involved, (beyond pointing to the fact that it is a face) or the mechanism of the feeling. In short, even the conditions of beauty for a single class of objects (faces) appears to be unquantifiable. How much "strangeness" is requisite? Just the right amount to make the face beautiful (to you). It is apt, then, that this quality was once referred to as the *je ne sais quoi* (Pascal, 1670, pp. 9; 90; Bouhours, 1671, pp. 231–238).

There is that in all aesthetic experience that makes us want the property we attribute to the object to belong intrinsically to the object to which we attribute it. However, whether an instance of the expression of power is sublime or bombastic, or an instance of the expression of economy of effort graceful or affected, or an instance of the expression of helplessness cute or grotesque, is entirely a matter of taste: a matter of what those expressions mean to us. Where beauty differs, not only from these examples, but apparently from all other aesthetic categories, is that there is no expression to point to, no abstract properties common to all objects, that might potentially instantiate it for the perceiver. The conditions for beauty are not quantifiable even within a single class of objects, let alone across different classes.

This very lack of *content* is perhaps why the word 'beauty' has had such a strange and confusing career. For one thing, it is often, justifiably, used as a general expression of aesthetic approval for a host of related effects that could be (perhaps pedantically) differentiated: graceful, elegant, glamorous, etc. For another, since there can exist, at any particular time, a public consensus on what, among a certain class, is 'beautiful' (facial beauty being a prime example), it is even possible to say, 'I do not like beauty': a phrase that, taken literally, is as meaningless as saying 'Pain does not hurt me'. However, perhaps, the most potentially confusing use of 'beauty' is to refer to aesthetic experience in general, particularly when, as in the philosophical discipline of aesthetics in modern times, 'aesthetic' is taken to refer primarily to the qualities of art.[8]

From the classical world, through the medieval, to the Renaissance and into the early modern era, theorizing about beauty and theorizing about art were

[8] For more on this, see Kirwan (2012). Here, I will offer just two samples from a century apart: "The starting-point for all systems of aesthetics must be the personal experience of a peculiar emotion. The objects that provoke this emotion we call works of art" (Bell, 1913, p. 6); "[The] object of aesthetic experience is the way in which the artwork is embodied or presented" (Carroll, 2012, p. 165).

two different activities. The reproduction of natural (including human) beauty might be one laudable aim of art but was by no means its *raison d'être*.[9] Yet, in the nineteenth century Baudelaire would claim that "Beauty is the single ambition, the exclusive aim, of taste", and Pater that the "desire of beauty" is "a fixed element in every artistic organization"; Wilde would define the artist as a "creator of beautiful things" (Baudelaire, 1851, p. 266; Pater, 1889, p. 258; Wilde, 1891, p. v). It is probably such statements that lead Danto, who rightly holds that "beauty belongs neither to the essence nor the definition of art", to claim that the Victorians and Edwardians had (mistakenly) held that creation of beauty was the goal of art (2003, pp. 59; 29). This perhaps overlooks the extent to which Baudelaire, Wilde, and Pater are, in their pronouncements, taking a stand against the mainstream rather than simply repeating it. (The enlisting of art to the cause of ethics, often at the expense of aesthetic considerations, was as much a feature of criticism in their age as it is in ours.)

Indeed, the Victorians did not believe that the creation of *literal* beauty was the purpose of art. In the middle of the century, Ruskin could assert that great art introduces only as much beauty as is consistent with the truth, and that when truth is sacrificed to beauty, and thereby deprived of its proper foil, the result is false art (1856, pp. 33-36). Bascom will plainly state that beauty is not the "exclusive object" of the fine arts, and Day that the "proper aim of art" is not pleasure but rather the effecting of a "communication between different spirits" (Bascom, 1867, p. 7; Day, 1872, pp. 20–21). Thus, in the early twentieth century, when Maritain prefaces his remarks on beauty and art with the acknowledgement that the association is now "old-fashioned", he is probably thinking more of a past fashion (Aestheticism) rather than a settled tradition (1920, p. 122). In the same era Dewey describes "beauty" as a mere ejaculation: a word that has become "obstructive" to analysis and classification (1934, pp. 129–130).

Indeed, the use of 'beauty', with its inevitable association of spontaneous and inscrutable pleasure, in connection with art continued to irritate champions of art, and particularly modern art, throughout the twentieth century. There is something suspect about 'beauty' to Passmore: the works of Goya, Joyce, and Moussorgsky are not 'beautiful' (1951, p. 50). Beauty, he says, is too invariably "nice", too "soothing": "it is what the bourgeoisie pays the artist for" (*Ibid*). Sontag scorns the notion that the province of art is "the beautiful", with its implications of "unspeakableness, indescribability, ineffability" (1967, p. 31). Danto objects to the idea of *les beaux arts* on the grounds that, like the epithet "fair sex", it is a means, of "political translocation", of trivialising (1986, pp. 12–13). For Lyotard, beauty is not serious enough for the avant-garde: it is a mere matter of taste, addressing itself to "the 'common sense' of a shared pleasure" (1988, pp. 124–126). Levinson speaks for the mainstream of contemporary aesthetics (as the philosophy of art), when he asserts that art is not a matter of merely passive sensation but an active enjoyment: an informed pleasure, based on the understanding of the provenance, intentions and

[9] Too much space would be required to demonstrate this *lack* of identity. As an example of the diverse ends considered appropriate to art one might consider, for example, Alberti (2011, Book Two passim).

accomplishments of its object (1992, pp. 295–299). Moreover, the value of the experience of art may be, and often is, that it is worthwhile rather than enjoyable: some art "like castor oil, is good for you, though not immediately pleasant, yet unlike castor oil, the good of it may not be conceptually separable from the experience of imbibing" (Levinson, 1992, p. 296).

One might deplore the apparent animus towards beauty some of these uses express: beauty, after all, can be an aesthetic merit of an artwork, and it is certainly not ultimately any more 'mindless' than any other aesthetic experience, whatever the perceiver's perception of those other experiences. Yet, as I have indicated, it is not the case that this apparently anti-beauty standpoint is the result of changes in artistic practice or aesthetic expectation. Beauty never was considered the goal of art. However, as already noted, beauty's very lack of content not only leads to 'beauty' often being used as an abbreviation for a variety of aesthetic experiences but also as a synonym for 'aesthetic' itself. Even in the eighteenth century, an age famous for positing beauty and sublimity as a fundamental dichotomy, it was possible to speak of the 'beauty' of a composition lying in its 'sublimity'. This conflation of all aesthetic categories was also a feature of German idealism, so influential on the subsequent course of the philosophical discipline of aesthetics: Schlegel defines 'beauty' as "what is at once charming and sublime", and for Schelling the sublime is sublime only to the extent that it is beautiful (Schlegel, 1798, p. 30; Schelling, 1859, pp. 9–10).[10]

The 'beauty' that is supposed to characterize art is not, of course, supposed to refer to what it is generally used to refer to. For Hegel, the "beauty" of artworks is a function of the profundity of the "inner truth of their content and thought" (1835, I, p. 74). The real pleasure of art, according to Schelling, is the "active perception and reconstruction of the work of art by the understanding" (Schelling, 1859, p. 9). The effects of art, he concludes, are "merely effects of nature" for a person who does not make such a reconstruction, and while such a person may appreciate individual moments of beauty, they will never appreciate the "true" work of art, in which only the whole is "beautiful" (Schelling, 1859, p. 10). The nineteenth century seemed particularly drawn towards using 'beauty' and 'beautiful' as synonymous with 'aesthetic' and 'possessing aesthetic merit'. Samson, for example, writes that "The general impression produced on the human mind by works of art is entitled 'Beauty'" (Samson, 1868, p. 127).

Such a practice is obviously at odds with the common meaning of the word 'beauty'. Yet the response is not always the seeking of a more precise language for the experience of art. Sometimes, theorists have still wished to claim that the aim of art is 'beauty', though they do not mean the 'beauty' of common usage. This may take the form of asserting that what most people call 'beauty' is not a matter of aesthetics at all. Collingwood, for example, rescuing

[10] According to Schelling, the sublime, insofar as it is not beautiful, will be merely monstrous, and, conversely, absolute beauty must always be awesome (1859, p. 90). I have elsewhere given an account of how the experience of sublimity became the model of the experience of art in the nineteenth century, which it became customary to refer to as 'beauty', thus leading to a conflation of the two; see Kirwan (2005, chs 6–8 passim).

"the aesthetic" from beauty, writes that the beautiful is that which arouses some emotion or satisfies some desire: a "beautiful woman" is a sexually desirable one, a "beautiful day" is one that has the weather we need for some purpose, a "beautiful sunset" one that arouses in us certain notions we find pleasant (Collingwood, 1938, p. 37).[11] "Aesthetic", in contrast, according to Collingwood, does not have this reference to use. This is, however, an extreme case; far more often this generation of aestheticians would rather claim that what they are talking about when they talk about 'aesthetic value' is really 'beauty' but that careless use of the latter term has rendered it too imprecise. Both Croce and Bell do just this, consciously renaming what they believe was once called 'beauty' expression and significant form respectively (Croce, 1901, pp. 78–79; Bell, 1914, pp. 13–16). Some persist in using 'beauty', despite apparently agreeing with Collingwood's view of common usage. Fry, for example, claims there are two distinct uses of the word 'beauty': "one for that which has sensuous charm, and one for the aesthetic approval of works of imaginative art", one which refers to "only the perceptual aspect" of the imagination, and one which refers to the "appropriateness and intensity of the emotions aroused", the delight we feel at their fitness to the needs of the imaginative life (Fry, 1909, p. 20). Hartmann, concedes that 'beauty' can be used to mean what most people mean by 'beauty' – a distinct category (like sublimity, charm, etc.) of aesthetic experience – but prefers himself to use to word to refer to "the universal and basic value of aesthetics [including experiences of the sublime, charming, etc.], and subsume under it every work of art that is well done and effective" (Hartmann, 1953, pp. 7–8).

Indeed, the practice of using 'beauty' as synonymous with 'aesthetic value', and the presumption that art is its peculiar province, persists. According to Mothershill, beauty is a "standing concept" in aesthetics, one that is tacitly understood and indispensable; all works of art, she writes, "lay claim to beauty" by being art, and all critical remarks are made against the background of this claim and take it for granted (Mothershill, 1984, pp. 247; 45; 257–258). However, despite this identification, she still finds the pull of connotation too strong and ultimately distinguishes between what is not "only beautiful" but also "complex, difficult and profound" (Mothershill, 1984, pp. 422–424). Likewise, Savile writes that 'beauty' is the most general term of aesthetic praise, and explains its notable absence from contemporary critical discourse on the grounds that the critic's main concern is with showing not that but why a thing is beautiful (Savile, 1982, pp. 173–174). By 'beauty', however, he means a satisfactory answer to a problem in style, so that only a response to an object that derives from a proper understanding of this problem is fit to enter into a "judgement" of its "beauty", and its appreciation cannot be divorced from clarity of vision and accuracy of understanding, both of which may be corrected by the intellect (Savile, 1982, pp. 166-181). Let us finish with a final, recently encountered, example. The chapter entitled "Beauty" in Solomon and

[11] Collingwood's is a strange case, for in his earlier *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art* he takes quite a different viewpoint. There he defines the work of art as a product "intended to be beautiful," and the task of the philosophy of art as the studying of "the awareness of beauty" (1925, pp. 7l8). The "aesthetic power" of an object, he claims, is that object's power "to make us realize its beauty" (p. 35).

Higgins' textbook *The Big Questions: A Short Introduction to Philosophy* announces that the questions it will address will be "1. What is it that makes some human artifacts … art? 2. Is a copy of a great painting itself a work of art? 3. In what sense is art an imitation of reality? 4. Does the appreciation of beauty make us better (more moral) human beings? 5. What is your (personally) favorite work of art? How would you describe your relationship with it?" (Solomon and Higgins, 2017, p. 323).

Clearly, this "beauty" is not what most people mean by 'beauty'. Aesthetics, in using 'beauty' to mean 'what art is' or even 'what art is valued for' ends up with a 'beauty' that is only incidentally, if at all, connected with the experience of finding a thing beautiful.[12] A definition of 'beauty' that will help to explain why Duchamp's *Fountain* was a work of art, or what is distinctive about the work of Francis Bacon is not going to be a definition of 'beauty' as it is normally used. Moreover, when a technical term turns out to be less precise than its everyday use, one has to question its value as a technical term. 'Aesthetic' will do as well, and can refer to a class that may also, of course, include beauty in art.

The experience of an artwork is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for any kind of aesthetic experience let alone beauty. ('Art' refers to a class of objects, not a kind of experience.) Nevertheless, there is perhaps a reason why beauty is, perennially it seems, evoked in connection with art. As already mentioned, the overall aesthetic experience of an artwork is unlikely to be a matter of a single nameable aesthetic property (beauty, elegance, sublimity, profundity, etc.), and more likely to be peculiar in character to *this* experience of *this* work. At the same time, 'beauty', which, since it does not denote any specific contents (no common non-aesthetic properties across the range of objects to which it is attributed), has frequently been chosen as a shorthand for a range of aesthetic properties and thus aesthetic experience in general. If we add to this the tendency within aesthetics from the nineteenth century onwards to take art as its principal field of study, we can see how this chainlike series of connections can takes us from a point at which art and beauty had no intrinsic connection to a point at which, as we have seen, the question 'What is a work of art?' can come to appear integral to an analysis of beauty. Unfortunately, this is also a point at which 'beauty' comes to have several incompatible meanings within a single context. Clearly, many of the aestheticians considered in the last few pages were talking very much at cross purposes, sometimes even with themselves.

Finally, then, to answer the question of the title. 'Beauty' has been used to refer to several disparate, though not entirely unrelated, things. (I am leaving aside its use in slang to mean any excellent example of something; as one might, for example, refer to a particularly conspicuous black eye or delicious apple as 'a beauty'.) Its primary meaning – the one preserved by common usage – is a property perceived to have inspired a certain feeling, where it is

[12] For a fuller account of the twists and turns of the fate of 'beauty' at the hands of the discipline of aesthetics, see Kirwan (1999, pp. 93–118). Unfortunately, in that work I opted to relinquish the word 'aesthetic' to the philosophy or art; I now see that this leaves a problem with how to refer to all those aesthetic categories that are not beauty.

impossible to point to what characteristics that object possesses in common with other objects that have inspired the same feeling. (From the perceiver's point of view, of course, what they are referring to is a property that belongs intrinsically to a set of objective qualities, but this is an illusion.) No doubt the feeling itself is subtly different from what is felt in the perception of other nameable aesthetic categories, but it is easier to distinguish beauty from these others in terms of the comparative absence of common characteristics rather than by trying to adequately describe the precise affective tenor of every different kind of aesthetic experience. There is a further common and informal use of the word as a blanket term for a certain range of aesthetic properties that inspire a similar feeling (the graceful and elegant, for example, though not the cute or profound). Lastly, as we have seen, there is, at least among some writers in aesthetics (as the philosophy of art), a tendency to use 'beauty' as a blanket term for the aesthetic merits of works of art. This last use, given the common meaning of 'beauty', and the possible need to use 'beauty' with that common meaning in connection with a work of art, is simply obfuscatory.

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James Kirwan
Faculty of Letters, Kansai University
Japan
james_kirwan@hotmail.com

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10491689

On the Indeterminacy of the Concept of Beauty and the Reasons for its Use

Andrej Démuth – Slávka Démuthová

The study explores the etymological and semantic challenges associated with the term beauty. The authors highlight that beauty is among the most vague and multifaceted concepts. As a result, its users often grasp completely different aspects/dimensions of it. After addressing etymological differences and conducting a conceptual analysis of its synonyms, the authors present empirical findings and a model outlining the semantic space of the term beauty. In the second part of the study, the authors shed light on the reasons behind the use of this ambiguous term, particularly focusing on its evolutionary and existential significance. The conclusion of the study draws attention to the fact that, despite the vagueness of the concept, beauty continues to play a key role in our lives, reflecting our need to share it, and portraying the human being as *homo aestheticus*. | *Keywords: Beauty, Etymology, Semantic Differential, Semantic Dimensions, Meaning*

1. Introduction to the problem

Beauty belongs amongst the key subjects of human thought. Whether we like it or not, it influences our choice of partner (Buss and Shackelford, 2008; Lewis et al., 2015; Perrett, 2012), our selection of living places (Isik and Vessel, 2021; Brielmann, Nuzzo and Pelli, 2021), captures our attention and prompts us to seek its presence. Not only do we surround ourselves with it, but we also use it to adorn our surroundings. According to several thinkers, beauty has often led us to a more detailed examination of individual objects (Vopěnka, 2000, p. 52), and sometimes even to a preference for which scientific theories or explanations we consider to be true and which we do not (Stewart, 2007; Démuth, Démuthová and Slavkovský, 2019, p. 18; Schwarz, 2018).

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the Contract no. APVV-19-0166.

Even though beauty, along with truth and goodness, belongs amongst the most influential ideas that shape both the personal and social settings of people – their values, desires, and attitudes – it seems that we still lack a comprehensive and universally accepted definition for it. This also applies to truth, which philosophers have strived to define through various paths and methods. However, thanks to science, precision of knowledge and analytical conceptual approaches to the question of what is true and what is false, there is still some agreement and possible consensus on what holds true and what does not. Scientists successfully eliminate theses and hypotheses that have not been substantiated or have been logically or empirically refuted. Similarly, although to a lesser extent, there is a certain consensus on what is good and what is evil, what is beneficial and why, and what is not. While we may not be able to find a universally accepted definition of good and evil in ethics either (and unlike the scientific consensus on which ethical framework should be applied and why, such unity in ethics does not exist), the majority of people generally agree on what they want, what they do not want, what behaviour is acceptable, and what is not.

On the question of beauty, such a strong consensus does not exist. This not only testifies to the absence of a generally accepted definition of beauty but also the relatively small degree of consensus among art-educated theorists regarding the content of the concept of beauty (Hosoya et al. 2017, p. 22), in comparison to other more specific aesthetic concepts such as elegance, charm, or sexual attractiveness (Menninghaus et al., 2019). Finally, it reflects the generally benevolent and ambiguous use of the term by the general public. On the contrary, we hear that taste is an individual and subjective matter (*de gustibus non est disputandum* – Merriam-Webster, 2023), and that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder (Shakespeare, 1597/2012, II, I. v. 499; Hungerford, 1878/2015), and even that unified beauty does not really exist, and there are countless diverse beauties (Levinson, 2014, pp. 190–207) that depend on the number of objects or the number of viewers assessing them. This is so despite the fact that aesthetic judgment, in principle, does not solely focus on a designation of our subjective feelings that are evoked by an object (that is, I like something), but rather claims a universal and necessary binding judgement among all rational evaluators (Kant, 1790/2000, 5:212). When I say that an object is beautiful, I do not express that it pleases me and may not please someone else, but rather, I expect that all other evaluators will also consider that the particular object is beautiful and agree with my judgment.

One of the reasons for the problematic nature and imperfect consensus among producers and evaluators of aesthetic judgments is that when using words such as beauty or beautiful, it is not always clear what we are talking about, what the concept, the attribute denotes. And this is not only in terms of whether we are talking about the qualities of a physical object, the qualities of an object as a sensory perception, or whether the focus of our considerations is the perception itself and its reflection.

2. Study objectives

In the first part of this paper, we will attempt to focus on several reasons for the ambiguity of the concept of beauty and the terms we use to denote it, as well as the various ways that we can explore the concept of beauty (compare Démuth and Števček, 2021). This section provides a brief overview of the results of our research that has already been published, in the context of recent studies by various linguists, psychologists, neuroaestheticians, philosophers, and aesthetic theorists, drawing on the theoretical foundations of Fechnerian empirical aesthetics.[1]

In the second part of the paper we will attempt, from the perspective of evolutionary psychology and existential philosophy, to reflect on why the concept of beauty (or what it signifies) is important to us despite not being entirely clear or well definable.

3. Etymological Divergence

If we examine the etymological peculiarities of the concept of beauty in various languages, we find that this overarching concept, which encompasses different aspects and attributes, is derived from quite distinct conceptual and linguistic fundamentals in different languages. While it is true that comparing different languages within the scope of an etymological analysis is quite impossible, as it takes away from the context or cultural and societal linguistic techniques and practices, and individual examples do not cover the entire spectrum of the contexts of those languages, we will attempt to illustrate the semantic diversity of the concept of beauty and the terms that denote it in various languages through selected examples. In English, for example, the concept of beauty is associated with the term "beauty," which has its roots in Old French and Latin. The original term for beauty in French, from which the English term "beauty" derives, is "bel," and it is connected to the Latin term "bellus," meaning "physical attractiveness" (Harper, 2020). *The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* describes this concept as "the quality of pleasure, especially when seen, or something or someone that gives great pleasure, especially when seen" (Hornby, 2011, p. 119). Therefore, the main significance of this term is associated with its designation of pleasant sensory stimuli. This is also the case in other Latin-based languages (Romance languages such as Spanish and Italian). Interestingly, but not surprisingly, references to this use can also be found in other, fundamentally different, languages. The Swedish or Proto-Germanic word "vacker" or "wakraz" refers to the sweet pleasure that arises from the perception of an object (Kluge, 1891). A similar dimension of pleasure can be found in the Turkish term "güzel," meaning "pleasant form" (Nisanyan, 2011, p. 308). The German term "die Schönheit" (Swedish "skönhet") refers to "visibility" (in Old High German, "Scōni 'ansehnlich' – Pfeifer, 1993) and "appearance" (schauen). However, in Latin, there are also other designations for beauty, namely "pulchritudo,"

[1] By this means, we would like to express our gratitude to both reviewers for their valuable comments and remarks on certain generalizations or simplifications in the original text. Similarly, we would like to acknowledge Winfried Menninghaus and Anjan Chatterjee for their inspirational insights and previous consultations on the methodology of our research.

“formositas,” and “venustas,” which have different roots (forma, Venus). “Pulchritudo” is derived from “polcher,” with the spelling “-ch-” being Hellenizing, so we can assume the root *polkro- or *pelkro-. Walde (Walde, 1939) and Pokorny (Pokorny, 1959) suggest that it belongs to the Proto-Indo-European *perkr, meaning “variegated” or “colourful.” Therefore, beautiful is that which is variegated or colourful.

Another, albeit semantically similar, etymological “logic” can be found in the Old Slavic designation of beauty associated with the colour red (краса / красота / *krasьnъ). The Proto-Slavic *krasa was connected to red (hence in Russian красный-красивый, meaning “red-beautiful”), thus it was associated with the shine, redness, and colour of fire, as well as with the Proto-Slavic *kresati (Derksen, 2008, p. 246).

Another aspect of the concept of beauty can be found in the Polish term “piękny”. It is etymologically identical to the Czech term “pěkný” and the Slovak term “pekný”, deriving from the Proto-Slavic “pěkrъ” (a similar root as the Latin pulcher) or from the Old Slavic пѣгъ. *The Concise Etymological Dictionary of Slovak* (Králik, 2015, p. 297) suggests that it may be derived from *pej(e) (to be fat, to abound in something, to overflow, comparable to the Old Indic páyate, to be swollen, to overflow), but also with an Avestan expression (to have milk in the breasts). However, the peculiarity lies in the fact that while in Czech and Slovak, “pekný” refers to a lower degree of attractiveness, the Polish term is already the second degree of irregular comparison. Therefore, the semantically identical equivalent of this word in Polish should rather be the term “ładny” (derived from the Proto-Slavic ladъ – Żmigrodzki et al., 2018). It refers to visual attractiveness, but in a different context, it also implies composure and harmony – tuning and the resulting pleasantness – pleasant on the eye as an expression of non-violence, appropriateness, orderliness, and arrangement, which in Biblical Hebrew is referred to as “Yapheh”.

The Chinese term “Měilì”, which may be translated as “beautiful”, depending on the context, can refer to physical attractiveness (“měirén” – beautiful woman), gustatory pleasure (“měishí” – deliciousness), as well as improvement (“měiróng”), goodness, pleasure, and desire (Chen, Qi and Hao, 2018). Similarly, in Serbo-Croatian and other languages, the concept of beauty is associated with goodness – “lijep” from *lěpъ, as well as with good or higher levels of quality (better).[2]

The most famous example of etymological diversity in terms of beauty is the work of Crispin Sartwell. In his book, *Six Names of Beauty* (Sartwell, 2004), Sartwell highlights the different roots and meanings of the concept of beauty in the English language (Beauty as an object of longing), Hebrew (“Yapha” as glow, bloom), Sanskrit (“Sundara” – holiness), Greek (“kalon" – ideal), Japanese (“Wabi-sabi” – perfection in imperfection), or the Navajo language (“Hozho” – health, harmony). Therefore beauty (or the experience of beauty), is not only

[2] Finally, even the Latin term “bellus" is often associated with “bonus” (good) or even with “optimus” (best). “Bonus” and “optimus” are originally derived from the Old Latin version of the word “duonus”, which means “good” (Vaan, 2008, pp. 73–74).

an overarching concept but also a semantically incongruous term that encompasses several often significantly different dimensions of aesthetic judgment.

The etymological divergence of the roots of individual words that are used to denote the concept of beauty[3] demonstrates its multidimensionality and semantic ambiguity. In some languages, the terms used to refer to beauty highlight different aspects than those highlighted by other languages. This divergence – or ambiguity – may not pose a problem to users of the same or similar languages as they draw from a similar etymology for the same or similar terms. However, in different languages, or as the number, ambiguity and potential polysemy of terms that denote the concept of beauty increases for the language users, these distinct terms become embedded in new contexts. This may be the reason that we do not fully understand each other when discussing beauty, as we are not always referring to the same thing. Our concepts often aim to express different meanings. However, this does not mean that our understanding is completely determined or that we are trapped in specific untranslatable linguistic frameworks without the potential to transcend them. Instead, it implies that we are compelled to seek and map the semantic spaces denoted by the individual aesthetic concepts and to deduce what a particular language user has in mind.

4. Semantics of the Concept of Beauty

How can we explore the semantic dimensions of the concept of beauty when this concept encompasses several, often completely different, levels and dimensions?

The classical tool for studying the meaning of words is semantic analysis. By the term semantic analysis, we mainly refer to the analysis of the meaning of concepts in natural language by examining their relationships (semantic and extensional similarities and differences) to related (similar and opposite) concepts in the given language. Such analysis assumes the exploration of intersections, as well as the semantic differentiation of the examined concepts, their disambiguation, and the examination of their mutual relationships.

One possible approach is to analyse the concepts that can be partially subsumed under the concept of beauty, in a particular language. For this purpose, the conceptual analysis of synonymous terms can be employed.

4.1. Conceptual Analysis of Synonymous Terms

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary lists the following as synonyms of the word "beauty": beautifulness, attractiveness, elegance, loveliness, aesthetics, prettiness, looks, comeliness, gorgeousness, handsomeness, beauteousness, cuteness, attraction, fairness, esthetics, glamour, exquisiteness, charm, delightfulness, sightliness, allure, appeal, fascination, radiance, sublimity, sexiness, radiancy, gloriousness, lusciousness, resplendence, sublimeness, shapeliness, seductiveness, glamour, pulchritude, desirability, flawlessness,

[3] For a more detailed analysis of etymological differences in naming beauty, see: Démuth, Démuthová and Keceli (2023).

perfection, splendidness, desirableness, daintiness, nubility, resplendency, sex appeal, superbness, flamboyance, foxiness, glossiness, showiness, flashiness, splendiferousness, slickness, delicacy, splashiness (Merriam-Webster, 2023). Similarly, the *Dictionary of Slovak Synonyms* lists words such as krasota, peknota, nádhera (unusual beauty), veľkoleposť (magnificence), malebnosť (picturesqueness), roztomilosť (cuteness), ladnosť (gracefulness), pôvab (charm), príťažlivosť (attractiveness), úchvatnosť (captivating beauty), velebnosť (grandeur), šumnosť (charmingness), driečnosť (loveliness), vzhľadnosť (appearance), čarokrásnosť (enchanting beauty) (‘Krása’, 2004).

Through an analysis of the main axes that form the semantic space of these terms, we can observe that some of them denote concepts that express a certain inclination towards the object and thus an activity associated with the experience of beauty: allure, appeal, attractiveness, desirability, charm, seductiveness. This activity often varies in its intensity (ranging from strong and irresistible attraction to subtle allure), with different agents (within attractiveness the subject is more passive and all activity emanates from the object, while desire implies activity originating from the subject), however, it generally shares the same orientation “towards beauty”.

The second cluster of synonyms characterises the nature of the feeling itself. Terms such as adorableness, delicacy, delightfulness, loveliness, sightliness, and others demonstrate that the sensation we experience when we perceive a beautiful object is essentially pleasant and connected to something sensorially desirable. What we find pleasing, pleases us because it evokes sensations that we enjoy, both sensorially and intellectually. It is perhaps for this reason that Hideaki Kawabata and Semir Zeki (Kawabata and Zeki, 2004), in a research that aestheticians still considered to be controversial, were able to identify the area in the brain that is associated with beauty, which becomes active during the perception or evaluation of beauty (a subtle structure in the mOFC), thereby identifying the neural correlate of beauty with pleasant feelings and a part of the reward system. However, beauty does not necessarily have to be solely associated with something pleasant.[4]

Another dimension of beauty reveals its exceptional nature. Connotations such as gorgeousness, exquisiteness, sublimity, gloriousness, lusciousness, resplendence, splendidness and superbness allude to the extraordinary quality of the perceived object. Beauty is not an ordinary quality, although it can be concealed within mundane things. When something is beautiful and we recognise it as such, we perceive its uniqueness (the way in which it is not ordinary). Therefore, Hume contemplates beauty as something that is highly above average, something that transcends an ordinary experience – something extraordinary (Démuth and Démuthová, 2019). This also applies to ugliness, as the natural opposite of beauty. Ugliness is even connected to the second dimension mentioned – (un)pleasantness and the dopaminergic reward system. Zeki has even discovered neural correlates that are activated in the sensorimotor cortex for ugliness (Ishizu and Zeki, 2011). However, when both concepts (beauty and ugliness) were tested by using the semantic differential

[4] Compare Brielmann and Pelli (2019).

method (Démuth, Démuthová and Keceli, 2022), it turned out that they were not exact opposites. Both beauty and ugliness are capable of evoking smiles and joy, which are not typically associated with exact opposites. Both of them, therefore, exist at the opposite ends of rarity, where beauty represents excellence and ugliness also signifies the uniqueness of something. However, between them lies a plethora of more or less mundane terms.

The exceptional pole of beauty demonstrates its extraordinary nature, from the perspective of an intellectually oriented subject. After all, what else do terms like perfection, flawlessness, or even fascination refer to if not to the perception of a unique quality of elaboration or organisation that attracts attention and intellectual appreciation? Georg Hossoya and colleagues (Hosoya et al., 2017), therefore, reflect upon the intellectual dimension of beauty. This dimension is represented, for example, by elegance, which captures beauty through simple and purposeful means, through simplicity, as well as the thoughtful complexity of ornaments, Mandelbrot sets or fractals, and the originality of ideas or execution. Such beauty is associated with astonishment, surprise, as well as admiration or other aesthetic emotions.

The final aspect of such a conceptual analysis of the concept of beauty is represented by terms that refer to its transcendent or moral value.[5] Beauty is magnificence, nobility, the sublime, and is often implicitly associated with goodness, divinity and autonomous value. This leads us to a different kind of research on the concept of beauty rather than just the analysis of the dictionary definitions. It involves an investigation of how it is used in a natural language by its users. This not only includes the study of the connotations of the term in the corpus of a particular language but also by conducting empirical research into the associations that people raise when they think about beauty.

4.2. Empirical Analysis of Connotations of the Concept of Beauty

Another possible approach is the empirical examination of the beauty concept connotations among users of everyday language. Research into free associations related to the concept of beauty, their correlational analysis, clustering, sorting, as well as semantic differentials, will allow us to better understand the dimensions of this concept among ordinary language users. Questionnaire-based research into the connotations of the concept of beauty, conducted by Démuth, Démuthová, and Keceli (2022),[6] revealed that people most commonly associate this term with the source which elicits its use. In other words, the word "beauty" is evoked by what we consider to be beautiful. However, if the dimension "Sources—Domain Centred around an Object" is excluded, the second most common semantic dimension to describe beauty is: "Reflection of the Quality of Perception—the Domain of Pleasant-Unpleasant." In this dimension, respondents describe the quality of an experience – the quality of the feeling along the pleasant-neutral-

5 For a more detailed conceptual analysis of the concept of beauty on the ground plan of Gärdenfors' geometry of thinking, see Démuth (2017).

6 The research was conducted with Turkish speakers (n=115), and the results of the Slovak sample are being processed.

unpleasant continuum. The third semantic dimension was "The Domain of Activity and Passivity". In this dimension, the respondents described the degree of excitement and the vector of attraction or repulsion they experienced towards the beautiful object, depending on the instinctual desire to possess it, to be with it, or conversely, to passively contemplate it. The fourth dimension of the concept of beauty is reflected in "The Domain Focused on Exclusivity and Ordinariness". The fifth dimension focused on "The Structure of the Object—Simplicity and Complexity". This dimension is also related to what was originally proposed by Hosoya, the Intellectually Focused Domain. In this dimension, the logic of the object is observed – something new is discovered, and the internal organisation is unveiled – for example, its originality, it surprises, and so on. In this sense, the proverbial statement "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" can be understood. Not everyone is capable of seeing what lies beneath the layer of mundaneness, and not everyone perceives beauty. The subject of the seventh dimension was "The Domain of Morality—Beauty as Good". In this dimension, beauty was often associated with goodness, nobility, honesty, and sincerity, among others. It is perhaps for this reason that psychologists and cognitive scientists ponder over the stereotype that what is beautiful is good and its opposite – what is ugly is dangerous or bad, and look for correlations between the function of beauty and moral judgments (Démuth, 2019a, pp. 118–123). From there, it is only a small leap to the next dimension, which is explicitly "The Transcendentally Oriented Domain". In this dimension, beauty is a value par excellence, it has transcendent implications and reasons.

The presented model assumes that the semantic space of the concept of beauty is truly multidimensional and encompasses at least 9 (possibly more) dimensions, each of which can be described as a continuum of properties that stretches from one pole to the other (e.g., pleasant-unpleasant, exciting-calming…). Different semantic nuances of the concept of beauty or the aesthetic experience it denotes differ in how they scored in each of the individual dimensions. If we perceive two aesthetic experiences as distinct, they must differ, as a minimum, in the level of saturation of one or more dimensions. The weight or significance of individual dimensions may not always be equal.

The latest research on associations of aesthetic concepts (Christensen, Cardillo, and Chatterjee, 2023, p. 335), using a network psychometric approach, has identified similar English terms that are semantically similar based on the responses of the participants (899 participants; 124 terms). Christensen et al. applied hierarchical exploratory graph analysis to map the relationships between the terms, and the analyses identified 17 descriptive dimensions, which could be further reduced to 5, and 11 impact dimensions, which could be further reduced to 4.

Similar empirical research on the connotations of beauty and well-being has been published by Kenett, Ungar and Chatterjee (2021). In their study (100 participants, 45 terms), they examined how different groups of respondents perceive certain concepts depending on their age, gender, and other factors,

and found that the concept of beauty is most commonly associated with terms such as Elegance, Feminine, Gorgeous, Lovely, Sexy, and Stylish. As mentioned by Menninghaus et al. (2019), terms like elegance, grace, and sexy largely overlap with the concept of beauty but also differ from each other in terms of their unique meanings. Nevertheless, it is evident that respondents understand beauty similarly to wellness. They found that the semantic neighbourhoods of beauty and wellness are largely stable across different ages and sexes. However, they also identified unique differences within these comparisons and discovered generational cohort effects, showing how the nuanced associations of these concepts vary by age.

A similar conclusion was reached by the team around Ursula Beermann and Georg Hosoya. They examined beauty in a broader context within the framework of mapping the *Dimensions and Clusters of Aesthetic Emotions: A Semantic Profile Analysis* (Beerman et al., 2021). Their research built upon the original study by Hosoya et al. (2017) *Mapping the Conceptual Domain of Aesthetic Emotion Terms: A Pile-Sort Study*, conducted at the Freie Universität Berlin,[7] which classified beauty as one of the most basic aesthetic concepts, but at the same time also the vaguest, with the greatest degree of variability or the lowest level of internal semantic coherence. In this study, Beermann et al. concluded that to understand aesthetic emotions (not just feelings of beauty), it is necessary to map four basic dimensions and clusters of the semantic space covering valence, power, arousal, and novelty. The findings show considerable convergence with previous studies that addressed the same aesthetic emotion terms but used slightly different methodologies (Hosoya et al., 2017; Schindler et al., 2017).[8]

Regardless of the specific dimensions or final number of dimensions of the concept of beauty, it seems certain that the concept of beauty represents a general concept. Beauty is truly multidimensional, complex, and intricate notion of aesthetic thinking. It is an overarching concept, enriched by several aesthetic dimensions and terms with which it partially overlaps, but does not merge. For centuries, we have been convinced that it is a key concept without which aesthetic evaluation would be impossible. Similarly, we have regarded beauty as something that could not exist without a sense of pleasure, whether sensory or intellectual. However, it appears that beauty is not solely dependent on feelings of pleasure and can exist independently of it.[9] Similarly, as an aesthetic judgment, that recognises the quality of an object, can exist in a way that we may not find aesthetically pleasing, in a sensory way, but we

[7] Even though all the mentioned studies were conducted in different languages, it appears that the concept of beauty possesses a certain universality of content, although there are culturally and linguistically conditioned specifics (e.g., the greater religious dimension among Turks compared to Slovaks), as well as peculiarities associated with age, gender, and education (e.g., women, in comparison to men had more segregated and organized concepts of Beauty and Wellness – Kenett, Ungar and Chatterjee (2021).

[8] Instead of free associations related to the concept of beauty, it involved associations with preselected aesthetic terms, or sorting them into groups based on similarity.

[9] "In aesthetic judgement, pleasure is not felt because an object satisfies a need or fulfils an aim, or because an end is finally worthy. Second, aesthetic judgements are universally valid. Someone who judges that an item is beautiful takes the judgement to apply not just to herself, but to everyone (CJ, 5:212)" (Lopes, 2021, 2).

recognise its artistic or aesthetic value. Works of art can affect us in ways other than by just evoking a sense of beauty. Their creator's strategy is often to evoke emotion, surprise us, and transport us out of reality – to move us, as Menninghaus et al. (2015) suggest. So why is beauty such a crucial concept if we cannot precisely define it and we might not even need it to make an aesthetic evaluation?

5. Reasons to Use the Concept of Beauty

5.1. Evolutionary Reasons

Evolutionary aestheticians and psychologists argue that the phenomenon of beauty has played, and continues to play, an important role in both the lives of individuals and our species. On one hand, our minds have evolved in such a way that we have learned to distinguish and evaluate important information about our environment and potential partners in a semi-automatic manner, without the need for slow and demanding analytical operations (Kahneman's System 1 – Kahneman, 2011, pp. 21–24). The result of this calculation, with its hidden algorithm, is communicated to us through a sense that we like something or that it is beautiful. This sensitivity has attuned us to the proportions of male or female bodies, their facial features or other attributes that are important in the selection of a partner (as a genetic ally), as someone who will help to preserve our genes, or simply as a life partner. Similarly, we are rewarded by feelings of pleasure when we consume energetically rewarding food sources (e.g., the sweet taste of honey) or, conversely, punished for the consumption of dangerous and inappropriate food sources (alkaloids, pathogens, etc.). Denis Dutton (2009) expanded this neo-Darwinian perspective to include the contemplation of places – landscapes that are suitable for us to live in.[10] We find such landscapes pleasing and feel good in them. Similarly, he gave an evolutionary explanation for the origins of art as a demonstration of the author's competence and our appreciation of "uselessness" in aesthetic evaluations. Evolutionary epistemologists consider beauty and attractiveness from the perspective of health (Etcof, 1999), immune compatibility (Foo et al., 2020), fitness (Little et al., 2011), as well as through potential burdens in the form of the handicap principle (Zahavi, 1975), and so on. Anjan Chatterjee, in his book *The Aesthetic Brain* (2013, p. 66), distinguishes between hot beauty, which arises from evolutionary preferences and the tendency to want to preserve one's own genes and manifests as the desire and drive "towards" an object, and cool beauty. The changes in our environment, its cultivation, and the acquisition of many skills and technologies which give our genes the chance to survive despite the hostility

[10] Dutton, referring to the studies of Orians and Hervagen (1992), highlighted an aesthetic-evolutionary preference for savannahs with trees. "Beyond a liking for savannahs, there is a general preference for landscapes with water; a variety of open and wooded space (indicating places to hide and places for game to hide); trees that fork near the ground (provide escape possibilities) with fruiting potential a metre or two from the ground; vistas that recede in the distance, including a path or river that bends out of view but invites exploration; the direct presence or implication of game animals; and variegated cloud patterns. The savannah environment is, in fact, a singularly food-rich environment (calculated in terms of kilograms of protein per square kilometer) and highly desirable for a hunter-gatherer way of life. Not surprisingly, these are the very elements we see repeated endlessly in both calendar art and in the design of public parks worldwide" (Dutton 2003, p. 697). Similarly, see Davies (2014, pp. 87–101).

of the environment, the highly competitive surroundings, selection pressures, and perhaps the suboptimal choice of partner, place, etc., has led to a fundamental decline in the significance of the evolutionary factors sedimented in our genes and minds. Cold beauty has assumed a significantly greater role in our lives, allowing us to contemplate spiritual, cultural, scientific, and transcendental beauties, which may seem unnecessary from an evolutionary perspective. Regardless of the fact that even cold beauty is still an expression and result of (socio)evolutionary processes (Prum, 2017, pp. 320–342), it is evident that beauty continues to be important to us and plays a crucial role in our lives. We (also) select our partners based on it, often even the place we choose to live, our dwelling, the things we purchase to furnish it and, above all, beautify our surroundings. The concept of beauty in art or in everyday life has the same roots as the concept of beauty in evolutionary biology. Cold beauty is grafted onto hot beauty.[11] Everyday necessities are not chosen solely based on price, functionality, and availability, but, on the contrary, we often have crucial aesthetic requirements for them. Therefore, most objects, if they are to be sold, must bring some form of added value in addition to their functionality, they must meet aesthetic demands and criteria. The existence of fashion and various aesthetic trends is clear evidence of this. In fact, sometimes beauty is the primary factor that influences our behaviour. We seek it out in our leisure time, visit galleries, concerts, theatres, go to beautiful places, read beautiful literature, and consciously and purposefully seek beauty, even if we often pay a significant price for it, both financially and in terms of time and effort. What better demonstrates the importance of beauty in our lives than willingly and significantly paying for (with money, time, and effort) what may seem to be superfluous at first sight? On the other hand, it is evident that in many aspects of life, we succumb to beauty to a greater than appropriate degree (see, for example, the issue of lookism – Démuth and Démuthová, 2018) and an uncritical preference for beauty often greatly complicates life.

Beauty has become an evolutionarily significant idea that shapes our behaviour. But why is that so? In addition to scientific and evolutionarily oriented explanations, there is also a metaphysical-existential perspective.

5.2. Existential Reasons

An aesthetic approach to things (like all other attunements, in the sense of Heidegger's theory of moods (Heidegger 1927/2018, § 29) allows us to see what we consider to be 'beautiful' in things. For one person, it may be the form, for another, the elaboration, original idea, inner structure, unity of diversities, functional form, or anything else – as implied by the multidimensionality of the concept of beauty – that is not essential at the given moment. What is essential is that we consider beautiful things to be aesthetically valuable, that we find them pleasing (for some reason), and that we perceive their unique nature and value.[12] Therefore, we either desire to possess them (we long for

[11] The fact that we can perceive, for example, mathematical beauty lies in our very ability to perceive beauty.

[12] A barbarian does not see the beauty of things, and therefore does not even perceive their

them), or we contemplate them with awe and reverence. The experience of the perception of beauty itself is considered to be enriching. "As we experience beauty, it does not remain outside of us, but becomes part of our very being" (Pallasmaa, 2022, p. 22). This means that when we like an object or a phenomenon, not only do we understand them and are capable of perceiving their quality and uniqueness, composition or elaboration, but above all, in that moment, we also understand ourselves – our own being, as something that should have a certain quality. We reflect on our own perception. We yearn to experience the quality of our own being, to enrich and fulfil ourselves through beautiful experiences, to dwell in beauty. Thus, beauty reveals that the quality of being matters. That it is not indifferent, that something simply exists, but that it also matters how it is, what form it takes, that it is the way it is, if it can somehow inspire, enchant, or captivate us. Our perception and pursuit of beauty also demonstrates that we are not indifferent to the fact we could simply just exist. That being is also about form, quality, and value.[13] In this regard, the beauty of things opens a path for us to perceive the beauty and value of (our own) existence (Démuth, 2019b; Scruton 2018). That is precisely why we surround ourselves with beauty, precisely why we seek it, because we care about the quality and value of our own existence.[14]

We consider beautiful things to be valuable, but we often desire them simply because we believe that they can somehow enrich us, for example, by increasing our value in the eyes of another. This approach is not related to the object or our being, but is about the desire to have a possessive relationship with the beautiful object as a means to an end. We want to possess a beautiful or otherwise valuable thing, to have control over it, to be in its proximity, because we believe that by doing so, we increase the value of our own existence. However, a non-possessive mode of being is not about owning or having the thing, but rather about peaceful contemplation and, above all, the perception of the value of our own being through the value of the beautiful object. Therefore, when we experience something beautiful, it enriches us spiritually, especially in the sense that we realise that being in itself has value, that it is something in which quality and form matter. Perhaps that is why we cannot grasp all the dimensions of beauty that reveal the aesthetic value of an object or phenomenon – that is, why they are aesthetically valuable. However, their value is always viewed from the perspective of the perceiver (in the Kantian sense, they do not have value in itself, but rather in how they affect us, whether we are aware of their value, and how it affects us). And here it is evident that the perception of beauty is not only marked by evolutionary factors but also by social and cultural contexts, by our ability to perceive something as aesthetically valuable (for example, through trained taste).

value. This should prevent the thing from being destroyed, just as a rapist does not see the purpose in the thing itself or in the person he "only" rapes.

13 For a more detailed existential analysis of beauty, see Démuth (2019b).

14 Roger Scruton sees beauty as an essential part of the human experience, providing meaning, transcendence, and a connection to the deeper aspects of our existence. Beauty, in this context, is seen as a source of inspiration and a connection to being (Scruton, 2018).

5.3. Transcendental Idealism

Even the least educated or most inexperienced subject perceives beauty and can distinguish between what is beautiful and what is not. It is possible that we do not agree on what is beautiful, but we do not know anyone who is unable to differentiate between the beautiful and the non-beautiful. Certainly, there is a discussion about whether beauty is inherently connected to pleasure – whether anhedonia (when we view a beautiful object, we may not experience feelings of delight or pleasure – contrary to Brielmann and Pelli (2018; 2019)) completely hinders the perception of beauty[15] or whether this dimension of beauty can be entirely null. Similarly, one can consider other dimensions and whether they are necessary for the perception of beauty. However, it seems that there is no disorder that can be defined as complete blindness or insensitivity to beauty.[16] Quite the opposite. The architecture of our minds assumes the existence of beauty and compels us to classify objects in this way. We are inherently built (evolved) to perceive beauty and distinguish between what is and what is not beautiful. This testifies to the fact that the idea of beauty (similarly to the ideas of truth and goodness) is anthropologically crucial.

On the other hand, given the multidimensionality and abstract nature of the concept of beauty (similarly to the concepts of truth and goodness), it is clear that its total comprehension and definition is very problematic, if not impossible. The concept of beauty designates (according to Kant) a certain transcendental concept – in the sense of a rational concept that enables aesthetic judgments – an indeterminate rational idea of a maximum that each individual must (!) create for themselves. However, since this idea is empirically pure and we are only able to sketch its contents through the ideal that we try to derive from experience, its complete comprehension may not be entirely possible, or rather, the degree to which the content fulfils the ideal will vary from context to context. Finally, according to the second moment of the judgment of taste, beautiful is that which is presented without a concept. However, this is not essential.

The concept of beauty is only justifiable when it is communicable. Therefore, Kant assumes it exists in all rational beings and points out that aesthetic judgment is disinterested, meaning that we take pleasure in something because we judge it to be beautiful, rather than judging it to be beautiful because we find it pleasurable (contrary to Brielmann and Pelli (2019)). Secondly, Kant asserts that aesthetic judgments are universal and necessary, meaning that they claim to have a general and necessary validity, not based on the properties of the object itself, but rather on the structure of our perception. We perceive them to be purposeful, even without direct knowledge

15 We do not have to experience pleasant feelings when perceiving an object, although we are aware of its quality.

16 It turned out that even patients suffering from prosopagnosia (the inability to distinguish faces) can finally rate attractive faces as attractive, although less consistently and without the knowledge that they are human faces (Blind To Beauty, 2007). This also indicates that the assessment of attractiveness or beauty is provided by a different module of the brain than face recognition (Sadr, Duchaine, and Nakayama, 2004).

of their purpose.[17] The foundations of this pure rational concept may not be fully accessible to us, but it is precisely this concept that allows any meaningful communication about aesthetic judgments because communication is only possible for those things that we assume we have, at least partially, in common.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we have attempted to demonstrate that the concept of beauty belongs among the key concepts of the architecture of human thought. Despite its complexity and elusive nature, its significance lies in its communicability. It is highly likely that the roots of its formal structure are derived from our evolutionary past. However, its content fulfilment depends (also!) on the personal experience of the respondents and their cultural context. The purpose of beauty is to bring about an awareness of the value and exceptional nature of existence, both of the object and especially of the subject themselves. It serves to protect and maintain the subject, for example, in the search for partners and provides a degree of self-protection. The evolutionary driving force behind the pursuit of beauty has primarily been the pleasure that is derived from a pleasurable sensation as a form of reward. However, at least since the last century, we have been able to conceive of aesthetic value devoid of pleasure. Its foundation lies in the admiration of value, even without any pleasant feelings that it is liked. Thus, art can exist on principles other than the production of a sense of beauty. A work of art touches us, it is meant to move and shake us, and it can achieve this through various means that are distinct from beauty. Nevertheless, we believe that beauty remains a key concept in our lives. Perhaps we are no longer so fervently seeking its definition or precise delineation, but we still seek it and strive for it. This pursuit extends beyond academic spheres and is prevalent in everyday life. Thanks to the accessibility of diverse achievements and technologies, almost everyone can be beautiful, and almost everyone can acquire some form of beauty (including through DeepForger). Thus, the era of *homo aestheticus* has arrived.

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[17] See the fourth moment of the judgment of taste according to the modality of falling in love with an object and the assumption of the idea of common sense.

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Andrej Démuth
Comenius University
Šafárikovo námestie 6
810 00 Bratislava 1
Slovakia
andrej.demuth@uniba.sk

Slávka Démuthová
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava
Námestie J. Herdu 577/2
917 01 Trnava
slavka.demuthova@ucm.sk

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10479732

Another Look at Jared S. Moore's Comprehensive View of Beauty

Filippo Focosi – Pier Francesco Corvino

According to what is known as the classic theory, beauty can be defined as unity or formal harmony. To overcome some of the criticisms that it encountered, the American philosopher Jared S. Moore proposed, in his paper from 1942, a modernisation of such theory, by distinguishing various types and subtypes of harmony which, taken together, are intended to cover both the objective and the subjective sides of beauty. Our goal is to look closer to some of the main principles that emerge within Moore's intricate taxonomy of harmony – most notably, the principles of organic unity, fittingness, and empathy – which in his article are only sketched or implicitly suggested. Employing such supplementations, we hope to make J.S. Moore's comprehensive view of beauty even more complete from a theoretical standpoint and suitable to face the challenge posed by the modernist and postmodern artistic practices, which seemingly undermined the notions of beauty and formal harmony.
| *Keywords: Beauty, Form, Harmony, Unity, Empathy*

1. Introduction: J.S. Moore's modernisation of the classic theory of beauty

In his paper from 1942, *Beauty As Harmony*, the American philosopher Jared S. Moore turns his attention to the "ancient problem" of the nature of beauty, which he finds inexorably tied to issues about art ("aesthetics is as truly connected with art *and* beauty as is Shakespeare's great romantic tragedy with Juliet *and* Romeo"). He takes as his starting point the so-called "classic theory", which defines beauty in formalistic and objective terms, i.e. as an order or formal harmony in virtue of which the object that possesses it affords a pleasurable experience in the observer. While accounting well for our appreciation of beauty, insofar as people (in the first place, art connoisseurs) enjoy how the different parts of an object are unified in a harmonious whole, the classic theory appears to J.S. Moore as partially defective, for two main reasons. On one side, it is deemed by him "too broad", to the extent that not all

formal harmony – or, to recall the most popular definition of beauty developed in eighteenth century philosophy, not all "unity-in-variety" – is aesthetic. On the other side, the formal-objective definition of beauty is judged "too narrow", since it (apparently) ignores "what lies behind the form" and "manifests itself through it", i.e., the meaning or "significance" of a beautiful object as well as the psychological and spiritual attitudes of the subject who perceives it.

In order to avoid these difficulties, J.S. Moore proposes a "modernisation" of the classic theory of beauty by way of extending the very notion of harmony, which lies at the core of such theory. He proceeds to distinguish three main types of harmony, which are: (1) an "objective harmony" among the elements of the beautiful object; (2) an "objective-subjective harmony" between the beautiful object and the mind of the perceiver; (3) a "psychological harmony", which is purely subjective and is internal to the mind of the observer. Within each of these principal varieties it is possible, according to J.S. Moore, to distinguish various subtypes of harmony, which, taken together, result in a "comprehensive", and more satisfying, view of beauty.

While representing an improvement with respect to the classic theory from which it departed, J.S. Moore's "complete analysis" of beauty, as he calls it, still needs to be complemented, insofar as the many facets of the notion of harmony that he envisages are not entirely treated. Thus, in what follows we'll try to deepen some of the main principles that emerge within J.S. Moore's intricate and compelling taxonomy of harmony – most notably, the principles of organic unity, fittingness, and empathy – and which, despite their acknowledged relevance, are only briefly sketched or implicitly suggested in his article. In doing so, we will take advantage of the insights offered by many thinkers who, especially in the last decades, have variously dealt with the topics of beauty, harmony, aesthetic experience, and the likes, and whose reflections can spread light on the above-mentioned principles. We'll leave aside only the third main type of harmony, the "psychological" one (which is a sort of inner harmony), not only because it would exceed the limits of the present inquiry, but also because it is presented as the product of the combined presence of the first two types of harmony, upon which our attention will be primarily directed.

Hence, following the steps of J.S. Moore himself, what we are going to propose here is a further modernisation of the formalist account of beauty as previously revised by the American philosopher, in order both to enhance its theoretical strength and to render it suitable to face the challenge posed by the most recent tendencies in art history, such as postmodernism and conceptual art, which often tried to undermine the concepts of beauty and formal harmony, albeit broadly conceived.

2. Beauty as an objective harmony

The first of the three main types of harmony upon which the beauty of an item relies, the objective harmony, involves, according to J.S. Moore, three subordinate ones: (a) a "formal harmony" among the parts of the material

(or perceptible) object; (b) an "ideal harmony" among the ideas, or the parts of the idea, embodied in the perceptible object; and (3) an "expressive harmony" between idea and form. The word "idea", in J.S. Moore's intentions, refers to the expressive or intellectual meaning of an object – most notably, an artwork – and thus covers the feelings and emotions it expresses as well as the thoughts or mental images it conveys. Despite being clearly outlined, these subtypes of harmony have aspects that deserve to be explored, both in themselves and in their mutual relationships.

2.1 Harmony as organic unity

According to J.S. Moore, the first of the three subtypes of the objective harmony, i.e. the formal unity among the perceivable parts of an item, corresponds to the kind of harmony supported by the classic theory of beauty. Such formal harmony or unity, we argue, can be effectively matched with the notions of coherence and completeness. According to Monroe Beardsley (1981, pp. 190–200), an (aesthetic) object is coherent when it is "highly organized" so that every part or internal relation is at the right place and "it all fits together", where it is "complete" when "it has all that it needs", which means that no other part or relation outside the object is required in order to satisfy its underlying purpose. He maintains that the features of coherence and completeness represent necessary conditions for being a work of art, since they occur – at least "to some minimal degree" – in any instance of musical compositions, literature, poetry, or visual arts (*Ibidem*). Indeed, we usually expect from an artwork to have internal interconnectedness and self-sufficiency, which elicit a distinctive pleasure in the perceiver; it is in this sense, we claim, that J.S. Moore (1942, p. 42) says that the appreciator of beauty enjoys not only "the unity of the whole", but also "the way in which every detail contributes to that unity".

Another way to enlighten the kind of unity entailed by the notion of formal harmony is by qualifying it as 'organic'. The notion of organic unity, as Richard Shusterman (1992, pp. 62–63) recalls, dates back to Greek philosophers – eminently, Aristotle – who introduced it in order to identify a "complete whole" having parts which are "so integrally connected" that "if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed". Such a notion – which partly overlaps with, and somewhat reinforces, the concepts of coherence and completeness – has been endorsed by several contemporary Anglo-American philosophers. Shusterman names people like Dewey, Beardsley, Osborne and Richards, who located 'organic unity' either in the works of art or in the aesthetic experiences that these are supposedly designed to elicit, and employed it as a useful tool to delve into most twentieth-century art practices, which in various ways discredited the mimetic theories of art. Another, more complex, account of organic unity is that developed by G.E. Moore in his famous *Principia Ethica* (1903). Here, the English philosopher distinguishes between three senses of "organic unity" (or "organic whole"), the second of which is the most useful to ethics and aesthetics. He expresses it in terms of value, and states that an organic whole "has an intrinsic value different in amount from the sum of the values of

its parts" (G.E. Moore, 1959, p. 27). However, since there is no difference in value without a difference in properties, this sense of organic unity can, according to Shusterman, be regarded in more general terms as "a unity where the properties of the whole are different from the sum of the properties of its individual parts and not reducible to them". While this second sense of organic unity obviously applies to living organism, it is likewise considered an "especially characteristic" feature of works of art, as well as a central criterion for their interpretation (Shusterman, 1992, pp. 67, 75).

The notion of formal harmony, as related to the properties of coherence, completeness and organic unity, accounts well for those art genres such as abstract paintings or sculptures, instrumental or absolute music, decorative arts, and, to some extent, dance works. But what about those artworks which, other than formal properties, have a meaning or significance? Actually, most artworks are appreciated also (and sometimes mainly) in virtue of properties belonging to their (representational, narrative, or expressive) content. Think of figurative paintings, program music, songs and lieder, opera, theatre, movies, literature, poetry, comics, and so on. Does the idea of an objective harmony still hold as regards the emotional, semantic or symbolic outcome of this kind of objects, which comprise the majority of artworks? J.S. Moore thinks it so, as he introduces the second subtype of such a harmony, which he calls "ideal", and which occurs between the ideas conveyed by an object. He conceives it as a sort of "logical necessity" which ties together the thoughts or the feelings that a work expresses, and states that unless the various ideas that the object incorporates "are consistent with one another", the "beauty of the whole" would be undermined (Moore, 1942, pp. 45–46). However, we suggest that we can understand this "ideal" harmony in formal terms as well, to the extent that a work's semantic or expressive components, beyond having an inherent value, also serve as means towards the reinforcement of the overall (organic) unity of the work. Think of how the landscapes or the figures depicted in a painting – along with their affective, evocative or symbolic value – constitute additional sources (with respect to the painting's base components, such as lines, colors, or shapes) for the artist to achieve a higher order of coherence and completeness in the design of the work.

To be fair, this "second level" of formal harmony can likewise be discovered in works of abstract art. As Jerrold Levinson (2016, pp. 102–103) states, the beauty of the patterns or configurations as they occur in the canvases of painters like Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian, Barnett Newman, or Frank Stella – but the same holds true also for, say, a Bach's prelude, or a Bartók's string quartet – is always "dependent" beauty (to speak in Kantian terms), since such patterns or configurations always have a "potential significance", i.e., "a content that must be grasped". In a similar vein, J.S. Moore himself, near the end of his paper (1942, p. 48), spoke of an "impressive beauty" to refer to those "beauties" – belonging, in the case of artworks, to absolute music and abstract visual arts – in which the idea or meaning, contrary to what one might think, is not absent, but is found "entirely" in the "material form" of an object (its tones, lines, colors, and so on). Conversely, we have "expressive beauty" when

the idea partly "overflows" the material (but not the ideal, if our reading is good) form, as in poetry, traditional paintings and sculptures, narrative arts, and so on.

As we mentioned, one of J.S. Moore's worries about the classic theory of beauty was that the notion of formal harmony is too broad to be useable to define the class of beautiful objects, since not all formal harmony is aesthetic. Such worry may look even bigger, in the light of the extension of the same notion that we just have advanced in order to cover also the relations among the meaning components of an (aesthetic) object. However, here we should remind ourselves that what determines the aesthetic character of the form of an object are exactly those features which we identified as central to the notion of formal harmony – i.e., coherence, completeness, and (organic) unity – and that, due to their emergent character, they are features that only some objects (most notably, artworks) possess. Indeed, as John Dewey (2005, pp. 106–133) pointed out, we must differentiate between the mere configuration of an object (which he named "shape or figure") and its aesthetic form: the latter – wherever it occurs – requires the "interfusion of all properties of the medium", so that a material (sensuous as well as intellectual) becomes adequately ("completely and coherently") formed, and "an experience" of an unusual and remarkable level of immediacy, vitality and intensity (i.e., an aesthetic experience) is produced. In a similar vein, as we have seen, Beardsley (1981, pp. 190–200) talks of a "special" – i.e., evaluative – sense of "form", as applying to those aesthetic objects that are "well ordered" or highly "unified", i.e., "coherent" and "complete". It is true that we can list some of the conditions that will tend to increase the degree of coherence or completeness of a work. In the case of the coherence of a visual artwork, for instance, such conditions include "focus" (i.e., the presence of a "dominant pattern" or "compositional scheme"), "balance", and "similarities among the parts of the design". Nonetheless, as Beardsley points out about music (but the same holds true for, e.g., visual art and literature), it is impossible to set forth all the conditions that might be combined to make a work cohere, since this is "something that composers discover and critics take note of". Moreover, these conditions are usually broad enough – think of the principle of "symbolic convergence and thematic affinity" in literature, or that of melodic and rhythmic parallelism in a musical composition (Beardsley, 1981, pp. 253, 198) – to leave room for artists to move freely and creatively within them.

The revised, twofold account of formal harmony that we have put forward, not only helps us to clarify the first two subtypes of objective beauty envisaged by J.S. Moore, but can also work as a classificatory criterion in the art field. As Noël Carroll (2001) rightly remarked, several theories of art in the twentieth century – most notably, the aesthetic definitions offered by Clive Bell and Monroe Beardsley – while not explicitly employing the term 'beautiful', absorbed various relevant features of beauty theories. If Bell's theory of art can be seen, according to Carroll (2001, pp. 31, 35), as an "updated version" of Francis Hutcheson's theory of beauty – insofar as Bell's notion of "significant form", which he regards to be the invariant feature of (visual) artworks, closely

resembles the property of "uniformity amid variety" that Hutcheson indicates as what causes the sensation of beauty – Beardsley's attempts to define art, in our opinion, can be paired with Moore's formalist account of beauty. Indeed, in his paper of 1961, Beardsley identified the properties of unity, coherence and completeness – which, in our view, play a central role in Moore's notion of formal harmony as well – as the common features of all aesthetic objects (belonging to different art forms, such as literature, paintings, music, and so on), and claimed that they can be used to give a definition of an "aesthetic object", i.e., of a work of art (see Beardsley, 1961). He went even further by saying that progress in the arts depends on the ability of the great artist to discover "new and profoundly valuable" ways of making a work of art cohere (Beardsley, 1981, p. 194). But then, if this is the case, another, even thornier, worry arises, since – as several aestheticians as well as art historians and critics typically maintain (see, e.g., Zecchi, 1990) – most of the artistic avant-gardes of the twentieth century moved away from the principles of proportion, harmony, and pleasantness, in favour of asymmetry, deconstruction, and discomfort. This trend to reject beauty – if not to "destroy" it, as the American abstract painter Barnett Newman famously stated – seemingly continued into the recent developments in art practices, most notably postmodernism, which further challenged the idea of organic unity by emphasizing fragmentation, decentring, and eclecticism (see Shusterman, 1992, p. 63).

Now, two points can be made in order to reply to these assumptions. First, we can observe that they appeal to a "monolithic" concept of organic unity, which ignores what "a whole skein of thinkers" stretching back to Heraclitus and Aristotle witnessed, i.e, that unity can involve radical "oppositions and conflicting forces" (Shusterman, 1992, p. 64). The two Greek philosophers argued that the harmony of a work of art is supremely beautiful only when, far from removing any form of internal opposition, embraces contingencies, dissonances, and heterogeneity, and is enhanced by the tension they generate (see Curi, 2013). Along similar lines, many authors of the eighteen and nineteenth centuries (such as Hutcheson, as we have already seen) supported the view that beauty is a "compound ratio" of uniformity (i.e., unity) and variety: if, on one side, variety without unity would be "a confused jumble of details", on the other side unity without variety is "monotonous and uninteresting" (Moore, 1942, p. 42). Second, we should not think that the goal of achieving unity limits artists' creativity and forces them to work within a fixed set of compositional rules. Rather, as Shusterman (1992, p. 76) rightly remarks, even "fragmentation and incoherences" can have their own "stimulating aesthetic effect" and can result in "more complex forms of coherence".[1] Actually this is what, in our opinion, most avant-garde and post-modern artists sought, and for the most part managed to reach, by experimenting novel compositional strategies and formal procedures, such as deconstruction, abstraction, seriality, hybridization, polystylism, and many others. As Roger Scruton (2011, p. 119) points out, features like harmony,

[1] It should be observed that unity and complexity are, together with the intensity of regional qualities, the three critical standards by which, according to Beardsley (1981, pp. 524–543), it is possible to assess and weight the aesthetic value of an object.

order, closure, and the likes – which as we just said can coexist with, and even be increased by, the urge for novelty and excitement – have "a permanent hold on the human psyche". This, in turn, explains why our interest in art is motivated by our "human need" to perceive and experience rich and satisfying unities (Shusterman, 1992, pp. 75–76), even when approaching the most experimental and daring art forms. Such a need, according to Shusterman, also works as a "principle of interpretive holism", which presumes a work's unity of meaning for it to be intelligible, so that if a work seems, at a first reading, "incoherent", we look for an interpretation that helps us to understand the work's incoherence and disunity "within a larger coherent totality of meaning" (Shusterman, 1992, p. 77); that is, to say it in J.S. Moore terms, to discover the work's "ideal harmony", along with its "purely" formal one.

2.2 Harmony as fittingness

So far, we focused on the first two subtypes of objective harmony, i.e., formal harmony and ideal harmony, and found some common traits that they share, namely, coherence, completeness, and organic unity. It might nonetheless seem that, having treated them separately – in line with J.S. Moore's general scheme – they are inhabiting two distinct fields, which invite independent considerations. But it would be a serious mistake to think it so, inasmuch form and meaning are "inseparable aspects" of an aesthetic object, as J.S. Moore (1942, p. 44) acknowledges, to the point that "each finds its value only in its relation to the other". Consequently, he introduces a third subtype of objective harmony, which, from this standpoint, can be considered the most important one: the "expressive harmony" between form and significance, which accounts for how the material object "exactly embodies" the intended ideas (Moore, 1942, p. 45). With the introduction of expressive harmony, J.S. Moore believes that the list of the objective conditions of beauty is complete. However, the picture is still incomplete unless we address the following issues: what kind of relation is that referred to as 'expressive harmony'? Is it formal or otherwise? Does expressive harmony occur in every instance of artistic activity?

Now, the idea of an intimate relation between form and content in art has a long history in aesthetics; we can trace it back to Kant, Santayana, Croce, Collingwood and Dewey, up to the works of several contemporary analytical philosophers, such as Danto (who, in turn, refers to the use Hegel made of it), Budd and Eldridge. Among the latter group, it is of particular interest the ways Levinson works out this idea, which he explored in many of his writings. The essay where it is most straightforwardly deployed is *Evaluating Music*, where he seeks for some principles that could work as primary sources of goodness in music, and states that the most adequate of these principles amounts to "a particular wedding" of the form and the content of a piece of music, that is, to the "fusion" of the "how it goes" of music (i.e., its temporally evolving form) with "what it conveys" (the emotions, qualities, actions, or events it suggests). Such a "wedding" or "fusion" is more appreciable and satisfying than following music's (kinetic) form and responding to music's expressive aspect, when these are experienced separately (Levinson, 2006, pp. 198–200). Considerations of this kind are not restricted to musical

field. Levinson discusses instances of the principle of fusion or coalescence of form and content in many other art forms, from tragedy to pictures and literature, where he speaks of an "inseparability" of the two aspects. And even in those cases, such as humorous artworks, where inappropriateness, in the form of "incongruity" (that is, of "non-fittingness of items or elements one to another") plays a crucial role in engendering amusement, still an aspect of congruity and fittingness has to be perceived: only grasping "the 'why' of the incongruity" and solving the puzzle it poses (though in a "relatively effortless way"), we can get an "amusement of a higher order" that the best humorous works are likely to offer (Levinson, 2006, pp. 389–399).

The thesis of the inseparability of form and content is likewise endorsed by Scruton (2011, pp. 91–111). On the one hand, he states, the meaning of a work of art is so closely anchored in the structure that conveys it, that it can never be fully explained or paraphrased (think of, e.g., poetry). On the other hand, every instance of formal art – be it an abstract painting, a piece of "absolute" instrumental music, or even a church – inherently carries within it a symbolic or emotional content which, in order to be grasped in its qualitative uniqueness, invites the use of metaphorical language. He refers to such interconnectedness of an artwork's form and content as "fittingness", which is, "in art as in life", at the "heart of aesthetic success". However, it is in the artistic field that aesthetic fittingness reaches its highest degree, since the artist, by "fitting things to each other" in order to express his ideas or feelings in the most intense and effective way, presents "complete instances of human actions and passions" as guided by a sort of "compelling artistic logic", which is exemplified in the "supreme artistic achievements", i.e., in "the highest form of beauty" (Scruton, 2011, pp. 105–109).

Now, in the light of the insights offered by Levinson and Scruton, we can assume that J.S. Moore's "expressive harmony" denotes the intimate relation through which an artwork's content is embodied in its form, and is inseparable from it. This relation can be likewise described as coalescence, fusion, or fittingness, which are, in turn, formal notions. Moreover, it seems clear that such harmonious interconnectedness plays a central role with respect to the aesthetic, if not the artistic value *tout court*, of a work, and according to some (see, e.g., Eldridge 1985)[2] can also serve as an art-defining condition. However, there could be cases in which the content of an artwork demands modes of expression other than formal beauty or harmony, which would then be "inappropriate" or, to say in Arthur Danto's words, "external" to the intended meaning. This is, according to Danto, particularly evident when a work refers to such subjects as war, violence, suffering, and so on, which are embodied in several artworks which would be misleading to describe as beautiful instead of, say, dramatic, powerful, tragic, anguished, and the likes (see Danto, 2003, pp. 86-102). But then, at least in those cases – which are anything but marginal in art history – in which the content deeply exceeds, so to say, any kinds of coherence or unity, the principle of "fittingness" would seemingly work against

[2] Richard Eldridge claims that the primary condition for classifying something as art is the "appropriateness to one another of a thing's form and content".

the notion of formal harmony. If so, this would render J.S. Moore's comprehensive view of beauty as harmony (albeit complex) partly defective, as far as objective beauty is considered.

The question is whether an artwork can be, say, dramatic and, at the same time, beautiful, or even dramatic *because of* its formal beauty, i.e., its inner harmony or unity. This possibility was explored, among others, by George Santayana in the fourth part of his *The Sense of Beauty* (1896). He says that "in all expression" we can distinguish two terms: the first is the "expressive thing", i.e., the object "actually presented" to our senses and imagination, while the second is the "thing expressed", in terms of the thought, images, or emotions evoked by the formal/material object. An expression has aesthetic value only if there is an intimate union between the two aspects, more specifically, if the evoked ideas or associations are "incorporated" in the present object, in its material and formal components. Now, what Santayana labels "second term", which approximately corresponds to what an (expressive) object conveys, comprises all subjects, emotions, circumstances of life, even the most repellent, tragic, violent, and painful. Nevertheless, these can be "observed with curiosity" and "treated with art", i.e., transformed and embodied in beautiful forms that partly mitigates their negative values and effects. Indeed, the most complex, intense and profound emotions that an artwork can arouse are, according to Santayana, the outcome of a fine balance – i.e., of a harmony – between the variety of the subjects expressed (which have to do with our thoughts and experiences of "labour, ambition, lust, anger, confusion, sorrow, and death"), and the aesthetically agreeable modes of their presentation. If we remove from any drama "the charm of the medium of presentation", it would be reduced "to a mere account of the facts and of the words spoken", and we would be left with only "literal and disjointed renderings and suffering" (Santayana, 1896, § 56–57).

Danto (2003, pp. 103–123) thinks that, in cases where the content of an artwork concerns (especially sensitive) social, political or psychological issues, beauty – either as an artistic mean or a critical assessment – would be inappropriate. The reason why he claims this is, in our opinion, that he relies on a narrow concept of beauty (which, as far as visual arts are concerned, he associates with qualities such as "simple forms", "smooth outlines", elegance, and the likes), to the point that he finds it wrong even to call a painting like Matisse's *Blue Nude* of 1907 'beautiful' (Danto, 2003, pp. 36–37). However, on a broader perspective, if beauty, conceived as formal harmony or organic unity, can embrace dissonances and heterogeneity, then it can likewise be "inflected" – to borrow a term from Danto himself, who refers to beauty as one of the many "inflectors" in art (Danto, 2003, p. 121) – so that it becomes "internal" to an artwork's intended meaning, without overshadowing its possible painful or dramatic character. Thus, there is no reason to think that upsetting, despairing, or disorienting experiences, which gained a special attention in modern and contemporary art, require unpleasant, if not "ugly", means of expression. Instead, as Santayana rightly claimed, "the more terrible the experience described, the more powerful must be the art which is to

transform it" by means of an harmonic interrelation of elements, even the most angular and disturbing ones, where these are needed in order to fittingly convey the work's intended meaning. It is true that beauty, even in the multifaceted version advocated here, is absent, or at best "optional", in those works belonging to Conceptual Art (from Duchamp's readymade up to Hirst's most famous works) that partly influenced Danto considerations on the "abuse" of beauty. I leave it open if works of this kind, having eschewed any kind of aesthetic trans-formation, are capable of doing something more than either merely mirror the reality to which they refer or elicit uncomforting and disorienting responses in the audiences.

3. Beauty as a relational property

According to J.S. Moore, a complete theory of beauty should take into consideration three factors: the perceptible form of an object; the idea or meaning that the object embodies; and the subject of the aesthetic experience. While the notion of objective harmony accounts for the first two factors, in the manner described in the previous chapter, the third still has to find its place in J.S. Moore's comprehensive view of beauty. In order to fill this gap, he adds a second main type of harmony, which he labels "objective-subjective", and which indicates the harmony between the beautiful object – considered in its formal structure as well as in its significance – and the mind of the observer. We suggest that such type of harmony could be equally described as 'relational', insofar as it is not so much a property of the object than a relation between the object and something that stands outside it, i.e., the subject who perceives it. Since the subject or perceiver can be regarded, from J.S. Moore's perspective, either in its spiritual or psychophysical nature, two subtypes of relational harmony accordingly emerge: a "spiritual" harmony and a "psychophysical" harmony. To grasp the former is, J.S. Moore maintains, admittedly a difficult task, insofar as it would bring into play the so-called "spiritual" or plotinian theories, which are as "profound" as, to a certain extent, "obscure" (Moore, 1942, p. 43). Hence, he prefers to focus on the latter subtype of relational harmony, and to this end he introduces a number of psycho-physiological principles which, nonetheless, are in need of some supplementation.

3.1 The principle of empathy

As we just mentioned, the second of the three principal varieties of harmony, i.e. the objective-subjective or, if you prefer, relational harmony, is divided by J.S. Moore in "spiritual" and "psychophysical" harmony. About the first, J.S. Moore offers a – quite general – definition, derived from Carleton Noyes' *The Enjoyment of Art* (1904). It states that spiritual harmony occurs when "the spirit of man" encounters a harmony outside itself, in the artwork.

On the contrary, the definition of psychophysical harmony is not directly addressed. Instead, it is presented according to three principles. First and most important is the principle of empathy, which J.S. Moore (1942, p. 46) takes to be so "well known" that there's no need to describe it further. Despite this lack of specifics, we can be quite confident that J.S. Moore has in mind a restricted

'psychological' meaning of empathy, introduced in 1909 in English-speaking countries by the British psychologist Edward B. Titchener, widely and commonly used thereafter. The term translates the German *Einfühlung* ('feeling within' or 'in-feeling') and accounts for the (somatic) ways in which bodies experience the felt environment. Aesthetically, it justifies how our perceptual encounter with aesthetic objects and our appreciation of them appear to be as direct as our mere perception of an object (see at least Coplan and Goldie, 2011, pp. IX–XLVII).

Following the criteria and the agenda of nineteenth-century experimental science, such a conception wanted to overcome the 'classical' conception of empathy as 'sympathy' (in general, see Greiner, 2012). The idea of sympathy has a long history, which can be traced back until the Greek word *sympatheia*. Nonetheless, it became a widespread philosophical concept especially in eighteenth-century Britain, thanks to well-known authors such as David Hume, Francis Hutcheson or Adam Smith. Sympathy is here conceived as the mental capacity to predict outcomes and form beliefs about natural processes. It represented, therefore, a primarily ethical concept, derived from a close observation of every-day life mechanisms. In general, sympathy was studied in order to understand the practical functioning of society. In the field of morals or taste, for example, it represented the medium toward others' ideas and impressions, arousing moral approbation or disapproval (see at least Frazer, 2010).

Such a background appears to be not relevant to J.S. Moore, as he leans toward a "psychologistic" reduction of empathy. Not surprisingly, the principle of empathy is associated with two other "neurophysiological" principles: "the principle of absorption", which is "the familiar fact that when one is intensely interested in an object of contemplation he has a feeling of oneness with the object", and "the principle of neural assimilation", according to which "the sense of beauty depends on the ease with which the stimuli from the beautiful object are assimilated into the neuronic patterns already existent in the brain".

Overall, J.S. Moore's psychophysical framework appears to be rather sketchy and too tied to cultural 'positivistic' assumptions, insofar as the notion of empathy is posed as a widespread and established notion. In other words, the late – positivistic – definition of empathy is presented here as a proper improvement of the modern definition, without any need of historical or critical contextualization. Moreover, his conception of empathy makes "objective-subjective" harmony rather weak, inasmuch as his "reductionist" stance on psychophysical harmony forces him to build a separated and abstract "spiritual harmony". In our opinion, J.S. Moore underestimated the ethical dimension of empathy or, rather, its connection to human nature. We call, therefore, for a deeper, anthropological understanding of empathy, which will show both its "spiritual" and "psychophysical" nuances.

This anthropological standpoint shows that an aesthetic conception of empathy cannot be reduced to the empathetic bond between artist and enjoyer. Indeed, we must always keep in mind a certain 'artistic character' in

those who are said to be artists. Such 'artistic character' should be seen as what conveys and embodies the act of empathy, putting 'the artistry' in the empathic act. We cannot be satisfied here with the empathic bond between two generic individuals, as we are seeking for the empathic bond between artist and enjoyer. As for the definition of character, we can simply refer to its common meaning: the development of a certain temperament or set of inclinations, within a favorable context. Furthermore, we can now link artistic character and artistic practice, as the former blossoms into a 'style', becoming peculiar and recognizable, in a given time and place. Overall, we maintain that an anthropological embodiment of empathy represents the necessary presupposition for beauty evaluation: if we are to grant aesthetic relevance to empathy, we must assume, for the one who possibly makes beautiful objects, a peculiar artistic ability to empathetically experience things in life.

Thereby, the core-relationship between empathy and artistic character unveils a deeper meaning for empathy in aesthetic context. Empathy[3] can now be seen as a form of inspiration experienced by the artist, as a feeling of empathy towards nature, experienced through its own character. Surprisingly enough, we already find this framework in nineteenth century continental debate. Specifically, it's the generation of philosophers that preceded the advent of experimental science that tried to revive eighteenth-century notion of sympathy through this anthropological connotation. See, for example, this quote from Frederik Christian Sibbern:

> It is clearly our original sympathy with the whole of humanity, indeed with the whole of Nature, that we harbour for the same reason, namely the fact that we constantly carry in our innermost selves this common ground of all humanity, from which in nature and reality all characters arise: this is evidently what makes the poet able to bring Nature so vividly and with such truth to life, and who feels the living impulse to do so, as he feels his innermost self to be powerfully touched and directed by Nature (Sibbern, 1834, p. 32).

What must be stressed here is that this 'embodied' act of empathy becomes very much recognisable by every average-trained art-enjoyer. Such an act pertains indeed to a natural language that is rooted in our constitution and brought to light by character. Although not everyone develops an artistic character, everyone develops their own character. In this respect, depicting what is characteristic (in the sense of peculiar, not ideal), the artist echoes the common structure of every human being:

> The whole of human nature is found entirely in the poet, therefore everything that gives human nature a peculiar character, a peculiar form in any individual, everything that is stirred up in human beings and sets them in motion, can emerge in the poet and revive in him. This is precisely what it means, or as one should say, to put oneself into all kinds of human individualities and constitutions. The poet recognizes them all in himself; he feels the same thing reviving in himself as if it were his own, if only he deals with it sufficiently, with sufficient desire and interest, so that what is in him can now also be set in motion and taught in order to grasp it (*Ibidem*).

[3] From here on, we will use the term 'empathy' in a broad sense, pointing at an 'embodied' definition in which empathy and sympathy intermingle.

Returning to our dialogue with J.S. Moore, we must add an important *caveat*: here we are not advocating for a hard-boiled naturalism. This core-relationship between empathy and the artistic character does not recall the naturalistic motto of Emile Zola, "art is a corner of nature seen through a temperament". Precisely by studying naturalistic tendencies in nineteenth-century art-history, Hans Rookmaaker pointed out how the language of art, especially of modern art, unveils its potential exactly against naturalistic claims (see Rookmaaker, 1972, and 1973, pp. 11–28). Art's "iconic" nature – in Panofskyan terms – eludes the mimetic command of naturalism, choosing alternative languages based on images: "in front of his easel, a painter is not a slave of the past, nor of the present, not of nature nor of his fellow-man" (Rookmaaker, 1972, p. 242).

The artwork gains beauty inasmuch as the artist gains his own artistic freedom; he gives an identity to his artwork, inasmuch as he hovers above its character.[4] In this sense, the artist depicts something which does not seem to belong to the thing depicted or, to rephrase it, something which does not pertain to the explicit (mimetic) definition of the thing. And yet, it is exactly this something that represents its proper and individual expression, as much as it eludes and overcomes styles, fashions, or schools.

In light of the above, we now understand that the core-relationship between empathy and character sheds light on the human ability to create new meanings, to create beauty. Most importantly, this connection between human action and human nature echoes the connection between human beings and nature, deepening the meaning of beauty-creation acts. Art, in this sense, recovers a relationship with the world, while beauty heals open wounds (see Rookmaaker, 2003, pp. 138–144). The very feel of empathy becomes the medium of a common shared experience – a harmonic and spiritual relation, to return to J.S. Moore's terminology – that involves human beings and nature as a whole.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this paper we gave a closer look at J.S. Moore's comprehensive view of beauty, as developed in his essay of 1942. The theory he advocates is as multifaceted as the types of harmony through which the notion of beauty, as relating mainly to the artistic field, is articulated. It combines traditional ideas on beauty, while suggesting novel ways of displaying them. He distinguishes various types and subtypes of harmony and traces a complex net of relations among the material, ideal, and spiritual components of beauty. However, due to its concise approach, in some points J.S. Moore's view has to be complemented, which is what we tried to do here. We focused on the first two main types of harmony on which the notion of beauty relies, which he labels

[4] Character's scope as a necessary correlate of empathy can perhaps be associated with the notion of 'interface' proposed by Kiianlinna and Kurjenmiekka in a recent paper. Bringing together phenomenological and analytical frameworks, they attempted to reform aesthetic judgment by overcoming the partial incommunicability of aesthetic experience as a whole. They have thus identified a notion, that of 'interface', which allows to intuit the possible aesthetic value experienced by others, although not necessarily in the same way. See Kiianlinna and Kurjenmiekka (2023, pp. 108-128).

"objective" and "objective-subjective". As regards the former, which is internal to the aesthetic object, at first we introduced and explored the concepts of coherence, completeness, and organic unity, which the notion of formal harmony, as applying to both the perceptive and the ideal components of an object, brings into play. We then considered the (harmonic) relation between an artwork's form and meaning, and argued that it can be conceived as particularly intimate union or fittingness. By analyzing how these concepts operate as general guidelines for the artist as well as for the audiences, we were able to address some issues raised by modern and contemporary artists with respect to formal beauty. Finally, we delved into the topic of empathy, which is at the core of J.S. Moore second main type of harmony, which we re-named as 'relational'. More specifically, we have tried to restore an 'embodied' notion of empathy, not distant from ordinary experience, which in artistic production emerges as the artist's relation to the world, to the artwork, and to the enjoyer.

Of course, there remain some other questions to be tackled on these subjects, especially as regards the subjective and spiritual implications that they can bring out. But we would be satisfied enough if we managed to show that beauty and harmony still have a lot to say, both in the philosophical and in the artistic fields.

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Filippo Focosi
University of Macerata
Via Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni 30
62100 Macerata MC
Italy
f.focosi1@unimc.it

Pier Francesco Corvino
Alma mater Europaea
Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis
Kardeljeva ploščad 1
1000 Ljubljana
Slovenia
pierfrancescocorvino@outlook.it

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10489478

Beauty between Space, Place, and Landscape

Recovering the Substantive and Normative Character of Beauty

Paolo Furia

Notions of space and place are often used interchangeably in everyday speech, but they are distinguished both conceptually and historically. When put in relation to space and place, beauty reveals all its vitality and ties to socio-political issues, like: why do we consider a place beautiful and another place ugly? How do taste judgments about places influence planning, tourism, heritage policies, urban, and landscape architecture? I will develop my argument in four points. First, I will shortly pin down the main tenets of a concept of beauty that is inherently spatial, by rephrasing Roger Scruton's insights on the beautiful and Ed Casey's notion of 'implacement'. Second, I will address the interconnection between the modern emergence of a quantitative and objectivist concept of space and a non-relational idea of beauty. Third, I will expose the relationship between the concept of place, idiographic and qualitative, and the emergence of a site-specific, phenomenologically based concept of beauty. In conclusion, I will show how non-relational conceptions of beauty risk to colonize aesthetic experience and I will take a stand for a relational conception of beauty against the risk of standardization of both landscape appreciation and planning. | *Keywords: Beauty, Place, Space, Landscape, Standardization*

1. Introduction

In this essay, my claim is that the geographical concepts of space and place are the locus of a possible recuperation of the relationships between the beautiful and the good. Notions of space and place are often used interchangeably in everyday speech, but they are distinguished both conceptually and historically. For the sake of my argument, I will not deal with all possible meanings that the words space and place have had in their complex and fascinating history. Rather, I will adopt a space-place opposition quite classic in both philosophy and human geography debates: on the one hand, there is Cartesian space,

which is objective, quantitative, infinite, and isotropic; on the other hand, there is place, which is symbolic, historical, idiographic. In both cases, the issue of beauty is relevant: when put in relation to space and place, beauty reveals all its vitality and ties to socio-political issues, such as why we consider a place beautiful and another place ugly, and how taste judgments about places influence planning, tourism, heritage policies, and urban and landscape architecture. Nonetheless, given the distinction between concepts of space and place, the notion of beauty assumes different nuances of meaning when put in relation to one or the other. I will develop my argument in four points. First, I will shortly pin down the main tenets of a concept of beauty that is inherently spatial, by rephrasing Roger Scruton's insights on the beautiful and Ed Casey's notion of 'implacement'. Second, I will address the interconnection between the modern emergence of a quantitative and objectivist concept of space and a non-relational idea of beauty. Third, I will expose the relationship between the concept of place, idiographic and qualitative, and the emergence of a site-specific, phenomenologically based concept of beauty. In conclusion, I will show how non-relational conceptions of beauty risk colonising aesthetic experience, and I will take a stand for a relational conception of beauty against the risk of standardization of both landscape appreciation and planning.

2. Space, place, and beauty: an aesthetic-geographical issue

My claim aligns with Roger Scruton's statement that beauty reveals that "we are at home in the world; the world is already ordered in our perceptions as a place fit for the lives of beings like us" (Scruton, 2009, p. 145). I take Scruton's geographical metaphors very seriously. Philosopher of geography Ed Casey (1997) uses the word 'implacement' to signify the act of attaching emotional and symbolic value to a portion of space to turn it into the home of a person or community, that is, a place.[1] Paul Vidal de la Blache, one of the forefathers of contemporary geography, defined geography as the "science of places" (1913, p. 289). As qualitative and meaningful, place is also "the horizon that determines our perceptions and preferences" (Haapala, 1999, p. 260), which makes place relevant for aesthetics as well. Place establishes a connection between aesthetics and geography; a connection often overlooked in current literature and research (Furia, 2020). Every place bears the mark of humans, who are "constituted by being-in-the-aesthetic-world" (Haapala, 1999, p. 257). If all this holds, Scruton's claim takes on a geographic and aesthetic meaning at the same time: beauty, far from being an abstract aesthetic value, emerges in the human effort to turn terrestrial space into the common home of humankind.

Following this path means adopting a relational, substantive, and normative account of beauty. First, beauty is relational, for it does not consist in an objective property of an object, but emerges in the relationship between

[1] The difference between space and place has been thoroughly addressed by the phenomenological strand in human geography (see Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977 and Seamon, 1979). Phenomenological geography opposed the quantitative, neutral, and isotropic notion of space (based on a Cartesian understanding of extension) to the meaningful, qualitative, and aesthetically relevant concept of place, suited for human life. To retrieve this conceptually important debate, see also Agnew (2011).

a subject and an object. Commenting on Kant's theory of beauty, Shaviro claims that "the flower is not beautiful in itself; rather, beauty happens when I encounter the flower" (Shaviro, 2009, p. 6). However, the subject-object relation always *takes place* somewhere; the local character of such relation renders beauty a situated relation, that is, a relation in which not only a subject and an object are involved, but also the spatial conditions of their encounter. To follow and rephrase Shaviro's quote: beauty happens when, but also *where* I encounter the flower.

Second: beauty is substantive because the place of the encounter between the perceiving subject and the perceived object can be considered as the 'substance' that gives rise to both the poles of the relation. The place of the encounter is certainly the medium that makes such an encounter possible. This means that place, properly understood, does not result from the subjective projection of human values on external reality, but comes before the poles it instantiates and gives shape to our ways to feel, perceive, and make sense of the objects that surround us. The relational character of beauty is not in contradiction with its substantive nature. Here I take the word 'substantive' without assuming metaphysical stances, just as the geographer Kenneth Olwig does when posing himself the objective of "recovering the substantive nature of landscape."[2] Olwig sees landscape as "as a nexus of community, justice, nature, and environmental equity" (Olwig, 1996, p. 630–631). Such a nexus is still a relation, but a relation in which the subjective pole participates to a greater socio-spatial whole. That whole cannot be properly grasped as a mere object: rather, it can be seen as the lifeworld itself, geographically understood as the circumambient reality in which the subject finds itself immersed.[3] Beauty, therefore, is not only the measure of the quality of the communication between a subject and an object, but also accounts for the overall quality of the place in which such communication takes place. Moreover, when I say that a place is beautiful, I surely mean that I feel good in appraising it with my senses, but I also mean that it is beautiful per se and that such beauty attracts, affects, and implicates my body and mind. Given what is at stake in the concept of beauty, namely the possibility for humankind to feel at home in the world, it is clear that the beauty of a place is not just a specific application of the general concept of beauty, but an eminent case of what beauty as such is actually about. Indeed, a beautiful place is "a place fit for the lives of beings like us" (Scruton, 2009, p. 145).

Third, the idea of beauty implies a normative dimension. If we take such a dimension seriously, we need to adjust Scruton's claim a little bit: instead of stating that beauty reveals that "we are at home in the world" (Scruton, 2009, p. 145), we shall affirm that we *can be* at home in the world thanks to beauty. Moreover, instead of claiming that "the world is already ordered in our perceptions as a place", we shall claim that the world *can be* ordered in our

[2] This is the title of an essay published by Olwig in 1996 in the Annals of the Association of American Geographers.

[3] Similar ideas have been developed on Heideggerian basis by the French geographer Eric Dardel in his 1952 book *L'homme et la terre*.

perception as a place. As the remarkable analyses of Arnold Berleant (2010) and Yuriko Saito (2017) on negative aesthetics have shown, the spatial world is far from being already ordered in our perception as a full-fledged place, where humans can effectively feel at home. On the contrary, we are surrounded by spatial hideousness, in various shapes: irrational land use (and abuse) produces floods and desertification, soil degradation and loss of biodiversity (Spaid, 2020), suburban junk spaces,[4] non-places[5] and anti-places.[6] In all these cases, spatial ugliness is the sign of a deeper crisis that affects and challenges both ecological and socio-political equilibriums. Beauty seems to reveal its ancient kinship with the good when it is missing: thus, it can be considered as a task to be accomplished in space, rather than an objective property of places: indeed, places are themselves the results of multiple and complex processes of 'implacement' fostered by humans to feel at home in the world.

I will return to the relational, substantive, and normative account of beauty by the end of this essay. Before, it is necessary to take a step back and provide a conceptual elucidation of the concepts of place, space, and landscape, in order to appreciate their inherent wealth of meaning and to address how they interact differently with the issue of beauty.

3. Space and beauty

The term 'space' historically put less emphasis on phenomenological attachment to place. With Descartes and Newton, it assumed the meaning of a boundless, infinite, absolute extension, suited for the exact measuring of distances and positions of the objects that are inside it. Such a concept of space was particularly important for the transformation of human geography, traditionally based on the qualitative description of regions, into a positivist and nomothetic science, a transformation that mainly occurred during the 1950s and 1960s in the Anglo-American context. Cartesian space played a pivotal role in a new "cartography of objectivism, which claimed to disclose

4 'Junkspace' is the neologism adopted by the architect Rem Koolhaas to indicate the kind of territorial remains of the modern era "after modernization has run its course" (Koolhaas, 2002, p. 175): inhospitable cities, inhabitable neighbourhoods haunted by socio-spatial clashes and inequal distribution of resources. In other words, the negation of beauty, "according to a new gospel of ugliness" (*Ibidem*).

5 The expression 'non-place' comes from the famous inquiry of the anthropologist Marc Augé on the spatiality of late capitalism (1992). According to Augé, *fin de siècle* modernity (rebranded as 'supermodernity') is completed with the realization of standardized sites throughout the entire globe, which lack a real link to regional architectural styles and landscape characteristics and can be replicated everywhere in order to perform a specific socio-economic function. Airports, gas stations, malls are examples of non-places, characterized by a certain indifference to aesthetic appraisal or, very interestingly, by a sharp fracture between aesthetic appraisal and integration within the broader context in which they are placed.

6 A remarkable example of anti-place is offered by the philosopher Caterina Resta in her book *Geofilosofia del Mediterraneo* (2012), in which the deformities of Messina's urban landscape caught arriving from the sea become the symbol of a denial of place and its aesthetic-phenomenological values: "Since Messina is not simply de-localized space, pure desert or flat oceanic expanse, it is not simply the matter on which one hopes to imprint new orders, but it is the deformed that leads back to the formless, to chaos, to anarchy, which is absence of Principle and Measure, Babel, city of total confusion. Suffice it to come from the sea to realize, at a glance, in a single startling view, not to be confronted with a built-up area, but with a haphazard concrete jumble, rained down nobody knows from where or how, that havocs what, by sheer effort of retrospective imagination, one can guess was the beauty of the natural site, now irreparably lost. Rarely, I think, much disharmony can appear more clearly or be more stridently" (Resta, 2012, p. 140 [My translation.]).

a fundamental and enduring geometry underlying the apparent diversity and heterogeneity of the world" (Gregory, 1994, p. 70). From the standpoint of spatial theory,[7] places are mere sites on a cartographic map and regional differences lose their importance. The fitness of place is assessed in relation to abstract models based on prior mathematization of space. The identity value, historicity, and narrative features of a place are not taken into account:[8] the equivalence of place and home is not considered relevant. Aesthetics has also lost its relevance: in spatial theory, a sharp divide is drawn between the objectivity of spatial distances and distributions and the subjectivity and place attachment, affection, and taste judgments, deemed too subjectivistic and relativistic for scientific discourse.

If space is regarded as devoid of intrinsic qualitative value or aesthetic significance, then it can be molded according to the intentions and orientations of cultures. Another assumption of such an approach is that humans, conceived as rational actors, have the power to purify real, terrestrial space, characterized by impurities and unevenness, by applying ideal models of spatial organization onto it. In this argumentative framework, real space is just the background for human action, or, in other words, the raw material to be reworked according to the spiritual needs and aims of humans. This an-aesthetic view of space does not necessarily exclude the question of beauty from the scope of spatial planning (both landscape and urban). However, the idea of beauty implied in spatial objectivist approaches is fundamentally non-relational, for in this case the ideal of beauty results from the artist's or designer's elaboration or adherence to aprioristic models, indifferent to the relationship with the environmental and spatial context in which the artist or designer is immersed. As non-relational, this kind of spatial beauty is defined by Paolo D'Angelo as an "extra-aesthetic value" (D'Angelo, 2021, p. 64) due to the prevalence of categorical elements in the evaluation, such as adherence to a universalistic paradigm of beauty like the one labelled by Tatarkiewicz "the Great Theory."[9] A non-relational conception of beauty aligns with a sharp separation of nature (as the realm of necessity) and spirit (as the realm of freedom) and, when applied to space, emphasises first and foremost the active role of the human subject on space seen as passive, deprived of life and quality. The distance between human and space is also a gap between ideal and real, bridged precisely through the transformation of real places according to criteria of efficiency and rationality.

7 Spatial theory can be deemed as an evolution of the "economic theories of location" (Olsson and Dale, 1968, p. 229) already in vogue during the first half of the XX century. In these approaches, the distances and the distribution of various elements on space, and even the very shape of the towns, are considered factors that impact the efficiency of market exchange, trade, and transportation of both commodities and people.

8 Identity, history, and narration are the three criteria singled out by Marc Augé (1992) to define the concept of 'place' from the vantage point of anthropology.

9 In this case, according to D'Angelo, beauty is still defined "by those criteria of proportion, order, and measure that, when transferred to art, prove to be insubstantial, but have their privileged field of application in beauty considered in an extra-aesthetic sense, for example in the beauty of the human body, for which there are 'rules' that are those followed in beauty contests, where, incidentally, the winners always tend to look alike" (D'Angelo, 2021, p. 66 [my translation]).

The objectivistic and non-qualitative notion of space, the reduction of living places to the raw material of human palingenetic intervention, the conception of nature as a mere resource and the affirmation of a disembodied and non-relational ideal of beauty inherited from the Great Theory form a unique constellation of the galaxy of modernity. Certainly, there has been no shortage of demiurgic interventions on space from the 18th century to today, qualified by the effort to make space conform to the interests, goals, and ideals of beauty of planners and their clients. Moreover, every demiurgical intervention aimed at realising an ideal of beauty on space has precise externalities in terms of producing ugliness, debasement and alienation. The demolition of historic centres to create grands boulevards,[10] the building of identical dormitory neighbourhoods, the invention of new State capitals out of thin air, and the transformation of villages and reserves into museums reproducing exotic experiences are productions of an appalling spatial rationality that reflects the interests of the privileged in the system.[11]

A radical example of non-relational beauty associated with radical spatialism is Walter Christaller's Central Place model formulated in the 1930s. In 1933, the German geographer presented the dissertation *The Central Localities of Southern Germany*, in which he introduced a rationalistic model of spatial hierarchisation of cities. The model is based on the principle that, as the distance of a household from access to a certain type of good or service increases, the demanded quantity of such good or service decreases. Where the distance between the good and the consumer is minimal, demand increases because transport costs are lower. Different demand thresholds for each type of product exist, concentrating the less necessary and therefore rarer goods or services in places with a large population; the greater the concentration of inhabitants, the higher the probability that those goods or services will meet demand. Cities not reaching the threshold of ancillary or rare goods and services revolve around the central location that produces and disposes of them. The model replicates in geography the physical argument that mass crystallises around a core in an orderly fashion. The circle is the geometrical figure for an ideal geographic region, appearing uniform from a physical point of view. However, since in real space circles do not touch each other except at a point, there would be wasted space and peripheral areas positioned at non-optimal distances from the centres. The model, therefore, is corrected by replacing circles with hexagons that share adjacent sides, thus avoiding the inconvenience of wasted space. Knowledge of simple spatial laws common to both physical nature and human settlements would thus provide the key to judging existing settlements and constructing new ones, arranged in strictly functional hierarchies. At this level, the cognitive and aesthetic spheres converge in the perfect adequacy of forms consistent with logic.

10 A historical critique to the 'grands boulevards' top-down urban planning has been formulated by Henri Lefebvre (cf. Lefebvre, 1996).

11 The subscription to an aprioristic model of beauty separated from the lifeworld is not only evident in the activity of building, where it is quite frequent that functional and instrumental motives override aesthetic ones (this is the case with the construction of dormitory districts that are all the same in various cities of the world), but also in the activity of cultural heritage protection. On the also political contradictions of this process cf. Olmo (2018).

The organisation of geographic space according to criteria of efficiency, functionality and simplicity, elicits a pure and disinterested aesthetic pleasure, detached from the cultural deposits of an old humanity attached to its own aesthetic habits:

> The more strongly and purely the location, shape and size express the centralised character of community spaces, the greater our aesthetic pleasure will be, because we recognise that the congruence of purpose and meaning with the external form is logically correct and therefore can be appreciated as clearly (Christaller, 1966, p. 14).

Geographer Tim Cresswell (2013), in presenting Christaller's work, reminds us that the author worked as a planner in the Third Reich's working group dedicated to territorial investigation.

It is worth noticing that Christaller gives the term 'place' the meaning of mere location, a geometrical form placed in a geometrical space. In general, according to geographer John Agnew, abstract spatial analysis "tends to view places as nodes in space simply reflective of the spatial imprint of universal physical, social or economic processes" (Agnew, 2011, p. 317). The non-relational model of beauty that informs Christaller's approach emerges from a peculiar convergence of classicism, rationalism, and positivism. While this approach surely interconnects the cognitive, the moral, and the aesthetic spheres, its anti-phenomenological attitude excludes aesthetic spatial experiences and practices and affective place-attachments from its scopes. To fight aesthetic subjectivism or culturalism, radical spatialism subscribes to a version of the Great Theory that ends up denying its own assumptions. In the manifold accounts of the Great Theory of beauty described by Tatarkiewicz, the universal and moral nature of beauty is always also phenomenological. According to the Great Theory, the beauty of the cosmos is not the result of a disenchanted, disembodied rationality imposing itself on an otherwise irrational nature from the outside. On the contrary, it consists of the intelligible order of nature itself (*physis*), which unfolds organically and dynamically, shying away from rigid schematism and fixity (Vercellone, 2008). This order is ontological, moral, and aesthetic-phenomenological at the same time, as long as humans take part in it with the unity of their being. The question arises whether it is possible to retrieve such a unity of the ontological, the moral, and the aesthetic-phenomenological dimensions without succumbing to intellectualistic metaphysics or controversial and reactionary nostalgias. One possible approach is to shift the focus from the concept of space and the concept of place and examine how notion of beauty resonates with respect to this latter.

4. Place and beauty

If it were possible to distil the difference between the concepts of space and place into a single word, that word would be 'home'. This is already clear at the level of everyday speech, at least in the Romance and Anglo-Saxon languages. The word 'place',[12] just like the Italian '*luogo*', the Spanish '*lugar*', the French

[12] See the definition and meaning in Britannica Dictionary (Place, no date).

'*lieu*', and the German '*Ort*', despite their different shades of meaning, all refer to a "specific area or region of the world: a particular city, country." The idiographic character of places is what renders them unique also in the experience of people. We all know at the precategorical level of everyday experience that inhabiting one place is not the same thing as inhabiting another. According to Ed Casey, places are those "in which we orient ourselves and feel at home" (Casey, 2001, p. 685). Of course, each individual feels at home in one place and does not feel at home in another one: in general, we feel at home only very few places on earth. But, in general, a portion of terrestrial space can be called "place" when it is enlivened by everyday spatial practices (Seamon, 1979; De Certeau, 1980) and aesthetic habits (Bertinetto, 2022; Portera, 2022) that qualify it as unique and irreplaceable. That does not mean that every spatial practice is place-based and results in the sense of home. Many spatial practices are based on movement, escape, and even displacement: consider, for instance, tourism, exile, migration, pilgrimage, and so on. However, recursive patterns of spatial movements, such as going from home to school or workplace on a daily basis, produce a sense of place (Relph, 1976) that makes the practitioner feel at home within a portion of space that is wider than her physical house.

This also explains a certain degree of interchangeability between the terms "place" and "home". According to phenomenological accounts of the concept of home, pioneered by Gaston Bachelard in his seminal book *The Poetics of Space* (1957), our native home can be considered the quintessentially first place (literally, the birthplace) because of the exceptional bond that ties us to it. In turn, as we grow up, we learn to feel at home in multiple contexts, starting from the spatial surroundings of our physical house. Just as home is the first place by definition, the place (the street, the village or city, to some extent even the country) in which our home is settled can be seen as home by metonymy. By following our everyday paths, we weave our identity with our spatial surroundings, turning them into places in every moment.

Of course, this account of both place and home is more normative than descriptive.[13] Spatial practices are not the same for everyone and are not equally accessible to everyone. Actual experiences of places can be very far from the concept and include displacement and negative feelings; but even in such negativity of actual experience, there is a lesson. We can appreciate the ideal association of the concepts of place and home even more strongly when we do not feel at home in a place. Experiences of displacement throughout history reveal in the most powerful, and sometimes tragic way, how much we need to feel at home somewhere.[14] However, the ideal connection of place and home is also confirmed in average experiences fed by everyday spatial

13 This is why I prefer to speak of a conceptual or ideal connection between home and place.

14 This was the argument of the Italian anthropologist Ernesto De Martino, who has investigated various experiences of spatial displacement in different cultures and ages: from the territorial angst of the Aranda to the estrangement felt by peasant of Marcellinara (IT) when he was temporarily taken away from his living place. It is worth noting that De Martino chose the term 'angst' with explicit reference to the Heideggerian concept in an article published in 1952.

practices. In our everyday spatial experiences, we are confronted with a kind of precategorical, everyday aesthetics that is mostly non-topical and non-explicit.[15] The experience of inhabiting refers to the ontological sphere of the being-in-an-aesthetic-world. By considering the experience of inhabiting, and the spatial practices tied to such experience, we realize that everyday aesthetics does not only accomplish the task of expanding the scope of traditional aesthetics but also represents a way to reconnect aesthetics to the profundity of ourselves, "constituted by being-in-an-aesthetic-world", to use Haapala's expression once again.

According to a phenomenological stance, inhabiting is not merely about possessing a house; rather, it involves repeating complex sets of situated practices and movements, through which a sense of belonging and place-attachment can arise. Inhabiting is about everyday habits and practices of orientation, territorialization, and care: our place-attachment and sense of belonging with a place develops mostly subconsciously, through the repetition of our spatial routines. Authors like Michel De Certeau (1980) and Henri Lefebvre (1974) distanced themselves from the concept of place precisely because of its association with the automatisms of everyday practices, which they saw as mechanical and filled with ideological motives and top-down impositions. Indeed, the act of inhabiting also involves the interiorization of predominant social values through everyday practices and habits. However, this interiorization encompasses not only the negative, alienating side of ideology but also the very condition of belonging to a social community that mirrors itself in its living spaces. In this regard, Paul Ricoeur's discussion of the three layers of meaning of the notion of ideology, as presented in his *Conferences on Ideology and Utopia* (1986), is still relevant. According to Ricoeur, the first layer of meaning of ideology is distortion and manipulation: it is in this sense that the word has been used most during the XX century, especially from the part of critical theory. The second layer is the process of legitimation of authority through a set of ideas about society, morality, politics, and so on. Ricoeur draws this idea from Max Weber's understanding of institutional authority as a kind of power that not only needs violence but also persuasion to be exerted with true effectiveness. The third layer is more horizontal and has to do with the social integration of a community, made possible by the sharing of symbols, myths, and images between people. If the first meaning of ideology is negative, the second is rather neutral, and the third is even beneficial, for no community can stay together out of a common framework of symbols and values. These ideas, which Ricoeur develops in the framework of a general theory of culture, can easily be applied to space. The symbolic heritage of a culture crystallizes itself in spatial configurations: the very possibility to feel at home in a portion of space, that is, to turn it into a place, depends on such crystallization. This insight points to the definition of a genetic phenomenology of place which transcends the narrow limits of subjectivism. A place is a place for us, as individuals, when we feel it as home;

[15] Everyday aesthetics has always been interested in spatial practices and experiences. However, everyday aesthetics has undergone its explicit 'spatial turn' only quite recently, thanks to contributions like the last book of Elisabetta Di Stefano, *Estetica urbana* (2023).

but a place is a place when a culture, a community, or an intersubjective entity settles in a portion of space, transforming it substantially, giving it a name with a capital letter. Such intersubjective, collective 'implacement' is at the basis of any subjective experience of place. This also means that places reflect the patterns of thought, beliefs, customs, but also power balances and ideological connotations of a culture. Consequently, the process by which a portion of space is turned into or preserved as a place is far from irenic: ideological motives usually lie behind our place-attachments, including how we appraise them aesthetically. This does not render our feeling-at-home in a place less real. Instead, often, the fact of not-feeling-at-home in a place reveals precisely that place's ideological constitution, embodied in physical, cognitive, and moral boundaries, and criteria of inclusion or exclusion concerning certain categories of people.

The same place may be home for some categories of people and a prison for others. In this ambiguous nature of places, however, their inherent vocation for change is found. Places are not the result of the mechanical replication of cultural biases and power dynamics onto space. Places are inherently animated by virtual possibilities that it is up to people to actualize. A place takes on different meanings for those who inhabit it across countless generations – new residents, migrants, pilgrims, students, business travellers, scientists, artists, tourists; the multilayered identity of a place consists in the open and delicate interplay of the representations and practices they host, enable, and preserve. A place is the dynamic whole constituted by the complex interplay between different spatial practices and practitioners; it exists as long as they coexist despite (but even by virtue of) their differences. The complex homeostasis in which a place exists is not static; on the contrary, it changes gradually but continually through unexpected encounters, displacements, clashes and conflicts, mash-ups and hybridisations.

The American geographer David Seamon coined the expression 'place-ballet' (1979) to outline the non-mechanical, non-automatic entanglement that weaves together places and people. Our place-based spatial practices do not only result from the blind application of social codes and rules. Rather, as we move along our everyday paths, we take on a sort of interpretative attitude, adding to the social use of spaces our personal and socio-cultural styles and preferences, which in themselves hinge on our social conditions, origins, genders, generations, etc. Spatial practices and 'space-time routines' (Seamon, 1979) are analogous to ballets, where personal interpretation and style is at least as important as having memorized the script. The place-ballet serves as a powerful metaphor which brings attention to the creative conditions of belonging with our living spaces and to the virtualities of places themselves: only by recovering such relational and processual dimension it is possible to retrieve the importance of places for the development of personal and collective identities, without falling into geographical determinism, nationalism, or political hyper-conservativism.

There is another, more subtle reason why the metaphor of the place-ballet is interesting to the researcher in aesthetics. Ballet, as an artistic practice, is

somehow concerned with beauty. Given the inherently local nature of places, place-ballets are particularly suited to reveal the site-specific, relational character of beauty itself. There is no general rule or parameter of beauty that can be applied uniformly to all places. This may sound quite obvious, but, at the same time, it is highly consequential at the level of place and landscape planning, where beautification often proceeds according to extrinsic stylemes, perhaps borrowed from the compositional values of picturesque art.[16] Moreover, the metaphor of the place-ballet emphasizes the practical dimension of beauty, which is attained in action, interaction, and engagement, rather than mere contemplation (Berleant, 1991). The fact that it is not possible to subscribe to an abstract and disembodied paradigm of beauty for appraising different places and place-ballets implies that all place-ballets and places may be beautiful (and must be beautified) in their own terms. Yet, at least one normative element for defining this practical kind of spatial beauty can be found by reflecting on the artistic metaphor of the ballet itself. However personal and differentiated ballet styles can be, it is hard to consider sprawling, disordered, confused and clumsy movements, disrespectful of the movements of the other dancers, as dance. Moreover, Seamon does not generally speak of dance, but of ballet, which is a formal kind of dance concerned with harmony and grace.[17] The aesthetic quality of a ballet interpretation, its beauty, resides in the realization of an embodied and practical kind of harmony, which is visual and performative at the same time. The metaphor of the place-ballet introduces the question of harmony from the artistic field, as if our being-in-the-aesthetic-world could be more or less successful in accordance with the ability of the self to live in harmony with others in a place. The metaphor of the ballet should not be taken literally, of course: the point is not about the artistic quality of our spatial practices, such as driving all the way to work on daily basis, having a stroll in the public garden next door, sitting on the steps of the central square of the neighbourhood. While such routine actions and tasks cannot be evaluated according to artistic criteria, they are habits endowed with significance that is, at the same time, aesthetic, cognitive, and moral. A harmonious place-ballet is one performed in harmony with the place-ballet of the others. In this way, place results in a dynamic composition of ballets in harmony with each other. It is, of course, a regulative ideal; but this ideal, which is both moral and aesthetic, prevents the issue of socio-spatial order from falling into the sterile problematic of formalistic public decor.

When speaking of places, beauty cannot be simply reduced to an artistic parameter applicable to different idiographic contexts; but beauty should not be dismissed as if it were nothing more than a caprice or even a vice. An institutional report from the English Parks Alliance delivered in 2015 is devoted to the formulation of a "community right to beauty" (Harvey and

16 To the improper attribution of general patterns of aesthetic beauty based on figurative arts to nature are directed the criticisms raised by Allen Carlson (2009) towards the very notion of landscape. In the conclusion of this paper, I will propose a variation on the theme.

17 On this subject, cf. the doctoral thesis of Serena Massimo: *Dance as Emergence. Lived Experience of Dancing between spontaneity and 'making sense'* (2023, [non-published, title translated by me]).

Julian, 2015). Among the key findings of the report, there is the fact that "Overall only 54% of people felt they had access to beautiful places, dropping to just 45% among those in social rented property." It is clear that, in this report, beauty is not considered only as an aesthetic quality detached from the other spheres of human life; it fully concerns people's quality of life. The statistical difference between people living in social rented properties and others tells a lot about differences in the experience of dwelling – that is, of place – between different social groups. Beauty is properly considered as a measure of people's quality of life.

Reflecting on the crisis of the concept of beauty after the fall of the Great Theory, according to which beauty, good and truth were different faces of the same coin, Tatarkiewicz writes that:

> The word and concept 'beauty' have been retained in colloquial speech, however; they are used in practice rather than in theory. One of the central concepts in the history of European culture and philosophy has thus been reduced to the status of a mere colloquialism (Tatarkiewicz, 1980, p. 146).

Nevertheless, the "communitarian right to beauty" sought by the abovementioned report and similar ones should not be simply dismissed as mere colloquialism. I think that the assumptions of that report offer much to be philosophically reconsidered even if, as Tatarkiewicz argues: "the concept of beauty, however, is not easy to improve" (*Ibidem*). When applied to the issue of place, beauty has already overcome the sharp boundaries of aesthetic consciousness (Gadamer, 1960), to reconnect with the ontological and phenomenological sphere of human dwelling in a spatial world.

5. Places and landscapes: between standardisation and uniqueness

The concept of modern space is either indifferent to beauty or connected to a non-related conception of beauty, whereas the concept of place refers to a relational, site-specific notion of beauty. In both cases, we are confronted with a substantive and normative conception of beauty due to the inherent links beauty entails with other spheres of human life. It is substantive because, when discussed with reference to space and place, beauty exits the perimeter of arts to become a qualitative indicator of our relationship to the world. It is normative because spatial beauty represents an objective to be attained, a goal to be achieved. In the case of the modern conception of space, however, the normativity of beauty is essentially cognitive and anti-phenomenological: we must know what constitutes a beautiful place (the central place of Christaller's theory, for instance) in order to realize it. In the case of place, on the other hand, the normativity of beauty is phenomenological, which means that it essentially depends on people's feelings about the beautiful and the ugly in space.

At this point, it is necessary to acknowledge that the abovementioned model is only ideal-typical. In the history of culture and aesthetic taste, as much as at the phenomenological level of everyday experience, the two well-distinguished concepts of space entailing non-relational beauty and place entailing relational beauty often overlap. In particular, one cannot ignore the fact that

non-relational ideals of beauty do not operate only at the strategic level of top-down planning, as if there were, on one side, the imposition of such ideals operated by the most powerful, and, on the other side, relational, local, idiographic ways to see beauty in places from the part of oppressed inhabitants. As a matter of fact, non-relational ideals of beauty affect habitual mental pathways all the time. Consider what is happening to landscapes today. From the conceptual point of view, the view according to which "the spirit of place resides in its landscape" (Relph, 1976, p. 30) is to be welcomed.[18] Landscapes, which can be defined as the material, bodily skin of places which lend themselves to representation,[19] are often judged beautiful according to picturesque stylemes that have very little to do with embodied experience of historical, narrative, and identity places. People often beautify their landscapes according to an 'acting-on' attitude (Besse, 2017), according to which several elements considered to be beautiful in the abstract are simply introduced in historical landscapes to make them look like the images of successful landscapes. Consider, for example, the various processes of 'tuscanization' that are taking place in several rural landscapes around the world. As has been noted in some specialised journals: 'tuscanization' has exported itself into the increasingly competitive southern region of Apulia, and the more austere (compared with sunny Tuscany) Umbria (see also Pellegrini, 2022). But the Tuscan landscape model has even reached Texas (Michalski, 2015). According to Carlson, the standardization of taste in the appreciation of nature hinges on the improper application of judgements parameters coming from the sphere of art. When speaking of landscape, it is pointless to argue against the confusion between art and nature, since, as Berleant has noted consistently with a thorough tradition of human geography dating back to Paul Vidal de la Blache (1913) and Carl Sauer (1925), in landscapes nature and art find themselves confused in principle. Rather, at stake there is the risk that a non-relational conception of beauty, extra-aesthetic in itself, is invading and influencing the aesthetic taste of planners, inhabitants, tourists, and travellers, to the point that the idiographic character of place (and its inherent beauty) is being sacrificed on the high altar of non-relational (often business-oriented) model of beauty.

Conceptions of beauty applied to space and place owe their power to their substantiality and their normativity. However, such power can be dangerous, as the extreme case of the palingenetic geographer in Nazi Germany proves. Engaging with spatial beauty almost unavoidably demands taking a stance.

[18] Relph's account of the relationship between place and landscape is the geographical equivalent of the aesthetic theory elaborated by Berleant. According to Berleant, landscape is "an individual environment, its peculiar features embodying in a distinctive way the factors that constitute any environment and emphasizing the human presence as the perceptual activator of that environment" (Berleant, 1997, p. 12). Even if Berleant does not explicitly address the conceptual relation between place and landscape (he rather discusses the relationship between landscape and environment), it is possible to draw a connection between place and landscape because of their shared focus on local specificity and quality. Moreover, with landscape, Berleant identifies a concrete portion of territory, not its representation: this also puts Berleant's approach in opposition to Carlson's, at least on this point.

[19] This has been expressly argued by Ed Casey (2002). On the complex relationships between materiality and representation in landscapes, cf. Wylie (2007).

A relational concept of beauty, despite its difficulties, proves more respectful to the history of places and the experiences of local communities, in spite of the threats posed by standardization and alienation. In conclusion, the substantive and normative traits of relational beauty cannot be substantiated in any rigid definition or pattern. A beautiful place is one in which I can feel at home.

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Paolo Furia
Università degli Studi di Torino
Department of Humanities
Via Sant'Ottavio 20, Torino
Italy
paolo.furia@unito.it

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10496140

The Loss of Sky-Blue: Changes in the Sky-Environment

Brit Kolditz

The main thesis to be explored is the undiscussed change in the sky-environment and the loss of sky-blue from our aesthetic reach. The concept of 'living blue-beauty' allows to introduce the dynamic sky-environment as a scientific subject and to use the findings to open an inter- and transdisciplinary dialogue on anthropogenic sensory pollution. The observation of increasing changes up to the possible absence of this beauty also enables to address aesthetic and atmospheric (in-)sensibility and (co-)affection for fundamental environmental changes. In the context of an unprecedented epoch of the Anthropocene, concepts such as 'everyday' and 'familiarity' are being challenged. Furthermore, the sky-environment becomes revealed as vulnerable in its natural variability. On top of that, its threatened beauty justifies the pursuit of preventing its loss for the future. | *Keywords: Aesthetics, Philosophy of the Body, Phenomenology, Sensory Pollution, Beauty*

1. Introduction

This article aims to open a discussion on the observable changes in the sky-environment, from the possibility of increasing haziness to the persistent blurring of sky-blue that deviates from historical and seasonal dynamics. Due to the scope of the work, the concern about the loss of sky-blue to be raised here cannot encompass the pressing issues of rapid urban growth and the built environment in terms of an increasingly obstructed view of the sky. Rather, the starting place is that we still have the opportunity to perceive and experience current developments in the sky. However, an aesthetic assessment of deviation from natural environmental variability is still particularly difficult, as it must be addressed against the background of a new, human-made epoch. The beginning of the Anthropocene is unprecedented in its phenomena for which there are no aesthetic and experiential references yet. In view of a transition, it seems urgent to identify and anchor aesthetic experiences with the sky-blue environment as a baseline. The natural sciences, by contrast, have defined comparable references on the basis of the Holocene epoch, in which the Earth system was considered relatively stable and resilient and in which we

humans were able to settle. This reference range of the last ~10,000 years enables the assessment of current changes of the 'post-Holocene Earth,' which appears to be in transition to more instability and unpredictability (Richardson et al., 2023). What this includes is the sky-environment and, in addition to the necessary measurements and objectified assessments of it through the natural sciences, attention should be drawn to the necessary but missing integration of living knowledge through aesthetic experience with the sky-environment. This is not about placing these different approaches and knowledge systems into competition or a hierarchy, but to promote integration and constructive dialogue for the benefit of the sky-blue itself and for human's possibility of experiencing it. The statement of an *increasing loss of sky-blue* is therefore given as motivation for the needed discourse in aesthetics and beyond.

A starting question that arises is why aestheticians, who are considered practically and theoretically sensible not only to art but also to their environment, have not yet addressed the profound change of the sky-environment that is claimed here. In the context of the claim, a possible lack of aesthetic and 'atmospheric sensibility' (Thibaud, 2021) towards this post-Holocene environment could be thought of in two basic ways.

(1) Either the sky is part of aesthetic life and is experienced, but no significant changes are observed that deviate from the 'familiar' and are considered worthy of discussion.

(2) Or the sky is not observed and experienced, and deviant phenomena can therefore not be recognized and discussed.

The latter case poses the more obvious initial situation that there is no necessary experiential knowledge base about the actual sky for a critical discussion, even though it is an environment shared by all. Although it may be a controversial topic, the prerequisite for an aesthetic debate is missing as long as some past and recent states of the sky have not been perceived and can hence not be considered as known or updated. So, if I want to question the current visibility of sky-blue, there must first be given actualized experiences of sky-blue and/or the absence of sky-blue. This basic but seemingly difficult prerequisite of human environmental knowledge appears to be often unfulfilled in so-called everyday life.

The first case, is the even more difficult starting point for the debate because it is obscured by supposed sky viewers. When the sky is visible to humans, experiences of change that differ from past perceptions and recognize deviating change seem possible. But assumptions about supposed 'familiarity' with this environment may get in the way of really experiencing change, as well as forms of silent adaption to or acceptance of any change that are already captured in important concepts such as 'shifting baseline syndrome' (Pauly, 1995) and 'environmental amnesia' (Kahn, 2002). 'Shifting baseline syndrome', for example, used particularly in ecology, is generally described as a "gradual change in the accepted norms for the condition of the natural environment due to a lack of experience, memory,

and/or knowledge of its past conditions" (Soga and Gaston, 2018, p. 222). In terms of human responses to environmental changes like 'shifting baseline syndrome' and 'environmental amnesia', an obvious reason for the supposed sky viewer not perceiving and experiencing deviant changes may be related to essential differences in the qualities of human experience and what can be considered living aesthetic experience. Either way, both versions indicate a lack of aesthetic knowledge of the sky-environment, and in this respect the human capacity for a living aesthetic experience is called into question here. This highlights the need to re-examine what and how a living aesthetic experience is constituted, especially in the context of a changing sky-environment that exceeds natural variation.

Nonetheless, aesthetics as an account of aesthetic life serves here as an opening into this complex topic by enabling the conception of a '*living*[1] *sky-blue beauty*' presented here as a means of better grasping and discussing contemporary changes in the sky-environment. Moreover, the philosophical questioning of the concept of 'familiarity' in connection with supposed knowledge of the everyday sky can also, according to one possible argument, be seen as a reason for a non-actualized and thus unreliable experience of it. Against this background, some essential differences between a shared sky-environment as an everyday 'by-product' and an aesthetic experience of the same will be identified. On the basis of the '*living sky-blue beauty*,' the experienced existence and appearance of the sky-blue can demonstrate the overcoming of the separation between the notions of 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary'. More importantly, the '*living sky-blue beauty*' that is intrinsically connected with its lived knowledge can help to address and communicate its changes and the possible increasing absence of sky-blue, for instance, due to problems of anthropogenic sensory pollution.[2]

2. Lost Reliability of a Sky-Blue Environment and the Problem of Familiarity

"I don't have to have Faith. I have Experience."
(Campbell, 1988, Ep. 6)

The recognition of everyday aesthetics and the aesthetic uncovering of once rather hidden and withdrawn entities and processes, from lichens and mushrooms to designed objects of the built environment such as wind turbines[3] or shopping malls, could suggest an expansion of aesthetic sensibility and awareness. In the context of the environment, aesthetics can be understood with Arnold Berleant as a "theory of sensibility" that he described as a "perceptual awareness that is developed, focused, and informed" (Berleant, 2012, p. 55).

1 'Living' is chosen here instead of 'lived' because it implies both the past [lived] and the future and emphasizes the temporal continuum of this experience in its continuing activity.

2 There are human impacts of sensory pollution across modalities such as light, noise, and chemical pollutions. E.g., Dominoni et al. (2020).

3 E.g., Saito, Y. (2004) *Machines in the Ocean: The Aesthetics of Wind Farms;* Gray, T-L. (2012) *Beauty or Bane: Advancing an Aesthetic Appreciation of Wind Turbine Farms.*

The awareness and appreciation of celestial events, however, seems to be ancient, and still today the sky can be understood as our closest environmental reference or involvement (Heidegger, 1962/2006, p. 413). In this sense, the sky tends to be seen as one of the last natural spaces. Its naturalness originates, for example, from the fundamental sun-dependent rhythms of darkness and light, whose complex meaning for humans, non-humans and ecological processes has only recently awakened new scientific interest in the light of precarious planetary health (Haines, 2021). On closer observation, however, the sky-environment is more than a self-evident naturalness anymore, as revealed, for example, by the increasingly dense air traffic and various perceivable 'signs,' be they indistinct clouds, stripes, strange light formations and persistent haziness (Larson et al, 2019; Baroutaji et al, 2019). In relation with air and atmospheric pollution, which ultimately affect the integrity of the biosphere, the increase in anthropogenic aerosol loading should be taken into consideration, which is defined as one of the nine planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009) that is very likely to be exceeded in some regions (Richardson et al., 2023).

Drawing attention to the loss of a sky-blue environment is a particular challenge since the sky is a shared everyday presence and yet it is ever-changing. The concept of 'familiarity' in everyday aesthetics appears paradigmatic here for such an everyday event that *was*, *is* and probably always *will* be above our heads. However, the assumption or belief that the sky will continue its 'familiar' range of appearances, including sky-blue, in the future is now questionable. The relatively reliable Holocene can refer to the *natural reliability* in certain patterns, dynamics and appearances of natural phenomena, which we are beginning to leave behind us. In other words, if natural reliability is an important precondition for what might be called 'familiar' experience, it seems worth asking whether one can still 'rely' on a blue sky-environment in the approaching Anthropocene. Already Soga and Gaston (2018, p. 223), in the context of the above-mentioned 'shifting baseline syndrome', name the "lack of familiarity with the natural environment" as a major cause of 'shifting baseline syndrome'. Can the human-sky relationship then still be considered a "kind of experience that is all-too-familiar to most of us" (Saito, 2007, p. 51)? Part of the aim of everyday aesthetics, according to Saito, is to "illuminate the ordinary neglected, but gemlike aesthetic potentials hidden behind trivial, mundane, and commonplace facades" (*Ibid*.). Furthermore, she says, it is important to "nurturing this awareness of the neglected, but familiar" (*Ibid*.). Consequently, she presents sky art as a seemingly necessary means for the possibility of an experience of the sky with a subsequent or accompanying appreciation (Saito, 2011). But when the everyday, like the sky-environment, is measured by what 'stands out' and what is not 'normal,' it suggests that the everyday needs protection or elicitation, for example by first being classified and then experienced as *gems*. If this is meant as a legitimate critique of our neglected aesthetic awareness of the everyday it does not change the fact that the everyday realm becomes devalued because it is still measured with the attention towards the arts or the so-called 'extraordinary.' The sky discovered as 'gem,' also intending to equate it with art

and thus integrating it into its sphere, nevertheless treats this realm as 'superior.' According to such an approach of everyday aesthetics, the extraordinary is conceived as the antithesis of the ordinary, and as a result the two cannot exist together. More importantly, one does not do justice to the experience of the so-called everyday – like the sky-environment – because one also denies the possibility of (experientially) transgressing and leaving behind cultural products. We will see below that this is possible and that an aesthetic experience of the sky-blue beauty allows us to overcome the limiting alternative of natural *and/or* cultural aesthetic experience.

But first the question remains whether something like the sky-blue can be neglected and still be familiar, as Saito suggests. As discussed, the notion of 'familiarity' has been scrutinized concerning the problem of a nowadays questionable *natural reliability* within *natural variability* such as of the sky-environment. Yet what can elucidate a supposed 'neglect' of the sky? Time seems to be essential here for the experiential context, because whatever the proposition 'the sky is blue' is based on, whether it was learned or experienced, it probably comes from a past. How far back this experienced past goes seems crucial for a dynamic environment like the sky. Especially if the everyday sky is assumed to be 'neglected,' which is why familiarity with its appearance can easily be deemed outdated.

Nevertheless, colour philosopher John Campbell says that we can share aesthetic experiences of colour, which for him in the case of blue would describe a relationship to an external blue in which we stand, in such a way that colour is understood as "an indispensable element in our imaginative understanding of one another" (Campbell, 2021, p. 410). Importantly, such a *shared blueness* still means that your "imaginative understanding" of it "depends on your knowledge of the shared environment," so it still requires first knowing a colour in the environment, like sky-blue (Campbell, 2021, p. 418). This does not answer the question of how up-to-date the experience of such a dynamic environment must be in order to 'know' it, for example, in terms of its colour or anthropogenic changes. More easily this might be the case with cultural artifacts such as human-made colours, for example, the famous *International Klein Blue*. The aim of the creation of *International Klein Blue* was to make the properties of a blue stable and obtain an unchanging color value and intensity (Gopnik, 2010). Of course, the perception of *International Klein Blue* can also change due to external conditions such as various light exposures and other contexts. Decay and aging are also real processes to which human artifacts are subject, although they might occur more slowly than natural decay and change. The sky, in other words, is special in that it is a very everyday environment, suggesting that humans are familiar with it while it is constantly changing, making it even more difficult to recognize any changes beyond the natural variability. However, in order to be able to further discuss a changing sky and the possible loss of sky-blue, the necessary prerequisite of an aesthetic experience and thus a lived and actualized knowledge with the sky must be given.

3. The Missing Central Link of the Everyday Body

> "If the Doors of Perception were cleansed [and open] then everything would be seen as it is." (Jarman, 2019, p. 89)

Although in Campbell's philosophy of colour, as we have seen, there was the precondition that one must first know one's environment, there was no distinction of the quality or mode of such experience, but he understood experience generally as a relationship in which one stands (Campbell, 2021). For example, the sky can be co-experienced as a kind of by-product when unpacking the car, perhaps even felt in its vastness above our heads. Here it is not clear whether for Campbell this would already mean 'standing in a relationship,' but in our context it is not considered an aesthetic experience. In no way does this mean that aesthetic experiences cannot be lived every day. On the contrary, aesthetic being is not only an essential part of life, aesthetics is life, like Katya Mandoki discusses that "beauty is not the cause but the consequence of evolution" (Mandoki, 2015, p. 32).

Nevertheless, a living aesthetic experience of sky-blue requires the participation of the human body, which will now be examined as the *missing central link*. The participation of the body disputed here concerns an imbalance in the interplay between the activity and openness of the organic-biological body and the *Leib*[4] with its affective dimension. The latter, he also referred to as phenomenal body, can transgress the physical boundaries towards the sky. Phenomenological research introduced this analytical separation of the human body for scientific observation and description, not to create a new artificial separation within the human being and thus establish a body-body problem (Thompson, 2007, p. 235). An attempt can instead be made to approach the complexity of the human body, which is in biochemical exchange with an environment as well as in a living and feeling exchange with the world. In respect to the *Leib*, Heidegger reminds us, for example, in his last seminars and conversations with the psychiatrist Medard Boss, that the *Leib*-dimension is the most difficult[5] and *Leib*-phenomenology is still outstanding (Heidegger, 1987/2021, p. 292). In this sense, it should be noted that the integrative consideration of the *Leib* goes beyond the mere mention of the first-person perspective and should be elaborated in more detail in the course of this work. Later, Varela et al. (1991/2016, p. 233) understandably criticized the fact that also body philosophers get stuck in theory and wrote, relevant to this work, that "one needs to be embodied to attain realization." The living aesthetic experience as the possible embodiment of a sky-blue beauty then also means the participation of both

4 The old German term *Leib*, for which "lived body" is often used, is avoided here as temporally insufficient. As stated in the note on "living" blue-beauty, the temporal continuum of past, present and future shall be emphasized [see footnote 1]. As an alternative to *Leib*, 'phenomenal body' is used.

5 "[…] *daß das Leibliche das Schwierigste ist und das ich damals eben noch nicht mehr zu sagen wußte*." (Heidegger, 1987/2021, p. 292)

interacting and codependent bodily dimensions and not the neglect of the organic-biological aspects that phenomenology often advocates. To the best of my knowledge, this bodily encompassing cooperation has not yet been seriously considered from a phenomenological point of view and could enlighten us about so far missed body-knowledge of the human being itself as well as with the [sky-]environment. For example, material seeing, such as the sky-blue spaciousness, can co-influence *leibliche* experience, create feelings, affective processes and even actions. Here, the possibility of aesthetic experience can unfold as boundlessness in the deep and wide, spotless sky-blue, all the way to contemplation in *sensual metaphysics*. Goethe famously wrote in his *Theory of Colours* (1810/1948) that "we love to contemplate blue, not because it advances to us, but because it draws us after it,"[6] what also alludes to the penetrating and "almost inexpressible effect" (Goethe, 1810/1948, p. 779) of the expansive sky-blue. The blue of the sky can draw us into its spaciousness, appear limitless and expand us on a bodily, mental and spiritual level. Moreover, the sky-blue is then also experienceable and thus understandable as "an energy" (*Ibid*.)[7] that corresponds to the dynamics of a natural element that can transmit its power to the experiencer. As a result, this living experience of a changing power and effect of nature, which accompanies the living and thus bodily understanding of the sky-environment, enables us to grasp the changing sky-environment in its vulnerability. Ideally, it could help to promote the preservation of this beauty for the future. Due to the scope of the article, it is not possible here to expand on related discourses on empathy and intersubjectivity (e.g., Zahavi, 2009) that would assist in better conceptualizing such *lived vulnerability* of the [sky-] environment.

Another possible bodily-active and thus living experience, by contrast, would be the aesthetic disappearance of the wide blue sky-environment, which can carry feelings of loss, such as the loss of freedom. Concerning freedom in relation to the concept of the 'everyday' discussed earlier, Varela et al. have written something very essential that is worth quoting in full:

Freedom is not the same as living in the everyday world conditioned by ignorance and confusion; it is living and acting in the everyday world with realization. Freedom does not mean escape from the world; it means transformation of our entire way of being, our mode of embodiment, within the lived world itself (Varela, 1991/2016, p. 234).

To further pursue the living aesthetic experience of the sky-environment as a prerequisite for the intended discussion, including the missing central link of the interplay of the human body, the focus will now be on *sky-blue beauty* and some related requirements.

6 "*So sehen wir das Blaue gern an, nicht weil es auf uns dringt, sondern weil es uns nach sich zieht*" (Goethe, 1810/1948, p. 781).

7 "*Sie[blau] ist als Farbe eine Energie*" (Goethe, 1810/1948, p. 779).

4. Atmospheric Life and Sky-Blue Beauty

> "Blue transcends the solemn geography
> of human limits." (Jarman, 2019, p. 86)

Starting from the sky as a by-product in the flow of everyday experience, such as unpacking the car parked under the sky, the bodily sense organs are at work like the eyes, which may glimpse the sky, but a living aesthetic experience of seems not really constituted in such otherwise goal-oriented scene. For such an everyday scene, it is generally assumed that the time required for an attentive gaze and the body involved to experience the world such as the sky would take too long compared to merely reflexive reactions and information reception from the close environment (Deisseroth, 2021, p. 67). Assuming that a living aesthetic experience of the sky-environment requires awareness,[8] aesthetic attention,[9] or mindfulness it might seem like an investment of time to experience the sky, which follows the popular argument of too little time in everyday life. However, it can also be seen not as measurable investment following the excess of counting, but as a way or quality of living that is always present in the way of possible being. I am deliberately not saying that one must first *choose* this present way of being and *engage* with the sky-environment – because that would again falsely suggest distinct steps that take time. It does not have to be chosen first, but lived.

It brings us back to the missing central link in the aesthetic experience of the sky-blue-beauty and the multi-layered bodily openness that resonates with it. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone provides an interesting comparison of the child's whole-body experience to that of an adult, asking: "how is it that adult humans commonly lose not sight but the *felt bodily sense* of their full-body affectivity?" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2016, p. 77) It is important to capture this bodily felt sense here as a whole-body experience that might be missing in adulthood. It also means that a missing felt sense of the body or body awareness is more than the absence of individual or different emotions, but refers to the possible bodily distribution range of affects and emotions. According to Eugene Gendlin, emotions tend to be clearer than the more encompassing *felt sense* he focuses on, which is larger than emotions but includes them (Gendlin, 1981/2007, p. 40). A missing felt sense of the body thus prevents the whole-body experience, which partly coincides with the missing link argued here. A prevented, blocked, or insufficient experience of the sky, to call it 'aesthetic,' concerns the body in its wholeness. For example, due to a lack of concrete *organic openness*, the sky-blue carried by the *Leib*, like a *sky-blue feeling*, cannot enter and spread. Also, a felt sense of a living experience never arises in the first place. In this regard, there is a striking connection to 'spatial medicine' that can help to demonstrate this entangled connection and inevitable interplay between phenomenal body and biological body that are

[8] E.g., See Berleant (2015, p. 5) debatable degrees of intensity up to "fully acute awareness."

[9] E.g., See Bence's (2016) claim on the centrality of aesthetic attention for understanding aesthetic experience.

part of 'full-body affectivity.' Spatial medicine, a branch of body therapy, focuses on concretely creating more space in the human body itself, for example, by treating living tissue and fasciae (Marfin-Martin et al, 2015). By expanding the interior body space and opening up the physical body, restrictive tensions that could be dominant today due to chronic stress are released. Now, the physical body is more open and attentive to interaction and especially to communication with the phenomenal body like for a whole-body experience of sky-blue. It is this co-openness of body that is manifested in a co-dependent relationship with the world and the environment. We find here a living synthesis of phenomenology and biology in aesthetic experience, in which openness becomes a multifaceted bodily prerequisite for a living aesthetic access and experience of sky-blue as an *felt beauty*. If this state of the body in its multidimensional openness is not given, it is possible that there are *inner-bodily imbalances* and compressions that rather do not allow an open interaction with the world and the environment while nourishing the assumption of a missing bodily link for living aesthetic experience. This is in allusion to so-called 'attentional imbalances' identified by contemplative science, which shows attention as so scattered and distracted that there is little to no (bodily) space for aesthetic attention (Wallace, 2007, p. 7).

However, the phenomenal body, which Merleau-Ponty called the "vehicle of being in the world" (2012, p. 537), can nevertheless exceed the organic body and extend to the sky. For example, the body can move in emotions (*e-movere*).[10] Merleau-Ponty writes concerning the experience of the sky-blue:

> If I wish to enclose myself entirely into my eyes and abandon myself to the blue of the sky, soon I am no longer aware of gazing and, at just the moment I wanted to give myself over to vision entirely, the sky ceases to be a 'visual perception' in order to become my current world. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 234/271)

Here we reminded of the above-mentioned adjustment of the eyes, which must first reach the sky and are also consciously adjusted to it until we reach an unified[11] moment of experience over time as essential part of the process of aesthetic experience of the sky. Here, in synch with the sky-blue, human beings can experience a *primordial balance* or coherence between inner and outer states in contrast to the preventing 'attentional imbalances.' Moreover, feelings of unbounded interiority in a continuum with sky-blue can emerge and the blue sky can become 'my current world.' It is important to emphasize, that perceiving, experiencing, and understanding occur simultanously in such moments, which is where the experience of beauty of the sky can happen. To experience the sky-blue in the present moment as beauty means to experience oneself integrated in this beauty, in a living aesthetic experience with beauty. It is a synchronized experience with the sky-blue through an openness to [natural] beauty by being in beauty. Fortunately, it is 'as easy as breathing' to feel and embody the beauty of the sky-blue when one is in the living body and

10 E.g., See Sheets-Johnston (2016, pp. 1–17; pp. 254–264) extensive inquiry on movement.

11 The feeling of unity is something different from a theoretical discussion about unity that happens "within this metaphysical point that is the thinking subject" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 242).

being the body. In this living way of experiencing, we can feel the sky-blue beauty and realize the sky-environment as *vulnerable* in a bodily way by understanding it as *atmospheric life*. It is essential to the living and the conceptualizing of a holistic moment in a continuum or process of aesthetic experience that despite its stimulated complex interplay of the human body we are momentary present in its unity. This alludes to what Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 249) discussed as temporality of the body – where "body takes possession of time and makes a past and a future exist for a present." By being in the body, we are here and present, and this includes freedom from stress and 'rumination' (Whitmer and Gotlib, 2013), the distraction through the daily talk of the mind that rather inhibits such moments of human-world balance in beauty.

However, *living sky-blue beauty* happens before rational attribution and is therefore not yet determined and expressed in the linguistic term 'beauty,' which I leave to the discussion of aesthetic judgements of taste. The point is rather to re-evoke a *living beauty with the sky*, from which the necessary aesthetic attention and deep sensing can emanate, initiating concerns regarding its changeability and vulnerability. Living blue-beauty carries additional meaning as *lived knowledge* which is not reached by thinking, but by seeing and experiencing. In this context, Ted Toadvine's *ecological aesthetics* should be cited: "The aesthetic significance of a part of nature depends on the elements revealed" by the perceiver "but these elements are still features of nature not subjective projections" (Toadvine, 2010, p. 89). Today, this can also affect features of nature that have been altered by anthropogenic sensory pollutants. Here it becomes a particular challenge for aesthetic skills and environmental sensibility to distinguish between natural and anthropogenic changes of the sky. Significant here is Berleant's determination of the environmental sensibility as 'educated sensation' and furthermore important in this context: "It requires the perceptual knowledge and skills that we are continually enhancing in and through our encounters and activities" (Berleant, 2012, p. 55). Just to mention that the embodied mind and the cognitive as well as intellectual capacities are understood as originating from the human body, and that they are not excluded in the process of aesthetic experience and in the processing of *living sky-blue beauty* and the *lived knowledge* contained in it.

Nevertheless, lived beauty as well as other forms of lived knowledge with the sky include relevant insight about this environment that can contribute to Dryzak's call for the cultivation of '*ecosystemic reflexivity*.' When he writes to "listening more effectively to an active Earth System, [...] to seek, receive and respond to early warnings about potential ecological state shifts" (Dryzek, 2016, p. 953), this must also include the sky-environment and its anthropogenic changes. Furthermore, *beauty*, understood here as lived aesthetic capability of the human being, challenges the aesthetic, and therefore also the bodily, condition of the human being and asks: How open are you to your environment above you? What do you know about it (from your experience with it)?

5. Summary and Future Considerations

Still, one might respond here, why is this concern about the sky-environment necessary at all, everything is changing and we are living in a human-made era where almost nothing is 'natural' anymore. But then again, we have already shown how we nevertheless presuppose naturalness when we rely on the sky in its blueness and existence as described above.

The predominant theme of this study was to draw attention on the changes within the sky-environment and the tendency towards the loss of sky-blue. Familiarity with the assumption that the sky is blue has proven to be untenable in the dawning Anthropocene. The aim was not to provide pre-determined aesthetic descriptions of new phenomena and appearances, but to encourage aesthetes and aestheticians to have their own living experiences and to look up to the sky again.

The concept of *living blue-beauty* was introduced as countermeasure that allows the close sky-environment to be perceived and experienced in an intimate way and to reawaken aesthetic awareness and atmospheric sensibility. Through the bodily experience, the potential vulnerability of atmospheric life could be understood. Based on the accompanying lived understanding of the sky-environment transformative discussions and actions in the context of change of a new epoch are initiated. Focusing on such complex subject required a multi-dimensional approach, which, however, did not allow the *living blue-beauty* to be captured as comprehensively as possible. One direction that has only been touched here in relation to the human body is how such living understanding of the sky-environment differs from merely hearing or reading *sky-news* (such as weather reports etc.). Other issues that could not be sufficiently discussed are clouds in general and in particular in relation to the monochrome blue, as well as a new indistinctness of cloud formations. Another undiscussed and understudied problem is the indirect impact on the visible sky. It would be important here to consider the increasing traffic in [outer]space, which is filling up with space debris and is known as the Kessler syndrome (Mark and Kamath, 2019). Furthermore, the cultivation of deep and atmospheric sensing in respect to borderless dimension of the blue sky-environment can be investigated together with the important concept of mindfulness that correlates with attention or its absence. Here affective sciences come in, where other cultures should be involved, asking how people experience, perceive, and understand the sky-environment? The objective could be a global aesthetic picture of the post-Holocene sky-environment allowing prediction and prevention of uncontrollable consequences as demonstrated, particularly fragile environment.

Finally, aesthetes and aestheticians should therefore intensify the investigation of anthropogenic sensory pollution, as an increasing main issue of our time, and address it more radically. Aesthetics can therefore play a role of a central 'change agent' of necessary societal transformation, in which aesthetic capabilities are required to access, perceive, experience, alternatively understand and possibly prevent changing environments. Especially, for a clean sky-environment itself and for the prevention of a continuously blurred and diminished experience of the natural beauty of the blue sky.

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Brit Kolditz
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Faculty of Humanities
Interdisciplinary PhD Program (Philosophy, Environmental Science)
St. John's, Canada / Germany
brit.kolditz@mun.ca

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10498500

Varnishing Facades, Erasing Memory

Reading Urban Beautification with Critical Whiteness Studies

Laura Raccanelli

The paper addresses the contemporary features of aesthetic capitalism (Böhme, 2001; 2017) in the city, connecting beauty studies with established analyses of 'territorial stigmatization' (Wacquant, 2007) in the framework of critical whiteness studies. My argument is that *beautification* practices in marginal public spaces can be regarded as an attitude of aesthetic neocolonialism. The text investigates the role that art plays in establishing spaces of difference, focusing on the analysis of the idea of beauty exhibited and used in processes of urban transformation. This beautifying operation could mask the intent of domesticating the 'urban exotic', representing the aesthetics of the 'urban other', overlapping processes of hypervisibilization and invisibilization within the production of normative white visual domains. The resulting transformation is viewed as a new field of value extraction from the urban space while at the same time being a new arena for privilege and inequality production. | *Keywords: Urban Beautification, Aesthetic Capitalism, Territorial Stigmatization, Critical Whiteness Studies, Street Art, Camouflage*

1. Introduction

> Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself (Benjamin, 2012, pp. 69–70).

As Lindner and Sandoval (2021 p. 9) have observed: "[…] aesthetics increasingly function as a battleground where these urban spatial power struggles are played out through displacement, exclusion, and division". Leveraging critical whiteness studies, with its focus on the construction of

hegemonic subjects, the paper will stress the role of visibility in the spatial reordering of stigmatized neighbourhoods, with attention to the racist configuration of space in urban transformations. The canonization and naturalization of aesthetics models within the semantic sphere of white (Giuliani et al., 2018), portraying the embodiment of the beautiful city, often catalyses processes of public space 'whitening' for the creation of beautiful, clean, decorated spaces, involving both the appearance of the neighbourhood, aiming for so-called 'urban decorum', and its inhabitants. This implicitly contributes to the erasing of former urban space features and memories. In the next sections, I will discuss the normative aesthetic dimension of urban regeneration projects, particularly those of an artistic nature. Even if it is acknowledged that in cities inequality dynamics related to visibility are not always associated with normative white aesthetic dominance, I contend that beautification actions in stigmatized neighbourhood are often suspended between attempts to either remove or domesticate the disturbing aesthetics of 'urban otherness', sometimes resulting in its factual expulsion.

2. The canonization of beauty as a social fact: images, imageries, and desire in the new regime of visibility

A vast literature from both feminist studies and critical race studies, as well as in historical and postcolonial studies, has examined the concept of beauty concerning the imposition of standards, codes, and practices that culturally determine its canons. According to these scholars, it is useful to consider beauty, as well as race and gender, as a dynamic category socially constructed (also) on the visual. In agreement with beauty studies scholars, analyzing the historical and social production of aesthetic ideals of beauty requires reflecting on their construction through an intersectional perspective. As Monica G. Moreno Figueroa writes:

> […] feminist claims have urged us to explore beauty as an empirical and pragmatic question. 'The question [of beauty] for feminist politics', wrote Claire Colebrook in her 2006 introduction to a special issue of Feminist Theory on beauty, 'is not so much moral – is beauty good or bad […]? – but pragmatic: how is beauty defined, deployed, defended, subordinated, marketed or manipulated, and how do these tactics intersect with gender and value?' (Moreno Figueroa, 2013, p. 137–138).

Beauty ideals are to be conceived as normative devices, capable of influencing the forms of regulation of life and perception of both the self and the community (Giuliani et al., 2018, p. 432); they have to do with everyday myths and abstractions and are subject to continuous ritualization through social practices that inscribe themselves and produce specific imaginaries (*Ibidem*). These are structured within canonization and naturalization processes capable of constructing standardized dominant patterns, usually taking the form of commodities, cultural products, symbols and desires whose circulation passes over different scales, imposing their imaginaries from the more local to the national and global ones (Giuliani et al., 2018, p. 433).

Beauty, as well as gender and race, are thus to be considered as discursive constructions (Hall, 2013; Mellino, 2015). What is important to grasp in its

processual aspect is their being functional for the reproduction of specific power relations or, at the same time, defining spaces of self-determination, and resistance, opening "spaces of agency and subjectification" (Giuliani et al., 2018, p. 433).

Sociologist Andrea Mubi Brighenti has long engaged in a theoretical reflection on the concepts of visibility and visuality, distinguishing them as "fully entitled sociological cathegor[ies]" (Brighenti, 2007, p. 324) and recongising their importance as a research field (Brighenti, 2007; 2008; 2017). The author especially elaborates on the "more complex phenomenon of visibility" (Brighenti, 2007, p. 324), which is not only relevant to the visual dimension *per se* but is to be understood as a category constituted at the intersection of two main domains: aesthetics, that is, relations of perception, and politics, that is, relations of power (*Ibidem*). Visibility, thus, not only produces and influences our everyday existence but has now become a primary means of knowledge (Mirzoeff, 2021). Nowadays, the visual realm has assumed a pivotal role since through the multiplication of screens and other image infrastructures we build our visual experience, which is now an integral part of our social experience. Understanding the cultural, social and political meanings of the norms shaping the dominant aesthetic codes and ideals implies questioning this new regime of visibility that has such a high impact on our society. Images now play a predominant function in our political life, they have a powerful influence on conceptions, desires and imaginaries (Giuliani et al., 2018, p. 233) almost assuming a 'religious sense', adopting the postulate of one of the best-known writings of the 20th century, Walter Benjamin's *Capitalism as Religion* (1921). In a scenario radically changed by the new technologies that have made the action of images and imaginaries even more pervasive, we can witness sacred attention to the aesthetic sphere and a contemporary obsession with the seeking for beauty.

"Visibility is a metaphor of knowledge, but it is not simply an image: it is a real social process in itself" Brighenti (2007, p. 325) argues. As a social process, the relation of visibility, encompassing what is seen and what is not seen, is often asymmetrical, structured by - and structuring – specific hierarchies. In this sense, processes of visibilization, invisibilization or hypervisibilization act on particular bodies, spaces, and subjectivities (Giuliani et al., 2018). Assuming a Goffmanian posture, Brighenti describes how normalized behaviour in the public space can be invisibilized. In fact:

> [they] are always subject to, and conducted through, practices for the reciprocal management of visibility among social actors. […] The 'normal appearance' (Goffman, 1971) of a setting is its invisibility. In the absence of alarm signals, the setting is 'transparent' to the observer. In other words, the normal is neither noticed nor thematized owing to its invisibility. Conversely, it is the anomalous which is marked and transposed to a different register of visibility (Brighenti, 2008, p. 3).

But the opposite is also true: the codes of beauty produce bodies, practices and spaces that are desirable or deplorable, legitimate or illegitimate. Their hypervisibilization and *monstrification* are often accompanied by processes of

invisibilization of non-normative and/or eccentric practices, involving the exclusion from the visual frame of what disturbs it. Thus, hypervisibilization and invisibilization are processes that overlap, alternate and often affect the same deviant body and practice at the same moment and in the same (public) space.

3. Attractive and creative cities, aesthetic capitalism, symbolic economy

Cities deploy various strategies to invest in the creation of aesthetically attractive spaces, producing, imposing and globally selling their dominant, homogeneous and standardized images. Starting with the post-Fordist city in its neo-liberal turn, new models of urban economic development have emerged. Unlike in the past, not only the private but also the public sector today allocate significant resources not only for services but also for policies related to the so-called *place making*. This is at the core of one of the best-known and most criticized theories on urban development: Richard Florida's 'creative cities' model (2002). The author's idea is to theorize an urban policy-making meant to attract in the city what he calls 'the new class of creative workers' (Florida, 2002). According to Florida, urban governments should address the explicit demand for a precise aesthetic that could be capable of attracting this new productive class to their territory. His suggestion involves building a new interesting and vibrant urban atmosphere through both productive and symbolic processes to transform the *look* and thus influence the *feel* of the city (Zukin, 1995, p. 7). Culture and creativity, innovation, art, museums and festivals have now become mainstream cultural consumption patterns, serving as recurrent strategic policies for producing local development.

The '*attractiveness blackmail*' of the modern city is well explained by Gernot Böhme in his *Critique of aesthetic capitalism* (2017), along with the notion of '*Enrichment*' proposed by Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre (2019). Both contributions stress how the logic of capitalist accumulation has over time redefined the way wealth is generated nowadays, moving towards an aestheticization of the economy or an aesthetic economy. This plays a central role in the dynamics of aesthetic capitalism in his urban configuration. Böhme's perspective of 'aesthetic capitalism' (2017), recalling the Marxian dichotomy, highlights how beautification affects both the use and the exchange value of '*beautiful*' space as an object of consumption. The philosopher also emphasises the need to create value through what he calls the 'staging of everything', which is manifested in the continuous effort to produce new urban images, imageries and representations, and their spectacularization. Sharon Zukin's notion of 'symbolic economy' (1995) explains how some cities specialize in the production of pictures, languages, and artistic and entertainment forms. These cities' model, becoming more hegemonic in the interrelation of image and product, aim to sell images of urbanity on both national and global scales, working on a globalized and cosmopolitan sense of urban identity and belonging to attract new populations (Zukin, 1995, p. 7).

Criticisms of Florida's creative city theory (Peck, 2005) highlight the risk of establishing hierarchies among attractive and less attractive cities and categorising people as more or less creative, creating divisions based on those who "just don't get it" (Peck, 2005 in Semi, 2015, p. 94).

4. Stigmatized spaces and beautification: street art as urban regeneration attitude

If in the past the aesthetic consumption of places was almost exclusively relegated to the central and productive areas of the city, over the last decade there has been a growing trend in promoting new regeneration projects devoted to the peripheries. These are often justified by systematically recurring narratives of 'territorial stigmatization' (Wacquant, 2007; 2008; Wacquant et al., 2014), involving the creation of a stigma (Goffman, 1963) linked to the living space and its residents, to which consequent 'effects of place' (Bourdieu, 1993) are related. Public discourses such as those conveyed by newspapers, politicians, or experts, play a crucial role in shaping the stigma, particularly by the widespread use of criminalizing narratives on the one hand and rhetoric of abandonment on the other. Such discourses are often justified by invoking a broader discussion on the relationship between aesthetics, public space, and politics. One notable example illustrating this connection is the well-known 'broken windows theory', initially formulated by social scientists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in the 1980s and later becoming the cornerstone for the repressive policies of *Zero Tolerance* in Rudolph Giuliani's New York during the 1990s. The two authors' views involve a very easy and tempting idea: it is sufficient to act on the aesthetic perception of neighbourhoods to affect the quality of life and renovate public order and a more legal climate (Bukowski, 2019; De Giorgi, 2015). However, the main bias in this view is the tendency to equate decay with urban insecurity, linking aesthetic interventions with securitarian approaches. According to the Italian urbanist Cristina Bianchetti (2011), one of the main features of contemporary public space is its entire devotion to consumption and entertainment. In this sense, public space requires new attributes capable of building highly attractive and visually comfortable public spaces, designed to respond to a desire for security rather than a desire for interaction (Mitchell, 2003 in Semi, 2020, p. 219). In trying to mitigate the conflictual aspect implied in the twentieth-century idea of publicness, public space must be both socially and aesthetically controlled (Bianchetti, 2011). Often these measures reflect policies and decisions of administrations that can choose what and who should be visible and not (Zukin, 1995, p. 7). This is also related to a typical attitude of the neo-liberal and securitarian city to assume that there is a correlation between increasing the creative population (Florida, 2002) and producing a more livable city.

In this context, the use of art, particularly street art, has nowadays become a very common urban renewal practice in stigmatized public urban spaces, playing a central role in *beautification*. Traditionally viewed as a deviant artistic form, subject to ongoing lively controversies, conflicts and oppositions

(Dal Lago and Giordano, 2016), the institutionalization and re-functionalization of urban art in the framework of an aesthetic economy and its connection with urban redevelopment interventions in stigmatized neighbourhoods remain a recent and still very little investigated phenomenon. Street art today has entered into a productive machine of symbols and space, spreading a specific urban aesthetic and atmosphere, found from New York to Cape Town to Naples, yet potentially reflecting certain class expectations (Bourdieu, 1979). Murals, covering entire facades of public housing, are linked to the evidence and erasure of the recognizability of social classes, particularly the "visibility of poverty" (Bukowski, 2019, p. 15). But why should a street art mural improve the space and life of the residents? Isn't it primarily a very simplistic way to create new economic value also from the popular areas of the city? Top-down street art interventions in urban peripheries, distanced from the urban subculture from which they were born (Dal Lago and Giordano, 2016), may contribute to the objectification and commodification of the associated urban space (Boltanski and Esquerre, 2019). Today's urban governance prefers to replace the demolition model, seen in examples like Barcelona's Olympics in the early 1990s, with a more progressive attitude devoted to urban regeneration, often reduced to aesthetic transformations. In this context, street art becomes an instrument of governance and a tool for urban transformation easily manipulated by urban planners: through interventions on surfaces and on external appearances of structures, quicker and less expensive than other deeper structural operations, the city can attract tourists and new inhabitants in brand new beautified redeveloped neighbourhoods. Such artworks may be enjoyed by adventurers who consume the associated public space. Consequently, the push for beautification techniques of public space becomes a new field of reproduction of inequalities, "placing individuals, territories and objects before the imperative of aesthetic performance as a guarantee of potential enrichment" (Semi, 2018, p. 90 [personal translation]).

In stigmatized areas of the city, such as peripheries, the idea of educating, domesticating, and civilizing plain areas is prominent in this transformation; artistic practices are presented as catalysts for the economic, social, and cultural development of the neighbourhood, promoting a greener, more sustainable and healthier environment. Thus, the aesthetic mechanism involved contributes to the social construction of beautiful and ugly, good and bad urban spaces, with the corresponding right and wrong citizens.

Niel Smith's seminal work on gentrification (1996) equated gentrification processes with a form of urban colonization, in which gentrifiers acquire the characteristics of good, civil middle classes who comply with social norms, conquer spaces of decay, and improve uncivilized, deviant, and poor neighbourhoods.

> As new frontier, the gentrifying city since the 1980s has been oozing with optimism. Hostile landscapes are regenerated, cleansed, reinfused with middle-class sensibility; real estate values soar; yuppies consume; elite gentility is democratized in mass-produced styles of distinction. So what's not

> to like? The contradictions of the actual frontier are not entirely eradicated in this imagery but they are smoothed into an acceptable groove (Smith, 1996, p. 12).

Therefore, certain beautification operations can be interpreted as forms of aesthetic neocolonialism, wherein images of an urbanity that are usually intended to be reproduced reflect the expectations of a seductive imaginary of a productive, successful and, particularly in Italy, white middle class, often representing the main (sometimes the only) target audience of these projects.

5. Producing beautiful white visual spaces: colonial expressions of urbanity

The association between canonical beauty and whiteness has long been eradicated in Western history. Nicholas Mirzoeff reflects on the different meanings of the white colour, tracing it back to classical European art and hellenic sculpture (2009). Although it is known that the ancient Greeks used to colour their statues with pigments, by the nineteenth century, the beauty of these statues was associated with pure clean white marble. Throughout art history, representations highlight how whiteness had come to represent the ideal type of race and thus the hegemonic canon of physical beauty *per se* (*Ibidem*). As it was stated:

> Reflecting on race and beauty […] means […] coming to terms with the lines of color that have been scuttled in the past and that characterize Italian society in the present and, particularly, with the *visual construction of its imagined community*. A critical approach to beauty matters: a critical analysis of beauty may help us understand how *aesthetic codes participate in the articulation of everyday racism* in both the public and private spheres of the Italian imagined community (Giuliani et al., 2018, p. 433 [personal translation, italics added]).

In alignment with critical whiteness studies, a theoretical strand framed within postcolonial studies, whiteness is to be understood as a socially and historically constructed category through which a dominant group imposes itself as *neutral* towards others, keeping them in a condition of exploitation and/or subalternity (Giuliani, 2014). These studies are concerned with analyzing the social construction of white identity, understood as an *empty signifier* akin to beauty (Giuliani et al., 2018; Nayak, 2007; Levin-Rasky, 2013), its ontological binary structure and its hierarchization, hegemony, purity and privilege implication. Whiteness is not only about skin colour but is to be considered in its intersectionality with other variables such as class, nationality, sex, age, gender, religion, and ability (Levine-Rasky, 2013). The whiteness paradigm, moreover, defines by contrast (Giuliani, 2014): it infers whiteness by determining the characteristics of what is not white, thereby producing a racialized 'other'. Racialization is always situated in time and space, and the construction of 'race' is always linked to the historical and geographical background. Following Emily Walton's theoretical proposal, I consider whiteness as a habitus, a complex set of "socialized norms, orientations, and practices that operate routinely to consolidate power in the hands of those racialized as white" (Walton, 2018, p. 72), a form of enactment based on structural privilege (Nayak, 2007).

The different temporalities and spatialization of whiteness connect these processes with urban studies and the analysis of urban transformation. Indeed, the construction of whiteness has also visible spatial repercussions, which can be captured in cities and neighbourhoods. It is useful to consider racism in its productive sense, as part of an economic rationality (Palmi, 2020) leading to the reconfiguration of urban space based on a racialized structure. According to several urban scholars (Harvey, 2001; Sassen, 2015; Wacquant, 2008; Rossi and Vanolo, 2010), the significance of the last economic recession, coupled with changes in the international division of labour and production structures, along with new international migration flows, has generated new pockets of poverty and consequent strong transformations in the social stratification of cities (Petrillo, 2018; Paone and Petrillo, 2016). In major global urban centres, this has affected a specific dynamic of spatialization of difference, with specific areas now segmented by income differential (Sassen, 2015). While the North American cities' rate of racial segregation might not be observed in Italy, processes of marginalization and socio-spatial exclusion of Southern European cities have been studied in their peculiar form (Arbaci and Malehiros, 2010). Ideological discourses about the need to govern the population that has become marginalized by the expulsive forces of the neoliberal city (Sassen, 2015) are often used to advocate for regeneration interventions and investments to restore public order in marginalized neighbourhoods, contributing to the subsequent so-called 'displacement phenomena' (Semi, 2015; Portelli, 2017; Petrillo, 2018). Considering the spatialization of whiteness and its influences on processes of urban transformations, particularly in the context of beautification, scholars emphasize its materiality and observe the politics of race in action (Nayak, 2007, p. 738). Whiteness can acquire an exchange value if we assume that its privilege allows a specific group of people to have unequal access to a set of resources and opportunities based on the semantic association between white identity and honest, reliable respectable citizen, embodying white qualities such respect, decency, fairness, *beauty* (Nayak, 2007, pp. 739–740). At the same time, Steve Garner introduced the concept of 'moral economy of whiteness' (2012) to suggest a set of all-positive values that are associated with it, situated within the semantic field of cleanness and respect of the order (Garner, 2012, p. 454). On the other hand blackness, referring here to a continuum of moral characterizations ranging from undeserving ethnic minorities to non-integrating migrants and unproductive white people, is repeatedly associated with disorder, chaos, and dirt. It is possible to trace the origins of this prejudice to the colonial context, where more structurally black and white were produced as binary ontological categories reflecting power relations. To legitimize their domination, the colonisers fabricated a positive image of the white settler by contrasting it with a negative portrayal of the dominated, black, through oppositional categories such as master/slave, civilization/wilderness, superiority/inferiority (Fanon, 1961) that translate today into other moral dichotomies like safety/danger, respectability/deviance beauty/bruteness, and so on.

Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1996), focusing on purification rituals and symbols, associated ideas of dirt and disorder with elements perceived as out of place, which must therefore be culturally restored to order. The cultural emphasis around symbols of dirty and clean has been underlined by several urban scholars who analyze the production of stigmatizing narratives and related redevelopment policies (Tonnelat, 2008). These policies aim to reestablish an aesthetic of order but often take the form of securitarian and repressive interventions. In this context, public space often becomes a conflictual arena within which invisible practices of whiteness construction define the appropriate use of urban spaces and designate dividing lines between white and nonwhite, legitimate and illegitimate, in both material and discursive terms. While it is indeed in public spaces that beautification operations are concentrated, the conflicts produced by these transformations are not always totally visible. They have a strong influence in the making and unmaking of new frontier of the colour line in and out these spaces, revealing also racist and power practices that are inscribed and embedded in processes of unequal urban change. The naturalization and reproduction of the connection between aesthetic transformation and the frequent expulsions, evictions, and removals of subjects and objects representing the 'ugly urban' (such as poverty, crime, deviance, disorder, degradation) raise important questions on the non-neutrality of redevelopment projects in fragile spaces.

6. Camouflages, distortions and destructions: aesthetic frontiers and fractures of urban memories

It seems useful to mention the definition of aesthetics proposed by Jacques Rancière (2006): for the philosopher, the 'partition of the sensible' is ordered by a political system that establishes what can be legitimately seen and considered of value, and what must be placed in the background. This perspective on *The Politics of Aesthetics* (Rancière, 2006) helps to grasp the processes of visibilization and, more importantly, invisibilization that take different forms in public spaces. In some cases, invisibilization materializes through expulsions (Sassen, 2015) towards categories of practices and people considered unseemly, removed either from the order of the visual or as actual physical actions of removal. Stavros Stavrides, in his *Common Space* (2016), speaks of practices of 'defacement' (Stavrides, 2016, p. 286) to indicate actions aimed at destroying the *face*, distorting and partially hiding its features:

> Space [...] is predominantly perceived in the form of stereotyped images which circulate through the dominant culture-shaping media and become actualized through in situ experiences. [...] These images identify space. Defacing the appearance of public space would thus mean targeting the perceivable characteristics of such space that create its identifiable image. Defacing acts create memory shocks because spaces familiar or recognizable through established images are suddenly rendered strange (Stavrides, 2016, p. 289–290).

Restoring the facades with brand-new street art murals and other similar interventions in the public space sphere are perfect examples of what Stavrides means with *defacement*.

In this sense, the notion of *camouflage* (Böhme, 2017, p. 91) is particularly relevant for analysing the mechanism of beautifying spaces commonly regarded as ugly: it could be understood as the technique of hiding public space imperfections; plaster renewal, storefront resurfacing, re-gardening and landscape decoration and so on could represent some striking examples of it. Stavrides reflects on how the gesture of 'defacement', in its similarity to *camouflage*, could be quite a violent act as it "ruptures in urban memory, since memory is essentially connected with the socially crafted images of public space" (Stavrides, 2016, p. 190). The aesthetic transformation of neighbourhoods, as implied in the title of this paper, involves actions *above* the history and memory of places. In stigmatized neighbourhoods, one can sometimes observe the simultaneous overlapping of two opposite processes. On the one hand, attempts at beautification are frequently addressed to cover and erase the 'un-saleable' appearances of poverty and classes (Bukowski, 2019). Simultaneously, we also witness operations of aestheticization and commodification of history (Herzfeld, 2010), aiming to produce and sell experiences of urban authenticity (Zukin, 1995). In his comparative study of two districts in Paris and Milan – *La Défense* and *Milano 2* – sociologist Bruno Cousin defines the so-called 'refunded neighbourhood' as "the result of large-scale real estate operations - of leveling, rebuild, and repopulate by the upper classes - totally erasing the working class and industrial memory of the previous places" (Cousin, 2016, p. 91 [personal translation]). In both areas, offices, shopping malls and luxury buildings were built, replacing factories, agricultural land, farms and barracks, as well as previous dwellers have been replaced by more affluent citizens who have managed to adapt on new neighbourhood's expectations and its current luxury functions. Its opposite in terms of urban planning action (but not for its social consequences) is the process of museification of the neighbourhood history, well explained by what the anthropologist Michael Herzfeld (2010) has called 'the neoliberal hijacking of history'. The London Docklands serves as one prominent examples of the districts where the history stealing through its aestheticisation is best experienced. The Docks were formerly part of the Port of London. They have now been redeveloped while maintaining their dockland appearance, becoming one of the coolest areas of the cities, a cluster of offices, luxury residential buildings, shops and small business headquarters. During the 1980s, image promotion was very intense, focusing explicitly on aesthetic and landscape values: emphasis was placed on the attractiveness of waterfronts and residences facing the vast waterways of the old docks. Within this framework, explicitly aimed at social substitution, real estate acquisitions for young families of skilled workers, professionals, managers were encouraged. In the words of Sharon Zukin:

> There are many different 'cultural' strategies of economic development. Some focus on museums and other large cultural institutions [...]. Others call attention to the work of artists, actors, dancers, and even chefs who give credence to the claim that an area is a center of cultural production. Some strategies emphasize the aesthetic or historical value of imprints on a landscape, pointing to old battlegrounds, natural wonders, and collective representation of social groups, including houses of worship, workplaces of

> archaic technology, and even tenements and plantation housing. [...] The common element in all these strategies is that they reduce the multiple dimensions and conflicts of culture to a coherent visual representation (Zukin, 1995, p. 271).

Herzfeld (2010, p. 259) underlines that "all conservation involves some degree of selection and often also of actual physical modification". By asking "who defines what matter in residents' life" (*Ibidem*), he highlights the ambiguity of top-down actions of patrimonialisation and how the rhetoric of heritage frequently raises conflicts towards the collective representations of identity from below. Devra Waldman (2021), in her study of a golf-focused gated community in India, underlines how aesthetics serves as a vehicle to produce a specific imagination and desire for a specific urban experience and living. She examines the politics of designing the 'sense of place' as a marketing strategy, reflecting on how these projects in postcolonial India carry colonial legacies within their willingness to build green, purified gated environments and atmospheres. The manipulation of symbolic assets of the urban space is now a well-known and appreciated tool for city administrations, leading to the emergence of a trend toward an aestheticization of the policies. Creating and designing more or less attractive places means also producing symbolic competitions over new identities of neighbourhoods.

These examples underscore the importance of elucidating the relationship between aesthetics and politics. It is crucial to understand the correlation between aesthetics and semiotics of spaces in its strong influence on the symbolic reorganization of spaces. Sociologist Andrea Mubi Brighenti also addresses the relevance of the symbols in this relation:

> What we are specifically interested in is not the visual dimension *per se*, but the more complex phenomenon of the field of visibility. [...] It makes sense to say that the medium between the two domains of aesthetics and politics is the *symbolic*. A symbol is aesthetically impressive and semiotically relevant in social relations. Just think of the powerful and ambivalent position of the *light* in western culture, its indelibly metaphysical *residuum*: light is the obsession of physics as well as of religion, it marks the field of the sacred and that of the secular. It is not simply visible. It constitutes a form of visibility (Brighenti, 2007, p. 324).

Many philosophers and sociologists[1] have highlighted the pervasive ability of capitalism to colonize even desires. If camouflage also acts toward erasing the memory of the neighbourhood, it can be argued that the specific imagination, through which the aesthetics of the new urban spaces are being produced, acts through a series of symbolic violent processes to adapt to the only normative urban appearances that today seems possible. In this paper, the focus was on discussing the necessity of observing the processes of symbolic production of the beautiful city. These processes, upon analysis, can de-invisibilize the power relations that constitute dominant visibility and marginal visibility.

[1] Among others: Mark Fisher with his *Capitalist Realism*, published by Zero Books in 2009 and Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's monumental *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Italian edition for Bompiani in 2014.

7. Conclusion:

In what has been called an increasingly ocularcentric society (Mirzoeff, 2021), one where much of social action is rooted in the visual realm, dominated by a visualization that is as pervasive as paralyzing (Grossi, 2021, p. 15), a crucial role is played by the debate on visual culture (Brighenti, 2007; 2008; 2017; Mirzoeff, 2020; 2021). The exploration began with an examination of the social construction of beauty and its connection with the colonial imagery of the idea of whiteness. Positioned within urban studies in the perspective of aesthetic capitalism, we have seen how beauty, through the mechanism of 'the staging of the self and the real' (Böhme, 2017), is now a field for value extraction in the neoliberal city. We analyzed how the focus on the production of the attractive and beautiful city has highlighted certain racist expressions of space and how they occur in specific politics of inclusion and exclusion. We emphasized why sometimes we can read beautification as an aesthetic neocolonialism operation. We followed the tension toward the search for clean, decorated, tidy and green urban space. Finally, we have analyzed art as a model of territorial governance in its most conflictual side. The paper focused on the understanding of how top-down beautification operations mitigate, or sometimes completely mask the symbolic and the structural violence embedded in aestheticization operations (Herzfeld, 2017), following the example of institutional street arts interventions considered as common urban regeneration practices. Investments in the aesthetic sphere with the aim of making a more productive and attractive city often end with the expulsion of the 'non-productive' and 'unattractive' citizen away from the sites of new urban interests (Harvey, 1989; Sassen, 2015; Spire, Choplin, 2018; Herzfled, 2017, Harms, 2012; Bukowski, 2019; Pitch, 2014; Desmond, 2018). It is crucial to stress the multiplicity of the functions of aesthetic. If we follow the critics proposed by seminal works of the Frankfort School and its successors, aesthetics could be understood as an instrument for economic value production; nevertheless, we would see how aesthetics can also *protect* - delimits and traces the inside and the outside of a community – *discipline* – mitigate and domesticate what exceeds the norm – and *govern* – decides who can or cannot cross the city (Waldman, 2021; Herzfeld, 2017; Ghertner, 2010). Aesthetic also serves within the logic of anticipating tastes in its correlation with investments at increasingly larger scales, as in art scene or real estate, what could be called the 'financialization of aesthetics' in the production and in the selling of global images of urbanity.

Returning to the title 'varnishing facades, erasing memory': aesthetic justification is often used in beautification operations, both destructive and conservative, to appropriate the discourse about the neighborhood's past and reinvent new narratives, revalorizing it through its transformation. Street art or art as a tool of beautification is just one of the ways in which the aesthetic transformation of places acts as an erasure of the neighbourhood identity to offer an oxymoronic idea of a new authentic identity. I, therefore, agree with Devra Waldman (2021) in stressing the importance of investigating

the aesthetic premises in the creation of dominant views and attractive spaces, recognising their role in producing a new sense of place but also in the governance of the city and its citizens.

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Laura Raccanelli
University of Milan Bicocca
Department of Sociology and Social Research
Piazza dell'Ateneo Nuovo, 1
20126, Milano - Italy
l.raccanelli@campus.unimib.it

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10498887

The Beauty of the Human Face in Contemporary Interdisciplinary Discourse

Renáta Kišoňová

The face serves as a fascinating focal point for exploring different perspectives and attitudes on human nature, including their identity, boundaries, culture, roles, the function of looks, beauty, religion, imagination, memory and more. In this paper, I will explore the analysis of facial beauty in the framework of contemporary interdisciplinary research, particularly the realms of contemporary cognitive science, neuropsychology, and evolutionary biology. Why do we prefer some faces and not others? What mechanisms underlie the evaluation of some faces as more attractive than others? What is the role of evolution in our perception of facial beauty? | *Keywords: Face, Beauty, Averageness, Symmetry, Straight Profile*

1. Introduction

The following reflection will explore the analysis of facial beauty in the framework of contemporary interdisciplinary research, particularly the realms of contemporary cognitive science, neuropsychology, and evolutionary biology. Why do we prefer some faces and not others? What mechanisms underlie the evaluation of some faces as more attractive than others? What is the role of evolution in our perception of facial beauty?

The face serves as a fascinating set of possibilities for perceiving human identity, emotionality, culture, beauty, and many other phenomena. When meeting others, the face is the first and most important feature that we notice. It represents a key element of our orientation in society, and provides us with an estimate of the age, characteristics, emotions, and moods of a stranger (Kohl, 2012, p. 13). Imagine the challenge of communicating with a person who has lost most of their face. Facial perception is part of our daily contact with

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the Contract no. APVV-19-0166 and VEGA 1/0120/22.

others. When we meet family members, friends, colleagues, and strangers, when we see people on TV or billboards, we focus on their faces. We pay more attention to the face than the clothes, body proportions, voice, smell, gestures or other features of a person. The face acts as a kind of guide that helps us create feelings about others and determine attitudes towards the people we meet. Faces look at us, smiling and crying, angry, tired, scared, disgusted, stern, cheerful, wise. Living faces are without any doubt visual mediums (Kesner, 2012, p. 6). Not only do they serve as representations of our identity, but they also represent a part of our material being. We can touch them, kiss them, caress them, put makeup on them and scar them. They attract us and repel us; we like them, we don't like them, we want to look at some of them for a long time, and we turn our eyes away from some of them. In European languages, the term for face extends beyond physiognomy, to visage, but also to the public image of our persona (e.g. face, *das Gesicht*, *twarz*, *ansikte*, *ansigt*, *l'affronter*, *viso* etc.). As Kesner notes: "Chinese has two terms to distinguish this dual role of face: while lian means the physiognomic face, mianzi refers to the frontal surface of a person, a 'social skin,' which one presents to others" (Kesner, 2012, p. 7).

2. On the understanding of face in the last century in philosophy

Despite its uniqueness, the face has not been a frequent object of investigation by philosophers. Ludwig Wittgenstein called it *a picture* (Wittgenstein, 1953). The face has been thematized by phenomenologists (Sartre, Merleu-Ponty). For Lévinas, the face is the most exposed, most vulnerable and most expressive aspect of the other's presence (Lévinas, 1979, p. 50–61). An interpretation of this concept can be found in Lyotard's understanding of the face as an anonymous landscape stripped of identity and thrown into anonymity (Sebbah, 2014, p. 137), in postmodern philosophers of deconstruction (Deleuze, Guattari), or the already mentioned Wittgenstein. In Sartre's philosophical novel *Nausea* Antoine Roquentin couldn't resist looking at himself in the mirror, even though he knew it was a trap: "It is the reflection of my face. Often in these lost days I study it. I can understand nothing of this face. The faces of others have some sense, some direction. Not mine. I cannot even decide whether it is handsome or ugly. I think it is ugly because I have been told so. But it doesn't strike me. At heart, I am even shocked that anyone can attribute qualities of this kind to it, as if you called a clod of earth or a block of stone beautiful or ugly. Still, there is one thing which is pleasing to see, above the flabby cheeks, above the forehead; it is the beautiful red flame which crowns my head, it is my hair. That is pleasant to see" (Sartre, 1955, p. 26). Roger Scruton's view aligns to the contemporary biological evolutionary perspective in his conception of the beauty of the human body and face. According to him, it is not an accidental feature of human beauty that it arouses desire (Scruton, 2021, p. 50).

Let us dwell for a moment on Lévinas' approach to faces. According to him, when focusing on the individual features of the human face – seeing the eyes, chin, and nose in front of us – and them, we approach the other in an objectified way. Lévinas perceives such an attitude as a form of murder of the

other person. By focusing on the face as an object, we forget our duty to its bearer. "The epiphany of the face is ethical" (Lévinas, 1979, p. 174). In his understanding, the face represents the most exposed part of our body, displaying vulnerability and covering the embarrassment with poses. Although each face is defined by a particular form, it always breaks through it, that is, it speaks to us and invites us to form a relationship. To manifest as a face means to assert oneself beyond the form that is manifest and purely phenomenal, and to present oneself in a way that is not reducible to manifestation as the very directness of that face-to-face, in its nakedness and without the mediation of any image, that is, in its need and its hunger (Lévinas, 1979). We should not be confused by the idea that a face's manifestation implies its expression. According to Lévinas, even expression does not reveal the interiority of the other. Instead, expression, can be a part of a pose or *vice versa*, a pose is part of an expression. Lévinas maintains an ethical stance when not assigning value to the presentation of a person through the face. He understands the face as an exceptional self-presentation that goes beyond the presentation of simply given facts, giving rise to the suspicion of falsity (expression, pose, make-up, aesthetic surgery procedures, etc.) (Lévinas 1979). In contrast, Frédéric Schiffter questions that Lévinas really believes in such a subtle definition of the face and says: "Isn't it the face with which the other in the blink of an eye draws my attention to his uniqueness? What is a face without a nose, forehead, chin, eyes, if not a ghost, the face of a Muslim woman covered with a hijab…?" (Schiffter, 2014, pp. 9–10). Schiffter further suggests that if we do not pay attention to the other's face and are not curious about it, this implies contempt, indifference, and disrespect. According to him, the bodily exceptionality of a person forms part of our identity and it is thus "a special moral attitude that requires us not to want to perceive the bodily exceptionality of a person" (Schiffter, 2014, p. 10). Merleau-Ponty also emphasizes the idea that the body should be visible, seen and touched, and it is precisely this distinct corporeality that, according to him, is a tool for participation in the being of others, it establishes communication and socialization (Merleau-Ponty, 2004). While Lévinas's ethical imperative is understandable, it is hardly usable in everyday interactions with others, their emotions and expressions.

Although individual philosophical considerations about the face differ, they share a common point: they do not seek objective ways of 'measuring' the attractiveness of the face. Rather, they perceive it as self-reflection (Sartre) or as an exceptional presentation of oneself (Lévinas), or as the basis of communication and socialization (Merleu-Ponty). They are not looking for measurable parameters of facial beauty, rather, they associate facial beauty with its manifestation of authenticity, the ability to communicate, socialize, self-present, and represent.

3. On the understanding of perceiving delight and beauty in deep evolution

Let us examine the connection between the feeling of beauty in human evolution and the criteria for evaluating the physical beauty of the human face. In humans, it is possible to measure the physiological response that

accompanies pleasurable treats, such as increased pulse, increased sweating, and dilated pupils. Physiological responses to perceived signals can also be measured, for example, in pollinators. Their neural networks create a simple hedonistic response. Neural networks whose activity is the basis of hedonic evaluation are functionally flexible, the more flexible the more complex the brain. Their flexibility depends on the state of the organism, its age, experience, etc. The roots of human evaluation of beauty lie in the activity of neurobiological systems, perception and evaluation, which we have inherited from our evolutionary ancestors. Since ancient times, the feeling of beauty has been expressed by people through art, personal adornment, and the embellishment of their homes and surroundings etc. The emergence and development of visual art in the Pleistocene are explained by three theories.

1. The theory of sexual selection. According to this theory, visual art should be interpreted as a manifestation of courtship that appears during the competition for sexual partners (a theory defended by, for example, Geoffrey Miller (2001; 2010)).

2. The theory of social ties. According to this theory, art was created in the context of group rituals (e.g. Ellen Dissanayake (1995)).

3. The theory of cognitive functions, according to which art appeared together with tool innovations (e.g. Steven Mithen (2007)).

These three theories may be understood as a connected continuum. Sexual selection in humans is influenced by culture. Both women and men have decorated themselves, probably since the Paleolithic. Grooming can be considered a strategy by which individuals try to influence other individuals in order to increase the probability of reproductive success by being more attractive to their potential mates than rivals. In ancient Egypt, both women and men used paints, oils and ointments to emphasize the blackness of their eyes. Women in ancient Rome painted their eyelids, cheeks, lips, hair and nails and whitened their teeth (Davis and Arnocky, 2020). Humans continue to beautify themselves with sophisticated surgical procedures, waxing, hairdressing, etc. For example, in 2017, the value of the sacred cosmetics industry was estimated at 532 billion USD (Dixson, 2022).

Why we like some objects, love them and desire them, and, to what extent the assessment is objective or subjective are age-old questions of philosophers and aesthetes. If we like or love something (whether it's a human face, a piece of music or a view from the window), we experience a pleasant feeling, a feeling of pleasure. On the other hand, if we don't like something, we experience distaste, disgust and we turn away. The hedonic reaction is involved in the regulation of the physiological state of the organism in relation to its behavior. It co-determines what we eat and drink, but also who we enter into a closer relationship with (Koukolík, 2023). Beauty is not the result of objective mathematical features, as Plato or Renaissance thinkers believed. Symmetry, which we shall later focus on, is processed by the visual neural networks of people, and it is thus an evolutionarily coded phenomenon. The subjective aspect of beauty perception consists of neural networks that learn through

reward-based mechanisms. Through the interactions of the neural networks with the inner and outer world, objectivity is evolutionarily conditioned and the subjectivity of beauty is individually, culturally and historically conditioned.

An assessment of whether we like, are repulsed by, or find something interesting or not represents one initial consideration when perceiving a face.

The perception of attractiveness usually varies on the basis of the context of the encounter. Whether we realize it or not, positive appeal significantly influences many of our social decisions and activities – the treatment of offspring, choice of partner, lawsuits, choice of employees, and so on. Individuals who give the impression of being attractive are usually considered to be more desirable partners, have more sexual partners and begin their sexual life earlier (Rhodes and Simmons, 2005). The face is not the only part of the human body which influences our perception of individuals as attractive or unattractive; other elements also include height, breast size as well as waist-to-hip ratio or waist-to-shoulder ratio in men.

Until recently, psychologists, aestheticians and anthropologists believed that the beauty of the face depends on individual taste, and thus that beauty perception differs depending on the cultural and social aspects of society (Havlíček and Rubešová, 2008).

Traditionally, female beauty did not always have a dominant place in the representation of overall beauty or in the attention of artists. The first portrayal of a Palaeolithic human face with individual features is the small head of a mammoth from Dolné Věstonice, showing an elongated face, a long narrow nose, a low forehead, and asymmetrical eyes (Blažek and Trnka, 2008, p. 15). It has massive hips in contrast to small arms and a small head with the features mentioned above. The emphasis on body parts such as the stomach, hips and chest, compared with the atrophic head, may mean that these parts were symbols of fertility. Later portrayals of faces were associated with the creation of societies in Egypt or China. The most famous work of Praxiteles of Athens, *The Aphrodite of Knidos* from the 4th century B.C., reveals all the sophisticated details of Aphrodite's face:

> When we had taken sufficient delight from the plants in the garden, we passed on into the temple. The goddess is set in the middle of it – an exceedingly beautiful work of Parian marble – with a look of proud contempt and a slight smile which just reveals her teeth. The full extent of her beauty is unhidden by any clinging raiment, for her nudity is complete except insofar as she holds one hand in front of her to hide her modesty (Pollitt, 1990, p. 86).

For a man, the primary criterion when it comes to evaluating the physical beauty of a woman is her youth, since a woman's reproductive value constantly decreases after the age of twenty. It is low at the age of forty and at the age of fifty is nearing zero. This preference for youth is not restricted to Western cultures. For instance, the anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon asserts that men from the Amazonian Indian tribe Yanomanö find women

who are *moko dude*, or represent a ripe fruit, as the most fertile and the most attractive (Chagnon, 1997). Across thirty-seven cultures studied, men preferred partners younger than themselves.[1]

4. Facial specificity

Facial perception is the most developed visual skill in humans, playing a critical role in social interactions. It is not surprising that the vision regions of the brain have evolved to become devoted to facial recognition (Kennard, 2006). Functional imaging has identified activity when viewing faces in the superior temporal sulcus, the same with monkeys, and also in the inferior occipital gyrus and the lateral fusiform gyrus, which are located anterior to the colour area V4 (Kennard, 2006). There are two prevailing hypotheses in cognitive neuroscience to elucidate facial dominance:

> One position contends that the brain is composed of domains – specific modules each of which (more or less) carries out an explicit function. Clearly, such functions that can be seen in the primary visual cortex are consigned to feature identification. An alternate view is one that suggests that the brain, although somehow segmented by neurological modules, processes information by means of domain-general mechanisms, which may process different types of information. This view suggests that the brain's modules may be far more versatile in dealing with the myriad of different signals that arrive in a great flood for simulation processing (Solso, 2003, p. 143).

The face specificity hypothesis is discussed in connection with the cognitive processes of facial perception. This hypothesis is based on the existence of a neural network between the temporal and occipital lobe in the *gyrus fusiformis* or the *fusiform face area* (Kanwisher and Yovel, 2006). Its existence is proven by the fact that we perceive faces as a specific category of observed objects. As soon as we identify an object as a face, cerebral cortex areas specifically focused on face analysis are stimulated (Gautier, Behrmann and Tarr, 1999). It is interesting that this stimulation also takes place as a result of an extraordinary stimulus – when a face is turned 180°. During the identification of an inverse face, a time delay of 120ms occurs which is known as two-stage facial recognition. When a face is considered attractive, the medial orbitofrontal cortex is stimulated. Face attractiveness improves the ability to determine very quickly that the presented object is a face and not something else. The ability to distinguish facial emotions increases with attractiveness as well. The activity of the cortex increases the more desirable the face is, which is remarkable as at the same time, one is smiling (Blažek and Trnka, 2008).

When considering biological determinants related to the human face, we should mention strokes. Strokes can result in agnosia or 'ignorance' and give rise to what neuropsychologists call prosopagnosia, i.e., face ignorance.

[1] Aging does not mean only a biological process, it is also a cultural process (different cultures have different attitudes regarding aging and death and these cultural perspectives can have a huge impact on how we experience aging and attractivity of face and body. While many cultures celebrate the aging process and venerate their elder (for example Native Americans cultures, Koreans, India etc.) in Western cultures where the youth are confronted with aging as a shameful experience. The physical signs of human aging tend to be frowned upon (aesthetical surgery, cosmetic preparations and so on). See for example Novak et al. (2016).

Patients with prosopagnosia then are literally of faces (Perrett, 2010). As Perrett contends (2010), people with face-recognition problems report that faces change and are altered in their attractiveness. He mentions the example of a young man who complains that his wife's face no longer looked the same after having a stroke. "He sadly recalls her beautiful eyes now that that beauty had gone. In fact, she was the same person, with the same eyes, but for him the attraction and wonderment of her eyes were now missing – when he gazed at her face, the eyes were almost blanked out; they had no significance" (Perrett, 2010, p. 44). Another element changing our perception of facial attractivity may be increased-blood alcohol level. When the connections within the brain between the parts that are necessary to see faces as faces and the parts that give us pleasure are broken, our capacity to find any face attractive is also disrupted. If the connection is primed by alcohol, drugs or pathologically over stimulated for example through epilepsy, this might change the attractiveness of faces and make them all beautiful (Perrett, 2010).

5. Can facial beauty be measured?

When the statue of Apollo (320 B.C.) was discovered, it was regarded as the epitome of beauty and became the most famous statue in the world. Beauty was then a matter of how satisfactory facial features aligned with this icon of beauty. Dutch physician and philosopher Petrus Camper measured facial angles in profiles. Camper found that Greek statues had a profile angle of about 100 degrees, yet most human profile angles range from 70 to 90 degrees (Bergman, 2010).

Subsequent to Camper, Johann Casper Lavater, Charles Darwin and others tried to measure faces, probing the question of whether facial beauty can be measured reliably. In the 21st century, contemporary researchers highlight three mechanisms contributing to facial beauty.

Three parameters contribute to facial attractiveness, none of which is unique to any specific ethnicity. "The first parameter is averageness. The second is symmetry. Both of these parameters apply to men and women. The third parameter has to do with features that make men and women look different from each other, or the parameter of sexual dimorphism" (Chatterjee, 2014, p. 11).

Let us delve into the three biological and evolutionary parameters that contribute to facial attractiveness, acknowledging that there are also some non-biological aspects, as for example spiritual beauty or expressions, which are unmeasurable.

6. Averageness

The English scientist Sir Francis Galton, in the mid-nineteenth century, was among the first who noticed the phenomenon of averageness He was interested in whether specific facial features were characteristic of personality traits, as was his cousin, Charles Darwin. Galton took composite photographs of criminals in order to find the typical appearance of an offender. He created photographs by superimposing repeated exposures of individual faces'

negatives, and noticed that the final face is much more attractive than the individual faces from which the composite was created. In this way, he discovered that averaged facial features are attractive: "These faces have statistically averaged features, such as how thick or thin a nose is, or how far apart the eyes are set. Earlier, there was doubt about the validity of averaging experiments. The concern was that composite faces blurred the edges of each individual face, making them look younger. They had the soft-focus haze often used by fashion photographers. However, recent computer techniques have avoided this methodological limitation and it is clear that faces representing the central tendency of a group are seen as more attractive than individual faces. Even infants look at these averaged faces longer than they look at other faces." (Chatterjee, 2014, p. 12). Averageness, in this context, denotes the fact that the face as a whole approaches the hypothetical average of the population. Later in the 20th century, this phenomenon reappeared in research. Evolutionary-oriented psychologists assumed that the attractiveness of averaged faces is a consequence of stabilising selection, pointing to the higher extent of heterozygosity of an individual (Fink and Penton-Voak, 2002). The averageness of the human face may be one of the indicators of good health and good design (Ettcoff, 1999). Authors focused more on cognitive processes explain the attractiveness of average faces through their prototypicality: they contain features that describe the perceiving object, the face, in the best way. Because averaged faces contain features that are familiar to people, they may rate them more positively than a configuration of atypical features (Havlíček and Rubešová, 2008).

7. Symmetry

The parameter of symmetry regarding the human face has been extensively researched by evolutionary biologist and anthropologist Karl Grammer and entomologist Randy Thornhill. They calculated facial balance by measuring the distance of various facial landmarks on both the left and right sides of the human face, and showed that the symmetry index correlated with our assessment of the attractiveness of faces. This conclusion can also be found in the philosophical tradition. Pythagoras of Samos, a Greek philosopher and mathematician, considered the balance between two opposed entities as a cause of symmetry. Symmetry was one of the most important requirements of the canon of beauty in Greek art.

Consider the sculpture of *Kore* from the 6th century B.C. According to Pythagoreans, the girl is beautiful because of the balance between her legs and arms, which are in the same harmonic proportions as the distances between planetary spheres. In n the 6th century B.C., an artist had to etch a girl's subtle beauty into stone. The task involved crafting the stone, creating two equal eyes, evenly distributed hair, breasts, legs, and arms, and correspondingly raising the corners of the mouth. Two centuries later, the Greek sculptor Polykleitos created the famous bronze statue *Doryphoros*, which introduced a new canon: a mathematical basis for artistic perfection. All body parts had to be arranged in accordance with geometrically defined connections; A-B is equivalent to B-C (Eco, 2005). Marcus Vitruvius Pollio formulated guidelines

for symmetrical body proportions; the face should comprise one-tenth of body height, the head one-eighth, and so on, although it is important to note that Vitruvius's symmetry differs from axial symmetry. "The design of a temple depends on symmetry, the principles of which must be most carefully observed by the architect. They are due to proportion [...] Proportion is a correspondence among the measures of the members of an entire work, and of the whole to a certain part selected as standard. From this result the principles of symmetry" (Vitruvius, 1914, p. 72). Symmetry was a main feature of beauty for philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Lucian, and Boethius. Aristotle, for example, considered symmetry the chief tenet of beauty. This view is maintained in contemporary standards by cosmetic surgeons who draw on the golden proportion standards of facial beauty:

> The ratio of the size of one segment of the face to another is the key element in these standards. On the basis of this general principle, it has been proposed that three vertical segments of the face should be approximately equal in height. One of the three equal segments extends from the hairline to the brow ridge, another from the brow ridge to just under the nose, and the third from just under the nose to the tip of the chin. The distance between the top of the face and the tip of the noses said to be "golden" if it is approximately two-thirds of the total length (Zebrowitz, 1997, p. 123).

How can we explain the tendency to consider symmetrical faces more attractive? There are at least two theories. According to the first, this phenomenon is a by-product of a function of our visual system which processes symmetrical objects more easily than asymmetrical ones. This justifies our general preference for symmetrical shapes. However, this hypothesis can be easily contradicted by the fact that we process faces in specific parts of the brain, the *fusiform face area*, as mentioned before. The second theory comes again from evolutionary psychology. The tendency to prefer symmetrical faces is viewers as an adaptation for the selection of a genetically high-quality partner. Slightly fluctuating face asymmetry indicates a certain developmental stability. The extent of symmetry reflects the quality of gene expression during the development of the organism and also its ability to cope with pathogens, toxic substances and other environmental dangers. However, as Zebrowitz notes, symmetry does enhance sexual success but does not necessarily imply markers of good genes (Zebrowitz, 1997). While highlighting the role of symmetry, we cannot overlook the apparent exceptions, such as situations where a lack of symmetry or asymmetry is more attractive. Well-known examples include actresses and models like Marilyn Monroe and Cindy Crawford who proudly accentuated or painted their beauty marks. One of the answers to why asymmetry may be beautiful is offered in Ramachandran's consideration:

> Imagine that you have room for furniture, pictures and other accessories. Even without a professional designer, you know that absolute symmetry will not work, although space contains symmetry islands, such as a rectangular table with symmetrically positioned chairs. To get the most dramatic effect on the contrary, you need some carefully selected asymmetric moment. The key to solving this mystery can be found in the notion that the symmetry law applies only to individual objects, not to dimensional representations. From the point of view of evolution, it makes sense, because a predator, prey, friend or partner is always an isolated, independent object (Ramachandran, 2013, pp. 275–6).

An interesting aspect of perceiving symmetrical faces may involve little asymmetry, like a 'beauty spot'. While a symmetrical face is generally considered beautiful, the asymmetrical element draws attention to the symmetry, as noted by Démuthová, Selecká and Démuth (2019). According to them, "the faces of famous supermodels and actresses such as Cindy Crawford or Marylin Monroe, who became beauty icons, can serve as an example" (Démuthová, Selecká and Démuth, 2019, p. 39). David Perrett also highlights another specific example of an asymmetrical face which is considered to be charismatic: a face of Gérard Depardieu, "Gérard Depardieu is still attractive to many despite his face being lopsided" (Perrett, 2010, p. 82). 'Universal rule' of attractive faces is maybe not so universal, in judging prospective we may be also using the other means of assessing the human faces (charisma, intersexual differences or straight profile for example).

8. On Intersexual Differences

The third parameter or 'universal rule' of facial attractiveness, according to contemporary cognitive studies, is sexual dimorphism. Male and female faces differ in their shapes, deepening during puberty. The main differences are a greater development of the lower jaw, larger protruding cheekbones and a deeper-set face (Enlow and Hans, 1996). Pivoňková (2009), Démuthová (2016) and Fisher (2020) mention the influence of sex hormones, testosterone in men and oestrogen in women, as a reason for intersexual differences. In order to increase their attractiveness and woman-ness, women accentuate all the mentioned feminine characteristics using decorative cosmetics (eye shadow, cheek make-up, lipstick etc.). Intensifying with a red lip colour gives rise to the idea of emotional states connected with excitement which increases, in no small measure, a woman's appeal (Kišoňová, 2019). The situation with the attractiveness of masculine features in a man's face is more complicated. Some studies based on the evaluation of photographs of male faces have found a preference for male features, other studies based on morphing show a preference for slightly feminized male faces. The lower attractiveness of faces with masculine features may be affected by societal associations of aggressiveness, dominance, and violence to such features (Havlíček and Rubešová, 2008). As Démuthová, Selecká and Démuth (2019, p. 81) mention, "sexual dimorphic features of a face are also "honest signals"; however, as opposed to the more universal signs of symmetry or averageness, whose presence increases its attractiveness to both men and women, these features have a different effect on perceived attractiveness in men and women".

9. Another aspect of facial beauty: the straight profile

This rule is consistent with the principles of cosmetic surgery; a straight profile is one in which the jaw is in relatively vertically aligned with the forehead rather than positioned forward or behind creating a concave or convex profile (Zebrowitz, 1997). It is interesting that children also respond to this attractiveness marker. Research that examined various facial measurements found that the straight profile was the only element to have a reliable and marked effect on children's judgement of their peers who were

shown in frontal and profile photographs (Lucker and Graber, 1980). "The straighter the profile, the more likely the children were to say that there was 'nothing wrong' with the face" (Zebrowitz, 1997, p. 122).

The attractiveness of a straight profile is evident in beauty competition winners, top-models, actors and actresses (Peck and Peck, 1970). Zebrowitz describes one study in which teenage girls were photographed with their jaws positioned into straight, protruding, or receding alignments. Orthodontists, artists, and lay judges agreed in ranking the girls' faces as more pleasing when they were positioned into a straight jaw alignment rather than into a protruding or receding one (Zebrowitz, 1997, p. 122). This may be a signal of genetic fitness. There is also a functional aspect to such a profile, as it is the result of a normal alignment of the molar teeth, which contributes to a positive prognosis for keeping one's teeth, which also had evolutionary survival value. Research showed that the best predictor of profile attractiveness is the extent to which the profile approximates the functional ideal that develops with normal growth and efficient chewing (Zebrowitz, 1997). Except for facial features, facial attractiveness is also influenced by skin condition, through which we can determine the age of an individual, their state of health or sex. As we get older, our skin acquires wrinkles, is looser and covered with more pigmented lesions. The skin reveals an array of health problems – acne, eczema, skin infections, jaundice, etc. These aspects greatly influence the assessment of facial attractiveness. Thornhill's research showed that the homogeneity of female skin texture correlates with facial attractiveness. Another characteristic affecting the appeal of a human being is hair. The amount of time and resources we dedicate to hair care is one of the signs of its significance (Havlíček and Rubešová, 2009).

Facial expression is another important criterion of attractiveness. For instance, people looking at us are perceived to be more attractive. Individuals with dilated pupils are equally perceived to be more attractive, a tactic frequently used in marketing. Those promoting products on billboards have digitally dilated pupils (Havlíček and Rubešová, 2008). The smile also has an exceptionally positive influence on attractiveness. Smiling faces are judged to be more attractive, while faces with a neutral expression are considered more appealing from the side view. The majority of studies agree on the fact that female facial attractiveness changes during the menstrual cycle. Men and women determined that photographs of women taken in the follicular phase were more attractive. Studies also confirmed a positive relationship between attractiveness, femininity and levels of oestrogen in women who did not wear make-up. However, the studies did not unequivocally show which face characteristics are modified during the period. It might be a change in the intensity of the red lip colour in connection with an increase in basal temperature during ovulation, modification of the colour and quality of the skin, dilatation of pupils and so on.

Symmetry, averageness, youthfulness, a straight profile, sexual dimorphism and other aspects indicate, the attractiveness of a face, as indicated by numerous studies and researches (e.g. Démuthová (2017), Démuth and Démuthová (2017)).

> However, all of the aforementioned aspects are not crucial regarding the attractiveness of portraits. The beauty of a human face activates a different network, with nodes in the left ventral striatum, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex and the perigenual part of the anterior cingulate cortex. Beautiful human faces activate this network more than less attractive faces. However, it should be noted that the beauty of a visual art face (portrait) activates a network whose nodes are the ventromedial prefrontal cortex and the pole cortex of the frontal lobe. Therefore, both types of visual beauty are processed by different neural networks, a necessity for distinguishing a beautiful face from its depiction (Koukolík, 2023, p. 115).

10. Conclusion

Contemporary interdisciplinary research, mainly in cognitive science, neuropsychology, psychology, neuroaesthetics and evolutionary biology, delves into a comprehensive study of the human face, including how we perceive it, the areas responsible for recognizing faces, the areas responsible for distinguishing a beautiful face from its image, and the like. Contemporary evolutionary psychology identifies three fundamental elements of a beautiful face.: symmetry, averageness and sexual dimorphism. This doesn't imply a preference for a dozen expressionless faces that just meet the mentioned criteria. However, research in evolutionary psychology, neuroscience, and anthropology suggests that the importance of facial (and bodily) beauty is increasing, especially as far as Western culture and society are concerned. This is evidenced by the overuse of cosmetic products and facial aesthetic surgery in younger generations. Individuals, including men, seek to prolong the youthful appearance and "vitality" of their face, to acquire skin without wrinkles and sagging. The result is often an inauthentic, artificial face that has lost its unique expression (which includes aging) and thus resembles many other faces, even blending in with them.

The paper also drew attention to the importance of subtle asymmetry when judging a face as attractive. A certain degree of uniqueness and authenticity that the face carries, through which it speaks to us and communicates the identity or anonymity of its wearer, must be perceived as significant elements. This uniqueness is vital as it allows a person to 'give themselves', and 'expose' themselves in an intimate and undisguised revelation. Finally, the consideration of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari underscores the meaning of the human face as follows:

> The face forms a wall that the signifier needs in order to reflect from it, it establishes the wall of the signifier, a frame or a screen. The face deepens the hole that subjectivization needs to penetrate, forming the black hole of subjectivity as consciousness or passion, as a camera (Deleuze and Guattari, 2010, p. 191).

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Mgr. Renáta Kišoňová, PhD.
Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Law
Department of Theory of Law and Philosophy of Law
Šafárikovo nám. 6, 814 99 Bratislava
Slovakia
renata.kisonova @flaw.uniba.sk

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10500937

Hiroshima's Bag Lady

Increasing the Parameters of the Real

Luciana Nunes Nacif

What is considered ugly, grotesque or unpleasant by the fashion world? The first collection presented by Rei Kawakubo in Paris was classified as offensive to Western aesthetic standards, for it questioned the French ideal of beauty and elegance. Through silhouettes covered in frayed, perforated and monochromatic fabrics, Kawakubo disrupted the established notion of the beautiful body, stripping it of the clichés of femininity, explicit sexuality and glamour. Under the lens of Vilém Flusser's philosophy, the Japanese fashion designer created the new, the beautiful, that which is capable of expanding the parameters of the real. | *Keywords: Fashion, Beauty, Deconstruction, Vilém Flusser, Rei Kawakubo*

1981. Paris was the world's fashion stage. For the first time, fashion designer Rei Kawakubo presented her collection outside Japan. The reactions from the specialized press were extreme:

> The terror and desperation that ooze from so many of the latest Japanese fashions, including those by Rei Kawakubo, are wholly absent from Saint Laurent's collections. In its most extreme forms, Japanese fashion heralds a world nobody wants to know. The woman who wears *Comme des Garçons* has money but is not proud of it; she doesn't want to dress in such a way as to present something pleasing to the eye, and she sags under the weight of the information she reads in the newspaper every day (Brubach, 1984, p. 94).

At that time, several journalists came to the conclusion that Kawakubo's collection reflected a kind of anger, perhaps an anger characteristic of survivors of the nuclear holocaust, which would explain why her style was called '*le look clochard d'Hiroshima*'.[1] But it seems that her intention was to question one of the axioms of Western culture: the French monopoly of elegance and the expertise of French couturiers (Vinken, 2023, p. 20). Her focus was the western woman's ideal of beauty.

[1] Hiroshima's bag lady look.

Fig. 1: *Lace Collection*, Comme des Garçons.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981.

Kawakubo's aesthetics were not simply the aesthetics of poverty, as the term '*la clochard d'Hiroshima*' may suggest. It was actually a negative aesthetic,[2] an examination of our own idea of beauty and fashion. It was a recognition of what is different, what is strange, and the deconstruction of an idea of a symmetrical, perfect, beautiful world. Her deconstruction was about the distortion and rupture of the traditional code of fashion, with its completed perfection and hidden internal structures.

But who is Rei Kawakubo and how did her brand come about? Born in 1942, Kawakubo grew up in a time marked by the stigma of war in Japan, where fear and austerity dominated. The country was destroyed, a fact that probably profoundly influenced Kawakubo's aesthetics. The daughter of a university professor, Kawakubo studied literature and philosophy at Keio University in Tokyo. In the 1960s, she was close to intellectual debates related to the status and positioning of women in society. In a rare interview, Kawakubo explains that: "when I was young, it was unusual for a female college student to do the same job as a man. And, of course, women didn't earn the same. I rebel against it [...] I never lose my ability to rebel, I get angry and that anger becomes my energy" (Kawamura, 2004, p. 137). This ability to rebel has remained alive throughout her trajectory, until the present day.

[2] Features such as ugliness, grotesqueness and disgust are considered negative aesthetics, as they become justified as a necessary means to facilitating an ultimately positive aesthetic experience. Negative aesthetics may lead to an activist dimension, because when confronted with negative aesthetic qualities, one generally doesn't remain a mere spectator but rather spring into action to eliminate or transform them (Saito, 2023).

In 1969, dissatisfied with the aesthetic standards of fashion at the time, Kawakubo decided to create her own brand: *Comme des Garçons*.[3] In the early 1980s, she already had a community of faithful followers in Japan, known as the 'crow tribe,' inspired by the English punk movement. At a time when fashion was obsessed with tight-fitting dresses, Kawakubo's oversized pieces were designed to intentionally drape the body. In 1981 Kawakubo made her appearance on the French fashion scene, transforming it profoundly. And what made Kawakubo's arrival particularly challenging was the fact that the other designers, such as Gianni Versace, Azzedine Alaïa, Christian Lacroix and Thierry Mugler, were beginning to engage in a hyperbolization of glamour, in contrast to the traditional understated elegance of haute couture. Designers in the 1980s were seen as celebrities and fashion shows became spectacular events that received wide publicity in the mass media (Negrin, 2023, p. 49).

The 1981 *Lace collection* seemed to 'hack' the fashion system, changing the functioning of weaving machines and establishing a new aesthetic, building a new relationship between beauty and fashion. To hack, from Old English *hæccan*, means 'to cut into pieces,' to shred. In the field of information technology, to hack means to solve a problem in an inelegant way, to improvise, to make a kludge. This is where the meaning of the word 'hack' comes from: that of an action that is capable of breaking a system or program. The hacker is not only able to access the data of restricted systems, but he/she can also change the functioning of the program, making it work in his benefit. The hacker creates bugs that break the predictability of the system (Reis, 2023). But, as Citton (2015) argues, the hacker's true challenge is to strike a difficult balance between respect for the code, without which the system will not work, and a subversive drive, without which the transgression will not occur. In this regard, Kawakubo seemed to subvert the functioning of the fashion system – and its established concept of beauty – by playing with its codes.

Kawakubo practiced a kind of deconstruction through silhouettes covered in frayed, perforated and monochromatic fabrics. But before analysing the deconstruction proposed by Kawakubo, it is important to clarify the philosophical meaning of the term. It originated with philosopher Jacques Derrida in the late 1960s and was at first understood more as an attitude than a defined methodology. According to him,

> [Deconstruction] enables us to interrogate the covert philosophical and political presuppositions of institutionalized critical methods which generally govern our reading of a text. There is in deconstruction something which challenges every teaching institution. It is not a question of calling for the destruction of such institutions, but rather of making us aware of what we are in fact doing when we subscribe to this or that institutional way of reading [...] (Kearney, 2004, p. 155).

Displacing the term from its philosophical origins, designers and artists have established an aesthetic of questioning through fragmentation, rupture and displacement. One of the first manifestations of deconstruction began on

[3] A french expression meaning 'like boys.'

the streets of London, with the punk movement in the 1970s. The punks' ragged black clothes were a manifestation of their indignation with society. The punk look became associated with clothes that were worn unfinished, inside out and destroyed. Therefore, in fashion, the term 'deconstruct' came to mean 'dismantling the form.'

Unlike English designers of the punk movement, such as Vivienne Westwood, who destroyed unexpensive clothing as a form of political expression, Kawakubo respected craftsmanship and commissioned special fabrics to look degraded. One of the iconic pieces of this period is a sweater full of holes, as shown in figure 2, intentionally knitted with empty spaces, obtained by loosening the screws in the knitting machinery – a process that subverted the standardized construction of knitting, which she called '*Lace*':

> Machines that manufacture fabrics are increasingly producing uniform and flawless materials. I like eccentric and imperfect things. Hand weaving is the best way to achieve this. As this isn't always possible, we've loosened a few screws on the machines here and there so they can't do exactly what they're supposed to do (Steele, 2000, p. 17).

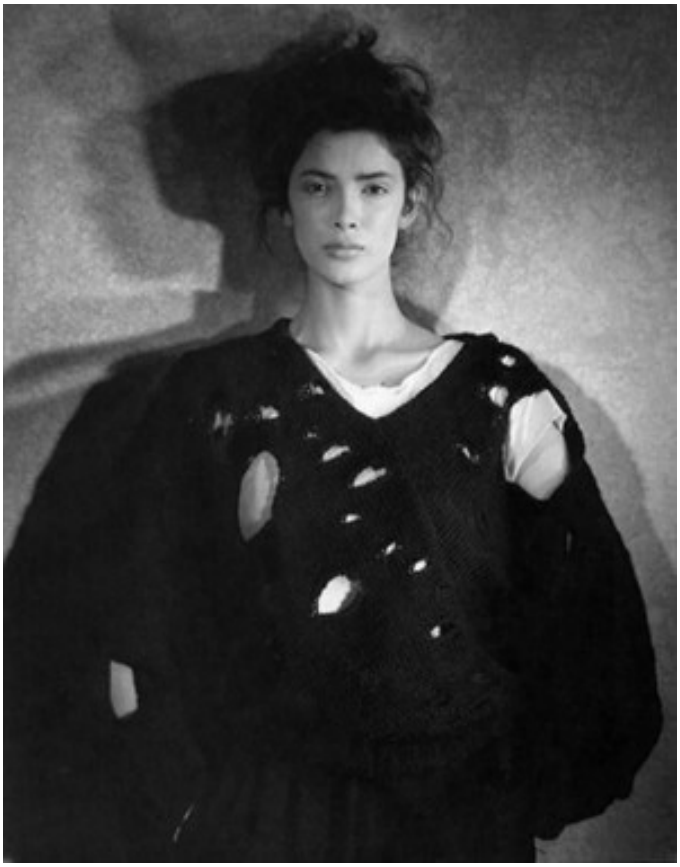

Fig. 2: Comme des Garçons, *Lace sweater*, fall/winter 1982-83.
Photograph by Peter Lindberg.

At first, Kawakubo's deconstructive practice was used against the dominance of finely crafted patterns for fitting and defining the human body. But, over the years, her deconstructivist aesthetics has been directed against oppressive discourses. What the concept of deconstruction in fashion tends to show is how absence and displacement affect the relationship between the individual body and a frozen idealization of it. Deconstruction seems to work like an x-ray of the fashion system, which reveals its charms (glamour, spectacle, fantasy, creativity, luxury) and its materiality (shape, material, modelling, manufacturing, sewing, finishing). According to Alison Gill (1998), designers such as Kawakubo represent a 'new thought' in fashion, which is concerned with the 'ontology of structure' of clothing. That is, the creator simultaneously deforms and forms, destroys and builds clothes. This bidirectional work disfigures and figures the body, decomposing it and composing it in new ways. Deconstructing and reconstructing crystallized concepts, such as beauty. Practicing the two terms together in one: de(construction).

The literal deconstruction of the fabric and finishing techniques presented in the *Lace* collection seemed to reflect the disturbance, or the upheaval, of the values established by western fashion. The disruptive force of Kawakubo's collection resided not only in undoing the structure of a given piece, through subtractions and displacements, but mainly, in rethinking the meaning of clothing itself. By deconstructing the history of western fashion, the concept of beauty and female body shape, she revealed that both are just cultural conventions.

The creation of a clothing via deconstruction points to new possibilities that have not yet been realized. More than a method, deconstruction is an activity, that is, a reading of the text, which shows that the text has more than one possible interpretation, and often contradictory ones (Loscialpo, 2011, p. 13). The unsystematic character of deconstructive reading emerges in its questioning of a series of opposites (binary models), such as beauty/ugliness, nature/culture, essence/appearance, subject/object, fashion/anti-fashion, body/clothes, female/male, negative/positive, inside/outside, noble/vulgar, form/emptiness. By exposing this binary, the creator operates what Derrida would define as "an openness towards the other" (Kearney, 2004, p. 155).

Kawakubo operates within the Western fashion system and, simultaneously, against it, questioning it and provoking a kind of critical dismantling. Kawakubo shows in Paris, the fashion capital, and depends on the approval of journalists and the entire system. In this sense, she does not deny it, but seeks to denounce the arbitrariness of its foundations from the inside. Even though she breaks rules and provokes extreme reactions, it doesn't take long for the fashion system to absorb her criticism, turning it into another commercial product. After all, every complaint ends up being incorporated by the system, preventing any form of lasting dissent. Perhaps, it is exactly for this reason that Kawakubo is always looking to create never-before-seen collections. She places herself neither inside nor outside the fashion system, but at its limit (Zborowska, 2015) or, in Derrida's words, '*au bord*.'[4]

[4] A french expression meaning 'on the edge.'

The aesthetics of Kawakubo's first collection presented in Paris was interpreted by critics as ugly, grotesque and offensive. But, from another point of view, the *Lace collection* is the perfect example of what Vilém Flusser would call '*beautiful*'. For the philosopher, '*beauty*' is the new, that which is capable of enriching our reality and proposing new possibilities for future experiences. Flusser (1975/76, p. 11) argues that "a model of an experience [...] is beautiful insofar as it is different from any preceding model. For it is the measure of the new domain of reality that this model opens up to experience. Beauty is the increase of the parameter of the real." As Kawakubo disrupts the established notion of the beautiful body, stripping it of the clichés of femininity, explicit sexuality and glamour, she creates possibilities for the construction of new parameters of beauty. Her collections present new realities, which do not yet exist. Her genius lies in the fact that she presents a communicable, understandable model, firmly walking the narrow path between the redundant aesthetics of the pleasant – mainstream fashion – and the madness of the incomprehensible. As Flusser asserts, beauty needs to communicate. To communicate new, non-redundant information, as stated by Kawakubo:

> What is important to me is information (in the journalistic sense of relating News). Through my collections [...] I like to tell a story. Without News, nothing is alive [...] Information deepens the work. So, if anything, I am maybe more of a journalist than an artist (Bolton, 2017, p. 188).

Even if the discourse of fashion constantly revolves around the 'new', what is seen, with rare exceptions, are expressions of the 'pleasant,' of what we already know. Flusser (1975/76, p. 12) claims that beauty "is not pleasant at all. If we wish to live pleasantly, we must content ourselves with old, traditional models of experience. They are pleasant because we are programmed by them." Pleasant is what we see in mainstream fashion, whose changes are but superficial, just creating the feeling of 'newness'. Kawakubo's beauty concept is not pleasant at all, as it jeopardizes established standards, expanding the parameters of the real.

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Luciana Nunes Nacif
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais
Av. Pres. Antônio Carlos, 6627 - Pampulha
Belo Horizonte - MG, 31270-901
Brazil
nacif.lu@gmail.com

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10501361

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Utopia, Sound, and Matter in Ernst Bloch

Federico Rampinini

Bloch's philosophy of music is one of the most interesting of the twentieth century, particularly in the context of Marxist aesthetics. This article focuses on the various peculiarities of this thought, which seldom are highlighted. Firstly, through a new analysis of the musical sections of *Spirit of Utopia* and *The Principle of Hope*, the relation between utopia and music will be discussed in Sections 2 and 3 in order to show the originality of Bloch's refusal of the Marxist base-superstructure model in the field of aesthetics. In contrast to the other philosophies of music, the study of music inspires theoretical speculation in Bloch's thought and not vice versa. In order to demonstrate this connection, in Sections 4 and 5, the idea of the sound in *Spirit of Utopia* will be examined and compared to the conception of the matter as it is presented in *The Principle of Hope, The Materialism Problem, its History and Substance*, and other works. These paragraphs aim to highlight how the early conception of sound was the model for the later conception of matter. | *Keywords: Ernst Bloch, Marxism, Aesthetics, Philosophy of Music, Materialism.*

1. Introduction

Ernst Bloch's philosophy of music represents one of the most remarkable and original theoretical reflections on music in history, particularly in the twentieth century, for at least two partially neglected reasons.[1] Firstly, the philosophy of music constitutes the nucleus of the theoretical reflection that is fundamental to understand the distance from orthodox Marxism that Bloch has always tried to maintain in his thought. Secondly, Bloch's thoughts on music constitute an extraordinary example of integration between music and philosophy that deserves careful analysis. Indeed, Bloch's reflection is not a systematic theoretical treatment of the musical problem from the point of view of philosophical aesthetics. Instead, Bloch's analysis arises from a complex phenomenological conception of consciousness and emotion in contact with musical language, and from art in general. Therefore, in Bloch

[1] The bibliography on Bloch's philosophy is growing wider. Italian studies are of the essence, on this matter see Cipolletta (2017). See also Münster (1985), Geoghegan (1996), J.O. Daniel-T. Moylan (1997).

theoretical and aesthetic thought combine and inspire each other, moving in the same direction.

Firstly, struggling with music's questions allows Bloch to develop a profound rethinking of Marxist dialectics based on the base-superstructure model.[2] As a result, Bloch does not reduce music to a simple outcome of the mode of production. On the contrary, he argued that the forms and contents of music contain the anticipation and traces for planning utopia.[3] Even though it is not possible to reduce to a univocal current the countless historians, sociologists, musicologists and music theorists inspired by Marxism in the most varied of ways, the purpose of studying the musical experience in order to analyse the phenomena of society can be considered as a common element. Since music, like any other human production, belongs to the superstructure within the base-superstructure model, it is to be considered as an element strongly influenced by the economic base that serves as a foundation for the society. Conversely, Bloch introduces his thought as a 'utopian philosophy', meaning research into, a promotion of, and preparation for the *Novum*, the *Noch-Nicht-Sein*; this research is led through an in-depth study of political praxis and poietic creativity, as well as, of course, an analysis of the confused uneasiness of quotidian existence itself. In the second and third sections of this work, this thought will be analysed so as to focus on the idea that it needs to be grounded on the belief that the model of 'base-superstructure' is not supposed to include the whole sphere of human spiritual nature and activities. Indeed, such a model weakens the universe of utopian 'pre-apparitions', i.e. the ample area of the activities and things expressing the most profound human desires, turning these phenomena into a mere reflection of the current mode of production. According to Bloch some realisations of the human spirit, especially music, instead tear apart the fabric of the present instant, allowing the 'utopian instant' to be experienced. Thanks to them it is possible to trace back some valid contents, beyond their elaboration time or diffusion, that are capable of revealing directions that turn out to be guidelines to current issues.[4]

Secondly, Bloch's reflection on music does not base itself on a theoretical setting previously conceived and *a fortiori* used in order to capture something elusive. Vice versa, the analysis of the musical phenomenon sometimes inspires the development of some philosophical concepts in his maturity. This peculiarity needs to be highlighted. Music does not represent a specific and circumscribed moment within Bloch's reflection; rather, it is the driving force for the philosophy of hope, both on genealogical and theoretical grounds. As the fourth and fifth paragraphs aim to demonstrate, all of this becomes evident when debating the notions of sound and matter. The concept of matter, which has been fully expressed in works such as *The Principle of Hope* and *The Materialism Problem, its History and Substance*, is strongly inspired by the concept of sound, eminently debated in Bloch's debut work *Spirit of Utopia*.

2 Garda (1983, pp. 124–125) touches on the peculiarity of Bloch's aesthetics compared to other Marxist thinkers.

3 See Bloch (2000, pp. 40–42).

4 See Bloch (1963).

2. Figures of Utopia

The notion of utopia constitutes the unitary theoretical synthesis of Bloch's entire philosophy, aimed at developing a new anthropology and ontology.[5] The former intends to promote an expansion of the field of the unconscious, and of the ego in general, to all those drive contents that are not below the threshold of consciousness but rather on the same line as becoming conscious. Meanwhile, the latter is aimed at founding the concept of utopia on the more general level, i.e. the cosmological and metaphysical levels; in other words, seeking the conditions of possibility for the realisation of the most hidden desires of human beings.

The notion of utopia in Bloch's unique perspective can be interpreted through the analysis of a number of figures, each of them capable of explaining it comprehensively, while jointly contributing to the projection of the proper extent of its substantiality. The primordial inspiration for Bloch's philosophy can be seen as consisting in an unorthodox assumption of nihilism as a steppingstone, deducing from a negative force the impulse towards utopian affirmation. As Boella (1987, p. 14) pointed out, the "instance of the 'overthrow of nihilism' dominates [...] Bloch's comparison with contemporary thought and is especially content to never accept the drastic and ideological oppositions of rationalism and irrationalism, philosophies of progress and philosophies of decadence". As a result, *Spirit of Utopia* can be read as the real counterpoint, or even the antidote, to Spengler's work *The Decline of the West*. Faced with the crisis in the West, Spengler presented himself as a sort of apologist for western imperialism and military expansionism. In contrast, for many intellectuals and artists of the time, the decline of the West was linked to an awareness of the exhaustion of a certain tradition: an awareness emblematically expressed by the *Der Blaue Reiter* movement. Bloch, in this sense, is the philosopher of expressionism, as Adorno (1961) claimed, who intends to translate the intentions of the avant-garde into a complex philosophical project. This project was directed towards the elaboration of a revolutionary thought aimed at the practical development of ethical and political needs, i.e. to escape from alienation in a world in which interiority was increasingly subjugated. Bloch moves from the experience of the 'darkness of the lived instant', understood as an embodiment of the nihilism and alienation inherent to modern times, which he nonetheless does not consider immutable. The very first words of *Spirit of Utopia* are emblematic:[6]

[5] On the relation between anthropology and ontology throughout the development of Bloch's thought see Zecchi (2008) and Cunico (1976). Cunico (1976, pp. 80–82) accurately criticised Zecchi (2008, pp. 134–140) for having underestimated the ontological turn in Bloch: in fact, in Zecchi's view the concept of matter is fundamental for the new anthropology Bloch traced in the first works, but it is not in relation to the new ontology Bloch aims to theorise in the latter works.

[6] The conception of a utopia that presents itself as a total eschatological opening, characterised by the messianic idea according to which "the creative, the philosophical hour kat exochen is here" (Bloch, 2000, p. 171) was already noted by the first reviewers of *Spirit of Utopia*. For instance, Blass stated that *Spirit of Utopia* was like a "lighthouse (which), unexpected in our darkness, suddenly casts its powerful light" (1978, p. 66). Susman welcomed the publication of *Spirit of Utopia* as the announcement of a "new German metaphysics": according to her, "[Blochian] utopia casts its anchor at the bottom of the deepest, most terrible night in which I have ever lived" (1965, p. 384).

> I am. We are. That is enough. Now we have to begin. Life has been put in our hands. For itself it became empty already long ago. It pitches senselessly back and forth, but we stand firm, and so we want to be its initiative and we want to be its ends (Bloch, 2000, p. 1).[7]

Against "the nihilism of this modern age", the "veiled life", the "pure nothingness", Bloch counterposes "the paradoxical courage to prophesy the light precisely out of the fog" (Bloch, 2000, p. 171). At the moment when reality presents itself as negative, human beings have the possibility and the capacity to imagine what could be but 'is not yet'. In this perspective, the desired reality becomes truth in its most authentic sense, the 'second truth', as opposed to the 'first truth', the actual one, which is unable to appease human beings completely. Authentic truth is 'not-yet' given; it is conceived as a utopia, a concept that, however, Bloch understands as viable in the foreseeable future. Thus, nihilism is only assumed to be overturned; a 'no' becomes a 'not yet'.[8] Utopian philosophy, therefore, is an anticipatory and propulsive analysis of what is 'not-yet-being', 'not-yet-conscious'. The recognition of the 'darkness of the lived instant' is far from suggesting a sceptical resignation; on the contrary, it urges the elaboration of a theoretical and practical plan. Bloch's intention is thus to establish a relationship between historical reality and ethical ideal, between praxis and theory, allowing a way out of the fragmentation induced by relativism and possible nihilist outcomes. The desire for a philosophy that would be opposed to the tradition of contemplative and rationalistic thought (thus against the neo-Kantianism of Windelband and Rickert, and closer to Simmel), and at the same time would return to inspire action; the more general questions about the meaning of human beings' existence and the world (already common to the philosophy that was immediately opposed to Hegel, like for instance Kierkegaard, Marx, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche); and the shocking historical events of the early 20th century were elements common to an entire generation of thinkers (such as Rosenzweig, Lukács, Kracauer, Benjamin), yet in Bloch they unfolded and led to truly distinctive results. For example, as Boella (1987, p. 38) pointed out, Bloch, unlike Lukács, never translated his critique of reification into neo-Hegelian categories, into a renewed sense of the totality of reality. The void resulting from the crisis of the Hegelian closed totality cannot be overcome by a historicist dialectic, which renews the sense of the totality of reality through a dialectic that is attentive to mediations as the connective tissue of reality. Bloch incorporates the acquisitions of the philosophies of the crisis in an original manner, and develops the idea of a utopian and evolving reality, which nonetheless is structured through a dialectical method aimed rather at the cracks and interstices of the present reality, i.e. at the utopian instants that sometimes reveal themselves within the darkness of the lived instant. The purpose of overcoming the nihilism is made achievable because Bloch, in the 'lived instant', envisages not only obscurity, but potentiality as well. Bloch draws inspiration from Plato and Hegel, supporting an ontological and dynamic connection between being and not being. In order to find

[7] See also Bloch (1965, p. 77).

[8] See Boella (1987, pp. 89–101).

a possible connection between negativity, darkness, and utopia within the lived instant itself, which would allow human beings to ascribe value to the instant by transcending it immanentistically, Bloch engaged in a profound reconsideration of Hegel's dialectics.

In particular, on "the problem of beginning", Bloch states: "the concept, as the essence of the world, could not take a step beyond the sterile A=A without the non-conceptual, the non-logical, which provides the stimulus and the first impulse" (Bloch, 1962, Section 18). In Bloch's interpretation of Hegel's dialectics, the process takes place with the priority and firm consideration of the real data and with the intrusion of nothingness within the very being, or even the entity. In this way, nothingness is not absolute nihil. It is the primary gap between existence and essence, that is the darkness of the lived instant, which can ignite the spark of becoming. This theoretical approach, which allows becoming not to turn into rigid necessity but to open up to possibility, is expressed in the context of reflection on time and history in the one-to-one relationship between *Jetzt* and *Nie*. The present displays itself as negative with the unavoidable experience of violence and injustice, but this could not happen if something of the utopian world of which it is the negation did not pre-appear in this same world. On the other hand, the utopian world would not manifest itself as utopian if the present, in turn, did not show its negativities. Bloch thus opens up the Hegelian closed system. With Leibniz (who attempts to oppose Spinozian necessity), he recovers the dimension of the future as a tendency already contained in the present, and with Aristotle he develops a materialistic and dynamic ontology. Thus, the reversal of Hegel's *amor fati* – a heavy tribute paid for opposing Kantian ought-to-be – is realised, recovering the explosive seed contained in Hegel's own thought, namely the mediation of thought with reality. This mediation, in fact, allows Bloch's utopia not to be lost in an abstract future but to become part of the real conditions of its possible – never predictable or inevitable – realisation.

On a more particular level, i.e. the practical and artistic levels, human beings are pushed towards the concretisation of the *Novum* experiencing a perturbing instant, which interrupts everyday life. That instant is 'amazement'.

> Of course this hoping and, making it clearer, this amazement often ignite completely arbitrarily, even inappropriately; indeed, there is perhaps not even a rule here by which the same causes of it within the same person could be found (Bloch, 2000, p. 193).

The experience of amazement allows the subject to save himself or herself from the caging induced by the 'darkness of the lived instant'. Through the insignificant succession of dark instants, some escape routes disclose themselves. It is up to human beings to grasp these and choose to undertake them. In a first moment, amazement can stun the subject, whereas in a second moment it stimulates, within him or her, the 'unconstruable question' (*unkonstruierbaren Frage*). Amazement is neither a theoretical act nor an ethical decision; it is an aesthetic experience. It reveals itself rather suddenly, as a rupture in quotidian life. Unlike Aristotle's thaumazein,

Blochian's amazement is not felt through any impressive experience. However, it instead starts with common, everyday, marginal objects, often overlooked and apparently irrelevant, such as the 'old pitcher'.[9] From this event, it is possible to catch a glimpse of the opening-up meaning that is unlocked on reality; the ethical choice, which should follow said experience and the accomplishment of which entirely falls back upon the subject, consists in the orientation of one's conscience towards the utopia, through an actualisation of those lingering concepts of our conscience. Bloch, in his typical poetic style, states:

> It [the amazement] is questioning in itself, an inmost, deepest amazement, which often moves toward nothing, and yet quiets the flux of what was just lived; lets one reflect oneself into oneself such that what is most deeply meant for us appears there, regards itself strangely. A drop falls and there it is (Bloch, 2000, p. 193).

3. Music

Music plays a pivotal role in Bloch's philosophy.[10] On the one hand, the analysis of the musical issue inspires the reflection on certain philosophical themes, such as the 'darkness of the lived instant', the 'amazement' and the 'daydream', characteristic of theoretical reflection. On the other hand, philosophical thought constantly invokes music in respect to such notions in order to make further clarifications on them. The differences and boundaries between the specificity of music and theoretical speculation almost seem to blend into each other, resulting in a unified conception. In his messianic perspective, Bloch attributes a more potent prophetic power to music than that of any other form of art. Even though paintings serve a purpose as a reminder of the utopian destination, they appear to Bloch as mere signs; music, instead, is a constant tension towards utopia itself. Music therefore represents the most powerful engine of new conscience acquisitions, volitions, and actions. It radiates a utopian spirit[11] and plays a fundamental role as an impulse for social and political praxis.

Utopian art does not confine itself to representing sensible reality, nor does it settle for plain objectivity; instead, it pursues a new truth. Thus, a true artist is one who is able to transpose material into a utopian guiding idea, anticipating within itself traces of the future. Nonetheless, it is essential to emphasise that music does not redeem the individual when it comes to utopian accomplishments; rather it articulates the inner dimension in order to stimulate the pursuit of any possible sensible paths to be entrusted to political and social praxis. In *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch claims:

> Though whether the call for perfection – we can call it the godless prayer of poetry – becomes practical even only to a small extent and does not merely remain in aesthetic pre-appearance is something which is not decided in poetry, but in society. (Bloch, 1995, p. 216).

[9] See Bloch (2000, pp. 7–9). On the crucial concept of marginality, see Latini (2005).

[10] For a thorough analysis of Bloch's philosophy of music, see Migliaccio (1995) and Rampinini (2018).

[11] See Bloch (2000, p. 41).

The task of art, similar but superior to astonishment, is to dispose the soul to question reality, looking for paths that lead to possible redemption. Once the phenomenic shell is broken, the possibility of an encounter between subject and object opens up. In the modern world, where clairvoyance has failed and the metaphysic has proven to be uncertain, music has become the place where transcendence can still be a glimpsed.[12] In the chapter *The Mystery of Spirit of Utopia*, Bloch (2000, p. 158), referring to music and clairvoyance, states: "one never saw them together in the same place, but as one retreated, the other grew slowly and, so it seems, increased by the same energies".

According to Bloch, music is a phenomenon proper to the modern age: a metaphysical gift that only modern human beings, who have to deal with the "death of God", can seize. Compared to any other figurative art, the privileged position of music is due to its capacity to tend towards our *Selbstbegegnung* with unparalleled strength, without the need to objectify, qualify or represent reality. Bloch thus seeks to understand the essence of music through a subjectivist approach: the 'melisma', "what sings within us", is the real element that guides the analysis of musical experience.

Bloch rejects any sociological[13] or merely formal criteria. For him, sociological explanations tend to underestimate the essence of music and its expressive contents. Hence, he does not aim to compose a sociology of music; rather he attempts to understand the musical phenomenon through a subjectivist perspective. In this way, he can overturn the Marxists' musical aesthetics, reversing the relationship between music and historical temporality from one of mirroring to one of anticipating. He also distances himself from the formalists, who deny music any capability to express feelings. Our longings, our deepest desires, which are externalised and which give shape to music, are the guiding criteria of Bloch's philosophy of music, which is to be eminently intended as a philosophy of the history of music. Bloch's philosophy of music consists in a theory of the intimate subjectivity that materialises in musical forms. As a result, works of art are assessed based on their expressive power, their utopian force: they should not passively submit to reality. Rather, they should rectify it, creating a new order and displaying previously undisclosed spaces of subjectivity. This subjective criterion is expressed by the evidently Hegelian notion of *Kunstwollen* (artistic volition), which in turn outlines the concept of *Teppich* (carpet).[14]

12 "Today the last things are no longer given as easily to listeners as in the blessed times when God was near, but at least artists are again letting their arrows, their slower arrows of expression, fly in the esoteric direction" (Bloch, 2000, p. 116). I believe that the ideas discussed in the chapter *The Mystery* presuppose the critique of metaphysics moved by Nietzsche, a philosopher Bloch studied eminently during his early years (see Bloch, 1983). According to Nietzsche, metaphysics resulted from fear and human desire for a rediscovery of an endless flow to the world; therefore, it had to be demolished. By accepting Nietzsche's theory of metaphysics' genealogy, Bloch nonetheless supports that the longings that originated metaphysical constructions needed to find satisfaction in the present world. While expressed and hypostatised through magical and religious rituals in ancient eras, these desires have been uniquely represented within the arts, and primarily within music, only in the modern age.

13 "Meanwhile, precisely, all this 'explaining' from the outside in remains ultimately superficial, and does not make Bach's total manifestation, his profound historical isolation, his sociologically uninvolvable level of existence comprehensible" (Bloch, 2000, p. 41).

14 Latini (2005, pp. 75–108) provides an important analysis of the concept of *Kunstwollen* in relation to Bloch's philosophy of art. In addition, Korstvedt (2010, pp. 11–18 and pp. 57–68) focuses on *Kunstwollen* and reconstructs the history of the metaphor of *Teppich*.

The concept of *Kunstwollen*, instituted by Alois Riegl, is employed by Bloch to tie chronologically distant eras, styles and compositions together, according to a new teleological order rather than a chronological one. As stated by Panofsky (1981), the *Kunstwollen* is a critical principle that aims to analyse the artistic object beyond its empirical presence, tracing back to its conditions of existence. Hence, the *Kunstwollen* represents the pure inner requirement to mould, to express oneself through art, independently from the object's material ways of production. In *The Principle of Hope* this concept is defined as follows: "the artistic aspiration is an aspiration to correspond, an actually constructed congruence with the utopianized space imagined as most perfect in each case" (Bloch, 1995, p. 719). Relatively to figurative art, three levels of *Kunstwollen* can be detected, which articulate "the path from a human being to what is human" (Bloch, 2000, p. 18). In the first level, the Greek form presents a complete adjustment to the expression on behalf of the matter, to the point that any transcendent tension is lost. In the second place, Egyptian artistic volition, eager to elude the test of time, achieves eternity by sacrificing any form of life, wanting to become like a stone. Finally, the Gothic is:

> the unconsummatedly expressive-descriptive sigillary sign for the unconsummated mystery of the We and of the ground, for a spontaneously animated, unconsummated, functional, in itself still symbolic ornamentalism and symbolism; is the artistic suggestion of living space [Lebensraum], of the problem of the We (Bloch, 2000, p. 24).

Just as three forms of *Kunstwollen* are identified in relation to figurative arts, three types of *Teppich* are distinguished in order to analyse and understand music.[15] These carpets are flexible and permeable formal models, which should not be considered to be exhausted within a certain historical moment. Roughly speaking, it can be said that the first carpet is inauthentic, as it only contains forms that were not personally created by anyone, such as dancing or humming, which need further recovery to be elevated to their maximally proficient expression. The second is an authentic carpet because it expresses a section of subjectivity – it represents the 'small Self', dominated by a taste for balance and shape, characterised by quiet, plain emotions. This carpet is the one of Greek expressivity, of the 'closed *Lied*', of the playful opera, eminently embodied by personalities such as Schumann, Pergolesi, Offenbach, and Mozart. The third carpet represents the acme of the history of music and includes forms such as the 'open *Lied*', the symphony, and Wagnerian opera; it finds its expression in the works of Mahler, Bruckner, Wagner, and, most of all, Beethoven.[16]

4. Sound

In addition to all that has been said above, the privileged position held by music is founded on the special characteristics of sound. Sound, as the matter of music, is an immediate manifestation of the inner Self and lends itself to equally immediate internalisation. The most elementary forms of sound (the exclamation, the shout, and the vocal modulations) are all utopian

[15] See Bloch (2000, pp. 18–33).

[16] On the three carpets, see Bloch (2000, pp. 34–94).

manifestations, that is, they are ways of investing the exterior world with an immediate inner expression of the Self. Therefore, we could say that, according to the early Bloch, sound (not matter) is the 'ontological ground of utopia' in the context of music. During composition, human beings find themselves in the condition to experience both their possibilities and capabilities to process the datum in order to externalise the lingering contents and potentialities of matter. It is precisely within music that the contrast intrinsic to the 'lived instant' becomes visible and liveable, unwinding the road that leads to utopia. A bare sound and bare theme in themselves mean nothing if considered in their pure singularity. The contradiction characterising musical fruition corresponds to the one characterising the lived instant, where, as said before, darkness and enlightenments coexist. A single sound and a single theme, when considered in their pure physical application – in their mere physicality – are not invested of any value. True richness emerges only from the sound through "our hands' fruitful violation of the note and its related frequencies. The note, if it is to become musical, depends absolutely on the blood of the one who takes it up and performs it" (Bloch, 2000, p. 142).[17] It is only through the work that human beings shape the sound and give it a meaning. In *Spirit of Utopia*, Bloch declares:

> One could say that since time immemorial music has glorified the other truth, the pious fraud, the constitutive imagination [...]. Only sound, this sensory riddle, is not so laden by the world, is sufficiently phenomenal for the end, that – like the metaphysical word – it can return as a final material moment in the fulfilment of mystical self-perception, laid immaculately on the gold ground of receptive human latency. That can and hence absolutely shall not mean that natural sound in itself is already a metaphysical part or even just a spiritual enclave within nature, but the correlation remains undeniable insofar as hearing sound, hearing and perceiving oneself within it, in other words sound's potential application to extrinsic, incorporeal spiritual categories, certainly do permit one to assert a similarity between this material and the 'material' of what is meant by 'God' (Bloch, 2000, pp. 145–146).

For this reason, Bloch engages a severe critique against any astronomical theory of music, such as those formulated by Pythagoras and Kepler, and against Arthur Schopenhauer's conception. The latter is wrong in his belief that music is a mere reflection of metaphysical truth. Bloch's pages are indeed clear on this matter:

> Schopenhauer [...] is still quite far from understanding music's true correlation to the *apeiron*, to the extent that he anchors it only passively, cosmically, and not in the individual, heroic, Christian element: in other words, to the extent that he indeed concedes to music the power to supplement appearance with the thing-in-itself, but nonetheless defines this thing-in-itself only as something metaphysical, of an indeterminate, deindividuated, aprocessual, indeed of the already empirically most real kind (Bloch, 2000, pp. 148–149).

Consequently, music should not be understood as a mere hypostatisation or mirroring of objective reality, confusing what is necessary for it with what constitutes its physical reality. According to Bloch, who is close to Jankélévitch (2003) on this point, the nature of music is not a different reality, in opposition

[17] See also Bloch (1995, pp. 1058–1061).

to human beings and to the world – it only exists during its execution. Adequate audition is essential to achieve a true comprehension of music;[18] this audition, because of the characteristic features of sound, implies the establishment of a contact with the dimension of our deepest Self. As Bloch (2000, p. 94) says, on the one side "we hear only ourselves", whether on the other side,

> nothing here may sound by itself, then. Only in us can it blossom and awaken. The sound is intensified by us, qualitatively coloured and at once dispersed. We alone are the ones who raise it up, even more: who make it define and animate itself with our life. Of course it is no accident that just this tender, transparent body is chosen. (Bloch, 2000, p. 120).

At this point, I believe that the comparison between the previously outlined conception of sound, presented in *Spirit of Utopia*, and the original notion of matter, developed after the Marxist breakthrough in 1926, which aim to ground utopia, which is otherwise too abstract, on the sphere of immanency, is of eminent interest. This comparison aims at exposing how the speculation on the nature of sound might have been the main ground on which the intuition of the renewed concept of matter blossomed.

A clear hint is suggested in Section 51 of *The Principle of Hope*, where Bloch reads the Ovidian myth of Pan and Syrix (*Metam*. I, 689-712). Ovid narrates the vicissitudes of how Pan, courting the nymph Syrix, ended up making her run away. Though Pan is made melancholic because of his loved one's escape, nevertheless she leaves behind her some bamboo canes:

> During Pan's lamentations for his lost beloved, the breeze produces sounds in the reeds, and their harmony moves the god. Pan breaks the reeds, longer, then shorter ones, sticks the finely graded pipes together with wax and plays the first tones, like the breeze, but with living breath and as a lament. Thus, the panpipe came into being, playing gives Pan the consolation of a union with the nymph [...] who has vanished and yet not vanished, who remained in his hands as the sound of the flute (Bloch, 1995, p. 1059).

Even though the sound is an immediate epiphany of our spirit, I believe that the construction of musical instruments is not a symptom of decadence compared to the more directed expression of the Self like the primal voice modulations and screams. Pan's flute represents the real beginning of music, a kind of music within which human beings have the widest expressive faculties, going so far as building for themselves a musical instrument to better shape the timbre of sounds. The construction of musical instruments shows very clearly the possibility for human beings, who are incomplete and indigent by nature, to gain redemption and reach utopia, by forging nature and impressing on it the seal of each own Self. According to Bloch, matter itself is filled with potentialities.

5. Matter

Bloch devoted a great deal of effort to the study of the concept of matter. As early as 1926, he extensively studied the works of Avicenna and Averroes. During his stay in France in 1953, he regularly visited the Bibliothèque

[18] See Bloch (2000, p. 141).

Nationale, studying French materialist philosophers such as Diderot, d'Alembert and d'Holbach. These studies – motivated and animated by the desire to bring to light a 'heated' and 'speculative' materialistic current, far from the approaches suggested by the 'vulgar' and mechanistic materialism – would lead, in 1972, to the publication of the extensive work *The Materialism Problem, its History and Substance*.[19]

The theme is of the utmost importance in Bloch's system. It comes down to extending the horizon of hope from the anthropological to the ontological level.[20] To protect the utopia and turn the utopian's intrinsic not into a not-yet, Bloch needs to bind it with the historic-practical dimension, which is proper to human being. However, this becomes possible only after distancing himself from the mechanistic conception of matter, which is rather widespread in orthodox Marxism. The mechanistic and deterministic vision of nature, which has dominated the Western intellectual landscape since the modern age, tends to bring with it the annihilation of all utopian tensions, which do not seem to find any room for their concretisation in a deterministically conceived world. The process of reducing every aspect of being to a mechanistic and deterministic scheme is analysed not only in its social and economic outcomes, but also in its deep cosmological and ontological motivations, as well as its ethical consequences. Such a *Weltanschauung* implies a prejudicial negation of every alternative horizon to present society. In fact, it reduces the whole reality to a space-temporal dimension, so any attempt at a revolutionary praxis towards a new horizon would be prejudicially denied. Therefore, the formulation of an ontology that would not shut the doors to human praxis and that would, instead, allow the subject to put in place the spiritual desires and tensions guiding him or her, through the peculiar interpretation of the concept of matter, is the cornerstone of Bloch's later philosophy.

Bloch tries to recover a 'warm materialism', following the path paved by the French materialists of the eighteenth century or by the 'Aristotelian Left', and distancing himself from 'vulgar materialism'.[21] He bitterly argues with the Marxist and positivistic vision of matter, conceived as lifeless, eternally guided by immutable laws.[22] In fact, such a position intends the universe as an organism held together by mechanistic and materialistic principles, precluding an adequate comprehension of nature in its qualitative aspects.

The analysis of the Aristotelian Left is essential for the elaboration of Bloch's materialism, which has to cope with nature's potential aspects. This current, already foreshadowed by Strato of Lampsacus, properly inaugurated by Avicenna, and later developed by Avicebron, Averroes and Giordano Bruno, is opposed to the 'Aristotelian Right', represented by Thomas

19 For an in-depth analysis of the concept of matter and the ontology in Bloch, see Holz (1975), Cunico (1976, in part. pp. 67–131; 2000), and Moir (2019, in part. pp. 26–76).

20 Habermas (1969, p. 319) and Schmidt (1981, p. 118) criticised Bloch for having founded ontology on an illegitimate hypostatisation of the principle of anthropology. Moir (2019, pp. 70–76) has recently responded in a persuasive way to this critique.

21 On the Aristotelian notion of matter, see Haap (1971).

22 Bloch's passages on that subject are numerous, see in particular Bloch (1976).

Aquinas and the Scholastics, who emphasised the pure theism of the pure *nous* and forced matter into a radical impossibility of taking form by itself. Aristotle recognised the "possibility in real terms, in the worldstock itself" (Bloch, 1995, p. 235). However, he accentuated the passive feature of matter by defining it as separated from and dominated by the form. If matter remains an exclusively receptive element, in need of an active principle, it is destined to be like something whose opening to the possible does not affect the actual historic procession. The overcoming of the Aristotelian matter-form and potentiality-actuality dualities is accomplished by the Aristotelian Left, which takes the decisive step from theism in the direction of pantheism. The philosophers of the Aristotelian Left do not consider matter as something purely passive, but rather as the womb from which everything arises, pursuing the efficient function of form in the bosom of matter.

According to the Aristotelian tradition, the notion of matter, although understood as the principle opposed to the formal one, has some allusions to the doctrine of the *horme*, of the aspiration to form. Strato of Lampsacus tried to include efficient form in matter, but his attempt had little success because the "actual philosophical work within the peripatetic school was close to dying out; it had become specialized within individual branches of knowledge and hence scattered" (Bloch, 2019, p. 19). While maintaining the separation between efficient form and matter, Avicenna conceived of the latter as uncreated and original, thus conferring on it autonomy from form on the plane of existence. Secondly, although he attributed to a *dator formarum* the task of raising things from possibility to reality, he immediately limits this power to the conferral and conservation of existence, denying the ability to create new content.

> Within this *actus purus*, therefore, there is no content (no Whatness, essence) *that is not already predisposed within the objective possibility of matter, indeed, that is not preformed*; and God alone can awaken matter. God, or Aristotle's immaterial actus purus, thus becomes the fiat within form, such that the form giver becomes the giver of a signal for the emergence of that which was already prepared for development, and therefore the sum total of the essences, the Whatnesses, the substances of the forms, does not rest within God. (Bloch, 2019, p. 22. Italics in the text).

Compared to Avicenna, a crucial step is taken by Averroes, according to whom "matter does not only carry within it all forms as the kernels of life but also the movement essential to matter and not, as in Aristotle, entelechy" (Bloch, 2019, pp. 22–23).

The apex of this tradition, which reverses the relationship between form and matter, is reached by the thought of Giordano Bruno. He eliminates the last remnant of the priority of form and develops a perfect coincidence of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, form and matter. As Bloch argues: "He [Giordano Bruno] maintains the unity of form (the active principle) and matter, that matter is productive in itself" (2019, p. 65). At this point, however, Bloch individuates further room for improvement of the form-matter relationship in connection with a conception of potential. Once the active dimension of

matter has been brought to light, it becomes crucial to understand the 'lingering and gravid with fermenting future' one. The absolute unity of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* brings along the negation of any future for the possibility, since in that case the *natura naturans* would turn out to be intrinsically indigent and God himself would be deprived of his perfection. "The thinker of fermenting infinity [Bruno], allows that the matter of his universe has already completed what it can, with the argument that all possibilities must have already been realized in the whole of the universe" (Bloch, 2019, p. 40).

According to Bloch (2019, p. 41), a "second transformation of the grand matter-form tradition [...], a transformation that now concerns the horizon of matter-possibility and not only its passivity" is inevitable; a metamorphosis that Bloch himself aims to accomplish with his philosophy. Once the passive character of matter has been swept away, what still needs to be realised, for Bloch, is the conjunction of matter and real potentiality, which cannot be fulfilled without taking into consideration Hegel's thought concerning the historical and teleological course of being. In order to guarantee the effective opening of dialectical becoming to the world of possibility, Bloch conceived matter as both *dynamei on*, what-is-in-possibility, and *kata to dynaton*, what-is-according-to-possibility. The critical issue, which appears to Bloch as unavoidable, is that of not precluding the creative potential of nature, even if now intended as one with the form, without falling back into the static nature of pantheism.

6. Conclusion

It is only through this conception of matter, fertile and malleable, capable of representing the objective correlate of hope (while the subjective correlate is constituted by the wide set of utopian desires), that Bloch can affirm the possibility of human beings to operate in the world in order to realise their innermost desires, to produce the 'self-encounter', and to effectuate the utopia. This revision of the notion of matter provides Bloch with a *conditio sine qua non* to the conception of a realisable positive utopia; as a matter of fact, on this account it is not possible to conceive Bloch's theory of objectification of utopian images without taking such a concept into adequate consideration.[23]

Similarly, within artistic production, from the ornaments' production to the sculpture, human beings mould the matter at their disposal (colour, marble or sound), imprinting on it their own code, their own Self. Sound, just like the material substrate of the universe, is plenty of potentialities, yet it remains sterile and flat without the intervention of the subject. More than any other artistic material, sound is suitable for an expression of the contents of the not-yet-being, since these concepts are not yet fully determined and can find

[23] Concerning the implication of the objective correlate and the subjective correlate of hope, see: "Without matter no basis of (real) anticipation, without (real) anticipation no horizon of matter is ascertainable". Said anticipations are also given in "psychologically as wishful image forwards, morally as human ideal, and aesthetically as natural object-based symbol" (Bloch, 1995, pp. 237–238).

a better representation within a material that transcends the logical sphere of conceptual language. Thanks to the specific features of sound, the subject can give shape to the 'daydream'.

The enigmatic nature of music is unveiled through this theory – through the means by which human beings infuse the not-yet-conscious, the daydream, within sound, the meaning of music may often seem obscure, or rather not-yet-understood. Bloch himself states that the pages about music in *Spirit of Utopia* are those that deal with the question music's language:

> Why does everyone assume to understand it (ed. music) and yet nobody knows its or a melody's meaning? Nonetheless, it is understood [...]. When will we eventually comprehend it properly? When will we finally clearly hear Beethoven, listening and understanding him as a spoken word? As it persists being open, music grows into a utopian expedition, in our own utopia. Hence, the encounter with the Self echoes within it (Bloch, 1978, p. 385, translation is mine).

In conclusion, the profound similarities between Bloch's interpretation of sound and matter appear extremely evident. Both appear to the subject as malleable and filled with potentialities, and both require a subject to determine them through the utopian project. Although the basic instances of Bloch's thought substantially remain unaltered during its evolution, i.e. before and after he joined with communist thought in 1926,[24] what changes are the conceptual instruments that he uses to justify, with a more consistent materialistic slant and a more profound need for substantiality, their possible implement into reality through human praxis. If, according to the early phase of Bloch's philosophy, physical nature is something extraneous,[25] without the potentialities, which would be seen in Bloch's mature philosophy, in *Spirit of Utopia*, by contrast, sound is living and already rich in itself. Therefore, it seems to me that what sound stands for in the first, more expressionist and mystical, writings of Bloch, coincides with what matter stands for in the second, more materialistic and concreteness-craving, production.

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[24] Recently, Cunico (2019, in part. pp. 42, 107, 132) has maintained a substantial uniformity in Blochian thought, consisting in a Messianism aspiring to elaborate the categories of not-yet-being. A similar idea was also argued by Moir (2019, p. 80). Conversely, the idea of a caesura between a first phase, that of the youth and of the *Spirit of Utopia*, and a second phase, starting around in the last years of 1920s, characterised in the joining to Marxism and which would find its inauguration in the work *Traces*, was supported first of all by Adorno (1961). Recently, Mancini (2005, pp. 23–27, 75–84) supported this account. Differently, Boella (1987, pp. 24–28) identified three different interconnected phases.

[25] As mentioned by Zudeick (1987, pp. 18–19), a thirteen-year-old Bloch wrote his first philosophical writing in 1898, *The Cosmos in the Light of Atheism*, arguing that "Matter is the mother of everything existing. It alone has brought forth everything, and no supernatural being played a role". Nonetheless, it appears that the idea of nature as the womb of everything, of potential being, is not developed and even rejected in his first published work, *Spirit of Utopia*, whilst it would be rehabilitated and further analysed in Bloch's maturity: "In the end, however, after this internal vertical movement: may a new expanse appear, the world of the soul, the external, cosmic function of utopia, maintained against misery, death, the husk-realm of mere physical nature" (Bloch, 2000, p. 3).

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Federico Rampinini
University of Ferrara
Via Paradiso, 12
44121 Ferrara (FE)
Italy
federico.rampinini@gmail.com

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10511154

BOOK FORUM

On J.J. Abrams' ***Shusterman's Somaesthetics: From Hip Hop Philosophy to Politics and Performance Art***

Somaesthetics and Embodied/ Enactive Philosophies of Mind

Stefano Marino

In this article I focus on Jerold J. Abrams' recently edited volume on Richard Shusterman's somaesthetics and I assume as a starting point the concept itself of soma, widely cited and examined in various contributions collected in Abrams' book. Then, I specifically concentrate my attention on one of the essays, the one authored by Stefán Snævarr, which connects in an interesting, original and sometimes also challenging way Shusterman's thinking to some questions that have characterized the current debates in the field of the philosophy of mind. On this basis, in the final part of my short essay I try to offer some provisional remarks on the potential and mutually enriching dialogue between Shusterman's somaesthetics and embodied, extended and enactive approaches to perception and mind, such as those, for example, of contemporary theorists like Andy Clark, Shaun Gallagher and Alva Noë. | *Keywords: Somaesthetics, Philosophy of Mind, Embodiment, Extended Mind, Enactivism*

1.

Jerold J. Abrams's edited volume *Shusterman's Somaesthetics: From Hip Hop Philosophy to Politics and Performance Art*, recently published in the Brill series 'Studies in Somaesthetics,' aims (and, in my opinion, definitely succeeds) to offer a broad overview and a detailed interpretation of Richard Shusterman's decades-long, thematically wide and pluralist, and quite often theoretically challenging, philosophical path. Abram's volume is divided in two main parts, including contributions by various authors. The essays that form the first part of Abrams' book are focused on the tight relation between pragmatism and somaesthetics, on some of the main topics addressed by Shustermans in his writings, and also on the relation of somaesthetics with other forms of contemporary aesthetic debate. The essays collected in the second part of Abrams' book, instead, are focused on the role played by the component of performance in Shusterman's philosophical work, with a special attention paid to his recent "adventures" in the field of performance art through the figure – or, say, the *alter ego* of Shusterman, his *Doppelgänger* –

of the 'Man in Gold'. After the aforementioned two main parts, Abrams' book also includes a third part, significantly entitled 'Shusterman in His Own Words,' which includes some comments by Shusterman on the various papers collected in the previous two parts of the book and finally an interview with Shusterman realized by Yanping Gao in 2020.

As noted by Abrams in his 'Introduction' to the book (2022, pp. 1-13), the overall development of Shusterman's path of thinking throughout the decades can be probably divided into three main phases, corresponding to Shusterman's early work in the field of analytic philosophy, then his turn to pragmatism, and finally his "foundation" of somaesthetics, a new disciplinary (and, indeed, interdisciplinary) proposal that is strongly rooted in the pragmatist tradition but also open to other approaches. As the name itself of this disciplinary proposal reveals, somaesthetics is a philosophical approach specifically dedicated to the theoretical *and* practical investigation of the soma: more precisely, it is "[a]n ameliorative discipline of both theory and practice" (Shusterman, 2000a, p. 101) that must be understood as "the critical study and meliorative cultivation of the body as the site not only of experienced subjectivity and sensory appreciation (aesthesis) that guides our action and performance but also of our creative self-fashioning through the ways we use, groom, and adorn our physical bodies to express our values and stylize ourselves" (Shusterman, 2019, p. 15). As an "interdisciplinary field of research, rooted in philosophical theory, but offering an integrative conceptual framework and a menu of methodologies not only for better understanding our somatic experience, but also for improving the quality of our bodily perception, performance, and presentation," it is possible to distinguish three main branches of somaesthetics ("that overlap to some extent," though): analytic, pragmatic, and practical somaesthetics (Shusterman, 2017, pp. 101–102).

Now, although the philosophical theories developed by Shusterman – and also by the various authors who have worked in the field of somaesthetics in the last decades, contributing to its growth, articulation, ramification, and dissemination – are undoubtedly rich of many concepts, insights and ideas, it is nevertheless clear that *one* concept has played *the* fundamental role in the development of somaesthetics from the late 1990s until today: the concept of *soma*. In fact, as has been noted, Shusterman puts "the soma at the center of philosophical research" (Kremer, 2022, p. 54). Combining and, so to speak, remixing in a very original way the diverse influences deriving from authors such as Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir, Plessner, Foucault and other authors, but also from "ancient Asian wisdom [that] privileges embodiment" (*Ibidem*, p. 50), Shusterman defines the soma as "the sentient purposive body," conceived as "both subject and object in the world," breeding the insight that "[o]ur experience and behavior are far less genetically hardwired than in other animals" and revealing that "human nature is always more than merely natural but instead deeply shaped by culture" (Shusterman, 2019, pp. 14–15). In a very stimulating way for the further development of my thoughts in the present paper, Shusterman also defines the soma as "the body-

mind whose union is an ontological given" (Shusterman, 2007, p. 149; cit. in Bukdahl, 2022, p. 178).

2.

The question concerning the understanding of the soma is a question that, not by chance, emerges in various contributions included in Abrams' edited volume. In this context, it is of particular importance the question concerning the relation between the body, the mind, and our natural *and* cultural environment – a relation that we can understand as characteristic and, in a sense, "foundational" of our consciousness and experience of ourselves and the world. So, for example, Leszek Koczanowicz (2022, p. 70) argues that "the more we concentrate on the body, the more we realize that the body cannot be considered apart from the environmental contexts, both natural and social, in which it develops and progresses," while Alexander Kremer (2022, p. 55), referring to "the ongoing body-mind debate" in contemporary philosophy, hints at Shusterman's "emergentist standpoint" about "the living soma." However, it is particularly in the first chapter of the book, authored by Stefán Snævarr, that the aforementioned questions are addressed in a specific, detailed and also challenging way.

Snævarr begins with "an outline of Shusterman's thinking concerning the body and the self," defining him as "a somatist," namely a philosopher "who thinks that the sentient body is primordial to consciousness and constitutes the ground of our coping with, and cognition of, the world." As Snævarr explains, "[w]hile many materialists tend to focus on the inside of the body, and especially on the brain and the nervous system, somatists tend to be more interested in the outside of the body, not least the limbs, and the way in which the sentient body as a whole interacts with its environment" (Snævarr, 2022, p. 23). In the first sections of his contribution Snævarr carefully examines the relation between Shusterman's concept of soma, the phenomenological notions of *Körper* and *Leib*, the Deweyan concept of the body-mind, and the idea of the aesthetic self, also inspired by thinkers such as Nietzsche and Foucault. Then, in the subsequent sections, Snævarr claims that Shusterman's theories, although "certainly interesting and thought provoking," "are not without concerns," and he consequently discusses these concerns that regard some "possible inconsistencies," some "question[s] of empirical science" and philosophy of mind, and finally some "ontological issues" (*Ibidem*, p. 34).

In the thirteenth chapter of Abrams' book, entitled 'Somaesthetics, Pragmatism, and the Man in Gold: Remarks on the Preceding Chapters', Shusterman offers some comments on the twelve chapters included in the first and second part of the book, and he also replies to certain objections and critiques raised in a few chapters – most notably, in Tonino Griffero's essay on the relation between somaesthetics and neo-phenomenological "pathic aesthetics" (see Griffero, 2022) and precisely in Snævarr's essay. In this context, Shusterman especially responds to "Snævarr's charges of inconsistency with respect to essentialism and dualism," providing a clear

explanation of the way in which he, as a pragmatist philosopher, despite his skepticism towards "[the] concept of essential [belonging] to the fixed, foundational ontology that pragmatism rejects," nevertheless legitimately uses the term "essential" in his writings with a more ordinary and practical meaning, hence without falling back into any form of essentialism (Shusterman, 2022, pp. 245–246). Replying to some of the concerns emphasized by Snævarr, Shusterman also provides an explanation of his understanding of the relation between the concepts of soma, *Körper* and *Leib*. For him, "the soma is not a dualist combination of *Leib* and *Körper* but a single entity that, in different circumstances and from different perspectives, exhibits capacities that phenomenologists have divided between those German concepts" (*Ibidem*), and according to Shusterman this prevents somaesthetics from falling back into any form of dualism.

In the present contribution, also due to the limits of space of a short essay (which obviously imply, among other things, also limits in terms of possibility to discuss all the interesting questions disclosed by the essays collected in Abrams' book and Shusterman's replies), I will not focus my attention on the aforementioned issue of essentialism raised by Snævarr. I will not even concentrate, for example, on another stimulating question emphasized by Snævarr in his critical essay, namely the question concerning the existence or not of free will – with special reference to "the research conducted by Benjamin Libet [that] points in the direction of our motor actions being dependent on neurological events, which take place about 350 milliseconds before our conscious awareness of deciding to make a movement" (Snævarr, 2022, p. 30) – and its implications for a philosophy like somaesthetics. Rather, I would like to briefly refer to other intriguing passages of Snævarr's essay, like those that cite the different philosophies of mind of theorists such as Patricia and Paul Churchland ("the best-known proponents of eliminative materialism," who explicitly "deny the existence of consciousness, mind, and self": *Ibidem*, p. 37), Alvin Plantinga (whose immaterialism, vice-versa, powerfully claims that the self exists and "is an immaterial, noncomposite whole": *Ibidem*, p. 38), and Kristján Kristjánsson (who advocates instead "a soft realism concerning the self": *Ibidem*, p. 40). I would like to take Snævarr's essay as a point of departure and, so to speak, as a source of inspiration to ask the question about the potential connections between Shusterman's somaesthetic paradigm and some recent models that have emerged in the field of the philosophy of mind strictly understood, i.e. understood as a specific field of contemporary philosophical research, quite often intersected with research in psychology, cognitive science, neuroscience, AI, and so on.

3.

In his unfinished and posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*, written in the 1960s, Theodor W. Adorno famously emphasized the importance of so-called "isms" in the context of 20th-century avant-garde art (impressionism, expressionism, surrealism, dadaism, suprematism, cubism, etc.), defending the necessity of "isms" as "secularization of [...] schools in an age that

destroyed them as traditionalistic" (Adorno, 2004, p. 25). With all due respect to the differences between the philosophy of art and the philosophy of mind, it is anyway interesting to underline that, as has been noted by the Italian philosopher Michele Di Francesco, also the philosophy of mind requires to "orient oneself in the forest of 'isms'" that have characterized this field in the 20th century: cognitivism, connectionism, functionalism, monism, dualism, materialism, immaterialism, psycho-physical parallelism, epiphenomenalism, reductionism, eliminativism, and so on (Di Francesco, 2003, pp. 17, 19, 21, 27). Beside all the "isms" listed in Di Francesco's comprehensive and useful catalogue of the different paradigms of philosophy of mind emerged in the 20th century, looking at some important debates of the last decades it is perhaps possible to add to the list other recent tendencies, such as, among others, internalism, externalism, and enactivism.

At a general level, internalism can be defined as "the view that a subject's beliefs and experiences are wholly constituted by what goes on inside the mind of that subject," so that, according to this view, "mental states depend for their content upon nothing external to the subject whose states they are, i.e. the mind is taken to have the referential powers it has quite independently of how the world is"; vice-versa, for externalism "mental states are externally individuated. [...] [O]ur experience depends upon factors that are external to the subject possessing the mental states in question" (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, pp. 121–122). Quite typically, externalists like Putnam, McDowell or McCulloch have argued that "meanings 'just ain't in the head' [and] neither is the mind," because, if "both mind and meaning are taken to be environmentally embedded," then "there is nothing mysterious in ascribing an intrinsic referentiality or world-directedness to the mind. [...] The subjective is not inside the mind and the objective is not *outside* of it" (*Ibidem*, p. 123).

Of course, as Gallagher and Zahavi rightly point out, it is also important to remember that internalism and externalism "are umbrella terms," and so it is "not enough to ask in general whether somebody is an internalist or an externalist": in fact, the answer to such a question "will depend on the specific kind of internalism or externalism one has in mind" (*Ibidem*, p. 121). Quite evidently, this determines a further proliferation of "isms" in this field, i.e. an increase in the internal differentiations and ramifications within the various approaches. Limiting myself to just one (famous) example, it is thus interesting to observe that Andy Clark and David Chalmers, in their influential article 'The Extended Mind,' in providing their original answer to the fundamental question "Where does the mind stop and the rest of the world begin?" explicitly suggest to differentiate what they call "the passive externalism of Putnam and Burge" from their own theoretical proposal, emphatically defined as "an *active externalism*, based on the active role of the environment in driving cognitive processes" (Clark and Chalmers, 1998, pp. 7, 9) and in constituting the mental states of human agents that are "spread into the world" (*Ibidem*, p. 18). From Clark's and Chalmers' perspective, at least "[a] part of the world is (so we claim) part of the cognitive process. Cognitive

processes ain't (all) in the head! […] [T]he mind extends into the world. […] Does the extended mind imply an extended self? It seems so. […] [O]nce the hegemony of skin and skull is usurped, we may be able to see ourselves more truly as creatures of the world" (*Ibidem*, pp. 8, 12, 18), in comparison to other perspectives – in particular, in comparison to "intellectualist conception[s]" (Noë, 2009, p. 98) that, freely using an intriguing expression coined by Shusterman in a different context, rather seem to suggest an image of the human beings as "disembodied talking heads" (Shusterman, 2000b, p. 129). In this context, it is surely important to mention also enactivism, a recent approach that I had briefly cited in the previous paragraph and that has been defined as "one version of recently developed embodied approaches to cognition" that offers "an approach that is more informed by phenomenology and pragmatism than other versions of embodied cognition, such as the extended mind hypothesis […], and more radical than the kind of 'moderate' […] or 'weak' […] embodied cognition found in theorists who locate the body 'in the brain'" (Gallagher and Bower, 2014, p. 232). Enactivist philosophers of perception and mind like Alva Noë, for instance, have argued that "to understand *consciousness* […] we need to look at a larger system of which the brain is only one element." For Noë, "[i]t could even turn out that consciousness depends on interactions between the *brain* and the *body* and bits of the *world* nearby. […] The problem of consciousness, then, is none other than the problem of life. […] *Mind is life*. […] The conscious mind is *not* inside us; it is, it would be better to say, a kind of active attunement to the world, an achieved integration" (Noë, 2009, pp. 10, 13, 41, 142; my emphasis).

4.

Now, there have been various attempts in recent philosophical scholarship to fruitfully connect aesthetics and the philosophy of mind, especially since the development in the last decades of various critiques of the traditional "denial of the cognitive significance of the body" and, consequently, of "disembodied view[s] on the mind," in favor of more embodied (or, as we have seen, even more extended) conceptions, according to which the body "structures our experience," "shapes our primary way of being-in-the-world," "is integrated with the world," and contributes to "our form of embodied life as it exists for us" (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, pp. 131, 137, 141). Among these attempts, making quickly reference to contemporary Italian debates that are particularly familiar to me because of my background, I would like to cite here the theories developed by philosophers working in aesthetics *and* the philosophy of mind like Fabrizio Desideri (2011) and Giovanni Matteucci (2019). The latter, in particular, explicitly relies on the aforementioned ideas of the extended mind and enactive perception to outline a general conception of human nature grounded on the aesthetic dimension, and Matteucci's book *Estetica e natura umana* has also been the object of a symposium on the international journal of phenomenology and hermeneutics *Meta* which included questions, among others, by Gallagher and Shusterman (see Iannilli and Marino (2020)).[1]

On this basis, returning now to some of the insights stimulated by Snævarr's essay, we can ask the question if it is possible to establish a connection between somaesthetics and the philosophy of mind, and, in this case, what kind of philosophy of mind can be coherently connected to Shusterman's thinking. As Shusterman explains in his short but dense article 'What Pragmatism Means to Me' (widely cited and commented in Kremer's essay included in Abrams' book), pragmatism and somaesthetics definitely favor "an essentially embodied view of human nature," rejecting "the traditional radical dualism of body/mind. [...] Pragmatist naturalism," as he observes, "is not aimed to reduce mental phenomena to mere neuronal reactions in the brain [...]. Mind is not an isolated psychic substance but rather incorporates energies and elements from the natural and social environments. In the full-blown human sense, the mind is essentially social and reflects a network of communication and meanings enabled by language. The embodied nature of mind is reflected in the importance that pragmatism gives to habit, which is shaped by and incorporates elements from both the natural and social environment to guide human thought and action" (Shusterman, 2010, pp. 61–62). In my opinion, such statements by Shusterman suggest that the potential connection between embodied/enactive approaches and a form of thinking like somaesthetics is a promising and fruitful one.

Among Shusterman's main works, I think that it is especially in his book *Body Consciousness* that one can find various stimulating passages that may be fruitful to establish a potential dialogue between somaesthetics and contemporary embodied/enactive approaches to perception and mind. Here, indeed, Shusterman repeatedly claims that the soma's "embodied intentionality contradicts the body/mind dichotomy" (Shusterman, 2008, p. 1) and that somaesthetic theory *and* practice undoubtedly lead to reject "the old rigid dualism of mind and body" and, more generally, all the "false dichotomies of mind/body, subject/object, self/world, activity/passivity" (*Ibidem*, pp. 52, 98). As he explains, "[s]omaesthetic disciplines can give us [...] a heightened experiential awareness of the impure mixture of our bodily constitution and remind us that our body boundaries are never absolute but rather porous" (*Ibidem*, pp. 131–132). What we can observe here is an extended conception of the body that can be profitably connected to the aforementioned extended conceptions of the mind that stress the importance to take into examination the relation between the brain, the body, and the environment in its entirety.[2] For Shusterman, the main roots of somaesthetics – notwithstanding the importance of its interdisciplinary and intercultural

[1] In a recent interview on the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* Gallagher has stressed the positive role that pragmatism, beside phenomenology, has played in paving the way to the development of recent embodied/enactive approaches to perception and mind, also emphasizing some possible connections between aesthetics and embodied/enactive philosophies of mind, for example with regard to the question concerning the aesthetic experience of performance (Baggio and Caravà, 2023, p. 6). A question, the latter, that is also fundamental for a philosophy like Shusterman's somaesthetics and that is precisely at the center of his own adventures in the field of performance art as *l'Homme en Or* (widely and specifically investigated, as I said, in the entire second part of Abrams' instructive book).

[2] Shusterman's reference, in *Body Consciousness*, to "Gallagher's instructive book, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*" is surely significant in this context (Shusterman, 2008, p. 64 note).

character – lie in the pragmatist tradition. From this point of view, it is noteworthy his emphasis on the significance of James' "philosophy of embodied mind" (*Ibidem*, p. 139) and especially of Dewey's "unified vision of body and mind": namely, his conception of "a transactional whole of body-mind," according to which the mind "is not opposed to but is rather an emergent expression of the human body" (*Ibidem*, pp. 182, 184, 186).

As I said, ever since the foundation of his new disciplinary proposal Shusterman has always distinguished three branches of somaesthetic research. The relevance of the pragmatic and practical dimensions of somaesthetics must *not* lead to overlook and undervalue the significance of its analytic dimension (and hence more theoretical) component. In this context, it is thus important to remember that analytic somaesthetics is also interested, among other things, in "the traditional topics in philosophy of mind, ontology, and epistemology that relate to the mind/body issue and the role of somatic factors in consciousness and action" (*Ibidem*, p. 23): all questions, the latter, that play a decisive role also in current debates in the field of philosophy of mind. From this point of view, it seems reasonable to suggest that somaesthetic research, at least in its most analytic and theoretical branch, could benefit from a renewed comparison and open dialogue with contemporary embodied/enactive approaches to perception and mind. At the same time, it is also possible to argue that these approaches – especially when dealing with questions concerning the importance of "habits of bodily activity" and how the latter are "essential to our mental lives" (Noë, 2009, pp. 77, 95), or questions concerning "specific body-style[s]"[3] and "[t]he posture that the body adopts in a situation," understood as "its way of responding to the environment (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, p. 138) – could benefit from entering into a conversation with a philosophy like somaesthetics that explicitly includes, beside its theoretical branch, an equally important practical dimension.

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Stefano Marino
Università di Bologna
Via Barberia, 4, 40123 Bologna
Italy
stefano.marino4@unibo.it

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10513033

Transfiguration, Art, Pathicity. Somaesthetics Reconsidered

Alessandro Nannini

In this discussion piece, I will comment on the collective volume, edited by Jerold J. Abrams, *Shusterman's Somaesthetics. From Hip Hop Philosophy to Politics and Performance Art* (2022). I will articulate my reflections around three main themes, which intersect the theme of several of the essays of the volume: I will first of all consider the concept of transfiguration, commenting upon the difference between Danto's hermeneuticist perspective and Shusterman's somaesthetic reinterpretation, with special regard to his performative experiment, the Man in Gold. Secondly, I will turn to a possible consequence entailed by this reinterpretation concerning the relation between aesthetics and art. Finally, I will turn to the controversy between somaesthetics and pathic aesthetics, and comment on a possible way to reconcile some elements of both, starting from the condition of the suffering body. | *Keywords: Transfiguration, Art, Pathicity, Somaesthetics, Shusterman*

The interdisciplinary field of enquiry of somaesthetics, which Richard Shusterman has theorised since the late 1990s, has now reached a breadth of internal approaches and a theoretical depth that well justifies a general reconsideration of the domain such as that proposed by the collective volume edited by Jerold J. Abrams *Shusterman's Somaesthetics. From Hip Hop Philosophy to Politics and Performance Art* (2022). Somaesthetics, originally defined by Shusterman as "the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory aesthetic appreciation (*aisthesis*) and creative self-fashioning" (Shusterman, 1999, p. 267), has in the last twenty years expanded beyond the very boundaries of philosophy to include regions of sociology, neuroscience, cultural studies, etc., which share certain foci and values (Abrams, 2022, pp. 246-247).

Acknowledgement: This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization of Romania, CNCS/CCCDI – UEFISCDI, project number PCE 105/2021, within PNCDI III.

In his introduction Abrams correctly points out the background at the basis of somaesthetics, insisting in particular on the pragmatist lesson which Shusterman has drawn from Dewey and Rorty, but also on an author such as Arthur Danto, who remained within the analytical horizon from which Shusterman himself had set out. Since its inception, somaesthetics has intended to develop not only an analytical investigation, devoted to the theoretical study of the body, but has also entailed a pragmatic dimension, which includes practical guides for the improvement of body consciousness in its various forms (from diets to bodybuilding, from martial arts to bioenergetics); and finally, a performance-oriented side, in which the body is actually trained through the relevant somatic techniques and care. In this sense, somaesthetics is part of a broader revival of philosophical practice that has been emerging in the West since the 1970s. The crucial element in this perspective is not the construction of a theoretical system, but the attempt to outline itineraries of self-reformation leading to the transformation of one's mode of perceiving and being in the world. Approaches such as philosophical counselling, inaugurated by Gerd Achenbach, clinical philosophy (James and Kathy Elliot; Lúcio Packter), philosophical midwifery (Pierre Grimes), philosophy for children (Matthew Lipman), have highlighted the need to reduce the gap between philosophy as academic knowledge and its influence in the lives of its practitioners. In such a revival, a prominent position is undoubtedly occupied by the work of Pierre Hadot, who brought attention back to the original meaning of philosophy as an art of living which would play a role for Shusterman himself. From this point of view, philosophy (hence also aesthetics) is not merely a declarative or explanatory discourse, but also a set of practices aimed at a performative change in the inquiring subject. In the following commentary on the volume edited by Abrams, I will take this perspective as the basis for a few reflections. For the sake of convenience, I will articulate my paper around three more specific conceptual networks that emerge in some of the contributors' essays: transfiguration; art; pathicity.

The concept of transfiguration, which Abrams's essay *Somaesthetics, Photography and the Man in Gold* analyses and which is taken up by Shusterman himself in his concluding response to the various contributors (*Somaesthetics, Pragmatism and the Man in Gold: Remarks on the Preceding Chapters*), was popularised in contemporary aesthetics by Arthur Danto with his volume *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. A Philosophy of Art* (1981). In Danto's case, transfiguration concerns the object of aesthetic interest. After the invention and initial establishment of photography and film in the mid to late 19th century, painting, which had reigned supreme in the realm of the visual arts up to that point, found itself in the uncomfortable position of having to justify its centrality. The confrontation with the realism of photography and the moving images of cinema led art to embark on a path of self-knowledge through a series of convulsions that lasted until the second half of the 20th century, leading to a rapid succession of schools and styles, ranging from Impressionism to Abstract Expressionism. As is well known, the end of this path is identified by Danto in Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, exhibited at the Stable Gallery in Manhattan, New York, in the late spring of 1964. The Brillo Boxes are

wooden sculptures made to look like boxes of Brillo brand dishwashing soap pads, produced by Procter & Gamble and designed by second-generation abstract expressionist James Harvey. While many visitors to the exhibition mocked Warhol's work, and gallery director Eleanor Ward herself was far from satisfied with the exhibition, Danto recognised in that exhibit nothing short of the end of art, the work that brings to completion the trajectory of development undertaken by painting in the 19th century. With Warhol's Brillo Boxes, in fact, art comes to clearly ask the philosophical question about its own essence: what makes those boxes works of art as opposed to those in the grocery store? In this sense, Warhol's operation goes even beyond Duchamp's *Fountain,* the ready-made sculpture consisting of a urinal signed by R. Mutt and photographed at Alfred Stieglitz's studio in 1917. While with *Fountain* Duchamp had shown that any object can be raised to the status of a work of art by the artist's act of choice, with the *Brillo Boxes* Warhol intends to question why the everyday Brillo boxes, which Warhol intends to replicate, are not artworks. What, in short, allows the "transfiguration" of bland, obvious, uninteresting, merely real things to the plane of art? At this point, it is philosophy that must pick up the baton from art and provide the answer to that question, explaining that the essence of art is precisely the path that leads art to formulate the question about its own essence.

Without going further into Danto's discussion, the question is interesting because it attracts attention to the essential difference from the concept of transfiguration in Shusterman's somaesthetics. As Shusterman himself points out in his response essay (Abrams, 2022, pp. 252-253; cf. already Shusterman, 2012), what Danto speaks of is not, at least in a technical sense, a transfiguration, but a transubstantiation. The point, in fact, concerns the elevation of the ontological status of mere real things to works of art without the appearance of the object being changed, as for the Eucharist wafer. Yet, the transfiguration, at least that of Jesus – Shusterman points out in commenting on the relevant passages of the Gospels – is a change that appears in his bodily features ("his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light", Matthew, 17:2). Herein lies perhaps the true and most profound difference with Danto: the transfiguration for which somaesthetics seeks to provide both a theoretical framework and the practical strategies is not effected by means of an atmosphere of artistic theory that the eye cannot descry as it is the artworld according to Danto (1964) – an atmosphere of artistic theory which must be projected onto the object; rather, it takes place directly in the inquiring subject itself, who intends to embark on a path of aesthetic refinement. What is heightened here, in short, is the dimension of *aisthesis* in its bodily dynamics, which can lead to the acquisition of new habits or in general to a repositioning of one's somatic perspective in the world.

This shows a clear break from hermeneuticism and theoreticism, and brings to light the melioristic dimension that constitutes the hallmark of somaesthetics. As an exemplification of this aspect, most of the essays in the book edited by Abrams focus on Shusterman's own artistic performance that culminated with the publication of *The Adventures of the Man in Gold: Paths between Art and Life*

(Bilingual Edition: English/French, 2016). The Man in Gold can be understood as an experiment in practical somaesthetics by Shusterman. Invited by his photographer friend Yann Toma to don a tight golden bodysuit costume for a photoshoot at the Royaumont Abbey in France, Shusterman is transfigured into another person, the shy and joyful Man in Gold. In the volume, Shusterman's texts about the adventures of The Man in Gold in the timespan 2010–2014 are collected – the Man in Gold himself does not speak, but is a silent presence in Toma's photographs. The photographer uses light drawing techniques to bring out the auratic brilliance of the Man in Gold, following him up to the moment when he finds love in the glowing golden nude sculpture Wanmei (in Chinese, "perfection"). Embracing Wanmei, a work by Danish sculptor Marit Benthe Norheim, it is suggested, the Man in Gold undergoes a transfiguration similar to that of the burning bush witnessed by Moses.

This atypical work of literary and multimedia fiction (in addition to photographs, there are also short films featuring the Man in Gold) is extensively analysed in the essays of the second part of the volume. Shusterman's experiment – experimentalism is an essential feature of pragmatism, as Else Marie Bukdahl reminds us in *The Golden Turn in Shusterman's Somaesthetics: The Magical Figure of the Golden Man* – provides an opportunity to examine the transformational potential of the corporeal self from multiple perspectives, insofar as the Man in Gold is both Shusterman and not Shusterman. While being temporarily inhabited by the Golden Man, in fact, Shusterman nevertheless retains awareness of his periods of possession, managing to provide readers with information about those moments. It is no coincidence that Diane Richard-Allerdyce's essay (*An Exquisitely Beautiful Longing: A Lacanian Reading of the "Adventures of the Man in Gold"*) uses a Lacanian framework to interpret such an experiment, foregrounding the fact that "all human subjectivity comes into being on the brink of a loss" (Abrams, 2022, p. 164); if the sense of wholeness of the self is a fiction, as made evident by the case of the Man in Gold, it can however be harnessed creatively. In this sense, the fiction of the Man in Gold makes it possible to problematise the relationship between art and philosophy in the precise moment in which art seems to step into philosophy itself. As a matter of fact, in a somaesthetic approach it is no longer art that takes the form of a philosophical question as a sign of self-fulfillment, as was the case with Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* in Danto's interpretation, but philosophy itself that needs to be performed artistically in order to get to the limits of its own practical possibilities, while still providing insights into the language of the apparently mute body.[1] In this perspective, while the artistic dimension is still connected to the concept of transfiguration, it no longer results from an ontological transubstantiation of the object, but is the outcome of an intensification of the vital dimension of the self – a sort of "*Beförderung des Lebens*", to put it in Kantian terms, rooted in the soma.[2]

[1] In fact, one of the aims of somaesthetics is precisely to integrate the discursive and nondiscursive on the common ground of the soma, see Abrams (2022, p. 178).

[2] This is true not only of Shusterman's transformation into the Man in Gold with which the volume opens, but also of the peculiar vivification that his requited love for Wanmei enables him to experience.

The relationship between art and life deserves a closer look. In fact, one of the most powerful stimuli that drove Shusterman to put on the golden bodysuit and become the Man in Gold is precisely the attempt to overcome the distance between his philosophical perspective and the arts. Shusterman's own aesthetic journey began with an analysis of the literary arts from an analytical perspective; subsequently, following the pragmatist and somaesthetic turn, the author's reflections specifically addressed the performing arts. The fact remained, however, that no matter how much Shusterman theorised the centrality of the practical aspect in somaesthetics, his philosophy seemed to find no way to concretely achieve this aspiration firsthand. As pointed out in Yang Lu's essay, *On Shusterman's Somaesthetic Practice: The Case of the Man in Gold*, Shusterman, following a personal episode that led him to reflect on the prevalence of the classical perspective of the interpreter in his thinking, agreed to explore the artistic possibilities inherent in his thought, to the point of becoming a performer of his own philosophy with the Man in Gold. The consideration of aesthetics as a possible form of practice reveals Shusterman's connection not only with the original conception of philosophy as an art of living, but also with the origin of aesthetics as an art of beautiful thinking. Despite the prevalence of the mind over the body, Baumgarten himself had already affirmed the need to keep together under the umbrella of aesthetics both a theoretical dimension (the science of sensible knowledge) and a practical dimension of thought (aesthetics as the art of beautiful thinking) which will in turn have a theoretical-practical dimension (the applicative techniques of the principles of aesthetics such as poetics could be) and a practical part *tout court*, in which the beautiful mind, suitably trained, is called upon to formulate beautiful thoughts in the first person. Such a tripartition, as mentioned above, will also feature in somaesthetics (analytical, pragmatic, and practical-performative somaesthetics); in this light, Shusterman, just like Baumgarten, does not view aesthetics simply as a speculative theory of the arts, but first and foremost as an art it itself, which can culminate in turn with an artistic work in the strict sense (in the case of the Man in Gold, a multimedia performance). By enhancing the pragmatic dimension of art as doing – a kind of doing that aims to intensify *aisthesis* – Shusterman thus goes beyond the radical caesura that has occurred in post-Baumgartenian aesthetics and was already evident in Herder, where the relationship between aesthetics and the arts was supposed to be merely theoretical. The principle of the division of aesthetic labour already affirmed during the *Sturm und Drang* whereby the aesthetician is responsible for speculation and the artist for the making of beauty must therefore be profoundly revised in this perspective.

On this note, I come to the third point of my commentary, which concerns the dimension of pathicity. Here it is Tonino Griffero's essay (*Somaesthetics and Pathic Aesthetics*) that provides food for thought. The distance that emerges between Griffero's atmospheric perspective and Shusterman's somaesthetic one concerns in particular the question of agency. Griffero traces the basis of aesthetic sphere back to the "non-distancing complicity with the atmospheric world" in the felt-bodily experience of the perceiver. In such

a phenomenological perspective, based not so much on the soma as on the body (*Leib*) in its vital and sentient dimension (as distinct from the material body or *Körper*), Griffero emphasises the importance of the pathic dimension, the ability to let oneself go to what is happening around us, marking a significant distance with the melioristic perspective of somaesthetics. It is precisely the consideration of the pathic dimension that, according to Griffero, makes it possible to philosophically rehabilitate the *lebensweltlich* involvement of the living body in environmental tonalities beyond the lordship of the subject that has dominated the modern era. While, in short, the emphasis for Shusterman falls on a melioristic activism, for Griffero the crucial point is the atmospheric harmony with the world and thus the resonance of appearances in the percipient's body, which generates specific affective situations. In response to Griffero's thesis, Shusterman, who recognises a broad common basis between their conceptions, states that somaesthetics includes not only an active dimension, but also a passive dimension, in deference to the thesis, already supported by Dewey, that experience is a relationship between doing and undergoing, outgoing and incoming energy (Abrams, 2022, p. 251).

The very experiment of the Man in Gold seems to confirm the permeability of the bodily identity in both directions. In fact, this experience has some features in common with the condition of dispossession that the aesthetic tradition since Plato's *Ion* (see Abrams, 2022, p. 16) had identified in the culminating moment of the artistic act: the inspiration of the poet or rhapsode. As already evident in Baumgarten, an author to whom both Shusterman and Griffero refer, the aesthetic act seems to involve two aspects: on the one hand, the need to develop embedded aesthetic *habitus*, which for Baumgarten were first and foremost *habitus* of thought, and which shape the identity patterns of the beautiful mind; on the other hand, the need to be exposed to the advent of something we perceive as radically other to ourselves, which, however, at the same time resonates in the subject's innermost being, raising the degree of its powers in a sudden and unexpected manner. Traditionally, this advent was explained with the doctrine of *en-thousiasmos*, the coming of the god in us: "The god, here is the god!", exclaimed the Cumaean Sibyl when Apollo took possession of her (Baumgarten, 1750, § 82). Yet, Baumgarten maintains, the visitation of such otherness – the "breathing into oneself of something greater" (Baumgarten, 1750, § 80), causes a more intense degree of vivification of the subject, because it allows one to involuntarily bring to consciousness one's interconnection with the entire universe "*pro positu corporis*". Although requiring prior preparation and an active effort, inspiration thus preserves an unavoidable character of gratuitousness (pathic element).

The centrality of the pathic dimension is also apparent in another condition mentioned by Griffero, that of illness and vulnerability. It is precisely the theme of illness that has triggered important reflections on the living body in the social sciences in the last decades, which could also be fruitful for (soma)aesthetics in order to better understand the indissoluble intertwining of agency and pathicity of *aisthesis*. Thomas J. Csordas, who advocated

embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology (Csordas, 1990), had already clearly pointed out that the body is not just a given natural object, but an active subject, embedded in a network of social processes, that feels itself and the world through the devices of its own cultural construction. The point, then, is not simply to account for the historical ways in which the body is understood in a certain context, but to look at the way in which the body is traversed by social processes that simultaneously provide it with a language to somatically express its (re)positioning in the world (see the classical essay 'The mindful body' by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock, 1987). In this sense, illness does not need a cognitively mediated symbology to convey meanings, because our somatic ways of being are already imbricated in a culturally informed context and express themselves in an aisthetic and pre-cognitive experience. In such an aisthetic dimension, illness can reveal biopolitical roots, not only owing to the inscription on the body of the iatrogenic aspects of a certain social system, but also because illness can sometimes embody forms of resistance and protest to the established order, becoming an actual "technique of the body". A classic example is that of hysteria (see Martin, 1987): at a time (late 19th and early 20th century) when the function of women in Europe was predominantly procreative, female discomfort was traced back to a problem with the reproductive system, which could be removed for therapeutic purposes. In this context, women often used to express their discomfort precisely through a disorderly movement of the abdominal area, which testified to the incorporation and appropriation of the dominant social symbology in a lived experience.

The suffering body therefore amounts to a privileged aisthetic terrain in which both the atmospheric ephemerality of proximate spatial environments and elements of "*longue durée*" such as large-scale social and political processes can intertwine.[3] In this perspective, where the idea of "thinking through the body" (Shusterman, 2012a) is taken seriously, it therefore seems necessary to combine an "aesthetics of the body", where the body is understood as a sentient subject susceptible to improvement through specific habituation techniques that help to develop "new skills of balance and body alignment" (Abrams, 2022, p. 251), and an "aesthetics in the body", where the body is experienced in an immediate manner in its co-implication with the world in the multiplicity of planes that cross it. In the produced and productive, pathic and agentive, sides of *aisthesis*, the body, as Leszek Koczanowicz's essay on somapower suggests, can thus become the existential terrain not only of conflict, but also of possible transgression and emancipation. Exploring and deepening these connections certainly represents an important challenge for the future of somaesthetics.

[3] Another example is that of Capoeira, which Matthias Röhrig Assunção, author of an important volume on this bodily practice, sees as an evergreen symbol of resistance that fascinates young people all over the world (Röhrig Assunção, 2005, p. 2).

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Alessandro Nannini
University of Bucharest
ICUB Humanities, Str. Dimitrie Brandza 1
RO-060102, Bucharest
Romania
alessandronannini1@gmail.com

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10513111

When Life is Art and Philosophy: The Case of Richard Shusterman

Lukáš Arthur Švihura

This article is motivated by a reading of J.J. Abrams' proceedings *Shusterman's Somaesthetics: From Hip Hop Philosophy to Politics and Performance Art*. Of the diverse range of essays in the proceedings, I concentrate my attention primarily on those aspects of the texts that highlight Richard Shusterman's practical somaesthetics, and in which their authors focus on the more personal aspects of Shusterman's philosophical-artistic experimentation, as captured in *The Adventures of the Man in Gold: Paths Between Art and Life, A Philosophical Tale*. Through references to Foucault's notion of care of the self and the aesthetics of existence, the article demonstrates that the individual level of Shusterman's practical somaesthetics is not separable from the social-ethical level. This is matched by the conclusion of the text, which points out that Shusterman's practical somaesthetics overcomes the dichotomy of private and public in Richard Rorty's pragmatism. | *Keywords: Somaesthetics, Richard Shusterman, Pragmatism, Art of Life*

I am one of those philosophers for whom the role models are colleagues and predecessors for whom philosophy is not only an area of theoretical interest, but also an area of life practice. For philosophers such as Socrates, Diogenes, Epicurus, and Marcus Aurelius (to mention just a few of the ancients), philosophy was reflected in the way they conducted their personal lives, in their interactions with other people, and in the kind of actions that could have socio-political, ethical, and pedagogical implications. Among contemporary philosophers, the pragmatists are especially known for such a link between theory and practice. And among them, Richard Shusterman has a special position.

There can be no doubt that Shusterman does not merely capture his philosophy in texts, but actually embodies it. However, new horizons of thought are opened to his readers by a book whose content will resonate with them for a long time after they have finished it. This is the case with the

This article constitutes the output of the research project VEGA no. 1/0537/21 The Art of Life in the Context of Philosophical Practice.

proceedings edited by Jerold J. Abrams and which was published in 2022 by Brill under the title *Shusterman's Somaesthetics: From Hip Hop Philosophy to Politics and Performance Art*. The title promises a rich probe into Shusterman's philosophy and its various developmental phases and transformations, and thus a probe into the transformations of Shusterman the philosopher and artist, who, as we will attempt to show, cannot be separated from his philosophy (and art).

Abrams divided the book into three parts, 'Part 1: Pragmatism and Somaesthetics'; 'Part 2: Performative Philosophy and the Man in Gold'; and 'Part 3: Shusterman in His Own Words'. In total, the volume contains fourteen chapters and Abrams' 'Introduction', in which he charts and introduces his readers to Shusterman's journey from analytic aesthetics to pragmatic aesthetics to somaesthetics. Here Abrams identifies sources of inspiration for Shusterman, most notably Rorty and Danto's interpretation of Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. From the still overly analytical aesthetics of Danto, according to Abrams, Shusterman begins to shift his attention to Dewey's aesthetics, which is imbued with the relationship between art and life, until finally Shusterman arrives at somaesthetics as the third stage of his thinking. This is fully manifested when "Shusterman traversed the boundary enclosing academic philosophy to become a performing artist" (Abrams, 2022a, p. 12).

The work Abrams refers to here was made in collaboration between Shusterman and photographer Yann Toma and is titled *The Adventures of the Man in Gold: Paths Between Art and Life, A Philosophical Tale.* The entire second part of Abrams' collection is devoted to analyses of this work. Before readers can learn more about the enigmatic figure of the Man in Gold, however, they have the opportunity to get acquainted with the different levels of somaesthetics in the first part of the book, entitled 'Pragmatism and Somaesthetics.' Although these parts of the book are thematically relatively closed units, it seems that Shusterman's pragmatism can be separated from his performance art only with difficulty, if at all. It is these intersections of philosophy, art, and life that we will attempt to reconstruct in what follows.

Since Shusterman's development from analytic aesthetics to pragmatist aesthetics to somaesthetics, somaesthetics has become "an open field of collaborative, interdisciplinary, and transcultural inquiry" (Shusterman, 2012, p. 8). This is ultimately evident in the diversity of somaesthetic approaches and themes that appear in Abrams' collection, as well as other approaches that can be found in different contexts. In the plurality and ramification of somaesthetics, then, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that, in addition to all that somaesthetics undoubtedly is and can be, it is first and foremost a complex philosophy. The authors of the texts in the Abrams collection are aware of this, for the references to philosophical theories that accompany their explorations are numerous throughout the texts. Perhaps the most uncompromising insistence on the philosophical character of somaesthetics, however, is made by Alexander Kremer in his essay 'From Pragmatism to Somaesthetics as Philosophy,' who systematically reconstructs the

philosophical inspirations of somaesthetics and finally lists five reasons why somaesthetics should be seen specifically as philosophy (Kremer, 2022, pp. 53–59). For me, the last reason is the most important, where Kremer argues:

> Somaesthetics also renewed the ancient Greek understanding of philosophy. It is not only writing and lecturing, but firstly, and above all, somaesthetics is a way of life. Shusterman, in arguing for philosophy as an embodied 'ethical art of living,' also finds support in ancient Asian thought (Kremer, 2022, p. 58).[1]

So when I say that somaesthetics is a complex philosophy, I am not at all denying the plurality of its other forms. I am writing about somaesthetics as a philosophy in a broader sense, concentrating mainly on practical somaesthetics. In doing so, I place it among the philosophies written about by, for example, Pierre Hadot or the late Michel Foucault, who were instrumental in reviving the ancient idea of philosophy as the art of living in the second half of the 20th century. Shusterman, however, surpasses them in something important. It is not just in the way he introduces the concept of soma and embodiment into thinking about philosophy as an art of living. After all, the problem of the body and corporeality appears as a topic of philosophical interest in a fundamental way already in phenomenology, especially then in M. Merleau-Ponty. In Shusterman we see a fundamental shift in that he somatizes philosophy himself. As Kremer writes, "Shusterman takes the idea of philosophy as an art of living in a radically new direction when he performed as the Man in Gold" (Kremer, 2022, p. 59). I will not, however, get ahead of myself and return to this theme later.

First of all, it should be said that I am not mentioning Foucault here at random. He is, after all, mentioned in various contexts by the authors of the texts in the Abrams' collection. Consider, for example, Leszek Koczanowicz's text, 'Somaesthetics, Somapower, and the Microphysics of Emancipation,' in which he draws attention to the interconnection of power, the body, and politics. This is a topic that has been widely discussed throughout the 20th century, but Koczanowicz points out the deficits of the conceptions of well-known theorists of the body and corporeality, such as Foucault, Bourdieu, and Merleau-Ponty. These deficits can be summarized by what the author of the text wrote in relation to Foucault when he argued that

> His theory is problematic in that it treats the body almost exclusively as a passive material to be transformed and subordinated into docility. Obviously, in his later work, Foucault introduced the concept of the 'technologies of the self,' which attributed far more agency to the body, but its conceivable power-opposing potency still remained very individualistic (Koczanowicz, 2022, p. 63).

I do not want to argue with the author's argument here, let alone with its results, because I largely share it and appreciate his proposal to include in somaesthetics an investigation of the so-called "somapower" (Koczanowicz, 2022, pp. 71–72), which can substantially advance Foucault's conception of the *biopouvoir*.[2] Such an exploration may be much needed in order for people to become more aware of the fact that the primary instrument of their liberation

[1] Shusterman, of course, distinguishes between analytic, pragmatic and practical somaesthetics (Shusterman, 2012, pp. 42–45), and what Kremer writes about belongs precisely to practical somaesthetics.

[2] I myself drew attention to the importance of the body in the context of resistance to power in my study *Estetika existencie v pragmatizme Richarda Shustermana* [The Aesthetics of Existence in Richard Shusterman's Pragmatism] (cf. Švihura, 2023).

is constantly at their disposal. Or, better yet, that they themselves, as somatic beings, are a potential instrument of opposition to power. Despite all this, however, we must admit that Shusterman's own philosophical endeavours in practical somaesthetics are in some respects quite reminiscent of Foucault's concept of technologies of the self. And this also applies to the 'individualistic' nature of practical somaesthetics.

It should be added immediately, however, that the Hellenistic forms of care of the self (*epimeleia heautou*), of which the late Foucault wrote, were not unilaterally individualistic. Certainly, the self was central in these forms of care of the self, but on the other hand, this was also true of care of the self: "It does not mean simply being interested in oneself, nor does it mean having a certain tendency to self-attachment or self-fascination" (Foucault, 1983, p. 243). Indeed, it cannot be overlooked that these forms of care of the self or technologies of the self were often associated by Foucault with the phrase 'the art of living,' whereby the existence of the individual, through care of the self and the technology of the self, became 'work of art' not only for the individual himself as the product of his own activity, but also for those who came into contact with this existence. Such an art of living was even, in a sense, a socio-ethical and pedagogical practice in which the life of the individual could act as a model for others. That the care of the self in antiquity was not a purely individual activity was shown, for example, by Foucault in his analysis of Plato's dialogue *Alcibiades*: "The practice of the self is now integrated within, mixed up, and intertwined with a whole network of different social relations" (Foucault, 2005, p. 206). What we must be aware of, then, is that already in the original forms of the art of living, the preoccupation with the self, a kind of seemingly private aesthetics of existence, was woven into social relations and may have had many public benefits. In other words, that individuality and sociality, care of the self and care for others, were in some sense inseparable from the beginning. This digression to Foucault seems important to me because it can be used to bring us closer to how we should understand Shusterman's practical somaesthetics.

This can be further elucidated through a theme encountered in several of the essays in Abrams' book. This is the issue of the identity of the self. In his text 'Shusterman's Pragmatist Philosophy', among other things, Stefan Snævarr draws our attention to the fact that, whatever their differences, "Shusterman and Foucault share an aesthetic view of the body and the self, and a normative view of them, regarding each as intertwined and shaped by cultural and social forces" (Snævarr, 2022, p. 34). It is necessary to draw attention to this because Foucault assumes the postmodern fragmentation of our identity/self, as a result of which he begins to think about aesthetic self-creation, returning to analyses of the ancient art of living. "To be sure, the self is fragmented, but it can bounce back and refashion itself (without any aid of rules), as a modernist work of art" (Snævarr, 2022, p. 33). Foucault's words confirm this: "From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art" (Foucault, 1983, p. 237). Shusterman's practical somaesthetics is an great example of this.

The meaning of the statement ‘to create ourselves as a work of art’ takes concrete form in Shusterman’s experiment, which he undertook with the photographer Yann Toma, and which brought to life the strange creature known today as the Man in Gold. It is the result of artistic collaboration, which obviously participates in the expression of important aspects of Shusterman’s identity – that part of it which is not expressible in the context of the philosopher’s public identity and permanently remains hidden, except through artistic performance. In fact, it is not even discursively communicable, which is why art – in this case, ‘somaflux photography’ – seems to be the only appropriate tool to express it. That Man in Gold is an expression of Shusterman’s identity is suggested by several texts in Abrams’ book, such as Diane Richard-Allerdyce’s article ‘An Exquisitely Beautiful Longing: A Lacanian Reading of *The Adventures of the Man in Gold*,’ in which the author argues:

> It is a costume that engenders transformation, as if the everyday costume of the narrator’s social self is exchanged for another in alignment with the creatively authentic yearnings of the narrator. The Man in Gold, a sensitive being whose motivating emotions are love and fear, does not speak; his having no language is significant of his character as a remembered part of the author’s being (rather than a projection or alter ego) and the book itself as, in part, a memoir, rather than or in addition to philosophical autobiography (Richard-Allerdyce, 2022, p. 151).

Through the author’s detailed Lacanian analysis, we come to a deeper understanding of Shusterman’s identity through the Man in Gold, as her text opens up deep levels of the private space of Shusterman’s somaesthetic experiences. For detached philosophical readers, this chapter may even be too personal, but it is nevertheless extremely beneficial in the context of understanding Shusterman’s philosophy, as it highlights its connection to the personal, even intimate, aspects of Shusterman’s life.

Overcoming the fragmentation of public and personal identity by making Shusterman’s art out of life suggests the individualistic and private nature of the motives of practical somaesthetics (in this particular case). The personal nature of Shusterman’s experiment is also highlighted in Yang Lu’s text ‘On Shusterman’s Somaesthetic Practice: the Case of the Man in Gold,’ which points out, among other things, the following: “Moreover, beyond its philosophical, literary, and aesthetic aims, the *Adventures* is a deeply personal effort at redemption through art, for the moral flaws and failures and regrets of the philosopher” (Lu, 2022, pp. 211–212), to which Shusterman himself admits. Equally personal, moreover, are Shusterman’s own words in the notes to each chapter of Abrams’ book, where he returns to the motif of detective mystery present in *Walk the Golden Night*. The latter is, among other things, the subject of Abrams’ last chapter in the second part of the book (‘Somaesthetics and Cinema: The Man in Gold in the Film *Walk the Golden Night*’), and Shusterman puts it in the context of the search for the true identity of ‘Wanmei’ – the supposed mother of the Man in Gold who appears at the end of the *Adventures*. Shusterman, however, asks who this character is to *the narrator of the story* (I consider my emphasis on the text important here) of Man in Gold – Shusterman himself.

> Does this extend to the narrating author, who certainly loved his mother and perhaps never got over her death in 2005? Was he seeking her in another world through the Man in Gold? I do not know, and the Man in Gold cannot say. His wordless silence is an apt reminder to end here my words of response (Shusterman, 2022, p. 260).

Thus, Shusterman himself suggests that something of the performative art he realized in the 'possession' of the Man in Gold may also reveal something important about the narrator of the Man in Gold story – Shusterman himself.

But why do we focus on this personal level, present in some of the texts of Abrams' book? It is because this personal plan proves that Shusterman's *soma* embodies his own philosophy, from which he is inseparable precisely as a person. He thus belongs to those philosophers about whom he himself has long written, such as Confucius, who, in Shusterman's words, taught his disciples

> by embodying his philosophy in his bodily behavior. Greek and Roman thinkers often likewise advocated this ideal, something by contrasting true philosophers who lived their philosophy to those who merely wrote philosophy and thus were denigrated as mere 'grammarians'. The idea of philosophy as an embodied art of living found renewed expression in American thinkers like Emerson and Thoreau who inspired both pragmatism and somaesthetics, underlining the distinction between mere 'professor of philosophy' and real philosophers who truly embody or live their thought (Shusterman, 2012, pp. 4–5).

Whether the distinction is ancient or American, between philosophers who write philosophy and those who embody it, what is important in each case is that the underlying Confucian motif is present in all of these cases, which is that embodied philosophy is never a purely individual and private enterprise, but that this embodiment is always involved in influencing others. Not only the immediate disciples of such a philosopher, but also the wider community (including the professional one) of which he or she is a part.

This connection of the individual and the social, or also private and public, I need to emphasize because it is an important part of Shusterman's pragmatism. And I think it is also an expression of his pragmatist meliorism. It is, however, a fundamentally different approach from that found in one of the most famous proponents of post-analytic pragmatism, Richard Rorty. Rorty is famous, among other things, for insisting very seriously on the distinction between an ethic of private self-creation and an ethic of public solidarity when he wrote about aesthetic self-creation (against which, as we know, Shusterman demarcates himself). Rorty's book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* is perhaps the best known in this regard, where he reduces aesthetic self-creation to a purely private space in order to prevent our self-creation from potentially hurting others (cf. Rorty (1995)). While this concern of Rorty's has merit, it cannot be overlooked that aesthetic self-creation, on the other hand, can inspire others and even have an educative and cultivating effect. It is Shusterman's practical somaesthetics that clearly overcomes this dualism of private and public morality and demonstrates that even deeply personal interests need not be exclusive of public benefit.

This is pointed out, for example, in Yvonne Bezrucka's essay 'Shusterman as Philosopher and the Man in Gold,' which assesses Shusterman's *Adventures* as "an entirely new kind of philosophical experiment" (Bezrucka, 2022, p. 167). It is an experiment that is important, among other things, because this performance of a silent, different, and in a sense faceless, non-specific, even outright 'sexless' being, opens up new ethico-political levels of philosophical thought. This is shown, for example, when the author describes how random people reacted to the Man in Gold:

> Nobody talks to the Man in Gold in a friendly manner, but each instead signals to him that barriers have been erected. In fact, some people even shout him away, and in doing so they reveal a pervasive frame of thought characterized by intolerance, prejudice, xenophobia, and cultural narrowmindedness with their correlated use of ethnic stereotypes (Bezrucka, 2022, p. 171).

Shusterman's philosophical-artistic experiment, while in a sense a way of coming to terms with his own life, also highlighted how the anxieties present in the percipients of the Man in Gold translated into an evaluation of what they were able to perceive thanks to Shusterman's experiment. And what they perceived was an embodiment of otherness that played an important role here. For, unlike the traditional medium of philosophy, which is the written text, at a given moment this experiment reveals an 'immoral' behaviour towards the stranger (the Man in Gold) who himself – both as a figure of art and as an *ex post* reflective philosopher – has the opportunity to experience and reflect on this behaviour not in detached philosophical abstraction but on the basis of personal experience. This cannot be seen other than as *par excellence* a consistent use of the Deweyan and empirical tradition in Shusterman's pragmatism and practical somaesthetics. This (and not only this) is what makes Shusterman's experimentation with photographic art original – for it fundamentally changes the mode of philosophical work, which in this case is not "just" working on oneself through artistic performance, but at the same time moves beyond personal experiences, which – if they can become discursive – can stimulate other people (I believe not only philosophers) to new thinking and new experiences (e.g., with morality, discrimination, and so on) as well.

And so Shusterman brings together in an original way what we academic philosophers have long been accustomed to compartmentalising. Philosophy and art, art and life, life and philosophy, which – as Shusterman teaches us by his own example – can form one harmonious whole. In this context, the numerous references to the philosophical tradition that Abrams mentions in his last essay are very revealing. In the context of my argument, however, this seems to me the most important to mention:

> Socrates (whose mother was a midwife) is himself now kind of midwife: he is a philosophical midwife to young philosophers like Theaetetus who are 'pregnant' with thought, which can only be delivered by philosophical dialogue. As Socrates delivers thought by question and answer, the photographer Toma acts as midwife to deliver from the philosopher Richard Shusterman a new kind of art which is a synthesis of photography and philosophy (Abrams, 2022b, p. 221).

In Shusterman's experimentation, photographer Toma acts as midwife. He is the one who employs *maieutike techne* and acts as Socrates, suggesting that philosophy is born out of and with the help of art in the case of the *Adventures*.

If this is the case, I think that Abrams' interpretation can be supplemented by another important point, namely that the emphasis on birth through art is in some opposition to the Platonic philosophical tradition, which places art in some opposition to philosophy. In Shusterman's work it is exactly the opposite, and the one always conditions the other. Art and philosophy are here in inseparable contact, and so this metaphor is also a reminder of the non-Platonic or even anti-Platonic philosophy of pragmatism. This is also why practical somaesthetics is an original kind of philosophy of pragmatism. A philosophy that does not divide but unites, that does not exclude but includes, that seeks intersections and not differences. A philosophy that recognizes that it is in this joining that life is richer and fuller.

If we look back to antiquity, it was Socratic philosophy, living in dialogue and not primarily on paper and in books, that was this living philosophy – the private and public art of living, which was still long referred to as a source of inspiration by the Socratic schools, for whom philosophy was a comprehensive way of life. In this respect, Shusterman's practical somaesthetics is an original continuation of this tradition, and certainly in relation to it what Emil Višňovský wrote about pragmatism as such is true: "Pragmatism is a successor to Sophists, Socrates, Stoicism, and Epicureanism in terms of conceptions of philosophy – of what philosophy is good for and what philosophers should do: provide an understanding of the human condition that corresponds with its transformation" (Višňovský, 2014, p. 141). As Shusterman shows, the value of ancient philosophy can come alive today. Not, however, in endless repetitions, interpretations, and reinterpretations of dusty texts, but through our lives. With the help of both art and new technologies. With the help of interdisciplinary overlaps and openness to collaboration. With the courage to do philosophy differently. Doing it by living it.

Abrams has managed to compile a book that captures the immense complexity of Shusterman's philosophy, art, and life (while still making no claim to completeness). Although – as we have tried to show – philosophy, art and life form a single entity in the case of Shusterman, and their terminological distinction is really only verbal. In the case of academic philosophers, this is still quite unique, even though ancient philosophy often saw such a connection as something quite natural. Shusterman's philosophy is really a consequentialist pragmatism in this sense – experiential, lived, real. It just screams it from all the essays.

Although less than three hundred pages in length, the contents of the Abrams volume are extremely comprehensive and wide-ranging. This is due to the great choice of the authors of the texts, who are both true experts in Shusterman's philosophy and undisputed experts in their respective fields of knowledge, which is reflected in the quality of the individual chapters of the book. In this context, however, it is necessary to add that the book may not be

easy to read, especially if the reader does not have a sufficient range of knowledge in the areas of knowledge in which the authors of the individual chapters work expertly. However, the potential difficulty in navigating the topics treated is worth experiencing, because the reward is a substantial broadening of the horizons of thought (and perhaps even life).

The added value of Abrams' book is that the reader feels that Shusterman is somehow suddenly closer to him. Even though he knows him as a world-renowned figure in contemporary philosophy, he suddenly sees him as a human being – a philosopher and an artist (in the conjunction of all of the above words) whose life creates philosophy, and whose philosophy is created by his life. It is obvious why we academics often shy away from such symbiosis as we find in Shusterman, even though we love to write about the art of living. For it means giving up the comfort of the demarcation of text and life. For through it, our texts are always judged, and can be corrected theoretically and verbally after critique, but our lives can safely remain in seclusion and hidden from the critical public eye. Shusterman, with his practical somaesthetics, goes to market with his skin on, he is almost naked. And though he is clad in a golden costume, his inner self is laid bare. We have to admit, it takes tremendous courage.

As it seems, Shusterman's philosophy and his art truly lives, breathes, rebels and draws in other actors in the life of the *soma* bearing the name Richard. In doing so, Shusterman is not conceiving a private project of self-creation. On the contrary, he co-creates his surroundings ethically and pedagogically through his practice, as several texts have suggested. If Shusterman were to take Rorty's advice seriously and conceive a project of private self-creation, how might he inspire others?

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Lukáš Arthur Švihura
University of Presov
Faculty of Arts, Institute of Philosophy
17. novembra 1
080 01 Prešov
Slovakia
lukas.svihura@unipo.sk

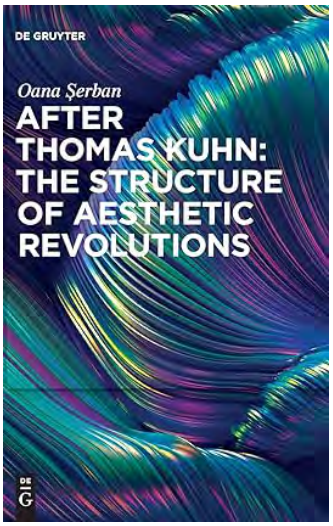
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10513469

BOOK REVIEWS

The Ambit of Aesthetic Validity

Andrea Miškocová

Şerban, O. (2022) *After Thomas Kuhn: The structure of Aesthetic Revolutions*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter 2022. ISBN: 9783110774696.



The ongoing discussion examining the foundations and similarities between the scientific and artistic domains as well as the distinction between the scientist and the artist – developed widely in the '*post-Kantian*' philosophy – is extensively explored in Şerban's work. This exploration involves a theoretical examination of thinkers such as Hofstadter, Clignet, and Habermas, with Habermas' roots tracing back to Kantian influences, particularly on taste. Şerban analyzes their philosophical orientations and subsequently presents an argumentative perspective, contributing her own perspective to the historical dialogue between Kuhn and Kubler. The specificity of the paradigms valid in the sciences is confronted with the aesthetic revolutions within art. The author's key argument is the thesis that "'style' and 'paradigm' are similar but not entirely commutable terms from art to science and vice versa [...] style must be placed in the nutshell of arts due to its iconic trajectories, whereas paradigms, from science, can be rightfully applied in aesthetics given their epistemic and ideological potential" (Şerban, 2022, p. 7).

The text is a part of research project VEGA 1/0725/22 Kant's Practical Philosophy - Potential and Perspectives.

The most important criterion that unites the individual parts and the analysis of art historians' theories is the author's concept of *aesthetic validity*, a term which she attaches to Kuhn's analysis as the basis of aesthetic revolution. "The challenge of my critical inquiry is to sketch a theory of historical progress, radical change and predictability in aesthetics and the history of arts that explains, inspired by Kuhnian terms of revolutionary shifts, what I call – a theory of aesthetic validity" (Șerban, 2022, p. 5). An illustrative argument for the cooperation of paradigms in art and aesthetics is found in Șerban's evaluation of the axiological determinations within art and science, considered by her as a peripheral element of their structure. She emphasizes that aesthetics serves as a space submerging ideological paradigms, to which art relates either as an expression of support or rejection within its defined field of influence.

The introductory chapter is devoted to Kuhn's five standards for the selection of a theory of art, particularly the *accuracy* of the art theory (verifiable by empirical states of the art world), its *consistency* with other theories devoted to progress and change in art, its *breadth* of scope, *simplicity*, and *fruitfulness* toward expanding knowledge about art paradigms. The second chapter contains an analysis of George Kubler's incommensurable model, influenced by the Cartesian division between object and subject, which separates meaning from form in an attempt to escape the explanatory inconsistencies caused by the disjunctive principle. However, according to the author, this approach did not enhance its credibility: "my purpose is to argue, on the resumption of this epochal polemic, that Kuhn has never operated the distinction between aesthetic and artistic contents, and that the simple introduction of this difference in his argument could radically change the perspective on the plausibility and justification of a similar construction that artistic and scientific revolutions share" (Șerban, 2022, p. 91).

In chapter three, Șerban elucidates her theory of aesthetic validity and introduces Hafner's alternative commensal model, which establishes a connection between science and art through spirituality. Hafner posits that spirituality serves as a metaphorical description of the world through these forms. The subsequent chapter continues the discussion of linear and cyclical progress in revolutionary art. This is exemplified through an analysis of Hegel's thesis of the 'end of art', Borstlap's rejection of progress, and Doorman's commentary on the absence of progress in Kuhn's incommensurability of paradigms. According to Șerban, the importance of progress lies in the thesis stating that avant-gardes emerged as cultural movements out of society's mistake in incorporating experimental values alongside traditional visions and innate traditions out of the fear that humans may not achieve progress.

The penultimate chapter elucidated Șerban's interpretative explanations of aesthetic validity, drawing on theoretical inspirations from Hofstadter, Clignet, Habermas and Heidegger. Aesthetic validity comes here from the artist's visual language, serving as an expression of reality and encapsulating the relationship between ideality and actuality. The artwork represents as

a clear, necessary and complete expression within the paradigm. According to the '*axiological complementarity argument*,' the confirmation of scientific theories is tied to their consistency with the expected tools of a given branch of knowledge, and similarly, the aesthetic nature of the artwork, closely related to its style, is confirmed. Both science and art are expanding quantifiable and controllable spheres of knowledge subject to the influence of progress, allowing the assessment of the acceptance or stability of a particular paradigm in the system. These interpretations culminate in the last section of the book, which explores the political line of the avant-garde.

The broader context in which this analysis unfolds is the political interconnectedness of governing paradigms. These represent the *political* implications of cultural and artistic revolutions, which the author presents to the reader at the beginning of the book: "I rather assume that politics and arts are contingent, depending on certain historical specific occurrences and that aesthetic paradigms are 'validated' – implicitly implemented – by a society whose expectances from such paradigms are to provide solutions to categorical puzzled-problems, that are politically oriented or fall under political perspectives" (Șerban, 2022, pp. 6–7). The hermeneutical basis for Șerban's interpretation of radical changes, understood as paradigmatic, encompasses *necessity*, *predictability* and the *ideology* behind them (Șerban, 2022, p. 89). An important caveat is the author's emphasis on the influence of these aspects on the development of changes in the aesthetic, artistic and scientific spheres. What paradigm will prevail in aesthetics is determined by various political factors. Briefly, artistic revolutions are *stylistic* manifestation of aesthetic revolutions, expressing the prevailing ideology of the time through objects or symbols.

Employing the genealogical and archaeological methodological perspective of avant-gardes in the light of cultural revolutions, in the last chapter, Serban concludes that science, art, and aesthetics share the same revolutionary patterns from a processual point of view, reduced to a paradigm-shifting mechanism. They differ in their nature of progression, with science following a linear trend of evolution that transforms into incommensurable entities, while aesthetics and art embrace a cyclical period of evolution where paradigms do not emerge concurrently (Șerban, 2022, p. 230). Simultaneously, she notes that aesthetic paradigms are mutually incomprehensible, and artistic canons or styles are incommensurable.

The philosophical-historical contribution offered by Șerban's work may extends beyond the theorists of aesthetics or those centered on Kantian aesthetics to practically-oriented philosophers. Thorough and detailed, the book provides a relevant and convincing argumentative reflection on the debate between Kubler and Kuhn. With its distinctive category of aesthetic validity, it introduces a new perspective relevant to a variety of social, aesthetic, and philosophical audiences. The outlined connection between the political ideologies of the time and their implementation in aesthetics and artistic production may have considerable implications for emerging aesthetic initiatives. In simpler terms, the artistic revolutions of a particular era can be

interpreted as a reflection of the direction of its political sphere. The future epoch can thus read today's artistic representations as a mirror of society: the kind of culturally (un)developed society at stake is currently in our hands.

Andrea Miškocová
University of Presov
Faculty of Arts, Institute of Philosophy
17. novembra 1
080 01 Prešov
Slovakia
andrea.miskocowa44@gmail.com

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10514457