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STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS  
BABEŞ-BOLYAI



# PHILOSOPHIA

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Vol. 69, No. 3, December 2024

ISSN (online): 2065-9407; ISSN-L: 2065-9407

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**STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI  
PHILOSOPHIA**

**Vol. 69, No. 3, December 2024**

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**YEAR**  
**MONTH**  
**ISSUE**

**Volume 69 (LXIX) 2024**  
**DECEMBER**  
**3**

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PUBLISHED ONLINE: 2024-12-05  
ISSUE DOI: 10.24193/subbphil.2024.3  
ISSN (online): 2065-9407

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**PHILOSOPHIA**

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**Issue Coordinator: Ion COPOERU**

**Publishing Date: December 2024**

## The Meaning of Kant's Attitude Towards the Technical Instruments of Science in the Atmosphere of Enlightenment

Ana BAZAC\* 

**ABSTRACT.** I mention the main, technophile and technophobe, positions towards technology in the Western 18<sup>th</sup> century, as the criterion of this paper. Then I show that, however unexpected would this be, the *concept* of technics – opening the *problem* of technics – was explicitly present within the transcendental philosophy. From its multiple meanings outlined in the logic of this philosophy, I focus on the technical instruments of science. Kant considered them optimistically, but insisted that they are only means subordinated to the capability of reason that alone is able to give knowledge. And the vault key of knowledge is the moral law (the moral *telos*) given by the human reason. Thus, answering to Rousseau, Kant indicates that the progress of knowledge is ultimately determined by this moral, and not by the enrichment of cognisance as a result of technical instruments. If we consider them as a model for the treatment of the technical objects in the broad sense of this term, Kant introduced the criticism of the technophile reductionism, while creating the frame of the positivist science and the humanistic philosophy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** *Kant, technical instruments of science, technic/technology, technophilia and technophobia, moral law*

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## Prologue: the Kantian meaning of technological optimism

The historical context (de Tocqueville, 1866, 22-26; also, de Vries, 1976<sup>1</sup>) within which Kant worked has deeply influenced his worldview. The reforms-lover Frederick the Great was for him a proof that these reforms are possible, not only logically and through *a posteriori* thinking necessary: and the power of reason gradually defeats irrationality, inhuman behaviours. Kant was a philosopher, always seeking the accurate and consistent reasoning: that was not utopia, of course, but the way toward the solving of cognitive and social problems; nevertheless, the distance between the rigorous demonstrations of theories and the real life was huge and assumed by Kant: the intellectual and the physical work were structurally different and opposed, and thus, even some structural aspects of agency were avoided. However, just in the Kantian understanding, this sidestepping leads to the exclusion of those aspects from the kingdom of the human *universalizable*. Kant was indeed the emblem of Enlightenment by promoting the idea of the human being understood through its universalizable: the human reason *and* the human capacity to behave according to the moral law.

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<sup>1</sup> The relative social backwardness – “Friedrich Wilhelm I had destroyed serfdom in his domains in 1717. The particular code of the great Frederick, as we have seen, purported to abolish it throughout the kingdom; but, in reality, it only made its harshest form, *Leibeigenschaft*, disappear; he preserved it in its softened form, *Erbunterthänigkeit*. It was not until 1809 that it ceased entirely” (de Tocqueville, 1866, p. 355, Note 5, Date of abolition of serfdom in Germany) – of the German states, and here of Prussia, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was accompanied by a quite vivid coagulation of the “public sphere” in the form of learned societies of high-ranking officials, officers, clergymen, university professors of different specialties, physicians and pharmacists, merchants (As Johann Conrad Jacobi (1717–1774) and Robert Motherby (1736–1801), in Horst, 2020) who shared the same commitment to develop not only knowledge but also the ability of citizens to actively promote the modernisation reforms in the administration of the state. In principle, thus theoretically because this was its modern Western constitution, the bourgeois private sphere is opposed to the public sphere. However, in Prussia the members of the learned society saw rather the consensus, the unity of the public sphere of the state – that imposes its own order – with the private one, motivated by and wanting freedom.

And this consensus was not seen by the German intellectuals without problems: but they could and should be solved with the freedom of critique, of the deployment of a state programme of knowledge sharing and education.

The Berlin Wednesday Society in 1783-1798 (*Berliner Mittwochsgesellschaft* (or *Gesellschaft der Freunde der Aufklärung*)) was an example of these societies. Johann Karl Wilhelm Möhsen delivered “What Is to Be Done Towards the Enlightenment of Citizens?” in this society in 1783. This and other papers promoted the critical spirit – result of education and ability of “*bien raisonner*” as Frederick the Great insisted – therefore the formation of modern members of society, of citizens. Hence, the entire Enlightenment age was “a pedagogical age” (Munzel, 2012).

Science<sup>2</sup> and technology<sup>3</sup> (and “even the empirical knowledge of humankind” (Kant, 1998 (AA3. KrV. A850/B878), p. 701) were the direct manifestation of the human knowledge. Their advancement proved the power of the human reason to construct “means” for the “essential ends of the human reason” (*Ibidem* (KrV. A839/B867), p. 695), with the *sine qua non* help of metaphysics. This position was not technophile in the present meaning of this word, that is, it does not deduce the solving of social problems only from the scientific-technological progress. But it was optimistic, emphasising that the scientific discoveries and technological innovations would bring a higher capacity of humans to develop the rationality of their behaviours. Science and arts are main parts and drivers of culture that “ennobles humanity”: but their results concern the human *species*, not a certain time interval when the progress is only fragmentary and “offers no guarantee against regression” (Kant, 2006b (Anth. AA 07: 325 and 326), p. 240).

This was a general viewpoint in Enlightenment. However, there was also a pessimistic stance, for instance that of J.-J. Rousseau (MDCCCLVI<sup>4</sup>) – we have doubts

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<sup>2</sup> Kant distinguished between *science* as concrete cognitive endeavour arising from a scheme (internal organisation of research and concepts and ideas) that follows empirically accidental intentions whose objects are not known before, and *philosophy* whose scheme is given by an idea in which reason gives *a priori* the ends and does not expect them from the empirical research. The internal organisation of science gives it a “technical unity”, while that of philosophy gives to this unique, special knowledge an “architectonic unity” because it is based on the “essential ends of reason “(the moral ones) (Kant, 1998 (KrV. A 833/B 861), p. 692 sqq, esp. A839/B867, p. 695).

(See also Gabriele Gava, “Kant’s Definition of Science in the Architectonic of Pure Reason and the Essential Ends of Reason,” *Kant Studien*, 2014; 105(3): 372–393).

<sup>3</sup> Here, *technology* in its contemporary meaning, as application of scientific knowledge. But Kant used the term *technology* – shortened as *die Technik* – as *methodology* of theoretical and practical problems, inserted either within the sciences or in the practical process of fabrication (Kant, 1987 (KU. AA 05:198), p. 388: “practical propositions that in their content deal merely with the possibility of a presented object (through voluntary action) are only applications of a complete theoretical cognition and cannot form a special part of a science. A practical geometry as a separate science [of geometry] is an absurdity”. And indeed, in its instrumental meaning of application of science, technology is the application of many types of methodology: of the process of knowing, of the practical applications, of the technical objects. (See also Aigner, 2020, p. 16).

Regarding *science and technology*, Leibniz (2012, 485, 491; 487, 489) considered them independently one to the other, 1) highlighting the separate development of mechanical arts/inventions and “rather by chance” or having a “superficial considerations than to the depth of mathematics” and 2) emphasising the real origin of the technological inventions: science, i.e., in the form of “geometrical” as deep understanding correlations and the “combinatorial” as transposition in symbolic calculus.

<sup>4</sup> And more related to the material side, Leibniz, *op. cit.*, p. 616, put the question and answered: “after so many inventions of our century do we die less often, or are we more secure from diseases?”... “we would often be happy, long-lived, and disease-free, if it sometimes occurred to men to be wise; if they reasoned seriously, if they used divine favours”.

to call it veritable technophobia because the author himself considered it, when the *Discourse* was re-edited, as “poor” (Rousseau, *ibidem*, 465) –: the progress of sciences and arts did never (as in examples of Egypt, ancient Greece and Rome) lead to the raise of manners and morals, and in modern times their application – as the printing press (*ibidem*, 475) – generates troubles and did nothing add to the human genuine happiness, but corrupts it.

Kant considered this question theoretically: *firstly*, the concrete morals and the level of science and technology are different problems and have no a direct mutual influence; *secondly*, the betterment of morals is directly depending on the degree the humans internalise the moral principles which are categorical imperatives, transcendental and arising from the power of the human reason; *thirdly*, this also means that the technical objects themselves reflect this degree and thus correspond to the human ends. In this way, the human and social problems globally, depending on many hypothetical causes, are ultimately solved not by the material marvels made by humans<sup>5</sup> but by their conscious self-control according to the criteria of moral categorical – since transcendently created by reason – imperatives.

Kant showed that Rousseau’s pessimistic position was related to his paradigmatic theory of the good state of nature versus the evil state of civilisation marked by the transmission, by the multitude of individuals, of their freedom to choose to leaders: thus, by the presumption that man is good by nature and perverted by the society based on the social contract of transfer of power. Kant mentioned the real experience of ancient and modern times which would “disconcert every thinking person and make him doubt whether our species will ever fare better”, and that nevertheless, Rousseau – and thus any logical thinking – would not profess the “return to the woods” but rather to use the model of state of nature in order to correct the present state of things (Kant, 2006b (Anth. AA 07: 325, 326, 326), pp. 239-240).

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Letting aside his deep appreciation of Rousseau, Kant criticised his theory about the relationship between the progress of science and art and that of morals. Concretely, Kant explicitly considered Rousseau’s paper in *Anthropology*, from the standpoint of the predominance of culture over “the crudity of mere personal force” of man, (Kant, 2006b (Anth. AA 07: 323, and 324), p. 237). As a result, “the human being is destined by his reason to live in a society with human beings in it and to cultivate himself, to civilise himself, and to moralize himself by means of the arts and sciences”, *ibidem*, AA 07: 324 and 325, p. 238.

<sup>5</sup> Humans have, of course, a “*technical* predisposition” to manipulate things, but at the same time they have, besides a *pragmatic* one (“to use other human beings skillfully, for our own purposes”), a strange predisposition related to sociability that “presupposes freedom” (but at the same time that could manipulate other human beings, so that is a technical skill): a *moral* one to treat others and ourselves “according to the principle of freedom under laws”, Kant, 2006b (Anth. AA 07: 241), p. 143, and AA 07: 322, p. 235. Also, Kant, 1987 (KU. AA 22: 120), p. 203.

And, according to the naïve approach of the objective world in Aristotle and pre-industrial τέχνη, but also in the industrial age, technics are instruments, and the human reason seems to be subjugated to the instrumental need, the need to consider everything as a means. In order to do what? Again, as if warning the following centuries, Kant explained in the most consistent manner to which ends are the technological means justified.

## Introduction

Already in the 17<sup>th</sup> century an entire field of European researchers in various branches of science flourished<sup>6</sup>. But the artisans' technical skills and results surpassed the scientific knowledge based on the decomposition of movement and its mechanical laws. While the concept of *machine* became common in philosophy (Bazac, 2010) and science, the construction of machines or mechanical structures remained the privilege of artisans. The philosophers cherished the concept of machine as the model of gearing the various forms and parts of a system within a single coherent and functioning unit.

But in order to conceive of and practically make machines, they had to learn from artisans<sup>7</sup>.

Kant was not a “philosopher- inventor- engineer, capable of uniting theoretical knowledge to practical knowledge of the material world and those who could work it— a new sort of persona” (Jones, 2016, 30), because his goal was to understand and reveal the formation of knowledge and not the practical application of technical knowledge. He was consonant with most of philosophers and, more, with the

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<sup>6</sup> Through the net and means of *knowledge communication* in his epoch, the so-called *knowledge in transit*, the dynamic system of recipients and means of communication of the texts, symbols, meanings. See Secord, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Leibniz thought of a calculating machine, thus not physical but of symbolic calculus to perform arithmetical “certainty” “prepared by observation rather than by meditation” and easing/simplifying the “geometrical” understanding of things that itself is the key of material objects by its selection of forms allowing profound meditation (Leibniz, 2012, 488; and 495: “This is indeed the reason, if I am not mistaken, why the ancients thought so much to contemplate forms separated from matter, and why they did...divine things”) and to even build it. In order to do this, he had to follow the artisanal secret in the Paris manufactures, (Jones, 2018).

The artisanal knowledge, related not only to calculating machines, included: propositional knowledge as resulting from a long experience with materials, “discernment, or the acuity of senses in making judgments about perceptions” of different properties of materials, “dexterity in doing work with hands”, “knowledge of the social world where other artisanal knowledge and skills can be found”, Jones, 2016, pp. 35-36.

learned society that benefitted from the separation of physical and intellectual labour. He contemplated the signs of ardent physical labour and its results, including the technical discoveries, from the distance given by his total urban-centred and intellectual life-centred outlook.<sup>8</sup> And he could not remove too much from his

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<sup>8</sup> However – and this is cardinal as an example of changes within the worldview of the intellectuals who were fully framed by the very old *exclusivist* tradition of rationalism, of reason as the human being's main feature covering all the others, and thus, of the qualitative superiority of contemplative activities towards the practical ones – Kant looked critically at his own imprisonment in his condition: not only in his personal *Remarks* related to his 1764 popular philosophy book *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, and where he many times expressly repeated that his awakening from the mechanically assumed disdain towards common people in the name of the privilege of knowledge was due to Rousseau, but also in the works of the critical period.

The main paradigms of these works were just:

- 1) “dualism”, i.e. theory of the *sine qua non* intertwining of the contents of appearances given by experience to our outer perceptions with the principles as “transcendental objects” conceived from concepts and which lack concrete determination but which substantiate our cognition, as “an unknown ground of those appearances that supply us with our empirical concepts” (Kant 1998 (AA 3, KrV, A379, A 380), p. 431);
- 2) transcendental idealism, that is to say mediation of ideas between we, the knowing subjects, and the external things; thus, we know: a) not directly the external world and b) we know what and how this external world appears empirically, so c) we know ideas formed through the above dualism; and the topic of transcendental dualism is just the formation of knowledge from an epistemological, and not a psychological standpoint;
- 3) the grounding and formation of ideas are natural, ontological, but the responsibility of ideas depends on the moral assumptions of humans;
- 4) the moral ideas are based on transcendental moral principles, grounding the moral assumptions, so these moral assumptions – obviously generated by empirical conditions which are the basis of hypothetical maxims – are evaluated by humans according to the moral transcendental principles embedded within the human consciousness as its formal conditions of knowing the difference between the good and the evil, according to the moral end of the human person that is his reason-to-be (“vocation”);
- 5) but concretely, this evaluation is the result of the empirical conditions of people, of their social place and their level of education; which are low for the majority of the population;
- 6) therefore, if the solution for attaining a general tendency toward morals according to the moral principles is the enlightening reforms and the contribution of the learned strata to them, these strata should take over the philosophical understanding of social equality within a successful civil union of all both in a *Staatsrecht* and a cosmopolitic *Völkerbund*;
- 7) the interdependence between the empirical data and the knowledge from concepts is the epistemological grounding of priority of moral thinking over the theoretical, epistemological, because the ultimate reason-to-be of theory is the practical, the human life according to the moral ends of the human being; therefore, the moral philosophy, grounding with its *a priori* principles the practical moral science, is preeminent over the theoretical philosophy (Kant 1998 (A 840/ B 868), p. 695).

Consequently, his example could nevertheless be thought by Kant as a necessary and possible path of intellectuals. Anyway, he knew very well the state of things in Prussia and not only there. Just from this knowledge arrived he to the understanding of the necessity and possibility of convergence between

personal Remarks milieu of destination and reception of his works. Instead, he provided theoretical messages concerning the criteria of freedom of critical thinking and of moral rigour, based on the principle of man-technology asymmetry and every man's capacity to behave according to the moral categorical imperative.

Kant wrote in a clear natural language, with direct explanations and not substituting the philosophical analysis/explanation with metaphors. He did not focus on *methodology* in order to get away from the traditional sensible instrumental meaning of τέχνη, but because (the cognitive) methodology was the way to arrive to objects: which, as technical objects as such, were not in the task of philosophy to being understood, he believed. The technical objects were not undetermined "things", but concrete, determined things: created by the human focus and by the human knowledge to transpose ideas, design *into reality*. The two versants of creation – the foundational/ the knowing, and its manifestation as making – were treated by Kant as methodology. This treatment was epistemological: methodology was the scaffold /skeleton of the deployment of epistemology. The (technical) objects belong to the ontological treatment, although the objects as such are constitutive elements of the epistemological relations.

The interest for the technical object, thus not for the process, methodology, organisation leading to it – keys of technics, but outside the technical object as such – involves a holistic approach of its integral reality (not of its decomposition and re-composition of its "matter" and form) in relation with the maker, the subject. The reason-to-be of the technical object is just its instrumentality for the subject, its beneficial relation with the subject. If this feature of the subject-object relation is dislocated, both the object and the subject change.

### A metaphorical use of "technics"

We start from Kant's use of the word "technics" (*Technik*) in a *metaphorical sense* – actually borrowing the ancient meaning as *art*, ability to putting into effect the creative ideas of making –. In the ancient meaning there are two aspects: one is the creative ideas and the other is the ability to transpose them into practice. The

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the modern "civil sense" and the "natural sense" of human relations. For this understanding, as well as the knowledge of real state of things and the self-reflection on the evolution of his intellectual attitude towards the common people, see *Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen / Remarks on the observations on the feeling of the beautiful and the sublime* (1764-1765), in AA 20: (Handschriftlicher Nachlaß) 24, 39, 40, 41, 44, 48, 102, 151, 153, 176.

Also, Michael Kryluk, "Reflection 6593: Kant's Rousseau and the Vocation of the Human Being", *Kant Studien*, 2023; 114(4): 728–758.

philosophical task Kant gave to himself was to understand the way through which the object is known by the subject, thus knowledge as such. But what does knowledge entail in order to arriving at creative ideas? Well, to know an object means to understand the *internal deployment of its constitutive causality*. Only by knowing the deployment of the internal causality of things can the humans imagine objects and materially transpose them into reality, thus having the capacity of generating/making new objects as nature has<sup>9</sup>.

The approach of the internal causality of objects is called *methodology*, namely, manner to know or survey the elements, steps, and links in the knowledge of the constitution of cause-effect structure of the objects. The humans approach methodologically every object. Just this approach guarantees the knowledge of things and is its sign.

Kant considered that the ability to focus on methodology, on the methodical deciphering of the internal causality of objects is a “technical” ability, that conducts to a direct description of the structure and functioning of an object, and only by having this ability can the humans make intentional objects. The deciphering as such was a technical theoretical perspicacity, while the transposition of such a theoretical ability into practice was a practical aptitude<sup>10</sup>. This model of the human beings as: 1. “*technical*” beings<sup>11</sup> and 2. *creative beings*<sup>12</sup>, was transposed on *nature*. But this transposition was made with the term exclusively related to humans, “*technic*”.

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<sup>9</sup> Kant, 2006b (Anth. AA 07: 198), p. 167, the body is a “machine” that generates and processes “mechanically” movements and affects.

<sup>10</sup> The (1) “*technical-practical reason*” or *instrumental reason* based on a hypothetical imperative and thus, a given empirical goal that imposes a certain action / “(which prescribes means: for the purposes of sense-objects)” (thus it is determination of the will) with (2) the “*theoretical-speculative reason*” that concerns the determination of objects, and here the eternal and necessary objects, and (3) the “*moral-practical reason*” emphasizing the principles of a good human life based on the categorical imperative form the world of ideas subjacent to our knowledge of reality/the world (Kant, 1993 (OP. AA 22: 52), p. 212).

Therefore (*ibidem* (AA 21: 12), p. 220), “Technical-practical reason contains skill and arts. Moral-practical, duties”.

And (*ibidem*, AA 21: 23, and AA 21: 24, p. 227) the “difference between the principles and laws of technical-practical or moral-practical reason”: the first concerns the freedom of a man in the world, the second, God as a *rational concept of freedom*, connecting the manifold with the categorical imperative of a person. (But, (AA 21: 17), p. 223: “There is an object of moral-practical reason which contains the principle of all human duties “as if divine commands,” without it being the case that one may assume, for the sake of this principle, a particular substance existing outside man”).

But these two kinds of reason intertwine.

<sup>11</sup> Because they are rational in a theoretical and practical sense, thus in virtue of their reason to search for and know the causality of things in a methodical manner.

<sup>12</sup> Expanding the reality by generating new objects, just because they transpose into practice their methodological (technical) knowledge.

Kant spoke about the *technic of nature* (Kant, 1987 (KU. AA05: 390-391), p. 271), nature having both *technica naturalis* and *technica intentionalis*) as:

(a) its internal articulation of its elements – thus as an internal “mechanism” with unintentional purpose – and

(b) as a system aiming to purposes, *as if* nature would have been a conscious rational being that knows itself, specifically that it understands its internal causality and deploys this in order to generate and regenerate, to create as an artist does.

Therefore, the metaphor<sup>13</sup> of technic of nature was based on two comparisons: a) (having technical skills) the humans are like nature, they produce; b) nature is like humans, it appears as to having knowledge of its own internal deployment of causality.

### The precise use of “technic”

Everything is – and must be – treated “technically”, namely, scientifically, decomposed and analysed so that to emphasise the constitutive laws of the functioning of every system. Thus, every system has its own technicity, its internal articulation for its duration, and, on the ground of the interest of humans to grasp it, the researchers in different domains developed the *instrumental reason* that is subordinated to the content of knowledge and to the pursuit of the practical purpose of knowing this content, being therefore “artists of reason” (Kant, 1998 (A839/B867), p. 695). Consequently, the sciences in different domains, and even philosophy in its “scholastic meaning” (as sure cognition from things/from ideas<sup>14</sup>) until Kant, aimed only a coherence of their cognition, their “logical perfection of cognition” (Kant, 1998 (A838/B866,) p. 694), thus their technique of “skills for certain arbitrary ends” (Kant, 1998 (A839/B867), p. 695<sup>15</sup>).

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<sup>13</sup> The metaphorical use of technics / technology is based on its literal meaning: as both a *way* of doing (or as rules of procedures) and as a *means* of doing (tools, devices, apparatuses); these aspects are intertwined, but the Greek etymology suggests that technology would be the discourse about technical means, thus including procedures, i.e., a set of precepts about the technical objects and procedures to implement them. This understanding is common in many countries, though the difference is not so harsh nowadays.

<sup>14</sup> This understanding means a twofold amphiboly: that the proof of things is what we do know about them, and that things are the proof of cognition.

<sup>15</sup> Again: Kant was interested to substantiate the sciences and their instrumental reason, and developed the metaphysics as “science” (Kant, 1998 (A841/B 869), p. 695) that mediates every science and every empirical knowledge with its own scientific (thus, technical) approach of “rational cognition”: “from mere concepts” (*ibidem*), that is to say in a *meta* epistemological – transcendental – consideration of the “system of all concepts and principles that are related to objects in general, without assuming objects that would be given” (*ibidem*, A845/B873 p. 698), and relating all cognition “to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*)” (*ibidem*, A839/B867, p. 695), skills for these essential ends.



In contemporary terms, Kant's technics means both:

1) *technique as ability* of reason a) to *disclose* the causality and internal articulation of things / to put order, namely to ordering concepts according to the infinite series of sense and experience data and ordering these series under concepts, and also b) to *make* objects on the basis of scientific ability/technique;

2) "technical" as *internal articulation* of things;

3) *technical as methodology* of scientific/technical knowledge, thus as a *meta* mental level of structuring the cognitive process from the standpoint of its efficiency, thus as an instrument for giving the frame necessary to know something;

4) *technical as feature* of objects;

5) while in a narrow sense, actually literally – *technical objects as man-made or artificial technical objects*<sup>16</sup>.

Concerning *technology*, it reclaims all of these meanings, as an automatic synonym, being nowadays more than its etymological meaning in Beckmann<sup>17</sup> as discourse about technical objects and procedures.

Obviously, my paper cannot consider all these meanings, but only one, chosen here in the frame of the man-made technical objects, thus a kind of 5': *the technical instruments of science*<sup>18</sup>.

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The transcendental level of our understanding and even of the constitution of the consciousness is a level of formal structure: components (concepts, ideas, judgements) and procedures of the formation of knowledge, level whose logical layer is rather an internal one in it.

<sup>16</sup> There is a significant difference between the artificial objects as *purpose/goal* of making, and as *means* of making: both in productive activities and research. Obviously, every artificial object is both purpose and means, but the purpose implies that it is the end of conception and realization, while the means is only an intermediary end.

<sup>17</sup> Kant knew the word technology at least from *Anleitung zur Technologie*, 1777, written by Johann Beckmann (1739-1811) who coined this word as a science of crafts and craftsmanship, as they are included within economy. To have craftsmanship involves knowing the methodology used by crafts, that meaning also the technical objects: tools and the objects of work ("*naturalia*").

<sup>18</sup> The paper draws attention on an aspect related to the most visible aspect of technics and that may help to understand one of the greatest general concerns nowadays.

## Technical objects

For Kant, every object the humans focus on is “technical” – namely, approached from the interest to be known so as to being arranged in their mental scape of cognisance in order to use this knowledge in the everyday life –; or, every object is approached through their internal methodology of the process of knowing: giving a more and more coloured and large “world”<sup>19</sup>.

The technical objects, which are the technically seen objects, are considered both empirically and rationally, with (and from) abstract concepts, that is, they are decomposed and their causes are known, therefore their relations and laws of functioning as they appear to the humans. This way of knowing is /gives the peculiarity of technology as both man-made objects and their methodology of knowing, making, and preserving.

*Methodology* is also a technical object, considered scientifically in Beckmann as “technology”, and without the awareness of technical objects there is no science as a systematic knowledge of the *system of*

1. *upstream*, 2. *fulfilment of knowing and practical application*, 3. *downstream*; neither of the principles of this knowledge and nor of its results. The methodology of crafts integrated within the knowledge of administration (the so-called cameralist

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<sup>19</sup> Already in the Inaugural Dissertation, the “world” is given by our knowledge, but only as reality meaningful for us, not as existence, and is objective: (Kant, 1992, 377 sqq) “the notion of a world should not seem merely arbitrary and made up, as in mathematics, only for the sake of the deducible consequences”; (*ibidem*, 391). “But the world regarded as phenomenon, that is, in respect to the sensibility of the human mind, acknowledges no principle of form but a subjective one, that is, a certain mental law by which it is necessary that all things qualified for being objects of the senses would seem to pertain *necessarily* to the same whole”. And further: “the principle of the form of the sensible world, it will comprise only *actual* things in as far as thought of as possibly falling under sense-perception”. (The translation uses the word “actual” for expressing “real existence”/“existence in fact”, thus not simply existence, that is the ontic basis of the ontological meanings, but existence that is ontologically significant, namely *reality*) (MSI. AA 02: 389 and 398).

For Kant, reality exists as a result of our experience mentally processed with the help of *a priori* elements; connected to this standpoint of knowledge, the phenomenological viewpoint expresses the same ontological-gnoseological description of reality as the meanings people discover following complex judgements. Reality is according to these meanings (information and significances) existing and forming within the mind in the complex process of judging with both empirical and abstract concepts and ideas; and, once formed (transcendentally) these concepts and ideas exist, so they are objective, being criteria of knowledge, thus of reality, and following our experience positioned according to the meanings from a “worldview”/paradigm. See (Kant, 1993 (OP. AA 21: 87), p. 250) – as the last expression of this theory – an experience “presupposes a formal *a priori* principle and a system). Observation and experiment, as an aggregate of perceptions, are far from founding the Hippocratic proposition: There is experience”.

science (Garner, 2017)) was intended for the elite who was to lead the German society in high-ranking posts (Wakefield, 2017). On the one hand, this science of “technology” seemed to have nothing to do with the principles a “true science” aims at and promotes. On the other hand, the systemic outlook was an early<sup>20</sup> notice of the integrative meanings of technology and of the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity in sciences (which could share and transfer particular views and principles) (Hock, 2017).

Therefore, technology had in fact all the five meanings mentioned above.

### The technical instruments of science

For thinkers, the scientific technical instruments were one of the most astonishing and, at the same time, problematic artificial objects: because they allowed the extension of physical and “combinatorial”<sup>21</sup> capability of researchers, although the power of “contemplation”, of thinking was the force of knowledge<sup>22</sup>; they were only *means*, but without which the scientific knowledge could hardly be conceived.

The scientific instruments were compared with the productive machines<sup>23</sup> which were anterior to them, and whose spontaneous practical models<sup>24</sup> generated

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<sup>20</sup> However, already in 1728 Christian Wolff (1679-1754) discussed the words *technica* or (*aut*) *technologia* as a part of practical philosophy – that is, of the “effective science directing the free actions through the most general rules” – as “science of arts and works of arts, or in other words, of the organs of the body, especially of the hands, the works of men they are done” (Wolffio, MDCCXXXV, § 70 and 71, p. 22).

That “or” was the follow-up of the use of these words in Middle Ages and Renaissance focussing on instruments, including on machines, as an art or artifice (*astutia, impostura, frauda*), necessary and existent everywhere in the human affairs (see Carnino et Hilaire-Pérez, 2017, pp. 13-36; but also, Aigner, 2020, 95, quoting Wilfried Seibicke, 1968. *Technik. Versuch einer Geschichte der Wortfamilie um τέχνη in Deutschland vom 16. Jahrhundert bis etwa 1830*. Düsseldorf: VDI Verlag, especially his underline that the Stoic definition of τέχνη as a system of rules became prevalent in the 17<sup>th</sup> century). Also, Maar, 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Leibniz, p. 488: “in the arithmetical instrument, which transfers all the labor of the soul into the wheels”.

<sup>22</sup> Kant, 1998, Preface to the second edition (KrV. B.XXIII), p. 113: “Copernicus assumed (with certainty) at the beginning only as a hypothesis (the central laws of the motion of the heavenly bodies)”.

<sup>23</sup> Leibniz, *ibidem*: “As nor are they easily enunciated, nor immediately understood by any hearer or spectator, whence we have an elegant example in the *weaving machine*, now frequented here and there...”. (I underlined, AB).

Or, it was about the *stocking frame*, discovered in 1589. (See Friedman, 2024).

<sup>24</sup> Leibniz, pp. 488, 489: “it is easier to condense into a body than vapor raised from things by heat; examples of bathrooms they were before their eyes, yet no one of the Greeks and Romans came to mind the spirit to draw out of the wine, although he was a witness”... “From this it can be understood that sometimes people look far away, but do not see what is before their feet”.

in researchers theoretical ideas covering a larger and larger area of things. At the same time, if the instruments were not based on a conscious theoretical thinking, they still were primitive and did not lead to certainty<sup>25</sup>. On the contrary, the principles – through rules – organise the investigated process and systems. Anyway, the scientific technical instruments were integrated in a different type of endeavour: Kant distinguished, though he observed their blurred boundaries, art as free arts<sup>26</sup>.

Kant sketched a frame for the latter analysis of the scientific instruments. He was not original in 1755 (Kant, 2012 (NTH. AA 01: 215-369) by emphasising many times the dependence of development of astronomical knowledge on “periscopes” (*Sehrohre*, AA 01: 253), telescope (*Fernglas*, *Ferngläser*, AA 01: 289, 294), once more mentioning this relation in *Anthropology* (Kant, 2006b (AA 07: 134), § 5, p. 25, and AA 07: 178, p. 78). Telescopes were seen as *sine qua non*, material conditions of confirmation, in their evolution (see 294), of their ability to emphasise new information and to contribute to physic predictions, but with inherent limits in front of theory. The creative initiative (in imagination and theory) belonged to scientists, irrevocably, but nevertheless the scientific instruments started to show their power to reveal reality<sup>27</sup>. And this, because: 1) the knowledge of what the things are (and letting aside that we cannot know really the things as they exist, the things in themselves) cannot anyhow be realised only by senses, and 2) the senses themselves are limited and need their artificial prolongation, the “prosthetics”<sup>28</sup> of technology; 3) however, as prosthetics not only substitutes the missing or damaged organs and senses but also enhances them, so the scientific instruments can show absolutely new unseen/unfelt and un-imagined things<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 491: “we ourselves had above objected to the telescope of a plebeian man unlearned in mathematics being necessary, is not so certain as some think”.

<sup>26</sup> Distinction of “occupation that is agreeable on its own account”, from the crafts, “mercenary art we regard as labor, i.e., as an occupation that on its own account is disagreeable (burdensome) and that attracts us only through its effect (e.g., pay), so that people can be coerced into it” (Kant, 1987 (§ 43, 3) (KU. AA 05: 304), p. 171).

And he discerned between this (social) type of coercion and that internal to every art, including the free ones, called “mechanism” (*ibidem*: “In poetry, for example, it is correctness and richness of language, as well as prosody and meter”, and thinking upon it is transcendental, too.)

(Obviously, Leibniz spoke about the technical scientific instruments – as telescopes and microscopes, 492-493.)

<sup>27</sup> Kant, 1993 (OP. AA 21: 88), p. 251, the barometer as the intermediary of von Humboldt's observation of specific movements in the atmosphere.

<sup>28</sup> Stiegler, 1998: permanently transformed and transforming the human, showing through this transformation the default, the lack of man towards the features fulfilled by technics.

<sup>29</sup> However, first, the scientific instruments are those which help the intellectual activity of mind's memorisation: utensils for writing / drawing (The compass and ruler are not only instruments to measure – as they are described immediately – but first to draw, i.e. to exhibit in forms what our

## Instead of conclusions

Obviously, Kant did not see all the meanings or consequences of technology we experience nowadays. Even manifested as procedures and methodology, and not only as tools materialising them, the instrumental reason substantiating all the tools, devices, instruments and imbued within them was seen as a clear illustration of the power of the human intellect. And even though both the biological systems<sup>30</sup> as a machine and the instruments without which scientific observations could not be made had a novel, special and paradoxical capacity to perform *as if* by themselves<sup>31</sup>, in fact they had not the *autonomous will*<sup>32</sup> that is compulsory for the action to perform, to make.<sup>33</sup> The *model* of the technical instruments of science whose advance

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*a priori* imagination conceive, for example, “the line and the right angle”. We see here a new type of mediation: that between memory and reasoning. Kant did not focus on this, but on the simpler instruments which measure (somehow engraving new signs/ideas in the mind): “compass and ruler” (Immanuel Kant, 1987 (KU. AA05: 198), p. 388).

<sup>30</sup> For instance, the body.

<sup>31</sup> This is the extension of Kant’s functionalism in the understanding of cognition: cognition (actually, consciousness) is a complex of structures (“nerves” and “the brain”) with specific roles which fulfill the reason-to-be of the entire system; and conversely, this entire system shapes the roles of different structures and their interdependence. (Kant called the roles as “principles” and “faculties”). The early modern functionalism was the result of both the development of scientific and philosophical research of determinism and the technological ingeniousness of playing around mechanisms. This functionalism challenged the “spontaneity” of mind, but Kant – forerunning the present science – conceived it as a “phenomenon” that is the result of the processes of cognition; but it is not neutral, because it involves reason, and reason with its moral principles have the power to conduct the “spontaneous” combination and construction of the human comprehension. Differently put, the human being has an autonomous will that can select and judge the hypothetical situations.

<sup>32</sup> This autonomous will, sign of reason in the broad sense of both cognition “*ex datis*” and “*ex principiis*” (Kant, 1998 (A835 / B 863), p. 1172), is thus related to the self-feeling/self-consciousness of the “I.”

The instruments of Kant’s time did not have, obviously, the “I”. But this distinctive feature is still valid today. See Dieter Schönecker, “Kant’s Argument from Moral Feelings: Why Practical Reason Cannot Be Artificial”, in *Kant and Artificial Intelligence*, Edited by Hyeongjoo Kim and Dieter Schönecker, Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2022, 169-188 (p. 185: “To say that a computer feels is like saying that a planet flies just because it moves through space”).

Accordingly, as Kant showed, only the humans are responsible, thus including for the use of instruments. But if the Enlightenment spirit was (at least moderately) optimistic concerning the development of the human responsibility, and the technical instruments of science as beneficial means were the model for all the technical instruments of humans, can this perspective still be consistent, valid? This question, obviously not discussed here, was felt by Kant. For example – and this example is of our highest interest – he spoke about the “diabolical arts” of producing and using “the means” of war (Kant, 2006c, p. 68; Zef, AA 08:347).

<sup>33</sup> Their autonomy is related only to their functions which depended on the human subject who transformed them from potentiality to actuality.

helped and will help the thinkers to deeper viewing the causality of things suggested him that other technical tools would and will lead to similar betterment of the human practice. And concerning J.-J. Rousseau's newly put problem – that the modern improvement of cognisance and technology did not conduct to better morals – Kant emphasised one of the methodological aspects of the *human development-context* dialectic: the hypothetical conjunctures – including the changes in the creation of the objects of civilisation – might well influence the humans, but there is a fundamental basis of their autonomy, just because of the autonomy (spontaneity, freedom) of the human moral-practical reason capable to conceive the categorical imperative<sup>34</sup>. And just because of the human autonomy towards contexts, their behaviour – their cognitive endeavour and practical transposition of their cognition in/through morals – is modelled by rational moral imperatives and is able to transpose them into hypothetical ones and maxims.

However, the instrumental reason proved to be subordinated to contradictory particular (hypothetical) goals. And this situation led Kant to once more: 1) insist on the subordination of the theoretical reason to the practical one, and 2) promote the autonomy of instrumental reason, and of the different realms of instrumental and moral reason, and at the same time the precedence and main determinative role of the moral-practical reason over the instrumental-practical one<sup>35</sup>.

Resulting from his ethical theory transcendently inferred, Kant was an optimist. A moderate one, of course, because, as a result of their life in unpropitious conditions – including from the standpoint of their still exiguous instruments – the human relationships were mostly aggressive and oppressive and people were immersed in their “*self-incurred immaturity*” (Kant, 2006a (WA. AA 8: 35), p. 3), but nevertheless the human beings could transcend this through education: essentially, if they impose to themselves, by the exercise of their reason, their mutual treatment as ends and not only as means; thus, if they substantiate their hypothetical subjective maxims with the universal requirements and features given by their ability to reason beyond the constraints of the empirical<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> “It is not the concept of freedom which founds the categorical imperative but the latter first founds the concept of freedom. Not technical-practical but moral-practical reason contains the principle of God. Likewise, nature in the world does not lead to God (e.g. through its beautiful order) but the reverse”, Kant, 1993, OP. AA 22:60, p. 217.

<sup>35</sup> The practical cognition/reason giving rules which “prescribe action as a means to an effect, which is its purpose”. And although these rules appear as subjective to the subject, as maxims, they are objective, as imperatives, when they hold “for the will of every rational being”, Kant, 2015, Book 1, Chapter 1, Definition (KpV. AA 05:20 and AA 05: 21), pp. 17 and 18.

<sup>36</sup> Kant, 1997 (GMS. AA 4: 388, 389), pp. 1-2.

Consequently, the solution against the social evil was not the technical progress and neither the ability to think and judge from concepts as if this ability would assure the confirmation of man's truth no matter the contents of his judgements. On the contrary, the human gift of thinking transcendently is proven by the moral *telos* of its concrete use.

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NTH Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels / Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens  
FM/Lose Blätter Bemerkungen zu den Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen/Remarks on the observations on the feeling of the beautiful and the sublime  
KrV Kritik der reinen Vernunft / Critique of Pure Reason  
WA Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung? / An Answer to the Question: .What Is Enlightenment  
GMS Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten / Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals  
KpV Kritik der praktischen Vernunft / Critique of Practical Reason  
KU Kritik der Urteilskraft / Critique of Judgment  
ZeF Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf / Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch  
Anth Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht / Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View  
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The *morally acceptable* or *inacceptable* must not result from hypothetical particular interests, and neither from a vulgar meaning of duty – namely, imposed from outside – but only if they (the morally acceptable or inacceptable) do not infringe the internal command of reason, the categorical imperative to never treat the others only as a means. The pressure to accept intellectually what is opposed to the categorical imperative cannot be legitimated by the human reason. On the contrary, only what is morally acceptable from the standpoint of moral reason can be accepted intellectually.

The human conscience is not a constant, obviously, but what gives it coherence in its practical transposition is just and only the “transcendentally” created moral criteria. If these criteria are not applied, moral becomes arbitrary, far away from its reason-to-be highlighted by its Greek etymology.

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# Rethinking Production. A Step Beyond the Hylomorphic and Anthropocentric Approach

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**ABSTRACT.** This research examines three thematic areas: philosophy, education, and ecology. It aims to be an interdisciplinary study, fundamentally based on the importance of the philosophy of environmental education and the practical implications that it can have. The problem of the contemporary *hylomorphic* production approach is first examined and then educational solutions are outlined towards a holistic understanding of the environment and of producing *with it* and not *on it*. By environment, in research, we also mean the human being because this is only one of his many appendages; therefore, as such, we try to relocate him to a non-privileged place (a place where he has been autonomously placed for centuries). It aims to be a militant study towards a different *anti-anthropocene educational approach* that finds its paradigm in the “Green Schools” of Bali, as we will see in the conclusion.

**Keywords:** *Hylomorphism, ontology, environmental education, philosophy of education, ecosophy*

## Introduction

Until a few years ago, authors who dealt with environmental issues, natural philosophy or educational philosophy used to begin their work by trying to convince the reader that the environment was really in crisis and that there really was an environmental issue. Today it is different. The authors who want to define themselves

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as environmentalists or educators to a different approach to nature take it for granted that that environmental issue so reviled and criticized is in front of our eyes and no one can really deny it, everyone more or less tries to do something, even if even more less than more.

In this article we will talk about those who seem to do or have the potential to be able to do something more, not only for the environment, but for the whole environmental issue and this also includes the human because he too lives with and thanks to the nature that hosts him. We will talk about *the Anthropocene*, about *morphogenetic* education in complete antithesis to the classically Western *hylomorphic education* and with which we have soaked in the last two thousand years. We will talk about education: the world needs training, different educational models and different visions of the place that human beings should occupy with respect to the same planet that hosts them. In this regard, it seemed essential to remember authors such as: Ingold, Simondon, Deleuze, Guattari, Naess, Descola. Authors committed to the morphogenetic front and above all eager to break down that Aristotelian dogma according to which nature is available to man, the only being capable of attributing a form to it and to what it offers us. A little further on, it will be a small possibility of getting out of Aristotelian hylomorphic dogma: the possibility for which it is still possible to think of a world in which the environment and the human will no longer be placed in a dichotomous direction, but it is necessary to change the productive approach of the human towards the environment, towards the matter that it grants. Moreover, in philosophy, whether we speak of the philosophy of nature or of the philosophy of education, one can almost never avoid discussing the *relations of production*, the relations between *subject* and *object*. These are key elements, they seem to be almost recurring notes even between different scores. Without these notes, you never really compose a melody, even if it is dissonant.

However, although we are talking about production, the landing place that this article seems to arrive at is that of Green Schools in Bali and that is the real purpose of the paper because, if it is true that we can think beyond the nature-culture dichotomy through a different production approach, it is also true that we cannot think of really implementing it without a healthy school education, to all students. We therefore want to talk about *the ontology of nature*, about a different way of conceiving ourselves in front of it: who are we? What can we do? What are our limits that evidently, by now, we must impose on ourselves, by our very *nature*? These are the questions that we try to answer in this article and we want to do it with one of the most powerful weapons that human beings have always had at their disposal, often unconsciously and often too consciously: education. Education to a different productive, environmental approach will be the keys to reading the following

writing. It is problematized at the beginning, but in the end we want to see in Green Schools the solution, the possibility of awakening that *ecological ego* that, perhaps, can still put the human in its place.

### To know or to appropriate?

«*Est pabulum animorum contemplatio naturae.*<sup>1</sup>»

One day, while in the north of the Peloponnese, Pythagoras had the opportunity to have a learned conversation with the lord of the city of Fliunte, Leontes. To the latter, who was admired by the knowledge and fame of Pythagoras, the mathematician replied that he was not an expert in any discipline, nor worthy of fame, but said that he was a philosopher. To Leontes' question, who on earth were the philosophers and in what way they differed from the rest of the experts, Pythagoras replied by comparing human life to a feast. At a celebration there are many guests and many other games and competitions arranged for guests. In these games, however, some participate in them by competing, others go to sell their goods, still others, the best said Pythagoras, do not seek either applause or profit, but observe carefully only what happens around them and try to understand why.

“So also among us [...] some, a few, do not care at all about everything else, and devote themselves to carefully observing the nature of things: they call themselves lovers of knowledge, that is to say, philosophers”<sup>2</sup>.

This tradition is ancient that sees Pythagoras as the first individual to make use of the term *philosopher*, but from him onwards it is known that the term designated that figure in search of an explanation about what constitutes wonder for the human being. And what more than *φύσις* (*physis*) constituted in antiquity and still constitutes, even today, wonder for the human being? Nothing. Nothing more than *φύσις* constitutes for the philosopher the object of knowledge, of wonder par excellence. And we have seen this with Thales, with Heraclitus and with all Greek antiquity, but not only, also with philosophical modernity<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *Academician*, (1 century B.C.), quoted by L. De Mauri in *Proverbi e motti latini*, edited by Gabriele Nepi and Angelo Paredi, Milan, Noepi, 1990, p. 390.

<sup>2</sup> Cicero, *Tuscolane*, (45 b.C.), in *Cultura e letteratura a Roma, profilo storico e testi*, edited by Maurizio Bettini, Gioachino Guarini, Alessandro Fo, Gianni Guastella, Renato Oniga, Giuseppe Pucci, Firenze, La Nuova Casa Editrice, 1999, V libro, p. 378.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ancient Philosophy: from Ancient Greece to Augustine*, edited by Giuseppe Cambiano, Luca Fonnesu, Massimo Mori, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2018.

In fact, however, this is precisely the problem, the fact that the *φύσις* is the “object” of philosophical inquiry, that it has the *status* of an object. But let’s continue in order.

The term *φύσις* in ancient Greek indicates “a living whole that grows, a whole that moves continuously towards an infinite becoming”. This whole, however, is not a set of “dead things”, but a living whole, that is, a set of living parts that move and grow together with that whole that makes them move. So, it’s not just “something that grows,” but also “something that makes you grow.” In fact, the verb *φύω* (*phyo*) in ancient Greek is an ancipite verb, that means it has both a passive form and an active, transitive form. It means both “to give birth”, but it also means “to be born, to grow”. With the passage of time, this “living whole” has been translated more easily (and rightly, I dare say) with the term *nature* or, better still: *natural world in its processes of generation, development, dissolution* and it is Aristotle who uses it specifically in this sense<sup>4</sup>.

“It is because of the wonder aroused by the natural world that men, both at the beginning of time and now, have begun to practice philosophy [...]”<sup>5</sup>.

So, human beings, amazed by the silent darkness of the starry nights, the warm rising of the sun, as well as the development and growth of plants and animals, began to investigate what was the engine of all this and investigating the functioning of what they rightly called *nature*, they ended up appropriating it. In short, remembering the example of Pythagoras in Fliunte, the guest at the party who did not care about selling goods, nor playing games, the one who only cared about investigating the reason for the ceremony, ended up taking possession of the ceremony and all the guests! The philosopher who tried to investigate what aroused wonder concluded his investigations by appropriating wonder itself. And this “misappropriation” of nature by human being has always been justified by ancient and modern philosophers<sup>6</sup> and especially by Aristotle. The Stagyrte does not limit himself only to creating a hierarchy of beings and dividing them according to the functions of their soul into nutritive, sensitive and intellectual,<sup>7</sup> but also affirms that the only intellectual beings are human beings and that as such, since

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. it., *Metaphysics*, Greek and Latin translation opposite, edited by Giovanni Reale, Milan, Giunti Editore, 2022, book I, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris, (2005), trans. it. *Oltre natura e cultura*, edited by Nadia Breda, Milan, Raffaello Cotina Editore, 2021, p. 133-137 and p. 321-340.

<sup>7</sup> Aristotele, *De Anima*, trans. it. edited by Giancarlo Movia, Latin text opposite, Milan, Giunti Editore, 2021.

they are endowed with superior intelligence (not only sensitive), they are “masters of nature, by nature”<sup>8</sup>.

The question that arises spontaneously is the following: why did Aristotle and with him a long group of philosophers have to believe that the true place of human being is to stand above nature and appropriate it? Why believe that plants, animals, the world “it is for human being that nature made them”?<sup>9</sup> Perhaps, this “humanism” has been and still is one of the greatest evils of the world<sup>10</sup>.

Human beings, in short, according to science and according to the very concept of *φύσις*, are a natural species, yet human beings seem to mean transcending this belonging. Seeing everything that surrounds us as our rightful property, always and forever. It seems that we can aspire to the truth of this world only through a kind of justified emancipation that distances us from it, making us strangers to ourselves, without a real place of belonging, or more simply, ignoring it.

The Aristotelian hylomorphic paradigm has done nothing but increase this presumed and justified detachment of the human from the natural world. What the concept of ilomorphism expresses is on closer inspection a relationship of subordination: from the Greek *ὑλη* (*hyle*), that means *matter* and *μορφή* (*morphé*), that means *form*, in union with each other indicate a relationship between matter and form. However, ever since Aristotle gave rise to the term, this is a relationship of subalternity<sup>11</sup>. If it is true that it is the soul that gives shape to the body, as Aristotle says<sup>12</sup>, it is logically true that only an animate being (and therefore endowed with an intellectual soul) can give form to a body, to a set of matter, and this human being, aware of this, finds himself justified in attributing forms to a nature that he sees as a set of matter to be “informed”. One perceives the idea of nature as a mass of inert matter, a shapeless heap of matter that without the intervention, the superior human intellect, cannot take form, does not even possess it. And that is why human intervention on it is always justified. Therefore, the human being, the only “natural” species endowed with intellect, can decide the destiny of all the others and must become master of all that *φύσις* that also hosts and has generated him. And Stagirita himself confirms it, over and over again.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. it. *Politics*, edited by Renato Laurenti, Bari, Laterza, 2019, Book I, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> For a careful and precise critique of the concept of “totalitarian humanism” I invite the reader to a broadly philosophical reading cf. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et infini: essai sur l'extériorité*, (1971), trans. it., *Totalità e infinito: saggio sull'esteriorità*, edited by Silvano Petrosino, Milan, Editoriale Jaca Book, 1980. With particular reference to the essay *Metaphysics and Transcendence*, *ibid.*, p. 31-50.

<sup>11</sup> For further information, see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Italian translation, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Greek and Latin translation opposite, edited by Claudio Mazzarelli, Milan, Giunti Editore, 2022, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima*, *op. cit.*

“The soul dominates the body as the authority of the master dominates the slave<sup>13</sup>, the intelligence dominates the appetite as the authority of the king dominates the subjects [...]. Now the same relations exist between men and other animals: domestic animals are by nature better than wild animals, but it is still beneficial for all of them to be subject to man, because in this way they have their security”<sup>14</sup>.

For a good part of Western philosophy<sup>15</sup>, it is as if human were responsible, owner, almost the undisputed god of all nature, as well as of all the plant and animal species that live in it. It is obvious that such a thought can only lead man to have an image of himself as an “informer”, “informing agent” of a nature at his disposal, seen as a mass of things, objects not only to be appropriated, but moved, formed, and whose fate to be decided at will. It is this hylomorphic thinking that has led man to consider it not so wrong to uproot 400,000 square km of Amazon rainforest, and 4000 square km in 2023 alone<sup>16</sup>. Let us say it more clearly: the ilomorphism and the culture that has perpetuated it up to today have led us here, to where we are today; To all this we add law, ontology, war and ethics (valid only for humans), and everything is ready<sup>17</sup>. The drawing is finished: it is in front of us just waiting to be interpreted.

Whenever we read that in producing artifacts the artificer impresses forms conceived in his mind on the material world, there, in those lines, the hylomorphism is at work. What can be done to go beyond ilomorphism? Is it possible to unhinge such an imposing paradigm? Is there really a solution, a cure for this protagonism that man has soaked up for millennia to the detriment of nature that has welcomed and generated him? Surely, no one can have a science infused in their pocket, yet in a small way, each of us can think and then act differently. The purpose that academic studies could set from these bases can be to rethink production, the productive act; see it as a process of mutual growth with the materials offered by nature, and no longer as an “informational act” of an external human agent on an inert nature that belongs to it. This means that, in the educational field as well as in

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<sup>13</sup> For a dutiful critique of the concept of slavery and its justification by Aristotle, I refer to E. Berti, *Il pensiero politico di Aristotele*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. P. Descola, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed analysis, see Andrea Porciello, *Philosophy of the Environment: Ontology, Ethics and Law*, Rome, Carocci Editore, 2023. see also <https://www.wwf.it/pandanews/ambiente/emergenze/amazonia-deforestazione-record/>.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Simondon G., *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de formes et d'information*, Jérôme Millon, Paris, 2005, trans. it., *L'individuation in the light of the notions of form and information*, edited by Jaques Garelli, Milan, Mimesis Edizioni, 2020. The philosopher Simondon carries out a real crusade, in this work, against ilomorphism and the evils it has entailed.

the philosophical one, the meaning of creator should be designated again: this figure could be presented from the beginning of the production process as a participant, one of many, within an ecosystem made up of active, living matter, nature that is not inert, but alive. In short, we should propose to go beyond the hylomorphic approach: to teach again how to find our space in nature<sup>18</sup>.

### Co-production and morphogenesis: a different approach

*«Naturae rerum vis atque maiestas in omnibus momentis fide caret, si quis modo partes eius ac non totam complectatur animo»<sup>19</sup>.*

What is our role in the productive act? When we produce something, what role do we play in relation to matter and the environment? From the very beginning, for any production, you can discover how recalcitrant the nature of each material is. Let's take wicker as a reference, an expensive and supportive example thanks to Tim Ingold<sup>20</sup>. If we wanted to build a wicker basket, where should we start? From a mental scheme that prefigures a shape to be imprinted on the wicker? Yet, wicker is never inside a precise shape. Because? Because it is not only the material that never fits into a mental scheme, because other forces come into play during the act of production and they are all forces that contribute to production as much as the one we call the human creator contributes to it. Try to build a wicker basket outdoors: the wind will contribute to the production of the final shape, together with the type of wicker used, together with the hand that is using it and also together with the contingencies that arise gradually during the work. Here the problem arises: who is the real architect of the final form? The wind or the human being or the intrinsic recalcitrant characteristics of wicker? Everyone and no one in particular, we could answer.

Every form emerges through movement; every form is the result of growth, of an interaction between the dynamic properties of materials and of informing agents. The final form can never be the same as the one imagined by the creator in his mind, but it will always be different because the properties that the material assumes depending on the environmental (and therefore also climatic) context in

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<sup>18</sup> In this regard, a systematic study was carried out by Tim Ingold. Cf. Ingold T., *Correspondences*, Polity, London, 2020, trans. it., *Correspondences*, edited by Nicola Perullo, Milan, Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, (I century B.C.), quoted by L. De Mauri, *Proverbi e motti latini*, edited by Gabriele Nepi and Anglo Paredi, Milan, Hoepli, 1990, p. 391.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archeology, Art and Architecture*, London, Routledge, 2013.



which it is placed, are infinite, ineffable<sup>21</sup>. That production of form through that material is given with the material, with its resistance to our imposing hand, with its resilience or not to the wind that makes it oscillate: all this greatly reduces the role of the human creator in the production process. Materials are not dead matter, formless before the human “informing” hand, but they are what the human finds himself working with, “colleagues” with whom the creator joins forces towards the co-production of a form already potentially emerging or present in the ineffable formative possibilities of matter.

Instead of standing aside, imposing his preconceived forms on a world that is always ready and waiting to receive them (as the hylomorphic model dictates), the most the creator can do is to intervene with his forces in the material-productive processes already underway and give life to productions *together with* them: *the attribution of a form is an act of growth together with the material with which one works*, not the realization of a preconceived idea of the human mind.

It can be seen how, during the twentieth century, the concept of “information” was radically revolutionized by one of the greatest exponents of the philosophy of technology such as Gilbert Simondon. In Simondon’s work: *L’individuation à la lumière des notions de formes et d’information*, the philosopher eradicates the hylomorphic assumption criticized above, wants to overcome that rampant Anthropocene in the consideration of the natural world and lay the foundations for a new assumption of the individual: the human being as a network of relationships within nature, not an external agent that possesses and exploits it.

Traditionally, the work is considered a radical attempt to subvert the concept of the individual, but due to the extent of its novelties it could also be admitted as a starting point for a new consideration of the role of the human being in the morphogenetic act; especially since it is always a question of reconsidering the role of the human agent in the natural world. In fact, Simondon explains well:

“Being is never one, it is always more than one [...] and it is richer in coherence with itself, it exceeds its limits, it is metastable, expanding starting from itself; it is restrained, tense, superimposed on itself. But being is not reduced to what it is. It is thickened in itself, empowered. It exists as a being but also as energy”<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Even in the world of architecture this thought around the ineffability and infinity of materials takes hold. In this regard, see. Zumthor P., *Atmosphären: Architektonische Umgebungen - Die Dinge, die uns umgeben*, Birkhauser, Basel, 2006, trans. it., *Atmosfera: Ambienti architettonici. Le cose che ci circondano*, Milan, Electa, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> G. Simondon, *L’Individuation psychique et collective*, (1989), trans. it. *L’individuazione psichica e collettiva*, edited by P. Virno, Rome, DeriveApprodi, 2001, p. 219.

The human being is not or never is what he was, nor what he thinks he is. He is a constant process of individuation, a living processuality as is the nature that hosts him. How could a living process create something firm, fixed, immutable that previously lived in his mind in the form of an idea and that he now wants to statically fix in the material world? How can a being who is never really stable create something stable? The hylomorphic model is already in crisis and seems to be tottering towards the abyss.

The greatness of Simondon present here, that is, that of revolutionizing the concept of the individual, we can see, brings a trail of radical transformations everywhere. It succeeds in subverting, upsetting everything that the previous idea of the individual entailed: it eradicates the hylomorphic model, lays the foundations, it seems, for a new interpretation of the productive act, puts the human being in its place as one of the many species existing in nature. Among other things, by introducing the notion of *metastability*, it is now possible to clearly review what was said about, when we spoke of production with matter and the environment and not on matter and the environment<sup>23</sup>.

By metastable, the philosopher means a system that is constantly evolving and susceptible to continuous transformation. This balance is not stable, but metastable, that is, characterized by internal potentialities that can be activated at any moment and capable of transforming the entire system<sup>24</sup>. This system can perfectly match the natural world, with nature, so much so that nature, the environment, for Simondon is metastable, namely:

“[...] a charge of unexpressed potential, within which the subject lives<sup>25</sup>.”

These potentials then all contribute during any process of formation of a form (information) and during any productive act, exactly as in the example of wicker. Production is therefore not a fixed act, as the hylomorphic model dictates, but it is an act of generating a form between co-producers present in the same environment. The production that can be glimpsed now is not a rigid fixation of mental schemes on the material world, but a procession, a processual act constantly in progress depending on the properties of materials, climate, environmental contingencies, and ultimately, also on the hand of the human being. Seeing production as a structuring process between co-producers belonging to the same environment as well as to the same nature, this seems to be what Simondon's philosophy can lead us to.

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<sup>23</sup> See in this article, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de formes et d'information*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

Let's not forget the role we have: this seems to be the Simononian warning on which the concept of "*pre-individual background*"<sup>26</sup> focuses.

"The pre-individual is individuation itself as a reality that hosts and precedes individuals and at the same time continues to exist as a reality full of potentials, *the milieu* to which the individual belongs"<sup>27</sup>.

So, what does he seem to mean by this term *pre-individual*? A space, a natural space, a background, a nature that pre-exists man and that continues to exist even without him as nature or space full of unexpressed potential, of which the human being is one of the many powers; as a space charged with metastability. It is very interesting to note how Simondon himself knows the scope of his statements and relocates man to "his place" in the world of nature: one of the many species that participate in the creation of structures, productions, but not the only species that can and must be able to do everything. Total subversion of the hylomorphic assumption that not only saw the human agent as a fundamental and ultimate principle in the creation and production of any nature, but also as the alpha and omega of the globe.

The human being thus designated seems to be nothing but a healthy bearer of change, of transformation in a world that in any case, already on its own, on its own, changes continuously. His creations are not even totally his, because his are not the properties with which natural materials respond during the act of production and his are not the environmental contingencies that allow that matter-flow to take on a certain form. His are only the hands that assist the matter-flux to assume a certain form together with all the other agents or co-producers.

The creation of an object, whatever it may be, is a process of morphogenesis in which the form is constantly emerging rather than given in advance in the mind of the human agent alone. Having thus posed the question, matter is not a passive receptor of form, but its essence lies in its ability to take shape according to its possibilities (potentiality of the material) and according to the hand, as well as the environment, which is deforming it. In any context (remembering that *metastability* is the constant of every environment), that matter is a matter-flow that the human agent, together with all the co-producers who are part of that context, can only follow the multiple forms that it will take from time to time. Only by taking up this concept of matter-flow, can the human being resume his place within the natural system. In fact, two other philosophers who agreed with Simondon's thought and

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

supported him for the crusade against the hylomorphic model, such as Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, wrote lines about the artisans and workers who “produced” forms.

“The artisans and workers do nothing but follow the material flow during production; they are therefore nomads, travelers whose task is to introduce themselves into the gears of the becoming of the world to bend them to a purpose that is not even fixed, but constantly evolving. Theirs is a production already in progress”<sup>28</sup>.

These last two philosophers also seem to put the human agent back in its place in the natural world, a place that it had long since abandoned, on behalf of the hylomorphic model, to rise above that *pre-individual context* that is nature. One could also take their quotation as an invitation, an invitation to take back the space that belongs to us during the act of production, an invitation to go beyond the Anthropocene with which the production process is also imbued. The example of metallurgy of the two philosophers seems to be perfectly in agreement with the conception of both matter as matter-flow, and of production as a morphogenetic act between co-producers, and not as a hylomorphic one.

“In metallurgy, the blacksmith must periodically bring the iron back to the fire. The mutation of the material encroaches on the process of formation and no doubt continues even after it, since it is only after forging that the iron is finally hardened. In metallurgy, on the other hand, operations continue to straddle the thresholds, so that an energetic materiality goes beyond the prepared material and a qualitative deformation or transformation exceeds the form. [...]. Never have matter and form appeared more rigid than in metallurgy”<sup>29</sup>.

With this example, what can we say that we have in front of us, if not a production, a productive act that looks more like a *dance* between human and non-human co-producers and intrinsic properties of materials? Somehow even gold flows and the blacksmith must follow it as far as it can reach. It is up to us to be co-producers together with the material and the environmental contingencies of the form that it will change; we just have to listen to what the matter-flow has to tell us and therefore we must follow the material, correspond with it have a morphogenetic and not a hylomorphic approach, this must now be clear. At its core, it is the desire

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<sup>28</sup> Deleuze G., Guattari F., *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, Minuit, Paris, 1980, trad. it., *Mille Piani: capitalismo e schizofrenia*, a cura di Paolo Vignola, Napoli, Orthotes Editrice, 2017, p. 599.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 520-521.

of every craftsman and blacksmith to see what the material has to say, what it can do, to see life in its properties and to collaborate with them. Following Ingold's supreme teaching in this field, one must not only see the act as morphogenetic, but "one must read production longitudinally rather than transversely"<sup>30</sup>. One can, with good reason, see the world escaping from this statement: the idea that the human being as a co-producing agent takes his place in nature can be read as one of the many species that contribute to giving shape to the world, and not the only one to have the right to it. One can glimpse in this sentence the rupture of the hylomorphic hierarchy previously imposed by the previous vision of the productive act. One can even come to the thought that in that "longitudinally" used by Ingold there is the desire to place oneself within a horizontal scheme of which to return to be part before human protagonism continues to take over.

### **A new ontological and morphogenetic paradigm: *Green Schools***

*"The Green School stands on steep slopes, so that the architecture, rather than appearing separate from the context, is part of it."<sup>31</sup>*

What we need, at this point, seems to be a new "ontology" within which to place ourselves. In fact, from the Greek *ὄν* (*to be*) and *-λογία* (*study, discourse*) this word designates the study of being; the study of what characterizes being as being and which studies what its irreducible properties are. What better than "life" can irreducibly characterize being? And what is nature if not life? What is nature if not life as well as the set of lives that it hosts? So, shouldn't we extend this "being-life" to the nature that welcomes us, as Naess advises us<sup>32</sup>? This seems to be the task of a new ontology, that of extending the property of being to what we have so far mistreated and reduced to mere objectification. Towards a new anti-anthropocentric ontology: this is the warning of the present. We do not need to extend traditional ethics to the environment in order to recognize natural matter its infinite properties, and we do not even need traditional ethics extended to the environment in order to recognize nature's right to live independently of us human beings, as Bartolomei

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<sup>30</sup> Tim Ingold, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> Caroline James, *The Green School: Deep in the Balinese jungle, a bamboo school complex becomes the place to train new generations of sustainability leaders*, (2010), in <https://www.domusweb.it/it/architettura/2010/12/13/la-green-school.html>.

<sup>32</sup> A. Naess, *Økologi, samfunn og livsstil*, (1971), trans. it. *Ecosofia*, edited by A. Airoidi, G. Salio, Como, Red Edizioni, 1994.

thinks<sup>33</sup>. It seems that we really need a new ontology within which to place our human being, without forgetting that this “humanity” is also part of a great being that contains all multiple lives: nature.

It would not be correct, at this point, not to mention the first to try to relocate the human being in an ontological dimension reduced to his expectations, namely Darwin.

“Let us remember that almost every species, even in its own area, would increase greatly in number, if it were not for the other species with which it competes. Almost all of them either prey or are prey to others. Every organic being is directly related to other living beings in the most obvious way, since it can be seen that the density of a species in any region does not depend on physical conditions that change imperceptibly over time, but to a large extent thanks to the presence of other species from which they subsist or from which they are eliminated or with which they come into competition”<sup>34</sup>.

Right here, in the front line, the supporting pillar of evolutionism seems to deny both the presumed divine origin of mankind and its arrogant anthropocentrism. Human beings, like other natural species, are just one of many life forms that compete with each other for better adaptation to the environment. It would seem that, although in embryonic form, Darwin presents the idea of nature as an immense ecosystem, life but a set of lives, a set of reciprocal relationships, the key idea of the most advanced ecologism, given that:

“[...] by ecology is meant the entire science of the relations of the organism with the environment, including, in a broader sense, all the conditions of existence that it provides”<sup>35</sup>.

Why, then, should we think that man has a presumed right of ownership, almost divine, over all nature and of all nature? Why think that being is a mere property of the human being, of man? Why think that works are only the creations of a human being and that only man creates from the top of his mental schemes, with which

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Bartolomei, *Environmental Ethics as a New Frontier of Contemporary Ethical Thought*, edited by P. Donatelli, Florence, Le Lettere, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> C. Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, (1859). *On the origin of species by natural selection, or conservation of perfected breeds for the struggle for existence*, edited by A. Barion, Sesto San Giovanni, Edizioni popolari, 2004.

<sup>35</sup> E. Haeckel, *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, (1868), trans. it. *History of Natural Creation*, Sesto San Giovanni, Mimesis, 2024, p. 286-287.

he imprints forms on an inert matter? Why not downsize the role of the human being? Why not rethink production, the hylomorphic production paradigm?

It is precisely to all these questions that the enormous work of the Green Schools in Bali seems to answer. In them, and thanks to them, the ecological ego of the human being is born in children and young people, in students in some way almost spontaneously. Education to interact with the natural environment through a natural place where one learns awakens the ecological *ego* of the individual<sup>36</sup>, the one that belongs to all of us, but which with the hylomorphic culture has too often been forgotten, rising to the masters of that environment that hosts us. These schools awaken a different ontology in which the human being is connected to the great being that hosts everyone, that is, always nature.

As is well known, in 2007 Cynthia Hardy and John Hardy founded, together with capable architects and educators, the so-called “Green School”<sup>37</sup>. Meanwhile, what was the intent? Following the research and literature on experiential learning, experimented and studied by Rudolf Steiner<sup>38</sup>, the “Green Schools” immediately stopped the thought that study, teaching should be carried out within the four walls deaf and closed to nature, a classic Western model. Knowing the Aristotelian peripatetic method extensively, this truly green educational model demonstrates how a constant interaction between the place of learning and the natural place is the basis of a different ontological paradigm, the one we have discussed above; is the basis for a different placement of the human being in relation to nature and production with it and not on it. This educational model is based on a different ontology, what we have talked about so far and what it seems that the generations to come and we with them really need.

This example of green schools, apparently so far from what was previously discussed, is actually extremely close. Because? Because, if you want to have even the intention or the idea of changing any approach to production, to production with and not on the environment, you must always start with education. The education of the human being, of otherness, to an integrated approach with nature, in nature and for it, which also means for ourselves, parts of a gigantic ecosystem of which we can never be masters. Contrary to what the hylomorphic paradigm teaches.

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<sup>36</sup> For example, look at what Andrea Porciello, *op. cit.*, p. 11-23, says about it.

<sup>37</sup> Per un ulteriore approfondimento sulla nascita storica delle green school *cfr.* Cynthia Uline, Lisa Kensler, *A Practical Guide to Leading Green Schools: Partnering with Nature to Create Vibrant, Flourishing, Sustainable Schools*, London, Routledge, 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Erziehungskunst. Seminarbesprechungen und Lehrplanvorträge*, (1919), cited and studied by Robyn Brown, *The Vital Processes. Seven steps on the way to learning*, Milan, Daelli Editore, 2020.

One of the many disciplines taught in these green schools is the so-called “bamboo carving”<sup>39</sup>. Students are taught how to carve bamboo not as if it were a tool from which to make money, not as if it were a shapeless material to which to attribute, from the height of human culture, a form that did not previously exist in the potential of matter. The precept of the morphogenetic approach is taught! Listening to the material, the possibilities it has to offer and together with it carving a shape that corresponds to the place and the properties of that matter-flow<sup>40</sup>. This is the warning, so much so that the discipline of “bamboo carving” is included in the broader disciplinary area called “environmental sustainability of the community”<sup>41</sup>. It is as if the ontological basis in which these students operate was overturned to the point of seeing in the material they work not a mere object that nature gives them because they are human beings endowed with superior intelligence (classic Western vision), but an extension of nature itself. They seem to be able to see in it the extension (one of many) of the enormous being of nature; an appendage that shapes itself and that also shapes them, a companion with whom you work and from whom you learn its properties. Not surprisingly, a phrase that educators often repeat to their students during that discipline is: “Listen to the bamboo!”<sup>42</sup>.

Eco-sustainability, morphogenetic approach, eco-entrepreneurship are not ways of being or doing, but in Green Schools they are parts of the individual, of what could also be defined as a new individual: an eco-human.

Another subject of study of the Green School that needs to be mentioned for the following discussion is “eco art”, that is an artistic form, both pictorial and sculptural and architectural, in which the materials and pigments of nature are used for nature. There is no color that can harm the environment, but a color that boys and girls use with their surroundings and thanks to it. Somehow, they seem to become alchemists and not just artists – their role is to create natural pigmentation with nature. It is not only the pigmentations that mix, but the gestures of the students together with them, the use of water as a reagent: you never have one color the same as another. There are no pre-packaged colors, classic hylomorphic model, but alchemical creations with nature. This mixing of theirs is intertwined like the gazes of lovers, mediation and transduction (a term that brings us back to Simondon<sup>43</sup>); they create a form (color) that follows the possibilities given by those pigmentations, by that environment. Nothing is out of place, nothing really seems to follow the classic Western dichotomous model: nature or artifice. Everything is

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>40</sup> For further information on the didactic-disciplinary subjects taught, see the school’s own website: <https://www.greenschool.org/bali/programme/specialist-subjects/>.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>42</sup> Cynthia Uline, Lisa Kensler, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>43</sup> *Cfr.* G. Simondon, *op. cit.*, p. 14.



nature, one could say, but everything is also human. It would almost seem to be placed in an animistic environment in which everything seems to have something human and everything that has humanity seems to have something natural: in short, there is a total mixture between human-matter-environment. Everything is in perfect connection.

Another fascinating discipline, which seems to report all the objectives that ecologists and natural philosophers have and follow, is the one called: “art of parrying in public”.

Although it is a term usually used to designate classic oratory, the students of the Green Schools present to the public (an audience made up of their colleagues, teachers and educators) their ideas, their projects, sometimes even quite interesting models on articulated subjects such as bioarchitecture and biomimicry<sup>44</sup> to then make it the center of their activity. This discipline is part of the GreenStone project and allows, especially educators, to be able to evaluate and see the skills acquired by their students. In fact, the project is structured as if it were a TED talk in which the subjects stage their ideas, their life and career projects, trying to argue to the public the reason for the importance of the environment as well as the different approaches, especially towards production, for an *eco-sustainable*<sup>45</sup> future. In fact, they act on the scene as if they were real established green leaders who try to explain the reasons for the need to change some Western paradigms related to production and the place that man must occupy in the environment, in nature. They seem to explain to the public a possible new ontological model; They seem to tell us everything we are trying to go to and explain.

We can still see the entrance to the Green Schools, but also their learning spaces. Everything, or almost everything, is created through bamboo wood so much so that the school does not even look like the usual human artifice. A study recently noted that such a learning space can be defined as “ADHD friendly”<sup>46</sup>. This is also

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<sup>44</sup> On these two topics, a guy has designed interesting ideas that have then been published on the net, and are found together with other projects so called “green”. On the basis of the example cited above, v. Sevan-Fidel Reznicek, *Wildlife preservation and biophilic architecture*, GreenstoneProject, 2023, in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51BffkgsUAE&list=PLLo3UtBdmnUnUr1AYfJd5VvJzrCEVnK0u&index=3>.

<sup>45</sup> As for the term *eco-sustainable*, it can be said with good reason that it is a word that is far too delayed. In reality, it is not even a word that now has any positive meaning since it has been widely used by the so-called “green economy” which, as Porciello tells us, have very little about “green”. One could use, as a substitute for it: *eco-humanity* or *ontology of nature*, both used by Porciello. Cf. Andrea Porciello, *op. cit.*, p. 13-14.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Marian Hazzard and Ed Hazzard with Sheryl Erickson, *The Green School Effect: An Exploration of the Influence of Place, Space and Environment on Teaching and Learning at Green School, Bali, Indonesia*, Inziativa Power of place, Midhurst, Really Regenerative Centre, 2011.

very interesting, because it seems to tell us that studying in a natural environment that is not devoid of noise, but rather noisy, resounding, not only eliminates the now meaningless equation silence in the classroom = learning and stimulates a different *ontological approach* to nature, but also stimulates, paradoxically, the concentration of students with greater problems of attention and discipline. In short, learning with and in nature is a sort of medicine for learning as well.

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## Wonder, Wandering, Mystery: Ricoeur on Sexuality and Eroticism – With a Brief Comparison to Marion and Levinas

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**ABSTRACT.** In this paper, we aim to introduce and analyze a lesser-known text by Paul Ricoeur, “La merveille, l’errance, l’énigme”, which was originally written as an introduction to the November 1960 issue of the journal *Esprit*, dedicated to the theme of sexuality. Along the two paths of sexuality—tenderness and eroticism—what becomes evident is that sexuality, fundamentally, proves impenetrable to reflection and remains inaccessible to human dominance.

After presenting Ricoeur’s reflections on sexuality and eroticism, this paper will also briefly compare his views with those of Jean-Luc Marion and Emmanuel Levinas, highlighting the distinctive contributions of these philosophers in relation to the themes of love, eroticism, and the self-other dynamic.

**Keywords:** *sexuality, eroticism, love, tenderness, mystery, Eros, marriage, erotic reduction, Ricoeur, Marion, Levinas*

This text was later included in subsequent editions of the essay and study collection *Histoire et vérité/History and Truth* (Third Edition. Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1975, pp. 198–209. This text was not included in the first edition of the volume, published in 1955.), a volume comprised of writings prompted by various events – discussions in working groups, colloquia, notable anniversaries, and conferences. Despite their varied origins, the texts in this collection are closely related in their themes and rhythm, demonstrating a coherent unity.

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volume, published in 1955.), a volume comprised of writings prompted by various events –discussions in working groups, colloquia, notable anniversaries, and conferences. Despite their varied origins, the texts in this collection are closely related in their themes and rhythm, demonstrating a coherent unity.

After presenting Ricoeur’s reflections on sexuality and eroticism, this paper will also briefly compare his views with those of Jean-Luc Marion and Emmanuel Levinas, highlighting the distinctive contributions of these philosophers in relation to the themes of love, eroticism, and the self-other dynamic.

Let me first say a few words about the Ricoeur’s collection. The essays in *History and Truth* are organized around two central poles: a methodological pole and an ethical one (in the broadest sense of the word). The first section (*Truth in the Understanding of History*) contains studies dedicated by the author to the significance of historical action. These essays are arranged in such a way that they move from an examination of the historian’s craft in its strictest sense, with its demand for objectivity, to the philosophical-theological problem of history’s full or ultimate meaning. The essays in the second section are grouped under what Ricoeur calls a critique of civilization. In these writings, he seeks to revisit certain civilizational impulses of our time through reflection, with all of these texts oriented toward a political pedagogy (in the sense elaborated in the pages dedicated to Emmanuel Mounier). Ricoeur rejects the opposition, introduced by Marx, between contemplative thought and transformative praxis. Nothing could be more foreign to the ‘style’ of these essays, Ricoeur writes, than the so-called dichotomy between committed and non-committed thought. Each of these writings, both individually and collectively, aims to testify to the futility of such a dispute.

(In various ways, these texts assert that the emergence of contemplative thought – whether in the form of Parmenides, Plato, or Neoplatonism, to take an extreme example – has transformed the world. By negating sensory appearances and manipulations, this mode of thought has provided us with Euclidean mathematics, followed by mathematical physics, and, through the mediation of measurements and calculations, the world of machines and technical civilization.)

The unity of rhythm, to which we previously alluded, is made quite explicit in the essay “Work and Word”. There, Ricoeur explores the alternation of contact and distance within the act of articulation – a dynamic that is always present in the responsible behavior of an “intellectual” when confronted with a problem. According to Ricoeur, this is why the more methodologically oriented reflections found in the first three essays are inseparable from the ethical-political approach to human relations that emerges in the second part of the collection. (...) “I believe in the efficacy of reflection, because I believe that human greatness lies **in the dialectic of work and**

**word**” (p. 15.), Ricoeur asserts. To speak and to act, to signify and to perform – these are so deeply intertwined that it is impossible to establish a lasting and profound opposition between *theoria* and *praxis*.

The first part of the collection, titled *Truth in the Understanding of History*, comprises two chapters. The first chapter, *Critical Perspectives*, includes the following studies: “Objectivity and Subjectivity in History”, “The Unity of the History of Philosophy and Truth”, “A Note on the History of Philosophy and the Sociology of Knowledge”, and “The History of Philosophy and Historicity”. The second chapter, *Theological Perspectives*, contains the essays “Christianity and the Meaning of History”, “The Companion, Friend, and Neighbor”, and “The Image of God and the Human Epic”. The second part, titled *Truth in Historical Action*, is composed of four chapters. The first chapter, *Personalism*, focuses on Emmanuel Mounier’s philosophy. The second chapter, *Speech and Praxis*, includes essays such as “Truth and Falsehood”, “A Note on the Dream and Task of Unity”, “Sexuality, Wonder, Wandering, Enigma”, and “Work and Word”. The third chapter, *The Problem of Power*, features writings on “The Nonviolent Person and Their Presence in History”, “The State and Violence”, “The Political Paradox”, “Universal Civilization and National Cultures”, and “Economic Forecasting and Ethical Choice”. The fourth chapter, *The Power of Affirmation*, contains “True and False Anxiety”, and “Negativity and Fundamental Affirmation”.

Let us return to the theme of sexuality, which is addressed in the second chapter of the second part (*Speech and Praxis*) and, as noted earlier, was originally written as an introduction to an issue of *Esprit*. One might ask why *Esprit* dedicated an issue to sexuality rather than to love or affection. Isn’t love the more encompassing term, the uplifting pole, the spiritual motivator? Certainly. However, for the editors, nothing was more desirable than to move the reader beyond the conventional mystical and lyrical shadows. Instead of a hymn of praise dedicated to love, they preferred an examination of sexuality that did not evade any of the difficulties that render human existence *problematic* as a sexual existence. The difference between the sexes intersects humanity differently from distinctions such as those between species, social classes, or intellectual categories. The editors of the issue thus gave voice to scholars, philosophers, literary critics, and ordinary people alike, including questionnaires and responses. As for Ricoeur, in the introduction to this collective work, he attempted to reveal the most evident aspects of our wonder before the mystery of sex, as he himself expresses it.

The order that Ricoeur follows is not the somewhat didactic sequence used in the issue, which progresses from a global perspective on the problem (Part I) through external, scientific, and objective knowledge of sex (Part II), to ethical issues (Part III), then modes of expression (Part IV), and ultimately concludes with concrete

practices (Part V). Instead, Ricoeur adopts a highly subjective order: he begins with what he perceives as a *wonder*, then moves to what he considers a *mystery*, traversing through what renders sex *perplexing* (and deviant).

He starts from what personally piqued his interest: **the search for a new sacrality in contemporary marital ethics**. He then shifts his focus to what threatens to undermine the meaning of sexuality, constituting this threat and connecting it to the problem of eroticism.

### Sexuality as wonder

For Ricoeur, it seems that all our problems related to sexuality stem from the collapse of an old sacrality – a cosmic-vital sacrality, which provided a complete meaning to human sexuality. He views modern family ethics as a relatively successful response to this collapse.

Indeed, one cannot understand the adventures of sexuality without considering those that were recognized as sacred among people of the past. Ricoeur speaks of imaginative repetition and the symbolic branching of rituals. In those times, rituals proclaimed a complete integration of sexuality into the sacred through actions, while myths supported this sacred establishment with their ceremonial and glorious narratives. The imagination did not cease “back then” to imbue things with sexual symbols in exchange for those symbols derived from the great rhythms of plant life, which, in turn, held symbolic significance through the endless play of correspondences involving the lives and deaths of gods. However, from this ancient sacredness, only small fragments remain; the entire network of correspondences that once linked sexuality to life and death, to food, to the seasons, to plants, animals, and gods, has become a large (disjointed) puppet, embodying our desires, our perceptions, and our needs.

But let us be clear: this sacredness had to collapse, at least in its direct, immediate, and naive form. It yielded to the influences of ethical monotheism and technicist intelligence. The former, ethical monotheism, largely “demythologized” the cosmic-vital sacred, its plant and infernal deities, its hierogamies, its violences, and its deliria/illusions, in favor of a greatly impoverished symbolism – more “heavenly” than “earthly” – of which the admiration for the sidereal/astronomical order – the starry sky above us – became the most important remnant, which we possess within ourselves. But the **transcendent sacred** is far more suited to supporting a **political ethics** centered on justice than to supporting the lyrical dimension of life. In relation to the sidereal archetype of order, sexuality appears as an aberrant

phenomenon, one whose sacredness has been emptied by the “demythologization” of infernal and plant deities. This is not because the transcendent sacred, such as that of the Heavenly Father, lacks any meaning for sexuality; rather, it cannot reabsorb the latent demonism, creativity, and violence of Eros. It can only support the institutional discipline of marriage, which it regards as a fragment of the *total order*. Just as order and institution gain validation for sexuality within the ascending sacredness and ethics, Eros must be integrated into this order and institution as best as it can, whether well or poorly. This is the origin of a strict ethics focused on a single axiom: sexuality is a social function, specifically for reproduction; it has no meaning beyond reproduction. (It is thus evident that this eminently social, communal, political ethics, derived from the transcendent sacred, is more skeptical of the errant virtuality of Eros. Eros always retains a dangerous and forbidden foundation from the ancient, faded sacrality.) The sacred, as something separate and untouchable, has survived the participatory sacred, but tends to imbue sexuality with a diffuse sense of guilt.

It is true that in **Judaism**, the condemnation of sexuality beyond the strictly utilitarian and communal function of family continuation was not emphasized. This is because, after a difficult struggle against Eastern mythology, the faith of Israel was able to rise to a meaning of creation, to an immanent-transcendent sacred, for which the whole earth together with the heavens sings the glory of Eternity. The exultation of flesh and body rising toward the heavens finds its magnificent expression in the cry given to the first man’s mouth in the sacred texts when he discovered the first woman: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!”

Ricoeur here speaks of both a physical and spiritual sense, but one that could not compensate for the deeper decadence of the old cosmic-vital sacredness. Before it could create a culture of its own magnitude, it suffered the assault of **dualistic waves**, of Orphic and Gnostic waves. Humanity simultaneously forgets that “flesh”, Word, Desire, and Image are indivisible; it comes to “know” itself as a separated, lost Soul, a prisoner of the body; simultaneously, it “knows” the body as Other, Enemy, and Evil. This “gnosis” of the Soul and Body, this Gnostic Dualism, seeps into Christianity, sterilizing the meaning of creation, distorting the confession of evil, and confining the hope of full reconciliation to a narrow and withered horizon of spiritualism. Thus, in Eastern religious thought, hatred of life and anti-sexual resentment proliferate, which Nietzsche believed to be the essence of Christianity.

Here, **modern marital ethics** represents a limited effort, somewhat successful, to reconstruct a new sacrality, focusing on the fragile alliance of the flesh and spirit within *the person*.



The essential achievement of this ethics, according to Ricoeur, is that it brings to the forefront the value of sexuality as a **language without words**, as a means of mutual recognition and personalization – in short, as *expression*. This is what he refers to as the **“dimension of tenderness”**, which he contrasts with **“eroticism”**. This ethics continues the Jewish creationism and Christian Agapé, insofar as Christianity rejects its Gnostic tendencies and the false opposition between Eros and Agapé. Ricoeur tends to see in this ethics an attempt by Agapé to reappropriate Eros. This ethics continues the tradition of Jewish creationism and Christian *Agapé*, as Christianity rejects its Gnostic tendencies and *the false dichotomy between Eros and Agapé*. Ricoeur is inclined to see in this ethics an attempt by *Agapé to reappropriate Eros*.

Like any reappropriation that is not merely repetition, this one simultaneously sanctifies both the remnants of the old sacred and its transformation. It sanctifies the remnants because the theme of the person, of mutual personalization, is alien to the cosmic liturgy of the vegetative/plant sacredness and its call for individuals to immerse themselves in the flux of generations and regenerations. In the infra-personal stage of the old sacred, reproduction remains fundamentally irresponsible, accidental, and bestial. **The Sacred must cross the threshold of the person.** By crossing this threshold, humanity becomes **responsible** for the gift of life, just as it is responsible for all of nature; the control of reproduction is a faultless sign of the death of the old sacred, an irreversible gain for sexual culture. One could elaborate on its ethical significance and new dangers. However, these dangers are the reverse of the greatness of human sexuality: with the control of reproduction, procreation ceases to be a destiny at the same time that the dimension of tenderness, where the new sacred is expressed, is liberated. At the same time, what destroys the old sacred Eros is what allows it to be saved in the light of *Agapé*. Through tenderness, we attempt to reconstitute a symbol of innocence, to ritualize our dream of innocence, and to restore the integrity and wholeness of the flesh/body. But this attempt presupposes the emergence of the person; it can only be inter-personal. The old myth of androgyny remains the myth of non-differentiation; it must transform into a new myth, that of reciprocity, of corporeal mutuality. The restoration of the primitive sacred at another cultural and spiritual level presupposes that *Agapé* is not only (image) destroying but can also save all myths, including that of Eros.

But is this approach possible? It already contains a seed of uncertainty due to the simple fact that, in order to gain intensity and permanence, sexual attachment must be molded by the discipline of *institution*. We have seen that the transcendent sacred is a necessary component of this history of sacredness; but the transcendent sacred, which generates an ethic of political law, of social justice, has brutally forced

the anarchy of Eros to bow to the laws of marriage. Sexual ethics, having suffered the impact of politics, has become burdened with rights and obligations, duties and contracts: the prohibitions, bans, and inhibitions that accompany the taming of instincts are well known. The price paid for socialization. Eros, of course, is terrible. Yet no modern society envisions giving up the channeling and stabilizing of Eros's demonism through the institution of the conjugal family. It is conceivable that there exist individual destinies exempt from legal constraints—there are notable examples, especially among artists and great creators of culture, whose fates cannot be imagined confined within the bonds of marriage. But which *legislator* would find an argument in this for “deinstitutionalizing” sex and prescribing this singular destiny as a universal rule? We know well that humanity and the humanization of sexuality have not been achieved solely through the discipline of marriage, which is costly in many respects. **An unstable pact has been forged between Eros and the institution of marriage**, one that is not without suffering and sometimes carries the risk of destroying humanity itself. **Marriage represents a cardinal bet in our culture regarding sex**; this bet has not been fully won, and it is doubtful that it ever can be. Therefore, the case against marriage remains a potential, useful, legitimate, and urgent task. It falls to literature and the arts to expose the hypocrisy of a society that continually seeks to conceal its betrayals under the pretext of its ideals. All coercive ethics generate deceit and trickery; hence, literature holds an irreplaceable scandalous function, as scandal is the scourge of deceit. Deceit will continue to accompany humanity until it can reconcile the uniqueness of desire with the universality of the institution. In our civilization, marriage always operates under the sign of duty to some extent, and many marriages are precisely shattered by this duty. Marriage aims to protect the duration and intimacy of sexual bonds, thereby making them humane, but for many, it is precisely this very duty that shatters their duration and intimacy.

The bet of an ethics of tenderness means that *despite* the risks, **marriage offers the greatest chance for tenderness**. What this ethics preserves from the transcendent sacred is the idea that the institution can serve as a discipline for Eros, translating the principles of justice, respect for the other, legal equality, and mutual obligations from the political sphere to the sexual sphere. In exchange, by integrating the institution, the **ethics of tenderness** changes its intention; within the spirit of the institution, the primary goal of marriage is procreation and the perpetuation of humanity as a species. The ethics of tenderness seeks to incorporate procreation into sexuality, rather than incorporating sexuality into procreation, **placing the perfecting of interpersonal relationships at the forefront of marital objectives**.

The promotion of the personal and interpersonal as the ultimate goal is where a movement that allowed the replacement of the ancient family model with the marital family has led, moving from inter-family pacts to the mutual recognition

of partners. **But is the fusion of the institution with sublimated Eros in tenderness always successful?** Nothing can guarantee this. (This is why there is a latent threat that humanity might face a rift in the completeness of human sexuality, as it seeks to achieve multiple divergent objectives.)

Here is the gap. Or, due to this dissonance, which threatens the fragile compromise between Eros and Civilization, a centrifugal force, anti-institutional, operates, culminating in contemporary “eroticism”. **Our era is influenced by two opposing movements: one towards the re-sacralization of love, and the other towards its desacralization/profanation.**

### **Wandering, or eroticism versus tenderness**

The term **eroticism**, as Ricoeur discusses it, is **ambiguous**: first, it can refer to an element of human sexuality, specifically the instinctual and sensual aspects; second, it can denote the art of love based on a culture of sexual pleasure, which, in this sense, is also one aspect of tenderness – provided that the concern with mutuality, mutual satisfaction, devotion, and gifting is more important than egoistic and narcissistic gratification. However, eroticism becomes a wandering desire for pleasure when it breaks free from the close bond maintained by a lasting, intense, and intimate interpersonal relationship. It is at this point that eroticism presents problems. As Freud taught us – especially in his work *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* – sexuality is not straightforward, and integrating its many components is an indefinite task. This disintegration, which is not seen as a failure but is explored as a technique of the body, leads to eroticism positioning itself as the opposite pole to tenderness. In **tenderness**, the relationship with the other is more important and can control eroticism; in **eroticism**, the egoistic culture of pleasure takes precedence over mutual giving and exchange.

**Eroticism**, in its limited and pejorative sense, has always existed (some argue that it is currently in regression within a utilitarian and work-focused civilization); the culture of pleasure is a fundamental aspect of human sexuality simply because it cannot be reduced to mere animal reproduction. It is playful and becomes play; this is its nature, and it must be understood and accepted. **The demonism of Eros represents the dual possibilities of eroticism and tenderness**; the compulsion exerted by the institution through tenderness does not cease to intensify the centrifugal force of eroticism at the same time that the institution works on integrating eroticism into tenderness.

If “eroticism” represents a possibility and an internal threat to sexuality, as much as it appears in new human and contemporary forms, we would like to clarify these in the following sections. Ricoeur **limits his focus to three phenomenological groups**, which are also interconnected through mutual actions:

I. **Loss of Meaning** (falling into oblivion). The removal of sexual prohibitions has led to a bizarre effect unknown to the Freudian generation: the loss of value through *ease of facilitation*. Reduced to an accessible and simple biological function, sex becomes insignificant. In this sense, the extreme point of the destruction of the cosmic-vital sacred also becomes the extreme point of the dehumanization of sex.

To this first phenomenon, many factors have contributed: the blurring of gender roles in economic life and education, the advocacy for women’s equality that grants access to sexual freedom previously reserved for men. Everything that facilitates easy sexual encounters also promotes the descent of meaning and value to zero.

To this, we add the entry of vulgarizing sex literature into the public sphere. A person becomes more aware of themselves from the moment their sexuality becomes public; but by losing its secret nature, it also loses its intimacy. As Béguin said, “We, these mammals...” Something irreversible occurs: thanks to the dissemination of human sciences, these phenomena become new cultural phenomena, part of the situation to be embraced.

The final point is that sexuality bears the consequences of all other factors that operate in terms of depersonalization and anonymity. The insights from American psychoanalysts are quite telling; they observe that the type of repression that characterized the Victorian era is gradually disappearing, replaced by much subtler and hidden symptoms. The disappearance of affective contracts, the inability to love or hate, and an increasing number of clients lamenting their inability to fully engage their entire personality in sexual acts – engaging in sex without love – illustrate this shift.

The descent of sexuality into meaninglessness is both a cause and a consequence of this emotional decadence, as if social and sexual anonymity mutually stimulate each other.

II. The second phenomenon: to the extent that sexuality becomes **insignificant**, it concurrently becomes increasingly **urgent** to address the grievances and disillusionments experienced in other areas of human life under the pretext of retribution or revenge. As sexuality, having exhausted its compensatory and retaliatory functions, is drained of its relevance, it becomes detached from reason. What are the disillusionments in question?

- a) Firstly, **the disappointments encountered within the context of work**. It would be valuable to undertake significant studies on this subject: the civilization of work and sexuality. The fact that work functions as a factor in the sublimation of instincts due to its anti-libidinal nature has been thoroughly explored within the Freudian school's ego psychology (Hartmann, Erikson, etc.). It is well established that personality development, from the perspective of instinctual drives, involves the acquisition of autonomy through non-conflictual situations. Work, along with language and engagement in institutional life, constitutes one such non-conflictual (or "conflict-free" sphere, as termed by Erikson) situation. However, the consequences are also significant. The modern individual experiences a profound dissatisfaction within a society perceived as a struggle against organized nature. This disillusionment runs deeper than mere rejection of the economic or political system; it is a disillusionment with the technological world itself. Consequently, one's sense of purpose shifts from work to leisure. In this context, eroticism emerges as one dimension of leisure time; it often becomes nothing more than the cheapest form of relaxation, at least when it pertains to what we might call an eroticism of inadequate cultural or intellectual sophistication.
- b) This primary disillusionment is further compounded by the **"political"** dimension. We are witnessing a certain failure in the political definition of the individual. The person, disillusioned with history, strives for the non-historical. They reject defining themselves as a social "role" and dream of being an unqualified person from a civil perspective. (...) In this light, eroticism emerges as a grand retort, not only as a response to leisure versus work but also as a counter to the private sphere versus the public one in general.

III. Finally, on a deeper level, eroticism expresses a more profound disillusionment – the **disillusionment with "meaning"**. There exists a covert connection between eroticism and absurdity. When nothing seems to have meaning, fleeting pleasure and its fireworks become all that remains. This trait leads us to a third phenomenon, which further illuminates the nature of eroticism. If errant sexuality is simultaneously **insignificant** and **urgent** as a form of retribution, it also becomes **intriguing**. Thus, eroticism not only serves as retribution or compensation against work, politics, and language but also embodies the futility of sexuality itself. This is where the quest for a mythical or legendary sexuality originates. This quest liberates a fundamental potentiality of human sexuality previously alluded to: that is, to separate procreative pleasure from the procreative function, but not only from this (as tenderness-love does the same), but also from tenderness itself. One sees that humanity appears in a struggle against the psychological impoverishment of pleasure

itself, which is no longer susceptible to perfection within its biological brutality. Eroticism will be constructed within the interval of the imaginary, the mythical, hedonistic disintegration, and emotional finitude. This is why its approach has a quasi-desperate character: a life devoted to sexuality's quantitative eroticism – sophisticated eroticism, ever-watchful for variations – constructs its imaginary eroticism within the play between "letting see"/"hiding" or "rejecting"/"giving". This voyeuristic intellectual eroticism refers to itself as a third party in every erotic role. Through each such pathway, a sexual legend or myth is constructed, reflected in various heroes of sexuality; this slides from one form to another, from mingling and cohabitation to desolate, defeated, sorrowful loneliness. **Eroticism's intense despair** – reminiscent of the Greek legend of the leaky barrel – **lies in its failure to compensate or make up for the loss of meaning and value by amassing some form of tenderness *substitutes* (Ersatz, surrogates).**

### The mystery of sexuality

Ricoeur does not wish to conclude his reflections on a pessimistic note but instead aims to juxtapose and integrate the two aspects of his analysis. Along the two paths of sexuality—tenderness and eroticism—what becomes evident is that sexuality, fundamentally, proves impenetrable to reflection and remains inaccessible to human dominance. Perhaps it is this opacity that accounts for its elusiveness, as it does not fully encompass either the ethics of tenderness or the non-ethics of eroticism. It is *represented only symbolically*, through what remains mythical within us.

Ultimately, when two beings embrace each other, they are unaware of what they are doing, what they want, what they are seeking, or what they will find. What does this desire mean, which drives one towards the other? Is it the desire for pleasure? Yes, of course. But this is a superficial answer, as we also sense that pleasure alone does not hold meaning in itself; it is figurative, symbolic. But what does it symbolize? The vivid and obscure consciousness we possess suggests that sex participates in a network of virtualities, whose cosmic harmonies have faded into oblivion but have not been erased; that life is something more than mere existence. Ricoeur seeks to convey that life is more than the battle against death or the delay of fatal destiny; **that life is unique, universal, whole in everyone, and the joy of sexuality grants access to this mystery.** The truth of romanticism, as of sexuality, lies in the fact that one does not become an ethical or legal person merely through formal designation but by immersing oneself once again in the waters of Life. Yet this living, vivid consciousness is also obscure because we are acutely aware

that the universe in which sexual pleasure participates has collapsed within us; that sexuality is the wreckage of a sunken Atlantis. Hence its mystery and secrecy. This displaced universe is no longer accessible to naïveté but rather to the scholarly *exegesis* of ancient myths; it is not revived except through *hermeneutics* or the interpretative techniques of today's otherwise silent texts. A new void separates the remains of meaning restored by the language of this hermeneutics from the other fragment of meaning that sexuality inherently uncovers without a single language.

Let us proceed: **the enigma of sexuality lies in the fact that it cannot be reduced to the trilogy that defines humanity: language-tool-institution.**

- i) On the one hand, indeed, the human being is linked to a pre-linguistic existence; even when *expressing* itself, the expression, which it assumes, is infra-para-supra-linguistic – beneath, beyond, or above language. It mobilizes a language but transcends it, embraces this language, sublimates it (turning it into an airy form), deceives it, scatters it into murmurs and appeals for help, invalidates it, neutralizes it as a mediator; it is Eros, not Logos. Therefore, its complete restitution within the element of Logos remains radically impossible.
- ii) On the other hand, Eros pertains to the pre-technological existence of humanity; even when a person assumes responsibility and integrates into a bodily technique (whether it is merely the art of sexual compatibility or more precisely the technique of preventing reproduction), sexuality remains **hyper-instrumental or beyond the instrumental**. Its tools must disappear from view; sexuality remains fundamentally alien to the “intention-tool-object” relationship. It retains a remnant of non-instrumental immediacy; the body-body relationship, or better, the “person-flesh/flesh-person” interaction, remains essentially non-technical. As soon as attention is fixed or concentrated on the technique of compatibility or the technique of sterility/infertility, its enchantment dissipates.
- iii) Finally, Eros, regardless of any balance it might achieve within marriage, is **not institutional**. It is an offense to reduce it merely to a contract or spousal duty; its natural bond can be analyzed in terms of rights and obligations; its law, which is no longer a law, is the reciprocity of giving. Thus, it is “intra-juridical, para-juridical, supra-juridical” – within the law, very much against the law, above the law. Consequently, it fundamentally threatens the institution, including marriage, with its characteristic demonism. Love, as it has been refined within the frameworks of our culture, advances between two chasms: that of wandering, errant desire and that of hypocritical pleasure, which is caused by its permanence – the rigorous, moral caricature of fidelity.

A meeting – experiencing fidelity – between the impatient Eros and the institution, which humans cannot maintain without sacrifices, remains happy and rare.

### **Comparing Philosophies of Love: Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Luc Marion, and Emmanuel Levinas**

In addition to Ricoeur, Jean-Luc Marion also has important things to say about love and eroticism (See his following works: *The Erotic Phenomenon*, *Prolegomena to Charity*, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*). While both philosophers engage deeply with the phenomenology of human relationships, they approach the topic from very different perspectives. Marion's view of love is rooted in a complex interplay of gift and loss, where love is understood as a movement toward the other that fundamentally transforms both the lover and the beloved. Unlike Ricoeur, who treats love as a phenomenon embedded within structures of meaning and reciprocity, Marion emphasizes a radical form of love that is both an act of self-giving and a loss of control over one's own identity. This is particularly evident in his conception of erotic love, which he approaches through what he terms the "erotic reduction"—a process that removes the self from the equation in favor of an other-centered love that never seeks to possess, but rather continuously gives.

In Marion's work titled "The Erotic Phenomenon. Six Meditations," he problematizes the concept of love, continuing the tradition of Plato, Ficino, and Spinoza. Jean-Luc Marion argues that love matters for who we are more than anything-more than cognition and more than being itself (See *Cassandra Falke. (99+) The Phenomenology of Love and Reading*) Marion creates a univocal concept of love that is free from all oppositions. With this concept, she outlines a new form of rationality: erotic rationality. This concept must serve as the foundation for the most diverse erotic phenomena, which is why its elaboration is exceptionally rich. One important aspect is the question of the certainty and assurance of love, or foundation of love, according to György Czétány (2014) which is also given considerable emphasis in the work and can, in a certain sense, be regarded as the book's true central issue. In the first meditation, the question is examined of what can provide the assurance that the personal self can overcome the feeling of futility and that life can become meaningful. All of this cannot be sustained by the certainty of the self-directed ego. Self-love also focuses on the certainty of the ego's existence. The second meditation examines the aporia arising from self-love.



The starting question of the first meditation is what can provide the security for the personal self to overcome its sense of futility and for life to become meaningful. The certainty of the self-directed ego cannot provide this. Self-love is also directed at the certainty of the ego's existence. The second meditation deals in detail with the aporia arising from self-love: since the ego, which is directed toward itself and certain of its own existence, is unable to make itself lovable either to itself or others, its self-love turns into self-hatred and hatred of others. Therefore, this dubious egological certainty must be abandoned in favor of a security that simultaneously overcomes the feeling of futility. Marion finds this in the 'erotic reduction,' through which the personal self becomes a lover and finds security in itself as a lover who approaches the beloved being as a non-possessed, transcendent other. Marion presents this process in the third meditation.

Love, which is not subordinated to the interests of my existence, can only be realized if I do not wait for eros to strike me from outside, but rather if I love first. It is about an event that originates from me, during which 'I am ready to lose everything I give, indeed, I am ready to risk my own existence in this gesture without regard for any gain or for any return proportional to my investment or my possession (ousia, foundation, goods).' It is precisely this loss, the renunciation of my gift, that guarantees that the event originates from me and that it is not tied to the certainty of my existence. This certainty refers only to the act of love and the gift; it is realized not in the certainty of reason, but in the certainty of feeling. Since reason is concerned with the certainty of the ego's existence, it makes love dependent on reciprocity as its sufficient foundation. However, radicalized erotic reduction loves without hope for reciprocation, that is, without a sufficient foundation in this sense. What alone grounds this love is nothing other than itself: love is its own sufficient foundation or reason (*ratio sui*).

To love first, to love without being loved: this spontaneous event is directed at a still undefined other. The other, as a beloved being, only becomes phenomenal in the erotic reduction created by the lover. This means that the other becomes visible as an irreplaceable, singular beloved being because the lover pulls them out of the uniformity of objects determined by the system of exchange values. The lover is 'the one who first notices the other, the singular, the irreplaceably unique, who is more than just an object.' But this also implies that the lover must again and again repeat the initial leap, the radicalization of erotic reduction, which can be suspended at any moment, losing the beloved being, who thus becomes one among mere objects. The lover must continually expose themselves to the risk of unreciprocated love. The lover can do this because they possess the coming possibility of becoming otherwise: this constitutes their self. Herein lies the originality of Marion's concept of eros: contrary to the Platonic or Freudian eros, which is directed toward a previous state, a past origin, for Marion, eros is the desire for a coming event.

However, if I love by projecting onto a future possibility without being loved in return in the present, this means that I do not make my present gift dependent on reciprocity. I can love first only to the extent that I can accept the possibility that the other may not reciprocate. This carries with it the risk of my own emptying, for the interest in the certainty of my existence cannot limit or hinder my love. 'To love without being loved in return—this is the definition of love beyond being or without being.' Therefore, love is realized when I expose myself to the danger of losing myself.

The only proof of love is in giving without holding back or desiring gain, in giving that does not calculate, does not fear loss, and does not even shrink from the loss of itself. This assurance is greater the greater the loss in terms of one's own being. The more one loses one's own being in the act of giving, the more one gains oneself as 'love without being.' 'The more one loses (gives, disperses, that is, loves), the more one gains (because one still loves).

The condition of love, with respect to being, lies in a threefold passivity: in vulnerability, approach, and risk. The erotic reduction is not governed by the principle of exchange, equality, and reciprocity but by the principle of gift and loss.

In this way, the lover can meet the other not as a usable object, but as transcendence. The other's transcendence means that the other 'comes when they please, when they decide to manifest from the distance of another world.' The arrival of the other is contingent; this is where the other's freedom lies. In the erotic reduction, I cannot possess the other. The only thing I have is the hope that someone will love me and thus save me from the futility that threatens my existence. This hope, since it is directed toward an unknown future, is without an object. Love is 'a perception that is intentionally directed toward another, but without being directed at any specific other. In short, it is an intentional perception without an intentional object, a perceptual fulfillment without a concept to be fulfilled.' At the same time, the meaning attached to it must come from outside. This meaning is the oath given by the other, the oath of 'Here I am!' The oath is only realized when it comes from a face, arriving as an unexpected event, disrupting my expectations—while I, too, take the same oath. The meaning is given by the other's counter-intentionality. The indeterminate other that I hoped for receives its determination and uniqueness, but not from me, rather from the arrival of the other themselves. However, even in their self-giving, the other can withdraw at any time; the lover is never free from the threat of unreciprocated love. The erotic reduction can be interrupted at any moment, by either party, as both must continually start again, as if they were loving for the first time. 'To continue the same unique erotic reduction, we must always start again, without interruption. We love each other only on the condition that we remain in a continuous new beginning, a quasi-continuous creation, without an endpoint or repose.' The fourth and fifth meditations problematize this process of

deepening, interruption, and restarting the erotic reduction. Instead of going further into these details, however, let us move ahead and ask whether the radicalization of the erotic reduction can truly be considered a process that grounds itself. Or put differently: Is Marion's concept of love capable of becoming its own sufficient foundation?

The lover must love first, before anyone else loves them, and this love must be its own foundation, its own ratio. However, since the other is transcendent, coming from outside and thus independent of me, there remains the possibility that the other may never arrive, meaning that the lover may indeed not be loved by anyone. The intentional orientation remains without meaning. But even if the other does come and makes me a lover by becoming a lover themselves, does this guarantee that I am loved? The radicalization of the erotic reduction—that I love first—can only provide the security that I love, but not the security that the other loves me as well. Thus, it remains questionable to what extent the erotic reduction can ensure that the lover can free themselves from the sense of futility and find meaning in life. It seems that the meaningfulness of the lover's life is entirely exposed to the contingency of the transcendent other. But how long can love without the security of reciprocation establish itself, give itself meaning, and remain *ratio sui*? Is this not too heavy a burden? Don't we encounter here a similar problem to the one Marion diagnoses with the *cogito*: the problem of the impossibility of living out of oneself? Will not love without the certainty of reciprocation eventually turn into hatred and self-hatred, losing its love along with its life? It seems that solid love still needs a firmer love that precedes and grounds it. Marion's thoughts in the final two paragraphs of the work also point in this direction. Here, Marion writes that the lover's advance cannot simply be an act that grounds itself; this advance can only happen because the other is already waiting for them and calling them. The erotic reduction must always be preceded by another lover. The lover does not ground themselves; their becoming a lover is based on the call of a lover who loves them. This call is the condition that enables me to enter the erotic reduction, to love first. However, it remains unclear how I can be certain that the other loves me. The examples that Marion mentions here—the love of procreating parents, the love of a conversation partner, a future lover—do not necessarily lead to the collapse of this uncertainty." "So, is the final conclusion that love cannot have a solid foundation? Yet, in the very last pages, a possibility does appear, namely God as the best lover, God who is love. However, in the context currently being discussed, the question is whether God can be called the guarantor or foundation of love. At the end of Marion's book, he himself reveals the common features of his concept of *eros* and Christ's *agape*. Among these, he mentions that in both cases, the lover asks for love

and also loves first. For the believing Christian, divine grace is this first love, the absolutely first virtual *agape*, preceding all actual forms of *agape* as the calling Word. For the believer in the Word, this faith gives support for realizing the life of Christ's love. Perhaps in this sense, God does not perform a separate act of love in His transcendent perfection, as Marion hints in the final lines, but rather forms the invisible level of the love that becomes visible in every act of love following Christ. 'For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And He has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

From all this, it seems that only faith can provide a solid foundation for love. But might it not also be that reason itself is capable of doing this, despite everything Marion says about reason and the principle of insufficient grounding? Is not reason capable of achieving this through intellectual love of God? In his book, Marion also addresses Spinoza's *Ethics*. In his critique, he focuses on the proposition of *conatus in sua esse perseverandi* (the striving to preserve one's being) and, on this basis, qualifies Spinoza as a philosopher of self-love. According to Marion, in Spinoza, the fundamental role of self-love remains unchanged even when one has adequate ideas instead of inadequate ones. Yet, in the *Ethics*, it is precisely the adequate ideas that lead to the transcendence of self-love and love based on inadequate ideas of passions, leading to the recognition that the *conatus* at work within me is an expression of the power of acting that is common to all beings, the immanent cause of all existence, and which illuminates every being, including myself, as a modified expression of divine substance. This knowledge—knowledge of the third kind—leads to a love that is indestructible, because—unlike passionate love—it has no opposite that could destroy it. This indestructible love is intellectual love of God.

We can say that while reciprocity and equality are very important in Ricoeur's case, in Marion's, the erotic reduction is not determined by the principle of exchange, equality, and reciprocity, but rather by the principle of giving and loss.

For Marion, erotic love is characterized by its openness to the unknown and the possibility of loss. It is not a relationship based on exchange, as Ricoeur might conceptualize it, where partners engage in a reciprocal understanding of one another, but rather a radical giving that exposes the lover to the risk of non-reciprocation. Marion's philosophy situates erotic love as a form of self-transcendence, where the lover is not seeking the union of two selves, but rather the perpetual act of giving oneself to the other. This contrasts with Ricoeur's more balanced, reciprocal view, where love involves a movement between self and other that allows for the mutual recognition of each person's unique subjectivity. Marion's emphasis on the erotic reduction as a form of perpetual giving resonates with his theological

commitments, where love is also a constant motion towards the divine, without the expectation of complete fulfillment. For Marion, erotic love is not merely an emotional bond or a physical attraction, but a philosophical and spiritual act that speaks to the depths of human existence, where the lover is both transformed and defined by the act of loving.

In contrast, Emmanuel Levinas (Levinas 1969, 1985) offers a profoundly ethical approach to love, grounded in his philosophy of responsibility and the face-to-face encounter. Like Marion, Levinas is concerned with the selflessness of love, but for Levinas, love is always embedded within the ethical imperative of responding to the needs of the other. Love, for Levinas, is not an abstract ideal or a romantic fantasy; it is a responsibility that arises from the encounter with the face of the other. This ethical responsibility calls the self to place the needs of the other above their own, and it is within this framework that Levinas explores various forms of love, including maternal, erotic, and paternal love. Unlike Marion, who sees erotic love as a movement towards union, Levinas insists on the irreducible separation between the self and the other. Erotic love, in Levinas's view, must preserve this distance in order to maintain the freedom and responsibility of the self. This ethical dimension of love challenges any understanding of eros as fusion or completion, which is more typical in romantic or traditional interpretations of love. Levinas famously states, "Heideggerian ontology, which subordinates the relationship with the Other to the relationship with Being, in general, remains under the obedience to the anonymous, and leads inevitable to another power, to imperial domination and tyranny" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46-47).

Levinas's approach to eroticism also involves a critique of Western philosophies of subjectivity, which he believes have often subordinated the relationship to the other in favor of a more abstract, impersonal connection to Being. Drawing on his critique of Heidegger, Levinas argues that any philosophical system that overlooks the importance of the other's face risks becoming an ontology of totality, where the other is absorbed into the self, leading to forms of domination and oppression. Love, in this context, is not a reconciliation of differences but an acknowledgment of them, a recognition that the other can never be fully known or integrated into the self. For Levinas, the erotic encounter is not one of fusion but of radical separation, where the lover remains distinct from the beloved, even in the intimacy of love. This concept of erotic love, which emphasizes the need to honor the other's alterity, places Levinas at odds with both Marion's view of union and with Ricoeur's more integrated vision of mutual recognition.

Comparing these three thinkers, we can see that while there is overlap in their understanding of love as a transformative, selfless act, their views diverge significantly in their treatment of eroticism and sexuality. Ricoeur's approach to love focuses on the dialectic of self and other, with love serving as the arena for a balanced exchange that allows each partner to maintain their autonomy while also engaging in a reciprocal relationship. His conception of eroticism acknowledges the complexities of desire, passion, and sexual intimacy, but it remains rooted in the phenomenology of language and interpretation. For Ricoeur, love is not just a feeling or a simple emotional bond, but a complex, interpretive act where individuals come to understand themselves and each other through their engagement in love.

Marion, on the other hand, reinterprets eroticism through the lens of the *erotic reduction*, which he presents as a movement that transcends the self in a way that risks both the lover's identity and autonomy. His vision of love, particularly erotic love, is one of continuous self-giving, where the lover becomes defined not by their ownership of the other but by their exposure to the loss that comes with giving oneself without the guarantee of reciprocation. Marion's eroticism is teleological, but it is a teleology that never fully reaches a state of completion. The lover gives, and in giving, they lose, only to begin the act of giving again. This endless movement of love towards the other, without expectation of return, makes Marion's philosophy distinctly different from Ricoeur's and Levinas's views, both of which retain a more reciprocal or responsibility-based approach to love.

Levinas's contribution to the discourse on love is perhaps the most radical in its ethical commitment. He rejects any notion of eroticism that seeks fusion or completion, and instead, insists that the ethical call of the other is a perpetual responsibility. Erotic love, in Levinas's framework, is not a romantic pursuit of union, but a call to ethical action that arises in the face of the other. His philosophy challenges traditional understandings of desire and eroticism, emphasizing that true love does not seek to possess or to complete the self, but to recognize the irreducible otherness of the beloved. For Levinas, the erotic encounter is always marked by a sense of distance and separation, which allows the lover to maintain their responsibility to the other while also recognizing the radical autonomy of the beloved.

While all three philosophers treat love as a profound, transformative experience, their views diverge in terms of the role of the other, the nature of erotic desire, and the ethical dimensions of love. Ricoeur's view of love emphasizes reciprocity and mutual recognition, where love is understood as a process of interpretation and understanding between partners. Marion's view, by contrast, emphasizes the endless self-giving of love, which exposes the lover to the risk of non-reciprocation and loss. Levinas, meanwhile, grounds love in an ethical responsibility to the other, where

erotic love is not about fusion or fulfillment, but about a continual commitment to the other's needs. Each of these philosophers brings a unique perspective to the discourse on love, eroticism, and sexuality, and together, they offer a multifaceted understanding of the complex ways in which love shapes human existence.

In conclusion, while Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Luc Marion, and Emmanuel Levinas all engage with love, eroticism, and sexuality from different philosophical vantage points, their reflections collectively enrich the conversation about the role of love in human experience. Ricoeur's emphasis on reciprocity and interpretation, Marion's focus on radical self-giving and perpetual loss, and Levinas's insistence on the ethical responsibility to the other each provide important insights into how love, as a human phenomenon, shapes both individual subjectivity and our relationships with others.

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## Quotidienneté et résistance

Jad HATEM\*

**ABSTRACT. Daily Life and Resistance.** Between daring project and tranquility, everyday life chooses the second term, the first threatening the habituality of serene existence. To do this, it deploys a minimal morality and, above all, a structure of resistance. The study is based on Andrei Pleșu, Simone de Beauvoir, and Josep Maria Esquirol.

**Keywords:** *Daily life – Resistance – minima moralia – cultivating your garden – Availability*

**RÉSUMÉ.** Entre projet audacieux et quiétude, la quotidienneté choisit le second terme, le premier menaçant l'habitualité de l'existence sereine. Il déploie pour cela une morale minimale et surtout une structure de résistance. L'étude se base sur Andrei Pleșu, Simone de Beauvoir et surtout Josep Maria Esquirol.

**Mots-clef :** *Vie quotidienne – Résistance - minima moralia - cultiver son jardin - Disponibilité*

### I

« Être ici, c'est beaucoup », clame Rilke en sa *Neuvième Élégie de Duino*. Bien que nous ne cheminions que dans le périssable, il reste qu'au moins *une fois* nous sommes. Et cela ne passera pas, si nous mêmes nous disparaissions. « Avoir été de cette terre paraît irrévocable ». Ne serait-ce pas pour une carrière appelée à justifier la création ? Une existence singulière saurait-elle se hisser au rang d'archétype ? Ignace de Loyola, Barrès, Vigny Napoléon, Goethe, Shakespeare et Balzac figurent naturellement dans l'ouvrage d'André Maurois intitulé *Destins exemplaires*. Qu'en est-il de ceux qu'Edmond Rostand qualifierait de petits, d'obscurs

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et de sans-grades ? Rilke n'a sans doute pensé qu'à eux : « Peut-être sommes nous ici pour dire : maison, pont, ou fontaine, porte, verger, jarre, fenêtre ». N'est-ce pas là épeler le cercle familial, et d'abord le lieu resserré où l'on demeure (*mansio*, de *manere*) ? Mais pas seulement lui qui possède le privilège, rappelé par la porte et la fenêtre, du binôme du dedans et du dehors, mais aussi le familial du dehors et cela, le pont, qui relie les extériorités dès lors qu'on est sorti par la porte. Finalement, n'est-ce pas là conférer un prix exorbitant à la chose banale, celle-là même dont il est inutile de parler parce qu'elle parle spontanément d'elle-même tout le temps sans que nous n'y prenions garde ? À moins que ces choses se constellent dans l'expérience que chacun fait du monde de la vie pour lui conférer assise et repères, ce pour quoi la poésie accepterait d'assumer leur validation par-delà leur usage réitéré en les transportant jusque dans la sphère de l'idéal là où elles n'ont cure de n'être jamais arrivées nulle part pour ne vieillir jamais et devenir objets de contemplation – comme dans l'éclat terne d'une nature morte. De quoi une philosophie de la vie quotidienne ne saurait se satisfaire, elle qui s'attache à décrire ou élucider le rapport à soi et les relations interhumaines à travers ou par-delà l'ustensibilité, relations qui ne sont pas faites pour s'engourdir.

## II

Andrei Pleșu propose dans sa *Minima moralia*<sup>1</sup>, une éthique de la réclusion et de l'isolement. Non dérivée, mais constitutive de l'éthique en général, précédant donc l'être-avec social. On commence par dialoguer avec l'autre en soi. Buber avait évoqué un Tu inné comme un principe d'ouverture à autrui, permettant de nouer spontanément la relation Je-Tu. Pleșu intériorise ce Tu inné en sorte de fonder l'intersubjectivité sur une intrasubjectivité dialogale.

En prenant pour fil conducteur l'expérience de Robinson, l'auteur constate que la solitude ménagée par le salut assure deux bénéfices moraux : le *repentir* pour toutes les fautes commises dans le passé et la *gratitude* pour la chance d'un salut présent. Le repentir s'établit (à la faveur d'une mise entre parenthèse de la société dont l'insularité accidentelle du naufragé offre la métaphore) sur une dualité interne, tandis que la gratitude doit pouvoir se tourner vers un inconnu, le tout autre qui a assuré la sauvegarde ou au moins a donné la vie. Se découvre à la solitude en tant que condition primordiale, une altérité qui ne dépend pas de l'altérité des semblables, une altérité qui s'appuie sur le binôme de la culture en contraste avec l'état sauvage. De même que l'île est le monde ramené à l'essentiel, Robinson est

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<sup>1</sup> Editura Cartea românească, București, 1988 ch. 7.

l'homme réduit aux simples nécessités de son humanité. Dans ce paysage nu, l'éthique prend tout son relief dès lors qu'elle se fonde sur la pauvreté en monde, comme dirait Heidegger lequel n'applique la formule qu'à l'animalité<sup>2</sup>. Pauvreté qui a parfois paru intolérable.

### III

« Le conseil qu'on donnait à Pyrrhus, de prendre le repos qu'il allait chercher par tant de fatigues, recevait bien des difficultés » (Br. 139). Cette remarque de Pascal trouve place dans le long développement sur le divertissement. Les fatigues du roi eussent consisté dans la conquête d'un vaste empire.

Comment se fait-il que prendre du repos soit si répulsif quand on sait, par Pascal, que « le malheur des hommes vient d'une seule chose, qui est de ne savoir pas demeurer en repos, dans une chambre » (Br. 139) ? C'est qu'il y a dans l'homme une pulsion, qui est une donnée première de la transcendance, en direction de l'expérience et par elle vers l'inouï, l'Inconditionné. Ce que reconnaît Pascal d'une certaine manière : « Nous ne cherchons jamais les choses, mais la recherche des choses » (Br. 135). Et nécessairement par-delà les limites que fatalement nous rencontrons. Les choses ne cessent de graviter dans le cercle de l'immanence spatio-temporelle quand bien même élargi en direction d'une unité horizontale – cependant que la recherche, bien que se situant en l'esprit immanent au monde, porte la marque de la transcendance et de l'infini concevant une unité verticale. Le sujet humain n'est pas une chose parmi les choses. Pyrrhus peut penser mettre un terme à son épopée qui volerait de victoire en victoire, pour s'établir dans le grand repos à festoyer et à deviser dans la joie, comme il le dit à Cinéas qui tenta en vain de le dissuader de se lancer dans son entreprise. Les conseils du sage allèrent dans le sens de la jouissance d'une vie paisible qui s'épargnerait de courir les aventures et de faire couler le sang. Plutarque note que l'argument n'entama pas la résolution du roi bien qu'il reconnût qu'il sacrifiait une félicité certaine au profit de désirs et d'espérances dont la réalisation était hasardeuse<sup>3</sup>. On pourrait lui faire avouer que le malheur vient de ne savoir pas demeurer en repos, chez soi. Nul besoin d'occuper une chambre à méditer dans le non-agir taoïste quand on a un jardin et des relations à cultiver qui ne demandent qu'à porter des fruits. Là n'est pas le fade et le trivial, voire le parfait ennui dans lequel on s'englué, pour peu qu'on sache éveiller le piquant de l'existence communautaire et donner direction créatrice au travail. Le jardin

<sup>2</sup> *Les Concepts fondamentaux de la métaphysique*, § 45-48.

<sup>3</sup> *Les Vies des hommes illustres, Vie de Pyrrhus*, § 30.

de la vie quotidienne appelle à la résistance contre ce que Pascal désigne par le *plein repos insupportable à l'homme*, « sans passions, sans affaire, sans divertissement, sans application ». De quoi surgiront *ennui, chagrin et désespoir* (Br. 131).

Simone de Beauvoir qui intitula l'un de ses essais *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* donne raison au premier – si l'homme est défini par son projet, transcendance qui est mouvement vers le monde et vers autrui. Monde qui n'est point impitoyable, comme le disait un personnage de Sigrid Undset, prêtre de son état<sup>4</sup> Il n'est point requis, pour cela de se restreindre spatialement et affectivement pour ne cultiver que la tranquillité de l'âme. « Le conseil de Candide est superflu, juge l'auteur, c'est toujours mon jardin que je cultiverai, m'y voilà enfermé jusqu'à la mort puisque ce jardin devient mien du moment que je le cultive. Il faut seulement pour que ce morceau d'univers m'appartienne que je le cultive vraiment. L'activité de l'homme est souvent paresseuse ; au lieu d'accomplir de vrais actes, il se contente de faux-semblants ». De quoi résulte que le jardin, assurance contre le destin, doit devenir l'espace où s'accomplit le projet. « Nous voyons donc qu'on ne peut assigner aucune dimension au jardin où Candide veut m'enfermer. Il n'est pas dessiné d'avance ; c'est moi qui en choisis l'emplacement et les limites ».

On objectera que le choix de Cinéas doit pouvoir figurer comme un projet, le choix de la quiète vie quotidienne que l'habitude a su domestiquer et dont on a appris à se contenter. Mais il n'en va pas ainsi : « C'est parce que l'homme est transcendance qu'il lui est si difficile d'imaginer jamais aucun paradis. Le paradis, c'est le repos, c'est la transcendance abolie, un état de choses qui se donne et qui n'a pas à être dépassé ». Pour un existentialiste, le terme même de repos est frappé d'indignité, non pas tant morale qu'ontologique. Et Pascal, qui annonce la philosophie de l'existence par tant de traits, reconnaît que « rien ne nous plaît que le combat, mais non la victoire » qui rassasie. La dispute donne du plaisir, guère la contemplation de la vérité (Br. 135).

Pyrrhus est expansion de soi, intempérance, indisponibilité. Cinéas contraction, tempérance, disponibilité. L'un aspire à l'étrangeté des voyages par lesquels l'inconnu s'ajoute à l'inconnu et l'expérience du nouveau paralyse et méprise la vie quotidienne qui, en sa pauvreté, a trouvé son foyer, l'autre s'installe dans la familiarité de l'habitude pour y trouver un plein contentement. L'indisponible pour les proches choisit souvent la gloire, l'aventure et la patrie et autres causes auxquelles il se consacre par esprit d'extraversion.

Que faire en temps de guerre ? Certains trouvent une parade dans l'émigration. D'autres, dans le recueillement de la maison qui, dirait Lamartine, vibre comme un

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<sup>4</sup> Christine Lavransdatter, III, iii, ch. 7.

grand cœur de pierre de tous les cœurs joyaux qui battent sous ses toits<sup>5</sup>. Caractères du bâtard rêvant d'un empire et de l'enfant trouvé calfeutré dans sa tour d'ivoire. Celui qui ne se dérobe pas à la lutte recommande, suivant René Char, d'épouser et de ne pas épouser sa maison<sup>6</sup>. Ce qu'il convient de comprendre comme une invitation à garder par devers soi, où qu'on aille, la maison fermée dans laquelle, dit Claudel, tout est tourné vers l'intérieur<sup>7</sup>. En réalité l'intérieur se situe en-deçà de la vie du foyer, ce qui explique qu'on puisse résider partout dans la maison fermée. Indisponible, dit Gabriel Marcel, est celui qui s'occupe de son perfectionnement intérieur<sup>8</sup> et est centré sur lui-même<sup>9</sup>.

Lors même qu'il s'était engagé dans la résistance contre l'occupant allemand, Char composa *les Feuilles d'Hypnos* où il dit : « À tous les repas pris en commun, nous invitons la liberté à s'asseoir. La place demeure vide mais le couvert est mis » (§ 131). Le couvert ne signifie tout autant l'espoir que la résistance. On voudrait la liberté familiale, autant que femme et enfants. Mais là où elle ne trouve pas place dans la quotidienneté et la sécurité que procure la maison, il faut encore lui réserver un siège comme on attend le Messie au repas pascal en sorte que l'exception pense à devenir la règle et que le très lointain rêve de se rapprocher.

#### IV

Recourant à l'étymologie du mot *compagnon*, Josep Maria Esquirol met en évidence, au début de son ouvrage intitulé *La resistència íntima. Ensayo de una filosofía de la proximidad*<sup>10</sup>, le rapport entre l'être-avec (*com*) et le pain (*pân*). Et même s'il néglige d'analyser le terme de commensalité, il tient compte de l'idée : le pain n'est pas seulement ce qui est rompu et consommé en commun (sur quoi dépend la vie collective), il est ce qui est partagé autour d'une table. L'espace est de la partie. La familiarité n'est pas qu'affective. Y a-t-il donc plusieurs formes de résistance ? Le philosophe espagnol propose une philosophie de la proximité qui révoque les abstractions de la vie et pour cela répudie le rapprochement devenu commun entre la vie quotidienne et l'inauthenticité. Elle considère l'autre, les objets familiers, le ciel qu'on observe de sa fenêtre, le travail et l'existence en

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<sup>5</sup> *La Vigne et la Maison*.

<sup>6</sup> *Feuilles d'Hypnos*, § 34.

<sup>7</sup> Argument de la Cinquième Grande Ode.

<sup>8</sup> *Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique*, Louvain-Paris, Nauwelaerts, 1967, p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> *Le Mystère de l'être*, I, Paris, Aubier, 1963, p. 178.

<sup>10</sup> Barcelona, Acantilado, 2015.

général. Elle porte aussi attention à soi, aux affects, à la mémoire, à l'espoir, etc. La pensée qui s'en empare devient une herméneutique du sens de la vie, un essai pour comprendre le fondement de l'existence humaine.

C'est là que le lien entre souci et résistance devient évident. Esquirol oppose désintégration et résistance dans la vie quotidienne. Sa proposition de base est : « Celui va au désert n'est pas un déserteur ». Nul besoin de se rendre au Sahara. Le désert est tout à la fois partout et nulle part. Façon de dire qu'il se rencontre tout aussi bien dans la quotidienneté. Et c'est là aussi et surtout qu'une résistance est requise, quand bien même discrète. Elle doit être efficace. Ne résistent pas ceux se complaisent dans le rêve et l'imagination.

L'auteur fait l'éloge de la résistance capable de contrer la désintégration. Une opposition en termes d'ontologie : que la désintégration aboutisse au non-être, ceci n'est pas difficile à admettre. Et ce n'est pas non plus une anomalie car il y a dans l'être une puissance méphistophélique qui ne cesse de détruire ce qui est. Esquirol fait appel ici à l'implacable et permanent passage du temps pour marquer l'idée de dissolution. Là contre il affirme que l'existence est résistance. Il y a là comme l'expérience d'un durcissement de l'être et d'un abri à trouver. Plus qu'un abri, il faut trouver un axe existentiel qui sache nous rattacher à la terre : « la maison comme centre empêche le monde de sombrer dans le chaos et la dispersion ». L'auteur saisit l'occasion de critiquer les médiocres théories contemporaines du bonheur et de l'accomplissement de soi. Il prend plus au sérieux la conception sartrienne du projet. Certes elle fait contraste avec la résistance puisqu'elle pousse vers l'avant, mais du moins, elle partage avec la notion de résistance « l'affirmation du sujet et l'idée de responsabilité ». Le projet n'est pas une option dont on puisse faire l'économie ; il caractérise ontologiquement l'individu, si bien que la résistance elle-même n'est pas une option, mais une donnée qu'on soit Pyrrhus ou Cinéas. On peut suivre ici Rilke déclarant que le tréfonds de notre être nous risque et que nous acceptons d'avancer avec ce risque. Parfois, ajoute-t-il, nous risquons même plus que ce que la vie exige<sup>11</sup>. Après tout, qui a peur d'échouer échoue à coup sûr. C'est alors l'aventure en terrain découvert, que l'on s'adonne à la différence exprimée dans toutes les latitudes baignées de soleil ou que l'on se voue à l'identité (dans les sombres mines de l'être) :

« Cela nous donne, hors de la protection,  
une sécurité, là où agit la pesanteur  
des forces pures ».

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<sup>11</sup> À *Lucius von Stoedten*.

Pesanteur qui n'est donc pas inertie puisque force des profondeurs (*Schwerkraft*), et par là condition de la résistance.

Le recueillement, retraite en soi, assure un silence qui est méthodique, ouvrant un chemin. C'est pourquoi il n'est pas isolement, mais force qui provient de l'être plus profond des résistants. Ils résistent et ne jouent pas à résister. C'est que le rassemblement en soi des forces propres assure une confirmation de soi qui ne donne plus la priorité à l'opinion des autres et à leurs exigences. Mais la concentration en soi ne signifie pas repli et complaisance à soi. Esquirol insiste là-dessus :

« Il n'y a pas de résistance sans modestie et générosité. Son absence donne lieu par l'arrogance et l'égoïsme. Narcisse n'était pas un résistant ce sur quoi il faut insister afin d'introduire l'idée de "de résistance intime". Intime pas tant au sens d'une l'intériorité, mais plutôt que sens de la proximité, de la centralité du noyau, de soi ».

Comme la pesanteur est, chez Schelling, nécessaire comme fondement, à l'éclosion de la lumière, pour Esquirol, la lumière éclaire les voies de la vie quotidienne : « La résistance est comme la résistance électrique au sens où, de façon paradoxale, c'est seulement à travers elle que se produisent lumière et chaleur pour les résistants. Dans les termes d'une philosophie transcendante, cela signifie que l'extension à l'infini de l'être abolit la conscience, dans la mesure où elle n'advient qu'à la faveur d'une opposition qui permette à la subjectivité de se réfléchir (la réflexion optique servant de métaphore à la réflexion intellectuelle). Il est naïf de penser que l'être se dédouble afin de se connaître sans devoir s'opposer à soi-même. Pour créer une image de soi en laquelle se voir, il faut que l'objet soit en opposition au sujet.

Selon Esquirol, la lucidité, effet de la résistance, sert à la fois l'individu et la communauté. « C'est une lumière qui illumine à la fois son propre chemin et agit comme un phare pour les autres, guidant sans éblouir. Non pas une lumière qui révèle les valeurs suprêmes là-haut au ciel ou le sens caché du monde ; c'est une lumière sur le chemin, qui nous protège de la cruelle nuit, nous apporte la clarté, ménage l'accès aux choses proches, nous reconforte et régénère ». Où l'on observe la pertinence de la lucidité dans le champ de la vie pratique immédiate. Le platonisme (celui pour l'élite comme celui pour le peuple) est mis entre parenthèses et avec lui les ésotérismes de toute sorte parce que trop élevés ou trop exigeants concernant ce qui est requis pour contrer la nuit cruelle – par quoi il faut entendre en priorité le nihilisme.

Pour cela, Esquirol proposera un modèle de conduite, une planche de salut, selon la proximité, consistant dans la culture de son jardin : « La proximité ou, dans le cas de Candide, le retour à la proximité (sa maison, ses compagnons, son jardin, son intimité, etc.) est un chemin vers la présence et le sens tout à la fois ». Il apparaît donc que l'authenticité est du côté de Cinéas. La vraie vie n'est pas ailleurs. Il est important que présence et sens soient mis en rapport. La présence signifie en général la révélation de soi à quoi s'ajoute ici la disponibilité et la réciprocité (comme chez Marcel<sup>12</sup>).

Le quotidien l'emporte sur l'exceptionnel si l'on cherche la paix et le bonheur. Folie de partir en expédition pour abattre les murailles de Troie ou pour s'emparer de la Toison d'or. Mais aussi entreprise inutile que de travailler indéfiniment pour amasser une fortune comme l'enseigne le pêcheur imaginé par Heinrich Böll dans sa nouvelle *Anekdote zur Senkung der Arbeitsmoral*.

La résistance ne défait toutefois pas tous les ennemis. Comme les parois de l'intimité ne sont pas étanches, la négativité trouve toujours le moyen de les traverser. Disons plutôt qu'elle est dans la place depuis toujours. Elle empêche les gens d'être justifiés parce qu'ils sont pour les inciter au désespoir, les angoisses préparant les échecs. Esquirol nomme « nihilisme » cet insurmontable ennemi. « Légion » aurait sans doute mieux convenu si l'auteur avait visé la pluralité des maux comme chez Voltaire. Admettons avec lui que le *nihil*, comme revers de l'être, puisse être l'adversaire par excellence, qui ternit la joie de vivre et l'affirmation de soi jusqu'à atrophier les potentialités de la subjectivité. Il suit de là que la résistance est incapable « de vaincre totalement le brouillard du nihilisme (ni Candide, ni ses amis ne peuvent effacer complètement de leurs mémoires tout ce qu'ils ont vu et expérimenté). Le brouillard du nihilisme ne peut jamais être véritablement défait parce qu'il fait partie de la condition humaine ». Disons plus : par là apparaît que la vie a la possibilité de se nier<sup>13</sup>. L'auteur poursuit : « En raison de cela, le sens de la proximité ne sera jamais celui d'un parfait monde heureux. On pourrait penser que ceci est trop modeste, mais voici le fait. Point ici de ruse, et parfois un peu est beaucoup ».

## V

Présence et sens définissent la proximité qu'offre la résistance. Mais la lumière que produit cette dernière pénètre plus profond : « Alors que l'actualité cache l'abîme de ce monde et perçoit l'existence comme une maladie, la résistance

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<sup>12</sup> Présent, c'est-dire disponible. « La présence enveloppe une réciprocité » (*Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique*, p. 83).

<sup>13</sup> Voir *La Barbarie* de Michel Henry.

observe l'abîme les yeux dans les yeux ». Ce que j'interprète ainsi : la vie quotidienne recouvre un intemporel abîme qui échappe au regard de celui qui se laisse aller à vivre au lieu de s'interroger sur l'être qui lui fait face. Résister à la suprématie de l'être, c'est cela qui ouvre un horizon sur l'inconnu (non seulement celui qui s'étale devant soi), celui qui est nécessaire pour vivre, selon René Char<sup>14</sup>, mais aussi sur celui qui creuse et dans lequel il faut s'enfoncer<sup>15</sup>. Tôt ou tard, la zone de confort devra être abandonnée.

C'est que l'actualité est un autre nom de la vie quotidienne, et dans ce cas, cette dernière paraît pouvoir se concilier avec une conscience mystifiée. Loin de toujours offrir une résistance, la quotidienneté est susceptible de s'adapter à la dictature par la mise en œuvre, selon Virgil Gueorghiu, d'une petite logique par opposition à la grande, celle des horizons et de l'histoire bien comprise. « L'homme au cerveau plein de vers ne désire que la "petite logique" ». Vers que le totalitarisme inocule afin de corrompre l'entendement au moyen de ses deux organes : terreur et propagande qui font l'individu se rendre à l'ennemi pour en admettre les contre-vérités et être rivé à la vie immédiate. Caractérise la petite logique que, fonctionnant au quotidien, « elle n'est plus valable d'un jour à l'autre »<sup>16</sup>. La perte de la continuité existentielle et normative n'est pas sans affecter la ferme position dans l'être et par là le sens.

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<sup>14</sup> « Comment vivre sans inconnu devant soi ? » (Argument du *Poème pulvérisé*).

<sup>15</sup> « Enfonce-toi dans l'inconnu qui creuse » (Char, *Fureur et mystère*).

<sup>16</sup> *Les Sacrifiés du Danube*, tr. L. Lamoure, Paris, Livre de poche, 1974, p. 47-48.





## Empathy and Semiotic Narrative Practices concerning Art: A Cognitive Semiotic Approach to Aesthetic Experience and Emotion

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper proposes a cognitive-semiotic approach to aesthetics to understand aesthetic emotion and its relation to the process of producing and valorizing art. The core argument presented is that the emotional aspects of aesthetic experience are integral to the processes of evaluation and meaning-making and that this interplay significantly influences individuals' engagement with art, highlighting the importance of these dimensions in the overall experience.

Therefore, the initial step in my approach is to illustrate that the process of meaning-making is significantly influenced by our active participation, as well as our interpretation and understanding of our own emotions and those of others. I intend to demonstrate that throughout this process, empathy is a vital component of the reciprocal interaction between the viewer and the artwork. In this regard, I will explore various concepts related to empathy, focusing on aesthetic empathy. Additionally, I will emphasize the correlation between aesthetic experiences and everyday life, explaining how a work of art can effectively mirror the core of daily life through a semiotic narrative practice. I believe that by exploring these narratives more thoroughly, we can achieve a deeper, empathetic understanding of both the artist and the artwork and that this understanding can lead to explicit and implicit responses to the artwork, ultimately shaping our overall attitude toward it. Hence, I will conclude that our aesthetic experiences provide us with opportunities to actively explore aspects of our narrative selves, which might help us understand how these experiences significantly change our relationship with ourselves and the social context we are a part of.

**Keywords:** *cognitive semiotics, meaning-making, simulation theory, empathy, narratives*

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## Introduction: features of cognitive semiotics

How does the mind interact with our body to produce emotions, and what role do these emotions play in aesthetic experiences? How do these aesthetic emotions differ from those involved in other experiences? To address these inquiries, my paper begins with Terry Eagleton's thought-provoking statement that "aesthetics is born as a discourse on the body" (Eagleton, 1988: 327). The focus lies on that aspect of aesthetic ideology that plays a role in reevaluating aesthetics in philosophy and science by presenting it as a sphere wherein meaning is constructed through bodily engagement with the external environment.

The premise from which I started is that current research in aesthetic theories strongly emphasizes the pivotal role of emotion in aesthetic experiences. These theories form the basis of what is currently recognized as sentimentalist aesthetics. Although there is a wide variety of approaches and theories about the role of emotion in the interaction with works of art (see, in this respect, Robinson, 2006; Rolls, 2011), we can also identify a common assumption that the emotional component is fundamental to the aesthetic experience. In this view, every time we experience something aesthetic, this experience is primarily based on complex emotional processes.

My paper explores how we can develop deep emotional and physical connections with art through the use of cognitive semiotics perspective and tools. Although cognitive semiotics is not a unified discipline since it "has been invented many times during the past few decades" (Sonesson, 2012: 208), it has now evolved beyond the status of an emerging discipline. In my perspective, cognitive semiotics should not be regarded merely as another variant of semiotics but rather as an embodiment of semiotics' enduring ambition to function as a genuine bridge between diverse disciplines. Jordan Zlatev offers us an integrative definition of cognitive semiotics, which he sees as a new transdisciplinary field of research into everything to do with the phenomenon of meaning "integrating methods and theories developed in the disciplines of cognitive science with methods and theories developed in semiotics and the humanities, with the ultimate aim of providing new insights into the realm of human signification and its manifestation in cultural practices" (Zlatev, 2015: 1043). In this regard, it is essential to emphasize the connection to cognitive science, specifically concerning the concept of embodiment, which is the focal point of interest in 4E Cognition theories. This entails studying the physical and sensorimotor foundation of phenomena such as meaning, mind, cognition, and language, a turn that has been noticeable in semiotics, particularly over the past twenty years. In short, this recent development in theoretical reflection on signs involves transitioning from conceptualizing signs as abstract relations to analyzing their material and corporeal nature.

Among the specific approaches of the theories included in 4E Cognition, I state that the enactive perspective is crucial for cognitive semiotics as it emphasizes the role of direct and lived experience in cognition. Therefore, the shift in the perspective regarding the construction of meaning entails a departure from viewing it purely as a static and structural phenomenon. Instead, it is now perceived as a *dynamic* process that involves *interaction* and *sense-making*. Furthermore, there is a strong link between the concept of a *semiotic system* (see C. Paolucci, 2021: 2-3) and the core idea of the enactive perspective, known as *enaction*, which is understood as “a history of structural coupling that gives rise to a world through a network comprising multiple levels of interconnected sensorimotor subnetworks” (Varela et al. 1991: 206). In this way, cognition involved in constructing signifying surfaces that mediate our access to the world is no longer primarily concerned with *representation* but with *effective* and *skillful action* in the ongoing interaction with the external world.

The process of creating meaning contributes to the formation of varied interpretations and narratives, which is why, in my paper, I intend to explore how semiotic narrative practices can facilitate our understanding of aesthetic emotion and its correlation with the creation and appreciation of art. Even though enactivist approaches are not uniform, I choose to concentrate on this prevalent perspective among other theories of 4E cognition and its contributions to cognitive semiotics. I firmly believe that this viewpoint can best elucidate the wide range of artistic genres that contribute to an aesthetic experience. However, given the complexity of the artistic phenomenon, we must not forget, as S. Gallagher & Mia Burnett warn us, that each approach has strengths and limitations and that no singular set of principles can universally explain all art across different contexts (Burnett & Gallagher, 2020: 157-176).

The primary goal of my paper is to demonstrate that the emotional aspect of the aesthetic experience involves a process of evaluation and sense-making, which is essential for engaging with art. This sense-making process is shaped through active participation, interpretation, and comprehension of our own and others' emotions. I submit that embracing a cognitive semiotic, which implies assuming an embodied-enactive perspective towards aesthetic experience and emotions, allows for the best realization of these attributes. In this perspective, cognition is intertwined with the body's emotional and empathic states, blurring the line between non-rational and rational aspects. Based on the enactive perspective on cognition, we can assert that cognition involves our ability to act in the world and that emotion is considered a fundamental aspect of perception, acting as a prerequisite for other cognitive processes. Consequently, it can be inferred that emotion represents a cognitive form that enhances our comprehension of the world.

I will revisit this thesis shortly, but it is important to clarify from the outset that this paper does not seek to propose a new theory of aesthetic experience. Even though this concept has generated so much discussion to the point where some philosophers consider it “obsolete” (N. Carroll, 2008), I decided to use it in this paper because it seems appropriate for the situations in which we want to see what kind of emotional experiences people have when they interact with an aesthetic object. My objective here is not to establish the criteria for defining an object or action as aesthetic. I am also not addressing the issue of aesthetic judgment or the art/non-art distinction. As important as these are, they are not investigated in the framework of the interaction between mind and body for the purpose of producing emotions, which is the focus of this research. I am interested, instead, in line with John Dewey’s pragmatist philosophy, in an extension of the scope of aesthetics to include objects and actions that are not traditionally characterized as belonging to aesthetics or which, according to conventional aesthetic theories, should not provoke aesthetic experiences. From this perspective, any object or action can generate an undeniable aesthetic experience. The result is that all our experiences have an aesthetic potential and that the self because it is intrinsically embodied and tied to its environment, can be dramatically influenced by art.

However, while the aesthetic experience is an everyday one, it also has specific features that make it unique among other experiences. This is because the emotions conveyed in art have a profound influence on individuals, engaging them on a subjective and physical level and consequently shaping their attention and aesthetic assessments. I aim to demonstrate that the cognitive semiotics’ perspective does not align with cognitive theories of art, which portray aesthetic emotions as being represented in a cognitive and detached manner. Undoubtedly, cognitive factors play an essential role in comprehending art and significantly influence the emotions evoked by the encounter with works of art; nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that aesthetic experiences are closely connected to the emotional states of the observer. One of the fundamental aspects of the aesthetic experience is its capacity to evoke profound and transformative emotions in the beholders. Consequently, it is often posited that individuals empathize with the artwork during an aesthetic encounter. This is why we can say that to gain a genuine understanding of a work of art, it is imperative to establish a deep emotional and physical connection with it. As a result, the artwork can evoke strong and harmonious emotions in us, the viewers.

## A cognitive semiotic concept of aesthetic emotion and experience

A comprehensive, cognitive semiotics explanation of aesthetic experience emphasizes the dynamic and pluralist nature of our engagement with artworks. It indicates that in our experiential engagement with a work of art, we need to be aware of our own situated experiences and emotions and dissociate them from the emotions and experiences of others. I will revisit this specific idea later in my paper, but for now, I want to emphasize that, in this process, our embodied skills play a crucial role. This means that aesthetic experience emerges from bodily and emotional engagement with works of art and that the exercise of our skills in situated and embodied action enables us to respond meaningfully to the work of art. In this context, the reference to abilities emphasizes two critical features of the enactivist approach: (1) the development of my cognitive and emotional skills undoubtedly hinges upon the biological endowment of my organism, and (2) specific environmental circumstances in which works of art may be encountered. Our abilities, primarily those linguistically imaginative and emotional, to interact with art or a cultural artifact enact some *affordances* the environment offers and predispose us to certain actions. In brief, an individual's reaction to a work of art encompasses an embodied know-how that is shaped by the cultural milieu surrounding the artwork. My point is that if we examine these ideas closely, we can see that they are already foreshadowed in the semiotics of Charles S. Peirce. In this regard, he argues that we must differentiate between everyday matters and significant crises in life. In his understanding, relying solely on individual reasoning is considered unreliable in matters of great significance. While reasoning proves to be reasonably effective in routine business affairs, its success is independent of its theoretical underpinning. In this sense, he wrote the following:

“The mental qualities we most admire in all human beings except our several selves are the maiden's delicacy, the mother's devotion, manly courage, and other inheritances that have come to us from the biped who did not yet speak; while the characters that are most contemptible take their origin in reasoning... . It is the instincts, the sentiments, that make the substance of the soul. Cognition is only its surface, its locus of contact with what is external to it... Thus, pure theoretical knowledge, or science, has nothing directly to say concerning practical matters, and nothing even applicable at all to vital crises. Theory is applicable to minor practical affairs; but matters of vital importance must be left to sentiment, that is, to instinct” (Peirce, par: 627).

From this quote, we can see that Peirce supported rational science, but at the same time, he acknowledged deeper modes of inference in practical conduct.

Because encounters with works of art are truly transformative in that they challenge us and take us out of our comfort zone, we tend to say that in an aesthetic experience, we empathize with the work of art. The concept of empathy entails establishing a deep emotional and physical connection with a work of art, enabling it to evoke strong emotions within us. However, we must recognize that there are situations when we engage with various artworks, and we may not always be emotionally moved by them or find them appealing, resulting in a lack of shared connection. In these situations, the enactivist perspective suggests setting aside the need to comprehend the artwork intellectually. Instead, it encourages us to engage with it in a way that fosters feelings, movement, and being emotionally affected by art. Therefore, the primary focus of this paper is to show that the notion of a meaningful appreciation of art is rooted in understanding and connection with others. These abilities are rooted in empathy and in its hermeneutic capacity to comprehend others' experiences and thoughts from their point of view.

This is why, considering the various concepts presented by the enactivist perspective on aesthetic experience, I have chosen to focus my attention specifically on the concept of empathy. I find it especially intriguing to investigate its role in the mutual interaction between the viewer and the artwork and how it influences the process of evaluation and sense-making. Next, I would like to discuss some ideas about empathy, specifically aesthetic empathy. In doing so, I will appeal to the mirror neuron accounts of aesthetics, such as Freedberg and Gallese (2007), and contrast it with D. Hutto and S. Gallagher's concept of *narrative practice* (see Gallagher & Hutto, 2008; Hutto, 2008; Gallagher, 2012). I will then attempt to analyze these perspectives using a semiotic grid that focuses on narratives and representation. Throughout my paper, I also strive to emphasize the correlation between aesthetic experiences and everyday life. My hypothesis suggests that a piece of art tells a powerful story, often capturing the essence of daily life. By examining these narratives, we can gain a deep, empathetic understanding of both the artist and the artwork, influencing our explicit and implicit responses to the artwork and shaping our overall attitude toward it. Thus, I conclude that aesthetic experiences are pathways for engaging with aspects of the narrative self. It becomes clear now that a comprehensive understanding of these experiences can provide valuable insights into their significant impact on our self-perception and the dynamics of our connections within the broader societal framework.

## Perspectives on empathy

It is essential to recognize that there is no consensus on understanding empathy and its relationship with aesthetic experience. Upon reviewing the history of philosophy, it becomes evident that the recent introduction of connections between emotion, perception, and bodily sensation regarding aesthetic experience and empathy has become a focal point in philosophical reflection (see Freedberg & Gallese, 2007; Scarinzi, 2015; Shusterman, 2000; Gallagher & Hutto, 2008; Burnett & Gallagher, 2020). Until now, the primary perspective for understanding aesthetic experience has been in the tradition of Kantian philosophy. In this line, aesthetic experience has often been viewed as an intellectual accomplishment, valued for its pure form. This is the most significant aspect of Kant's aesthetic theory, which has sparked the most interest in embodiment research. It also relates to his explanation of judgments of beauty, particularly pure judgments of beauty. Therefore, following Kant's idea that experiencing beauty requires a form of disinterested judgment that suspends practical, ethical, and political commitments and which links aesthetics to a theory of judgment based on feelings that are non-rational, non-conceptual, and non-cognitive, the dominant aesthetic tradition until the late eighties overlooked the emotional, prereflective, and bodily sensations in aesthetic experiences.

Empathy refers to the philosopher and aesthetician T. Lipps' concept of *Einfühlung*, by which he understands "feeling one's way into" an artwork or another person. Later, the concept of empathy was exemplified by the appeal to experience, bodily sensations, and emotional receptivity within the aesthetic experience. Discussions about the role of the body and aspects of corporeality in the aesthetic experience are well-established in current art theories. These discussions were first addressed within the framework of J. Dewey's pragmatist philosophy and in the research on perception found in M. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and M. Dufrenne's phenomenology of aesthetic experience. In these conceptual frameworks, the analysis of the nature of the embodied mind was also developed, as Varela, Rosch, and Thompson assumed in their well-known 1991 book. These analyses form the basis of enactive perspectives, which not only ground the mind in sensorimotor features, seeing experiences as outcomes of our interaction with the environment but also hint at the idea of attunement in the features of an embodied affectivity (see Colombetti, 2014).

On the other hand, recent neuroscientific research, which assumes the exploration of the visual processing of works of art by investigating the neural basis of the aesthetic attitude towards works of art, everyday objects, and natural events, has definitively rekindled the perspective that aesthetic experience is firmly rooted



in empathy and encompasses the mental and physical simulation of elements depicted in the artwork. The idea that findings from neuroscience research are crucial for understanding and aesthetic appreciation of works of art is now widely accepted, particularly by enactivist perspectives, which emphasize the interaction and mutual influence between the perceiver and the artwork in creating meaning. However, many philosophers and art theorists raise several questions about whether empirical evidence can serve as a substantial foundation for validating aesthetic judgments. Reflecting on the explanatory potential that cognitive neuroscience can have on the aesthetics and philosophy of art, D. Davies asks what it means for a theory of aesthetics to be based on neurobiology. To this end, he discusses S. Zeki's claim that aesthetics, like all other human activities, is a product of our brains and that it must ultimately obey its laws (see Zeki, 2001). According to Davies, Zeki's statement indicates his exclusive focus on comprehending the production of art without an equal concern for the philosophical aspects of its reception and evaluation. To validate Zeki's argument, Davies supports his remarks with the following statement, which aligns meaningfully with the dynamic and interactionist perspectives proposed by cognitive semiotics and enactivism:

“Aesthetics is concerned with describing and explaining human artistic activity. It is concerned with explaining what goes on in the agent when she exercises artistic creativity or achieves some artistic end, and what is going on in the receiver when she appreciates or responds to an artwork” (Davies, 2014:59).

Based on Davies's observation, we can sense the body's significant impact on the aesthetic experience and evaluation of the artwork. In addition to aspects related to corporeality, there are those related to bodily movements, as seen by authors such as Shusterman (2006) and Brink (2018), as an integral part of the aesthetic experience. Taking into consideration Davies's observation, we can enhance the viewpoint presented by neuroscience, which concentrates on the internal and psychological factors occurring in the brain and nervous system during the aesthetic experience, by incorporating the externalist perspective advocated by enactivism, which holds that many of our aesthetic responses are influenced by external factors and by active engagement with the environment. From this perspective, works of art, with their diverse and complex nature, as well as the unique interactions they facilitate, contribute to the shaping of cognition and afford specific types of practices that differ from our everyday experiences.

*Freedberg and Gallese's simulation theory on empathy*

One of the most exciting discussions about empathy for cognitive semiotics refers to the results of empirical (neuro)aesthetics regarding embodied simulation and motor processing. This research concerns how neural activity can be measured within an engagement with the work of art and what kind of responses can be generated by the receivers involved in such experiential engagements. One research study dedicated to examining physiological responses that occur during our emotional connection with artwork is the well-known article, *Motion, Emotion, and Empathy in Aesthetic Experience*, by the art historian David Freedberg and neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese. The two authors firmly reject a theory of empathic responses to artistic works that is solely “introspective, intuitive, and metaphysical” (Freedberg & Gallese, 2007: 199). They also challenge a cognitive approach in aesthetics that considers the interpretation of an artwork’s meaning as exclusively occurring within the observer’s mind, emphasizing its connection to cultural, historical, social, and even personal influences instead. However, their aim is to demonstrate that viewers possess a precognitive understanding of artworks using the fundamental mechanisms of mirror and canonical neurons, as indicated by their physiological responses to the depicted poses in various figurative works. From the variety of artistic genres facilitated by the aesthetic experience, they chose to focus on the visual ones to explain the involvement of mirror neurons in simulating our actions and emotions within the brain. These neurons (also called ‘canonical neurons’) are in the premotor cortex and are activated, both in the brain of the observer and the agent, whenever we see or contemplate various artifacts or representations of them, when we act following a goal, or when we see explicit or implicit gestures. From their perspective, the neural processes evoked by empathetic access to visual works of art account for two types of relationship:

“(i) the relationship between embodied empathetic feelings in the observer and the representational content of the works in terms of the actions, intentions, objects, emotions, and sensations depicted in a given painting or sculpture; and (ii) the relationship between embodied empathetic feelings in the observer and the quality of the work in terms of the visible traces of the artist’s creative gestures, such as vigorous modeling in clay or paint, fast brushwork and signs of the movement of the hand more generally” (Freedberg & Gallese, 2007: 199).

According to their argument, we can notice an internal resonance with artwork that forms an integral part of the aesthetic experience and that the brain’s simulation or mirroring mechanism facilitates this experience. As we can see, their methodological

approach neglects the artistic aspects of the work in order to prioritize physical responses. One of the examples they offer in this regard refers to the series of prints created by the Spanish painter Francisco Goya, where viewing images of punctured or damaged body parts activates the same brain centers that are usually activated when we feel pain ourselves. This explains why we might feel physical sensations and shock when we see someone else experiencing pressure or injury to their skin and limbs. Another example they provide illustrates the idea that we can experience a sense of exertion, as it triggers the mirror system when we observe Michelangelo's sculpture "*Slave called Atlas*," renowned for the powerful impression it creates of someone struggling to free themselves from a block of stone. It is essential to remember that, in the authors' view, spectators of such works of art develop feelings of empathy, either through an empathetic understanding of the emotions of others or through the internal imitation of the actions of others observed in images or sculptures, in this case.

The statements made by Freedberg and Gallese are of great interest to philosophers and art theorists as they concern the problem of our understanding of works of art and our somatic reactions to the representational content of these works. However, the examples from Jackson Pollock and Lucio Fontana are especially noteworthy because they serve to illustrate that our bodily responses are not limited to figurative or representational art but extend to abstract art as well, encompassing the implicit movements in the works of these artists. The authors explicitly state this from the beginning of their work when they claim that "even when the image contains no overt emotional component, a sense of bodily resonance can arise. These are all instances in which beholders might find themselves automatically simulating the emotional expression, the movement, or even the implied movement within the representation" (Freedberg & Gallese, 2007: 197).

*Reviews of simulation theory (ST): Semiotic narrative practices and empathy*

Despite the compelling nature of these assertions, it is essential to acknowledge that the reasoning presented by Freedberg and Gallese contains a significant degree of speculation. While there are undeniable and direct bodily reactions associated with the perception of these works of art, the mechanism through which an automatic phenomenal simulation is generated in the perceiver's body remains unclear. Nonetheless, I agree with Brink's observation that the strength of Freedberg and Gallese's simulation theory of intersubjective understanding is that one can naturally infer the directness of experience, given the automatic responses of the brain's receptors (Brink, 2018). This aspect is essential for comprehending

empathy, which is based on the central thesis of philosophical hermeneutics, which entails recognizing the emotions of others as distinct from our own. The underlying concept essentially involves empathizing with another individual by imagining oneself in their position. Subsequently, this process prompts us to contemplate the potential actions and emotions we would experience if we were to inhabit that individual's circumstances. In this instance, empathy is manifested as a form of simulation in accordance with the understanding of the mirror neuron mechanism.

This viewpoint has been the subject of numerous criticisms, mainly because it is perceived in a reductionist way. Given the complexity of aesthetic experiences, it seems to me that it becomes evident that simulation processes cannot succinctly explain their diversity. Instead, a dynamic approach to aesthetic experiences appears more fitting, as they derive their expressive meaning from the interaction between the viewer and the artwork. This statement is not made in the sense of suggesting that empathy-based simulation processes involving mirror neurons are not crucial in shaping aesthetic experiences. On the contrary, I do not question their role in processing the somatic reactions that arise in engagement with a work of art. However, my observation pertains to the necessity for certain conceptual clarifications regarding the specific characteristics of an aesthetic experience and the elements that distinguish it while also establishing connections to everyday experiences. The problem, as mentioned earlier, remains unanswered in Freedberg and Gallese's paper: if the mechanism of production of the two types of experience is the same, if both everyday and aesthetic experiences are embodied and enactive, then how can we identify the specificity of each? Analyzing this issue, Brink (2018) points out that the theory proposed by Freedberg and Gallese has the potential to provide insights into the causal mechanisms underlying the two distinct types of experiences. According to the theory, aesthetic experience is derived from the contemplation of representations in works of art, whereas everyday experience originates from the perception of actual movement. However, the potential ramifications that could influence the production and development of these experiences are not explicitly addressed or examined.

Gallese and Freedberg's theory also faced criticism from a phenomenological perspective. The main accusation was that it reduced empathy to the activation of the visceral and sensorimotor systems. In this regard, Zahavi argues that the process of automatic simulation is more akin to contagion than empathy. (Zahavi, 2014). In his understanding, emotional contagion is a basic automatic affective mechanism by which an agent synchronizes its physiological and mental states with another person's. However, the fact that it is an automatic synchronization process with another person's emotions does not imply the understanding that the emotions felt

are different from the other person's. Because emotional contagion can also be observed in infants, it has been considered a justifiable basis for more complex forms of emotion sharing, such as empathy. However, as Zahavi explains, empathy entails cultivating reflective perspectives to grasp and empathize with others' viewpoints. It is crucial to recognize that this capacity does not manifest spontaneously, signifying that empathy is not universally pervasive in intersubjective interactions.

Compared to simulation theory, the phenomenological perspective emphasizes the significance of intentionality by highlighting the context and situation of the other person rather than focusing exclusively on their internal emotional state. Despite Simulation Theory emerging as the primary challenger to the Theory Theory, or Theory of Mind (ToM), that relies on our mental states and those of others to interpret, predict, and explain our intentions, beliefs, and desires, thus implying a third-person perspective on social cognition, certain parallels can be identified between the two perspectives. First and foremost, compared to enactivism, they seem to be more reflective approaches: while proponents of Theory of Theory (TT) advanced the idea of *mindreading* as a prerequisite for social cognition, meaning that in our daily activities, we make sense of others' behavior by deducing their mental states, supporters of the simulation theory (ST) also propose an internal model to understand others' minds. The difference lies in the fact that in this process, one uses one's own experiences and mind to deduce how others will react through simulation. In both scenarios, empathy appears to result from an internal process akin to understanding the thoughts of others.

On the other hand, the enactivist perspective advocates for the practical and embodied nature of our social interactions, setting aside the concept of mindreading. In interpersonal engagements, individuals depend on social skills, which are facilitated by the exchange of experiences with others. As articulated by the developmental psychologist Colwyn Trevarthen, these skills commence their development at an early stage in a child's ontogenetic progression. He refers to these skills as emerging during "primary intersubjectivity" in infants aged 1-9 months and "secondary intersubjectivity" in infants aged 9-18 months (Trevarthen, 1979). Based on his research, Trevarthen has established that a 2-month-old infant possesses the ability to distinguish between people and objects and is capable of forming intricate and substantial interactions with its caregivers. The primary intersubjectivity is explained by Trevarthen by the fact that the child's social skills are intuitive and therefore innate, the child being from the start a human being who seeks an "understanding of what to do with body and mind in a world of invented possibilities" (Trevarthen & Delafield-Butt, 2017:17). These social skills can be understood in terms of "intercorporeal dimension" described by M. Merleau-Ponty, which is already apparent in the mimetic nature of primary intersubjectivity (see also on this topic Zlatev, 2008).

According to Gallagher and Hutto (2008), Trevarthen's concept of primary intersubjectivity is a suitable theoretical framework that can account for young children's abilities to implicitly understand the mental states and intentions of others through the perception of bodily movements, gestures, and facial expressions. These nonconceptual skills that we develop early in life, potentially from birth, demonstrate that our ability to understand and empathize with others is not merely a process of *mentalizing* or mindreading. Instead, these skills represent a direct, pragmatic approach to comprehending the experiences and perspectives of others. Through social interactions and bodily practices like mimicry, intuiting intention, and gaze tracking, we can develop meaningful connections with others. This connection can be described as basic empathy, though it does not capture the entire range of ways we can understand others. According to Bruner and Kalmar (1998), this approach can be understood as a '*hermeneutic mass background*,' which plays a crucial role in fostering more advanced forms of social understanding.

The importance of socialization skills in human development and the need to explain a higher level of empathy led to the introduction of the concepts of *narrative competency* and the *Narrative Practice Hypothesis* (or NPH). These concepts are an integral part of an "Interaction Theory" of social cognition proposed by Shaun Gallagher and Daniel Hutto (Gallagher & Hutto, 2008; Hutto, 2008; Gallagher, 2012), which is very much in line with the enactive perspective in the sense that it advocates for an externalist view that considers intentional states and behaviors of others from a second-person and interactive perspective. It is through these encounters with others that we can identify those distinctive types of *narratives* that are the "normal route through which children acquire an understanding of the forms and norms that enable them to make sense of actions in terms of reasons" (Gallagher & Hutto, 2008: 17). The cultivation of narrative competency significantly enhances our ability to understand others in a nuanced and context-sensitive manner. We can accomplish this by tapping into a rich and diverse array of narratives, encompassing our own limited personal experiences and drawing from various cultural sources, such as art, films, theater, television, bedtime stories, fairy tales, novels, and more.

This skill fosters deeper connections and promotes empathy within diverse interactions, which is why Gallagher states that narrative competence intervenes in the development of narrative imagination. The latter does not depend on "a resonance-simulation mechanism but requires a way to narratively frame the other person's experience" (Gallagher, 2012: 370). This issue becomes even more evident when we consider what Gallagher called the *diversity problem*. This concept illustrates that imagination is crucial in enhancing our ability to empathize with others. By allowing us to envision ourselves in different situations, it enables us to understand

better the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of those around us. This capacity to imagine diverse perspectives fosters deeper connections and encourages a more compassionate response to the challenges faced by others. However, it is essential to recognize that this understanding does not necessarily reflect the true feelings or experiences of the other individual. The essential point is that when I limit my understanding to my own perspective by imagining myself in another person's situation, I risk narrowing my viewpoint to the extent that I may overlook the true significance of their experience. While this method allows me to consider how I might respond in a similar situation, it does not necessarily provide a comprehensive understanding of the other person's actions. At this point, narratives become significant because they help us grasp various contexts, extending our understanding beyond our immediate experiences. Narratives open doors to a wide range of situations, enabling us to explore and appreciate the richness of diverse perspectives. This is why narratives seem necessary for empathy, as Gallagher argues. Since narratives are always *situated* within specific *contexts*, they must be interpreted through the lens of particular discourses. As a result, narratives offer a hermeneutical framework for understanding, which encompasses learned skills and practical knowledge about others' expectations and effective ways to engage with them. In this way, narratives inspire us to take action and connect with others, an idea that aligns beautifully with Greimas's semiotic narrative program, which emphasizes that narrative embodies action. However, narratives do more than just convey information about specific contexts. They must be understood within a meaningful framework, which involves a coding process that assigns significance to the actions depicted. This process allows us to see how events are interconnected and how they fit together. As a result, narratives "give us a form or structure that we can use in understanding others" (Gallagher, 2012: 371), and this narrative structure is primarily shaped by movement and action.

In the semiotic tradition, the analysis of narrative structures and models holds significant importance. This analysis mainly focuses on examining the interdependent relationship between two main elements: (1) narratives, which may be regarded as specific types of representational artifacts or as representations of events that exist independently of those portrayals, and (2) narrativity, or the capacity to convey those events or narratives effectively. Paolucci also emphasizes the need to distinguish narrativity from narratives, explaining that narrativity represents "the deep cognitive structure that shapes narratives" (Paolucci, 2021:111). Therefore, enhancing the framing and definition of narratives within the NPH perspective would provide greater clarity regarding the concept of narrativity and its shared elements with semiotic inquiry. This refinement could foster a more comprehensive understanding of these interrelated areas.

Considering the points mentioned earlier, we can now revisit our initial inquiry: What does empathizing with artwork during an aesthetic experience mean? The research findings suggest that empathy is expressed through action and movement. It involves a deep understanding of the contextual narrative of the artwork, which includes a range of actions, expressions, words, and emotions. From an embodied-enactive perspective, the process of understanding transcends a merely representational explanation of the external world. Rather, knowledge of the world emerges from active engagement and sensemaking activities, indicating a dynamic interaction with our environment. This perspective differs from the idea presented in the Theory of Mind (ToM), which often confines empathy to a mental simulation or theoretical inference. A key point regarding the hermeneutic dimension of the narrative is the importance of being open to other people's stories because by engaging with different narratives, we can become more willing to understand others' life experiences and the unique contexts in which they arise. Our capacity to develop narrative frameworks in relation to works of art can be extended and applied to our daily activities, underscoring the relationship between aesthetic experiences and everyday interactions. This connection enriches our understanding of both realms and enhances our overall engagement with the world around us.

## **Conclusion**

My paper delves into the topics of empathy and the narrative phenomenon from the vantage point of cognitive approaches, which have undergone notable advancements, particularly over the past decade. This period has also been linked to the development of cognitive semiotics. Throughout my paper, I have posited that the cognitive semiotic development of our minds underscores the dynamic nature of the interaction of signs. These signs are perceived not as inherently linked to objects but rather as interconnected constructs within structured relations. In my paper, I have opted against deepening general empirical aesthetic theory. This decision stems from its excessive focus on internal responses to art, centered around our subjective preferences while disregarding the discursive contexts that delineate the methodologies employed in our actual engagement with art. It also contributes to an embodied and enactive understanding of artworks, emphasizing the physical properties of art objects and the specific bodily engagements resulting from this interaction.



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## For a Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach to Teacher Observation

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**ABSTRACT.** The present paper describes an alternative mode of doing teacher observation meant to overcome the limitations of the common approach in use today. To this end, the paper first draws upon the hermeneutic theory of perception developed by Graeme Nicholson and establishes the fundamental principle that ought to govern didactic observation and the conditions of possibility of this endeavor. Subsequently, taking Lester Embree's description of phenomenological observation as model, the paper describes the basic rules to be followed. The paper ends with a series of logistic recommendations designed to increase the pedagogical gains of the process.

**Keywords:** teacher observation; hermeneutic theory of perception; phenomenological observation; rules of observation; reflective analysis of teaching.

### Introduction

Teacher observation (also called “(high-)school observation,” “classroom observation,” or “observatory practice”) is one of the main instruments of teacher training since late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> And during all this time it seems to have been done mainly one way, derived from its task. The task of teacher observation is to offer

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<sup>1</sup> Teacher observation is minutely described by Guy Montrose Whipple and William Chandler Bagley in 1908, but Bagley notes that, at this time, the practice was spread in “practically all normal schools” (p. 275). Which leads us to believe that it was introduced much earlier. See in this sense Guy Montrose Whipple, *Guide to High-School Observation* (Syracuse, NY: G. W. Bardeen Publisher, 1908); William Chandler Bagley, *Classroom Management: Its Principles and Technique* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1908).



students the opportunity to learn through observation how to teach. So, students are called to attend several classes equipped with an observation protocol which draws their attention to the things they ought to emulate.

Being simply derived from the task it is supposed to fulfill, the didactic efficacy of this mode of approach to teacher observation might seem self-evident at first. Yet, upon closer examination from a pedagogical and psychological point of view, it becomes apparent that it is marked by a series of limitations which impair its efficacy as an instrument for teacher training. For, as we have showed in a previous paper,<sup>2</sup> through the very way it is conceived, the common approach reduces teacher observation to a mere acquaintance with what teachers do, offering no possibility to understand why they do what they do. But precisely this is needed for students to learn how to teach. At the same time, the common approach reduces the class, dynamic par excellence, to a series of static scenes. To learn to teach, though, it is important to see not only what the teacher does in class, but also how her actions influence what happens afterwards. Furthermore, the common approach focuses exclusively on the teacher and loses sight of the students, forgetting that they are correlative terms, in a dialectical relation to one another. But the teacher is what she is only in virtue of her students, just as the students are students because of the teacher who offers them the opportunity to learn. And, lastly, insofar as it draws students' attention to certain aspects of the teaching performance, the common approach prevents them from gaining a wider perspective on what is happening in class and, therefore, from making use of the experience afterwards, in other ways, to improve their teaching skills.

Insofar as these limitations are constitutive to the common mode of approach to teacher observation, our contention is that it must be abandoned and replaced with another one based on free observation. This, we have showed in the study previously mentioned, exhibits a series of pedagogical benefits attesting its efficacy as a teacher training tool.

In the present paper, drawing on philosophical hermeneutics and phenomenology, we would like to describe such an alternative mode. Our recourse to these philosophical disciplines is grounded by the fact that they deal with the matters of perception and observation from a perspective highly relevant for our task: from the point of view of their functioning in everyday life and their applicability across diverse theoretical and didactic contexts; or, to put it otherwise, from the point of view of their inner mechanisms and of how they can lead to the discovery of something new about the world around us.

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<sup>2</sup> Adrian Costache, "The Limitations of the Common Approach, and the Educational Value of Teacher Observation," n.d. Under review.

## The guiding principle of teacher observation and its conditions of possibility

In our opinion, the essential contribution concerning the workings of visual perception was made by the Canadian philosopher Graeme Nicholson. Starting from Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic ontology and Jean-Paul Sartre's existential phenomenology, Nicholson articulates theoretically an experience familiar to most, but commonly disregarded by the psychologists and philosophers of mind who study perception in "laboratory conditions," independent of both its object and its context. Nicholson shows that perception is always governed by interest. For him "it is wrong to suppose that our practical life is one stream that runs its way and that side by side with it runs another stream, our perceptual life."<sup>3</sup> Because of this identity of the stream of perceptual life with that of practical life perception has two basic attributes: it is (i) selective and (ii) interpretive. Which means to say that our practical interests determine both *what* and *how* we see what we see.<sup>4</sup> They make us miss the things deprived of relevance for our projects and see the same things differently every time our interests change.<sup>5</sup> The same visual stimuli will be perceived as a tree, a chair, a desk in one context and as a shelter from sunlight, something to climb onto to replace a bulb, or a table to dine on in another, when our interests shift.

Nicholson's theory confirms Ulric Neisser, Daniel J. Simons, Christopher F. Chabris et al.'s work<sup>6</sup> on the selectivity of attention to which we resorted in the paper mentioned above for our analysis of the common approach to teacher observation. In fact, Nicholson's theory places this insight onto a broader, firmer

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<sup>3</sup> Graeme Nicholson, *Seeing and Reading* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1984), 36.

<sup>4</sup> Even though Nicholson focuses exclusively on visual perception, we believe that his tenets apply to auditory and sensory perception just as well.

<sup>5</sup> For Nicholson, the perception involved in aesthetic contemplation is not exempt from this principle. For even though it is not done for something else, it still has a purpose; its purpose is in itself. (See in this sense Nicholson, 47-48). On the other hand, even when it serves as ground for theory perception is still guided by a practical interest. For pure theory itself, mathematics, or logic for instance, are not disinterested preoccupations. In this case the interest is postponed, projected into the future when applied sciences will have found the use cases for their theoretical gains.

<sup>6</sup> Ulric Neisser and Robert Becklen, "Selective Looking: Attending to Visual Specified Events," *Cognitive Psychology* 7, no. 4 (1975): 480-94, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285\(75\)90019-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(75)90019-5); Ulric Neisser, *Cognitive Psychology: Classic Edition* (New York: Psychology Press, 2014); Daniel J. Simons and Christopher F. Chabris, "Gorillas in Our Midst: Sustained Inattentional Blindness for Dynamic Events," *Perception* 28 (1999): 1059-74, <https://doi.org/10.1068/p281059>; Christopher F. Chabris and Daniel J. Simons, *The Invisible Gorilla and Other Ways Our Intuitions Deceive Us* (New York: Crown, 2010); Daniel J. Simons and Melinda S. Jensen, "The Effects of Individual Differences and Task Difficulty on Inattentional Blindness," *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 16, no. 2 (2009): 398-403, <https://doi.org/10.3758/PBR.16.2.398>.

ground by showing that not just attention, but perception itself is selective and this *because* it is guided by interest. But Nicholson's theory also brings to the fore a fundamental condition of teacher observation. Since perception is governed by interest, teacher observation can and must only be done when students have completed their theoretical training in educational psychology, pedagogy, didactics, and classroom management. For these courses reveal the significance of what happens in class and thereby open the possibility of observation. With no familiarity with the fundamental concepts and theories of these disciplines students are bound to remain blind.

This condition warrants particular emphasis especially in Romania where the newly introduced didactic master's program mandates that students partake in teacher observation beginning with the first semester of study. Such requirement condemns teacher observation to be a failed experience. Completely failed at first, when students have no understanding of teaching and failed in part as time goes by and they complete the above-mentioned courses. The intention of the architects of the reform is laudable, for students will benefit from more teacher observation. But the way it is put into practice undermines it.

### **A Phenomenological Model of Teacher Observation**

Now, after having brought to light the basic principle guiding observation and the fundamental condition to be met by teacher observation, we should turn our attention to the question how it must be done. To answer this question we will take phenomenological observation as described by Lester Embree in *Reflective Analysis* as our model. The reason why phenomenological observation can and must be taken as model for didactic observation is that both have an epistemic end. Just as didactic observation is meant to enhance our understanding of teaching, phenomenological observation is meant to enrich our knowledge of the phenomena observed, to help us find answers to the questions they pose.

On the other hand, the reason why we prefer Lester Embree's description to a confrontation with the Husserlian corpus is because it was conceived from the very beginning with a pedagogical intention in mind, being envisaged as a "first introduction to phenomenological investigation" and, what is more, one meant for students and researchers in the humanities and social sciences at large, not just in philosophy, the field wherein phenomenology was first born.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lester Embree, *Reflective Analysis: A First Introduction into Phenomenological Investigation*, Second edition (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2011), 9–15.

In *Reflective Analysis* Embree argues that phenomenological observation must obey three basic rules. First, the observer must adopt a “detached,” “dispassionate” or “neutral” attitude toward the phenomenon observed.<sup>8</sup>

In everyday life we are incessantly delivered to the temptation to spontaneously judge what comes about from a practical and/or aesthetic and/or ethical standpoint. In passing, it should be noted that Graeme Nicholson’s theory offers us a good explanation why this is so. We spontaneously evaluate the things we encounter because our perception is guided by our interests. Didactic observation is exposed to all these temptations, but, in addition, it is also exposed to the temptation to judge things from a didactic point of view. Through all the time spent in class students learn not only what their teachers and the hidden curriculum tell them, but also what teachers do, what their duties and means to fulfill them are. This implicit learning is what makes teacher training so difficult. For the things thus learned will constitute the stock of knowledge and practices to which they will spontaneously turn when called upon to teach. But this stock of knowledge and practices is also taken as reference for appraising the didactic performance witnessed during didactic observation. Students in training often tell us they “liked” or “didn’t like” the teacher and they deem the class/ lecture/explanations given etc. to be “beautiful” or “boring.”

Such spontaneous appraisals though classify the thing appraised. As soon we reach a verdict, the thing is integrated into our stock of knowledge and falls into forgetfulness; as soon as it becomes non-problematic, it becomes uninteresting and gets out of sight. So, because phenomenological and didactic observation have an epistemic goal – i.e. because they endeavor to discover something new about the phenomenon observed, respectively to find out what works and what does not work in class, what makes the educational content intelligible for the students and what seems to block this understanding – any such spontaneous appraisal must be withheld. Of course, this does not mean that teaching is exempt from moral evaluations. On the contrary, it needs to be closely scrutinized, both from the point of view of the code of conduct of the school and from a wider viewpoint, of the values of a democratic society. But such scrutiny must not come at the beginning of the observation endeavor, but at its end, when we have reached an overall understanding of what happened in class.<sup>9</sup>

Second, phenomenological observation must focus on the phenomenon in the foreground and not the entire setting in front of the observer.<sup>10</sup> Even though it

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<sup>8</sup> Embree, 49.

<sup>9</sup> We will return to this issue later.

<sup>10</sup> Embree, *Reflective Analysis: A First Introduction into Phenomenological Investigation*, 33.



might seem so at first, this does not mean to take it out of its context and study it independently, as it currently happens in the common approach to teacher observation. Rather, it means to transform it into a point of reference which, in virtue of its relations with the other things surrounding it, will open the possibility to systematically map the entire setting. The phenomenon in the foreground will draw the observer's attention step by step, from one thing to another, toward all the constitutive elements of the visual field, thereby offering her the possibility to trace its contours.

In the case of didactic observation, the thing in the foreground is, alternatively, the teacher, a student, or the class taken as a collective subject, and each of these is given to the observer as a point of accumulation and juxtaposition of a series of things. For instance, the teacher is a point of accumulation of a verbal, paraverbal and corporeal discourse; of a mood expressed in behavior, which reflects the behavior and mood of the students and will be reflected in its turn in theirs; a bridge between students, one playing a fundamental role in those classes where they do not know each other; a bridge between students and their textbooks as well as any other instruments at their disposal in class; a bridge between students and the theories, concepts and practices of the subject taught, on the other. And so on. Likewise, the student is a point of accumulation of a verbal, paraverbal and corporeal discourse; of a mood reflecting the mood of the teacher and of the colleagues'; a bridge between the educational contents learned and the world of youth etc.

Third, phenomenological observation must proceed in a categorial manner. The phenomenologist approaches the world through the lens of several general categories, which, when needed, are better specified. She sees "phenomena" or just "things" (which can be objects, or actions, or persons) endowed with two types of "determinations" – "properties" and "relations" –, which are either "naturalistic" or "cultural."<sup>11</sup> In everyday life such "cultural properties" and "cultural relations" take primarily the form of practical "values," i.e. properties and relations which make the phenomenon encountered useful or useless, depending on the context and how it is encountered.

In a pedagogical setting the phenomena to be observed are the teacher's verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal (corporeal) discourse; her and her students' (taken both individually and as a group) mood and all the other things enumerated above.

The naturalistic determinations of paraverbal discourse are the property of being loud or quiet, cadenced, or syncopated. The naturalistic determinations of non-verbal discourse are its property of being noticeable, ostentatious, or inconspicuous. While the cultural determinations of both spring from their consonance or lack thereof.

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<sup>11</sup> Embree, 36–41.

Verbal discourse does not have any naturalistic determinations since, as we know already from Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, there is nothing natural in human speech.<sup>12</sup> But it has a long series of cultural determinations such as its property of being monosemic or polysemic, logically structured or unstructured, conceptually precise or vague, as well as the fact of having close ties to both paraverbal and non-verbal discourse, being consonant or incongruous with them, or in line or dissonant with the discourse and the behavior of the students.

The naturalistic determinations of the teacher's movements are the fact of being jerky, enthusiastic, or slow, while its cultural determinations, the fact of being threatening, disturbing, or soothing.

The naturalistic determinations of the textbooks are their size, or readability or lack thereof (due to the size or colour of the fonts, or the quality of the paper) while their cultural determinations, the fact of being easy or difficult. In this context we cannot exhaust the list of things to be observed in class, as we cannot exhaust the list of their possible determinations, but the examples given ought to make clear how phenomenological observation must be put to work in a pedagogical context.

In phenomenological research, to lead to the knowledge, the observational data gathered based on these principles are always subjected to a reflective analysis. This must also be done with the data gathered through didactic observation. But given that in this case the knowledge sought is practical in nature, being meant to guide teaching, now, the reflective analysis must follow three particular lines of questioning. The first will focus on the effects of the things observed on how the class progresses. The second must explore alternative courses of action at the teacher and the students' disposal and their possible outcomes. While the third must examine the ethical implications of the things observed.

For instance, upon noticing that a philosophy lecture is overly metaphoric the observer should wonder whether students will realize that philosophical concepts do have precise meanings and if they will be able to make a rigorous argument about the things discussed. And, subsequently, they should wonder whether a discourse in which metaphors are accompanied by rigorous descriptions would not be more useful from a pedagogical standpoint.

Or, upon observing the teacher often making jerking moves the observer should start questioning whether students can focus on their task, what triggers these moves, and if and how they can be avoided. Afterwards, the observer should ask whether the atmosphere in class would have been different if the teacher moved gently as well as if this would not have predisposed students to daydreaming.

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<sup>12</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 9–11.

Then, observing that the teacher stands very close to certain students when she talks to them should make the observer wonder if this will not be perceived as an invasion of one's private space and if it can be considered inappropriate conduct or not. Or, to take a final example, a reference made by the Civics teacher to a political party ought to make the observer ask whether this might not be construed as propaganda for that party or as negative propaganda for the others.

Observance of these principles will ensure the pedagogical value of teacher observation. But this value can be increased by a good organization of the process. This will be our focus in the last section of the paper.

### **The Logistics of Observation**

To maximize the pedagogical gains of observation it is important to bear in mind the following recommendations.

First, students should engage in teacher observation for extensive periods of time following, if possible, one teacher in multiple parallel classes. This will increase the chances to encounter different types of response to the same didactic and/or behavioral input which, by confirming or infirming their hypothesis regarding the consequences of this input, will help them better understand what works in class as well as what makes things work.

For instance, if we see that a PowerPoint presentation given to classes with similar levels of training and interest in the discipline has one outcome at 9 a.m. and a completely different one at 2 p.m., we discover the pedagogical relevance of the schedule and we learn to plan our lessons accordingly and to choose class activities based on it.

The second recommendation is for students in teacher training to consult the curriculum to become familiar with the competences to be developed through the lesson they will observe. These competences contain important clues as to why the teacher chose to use a certain strategy rather than another or to evaluate her students the way she did.

The third is to start the program with a teacher – student conference meant to offer students the opportunity to become familiar with the yearly plan of the teacher and to learn what has been taught so far and what follows.

The fourth recommendation is for the students to take notes during observation. Being based on this phenomenological model, observation yields a significant amount of data in 50 minutes. Because they must also be subjected to

a reflective analysis which requires a constant return to what was observed, the observer cannot and must not rely on her memory. Along with the events taking place the notes should also record:

1. The name of the school and of the teacher, the subject, and the period when observation took place.
2. Details about the context, such as the arrangement of classroom furniture, the types of didactic tools and instructional materials available (video projector, smart board, maps, textbooks etc.), the general atmosphere in the classroom, as well as the mood of the teacher and of the students at the beginning of the class.

As we know, furniture arrangement enhances certain activities and inhibits others, while the teacher's mood has direct impact on student learning.<sup>13</sup>

Fifth, for taking notes the literature on academic development recommends splitting the page in half and noting the activity of the teacher on one column and that of the students on the other.<sup>14</sup> This way it is easier to follow their interaction and the effects of one party's input on the other.<sup>15</sup>

The sixth recommendation, coming still from the field of academic development, is to take notes at regular intervals. Graham A. Martin and Jeremy M. Double recommend a 2- or 3-minutes interval.<sup>16</sup> In our opinion, any tempo imposed a priori has limited value for, sometimes, in the span of two minutes can happen a lot, while other times almost nothing. The rhythm of the class cannot be anticipated despite being predetermined through the lesson plan. That is why our recommendation is the observer to take notes at the end of every didactic sequence, regardless of its duration, or as soon as something unexpected happens.

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<sup>13</sup> See in this sense Victor E. Mastin, "Teacher Enthusiasm," *The Journal of Educational Research* 56, no. 7 (1963): 385–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.1963.10882963>; Edward M. Bettencourt et al., "Effects of Teacher Enthusiasm Training on Student On-Task Behaviour and Achievement," *American Educational Research Journal* 20, no. 3 (1983): 435–50, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1162610>; William D. Coats and Uldis Smidchens, "Audience Recall as a Function of Speaker Dynamism," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 57, no. 4 (1966): 189–91, <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023568>.

<sup>14</sup> Graham A. Martin and Jeremy M. Double, "Developing Higher Education Teaching Skills Through Peer Observation and Collaborative Reflection," *Innovations in Education and Training International* 35, no. 2 (1998): 164, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1355800980350210>.

<sup>15</sup> For a template of teacher observation notes see appendix 1.

<sup>16</sup> Martin and Double, "Developing Higher Education Teaching Skills Through Peer Observation and Collaborative Reflection," 164.

And the last recommendation is for the observer to choose a seat that will enable her to see the facial expression and the gestures of both the teacher and the students. If the class furniture consists of individual desks or tables of two arranged in rows, the ideal place is in front of the class on the extremities, position which puts both the teacher and the students in full view if she turns to the side. If the furniture is arranged in U or chevron, the ideal place is opposite the teacher.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this paper was to describe an alternative mode of doing teacher observation. For this, we have begun with a discussion of Graeme Nicholson's hermeneutic theory of perception, and, on its ground, we have brought to light the fundamental principle that ought to guide such an endeavor. Nicholson shows that human perception is selective in nature because it is always guided by an interest. That is why, we have argued, teacher observation can yield the pedagogical benefits it is expected to have only by cultivating students' interest in teaching through courses in educational psychology, pedagogy, curriculum theory, didactics and classroom management, to name just the core of the curriculum of initial teacher training programs.

In the second part of the paper, to show how didactic observation ought to take place, we turned to Lester Embree's description of phenomenological observation. We argued that this can serve as model for didactic observation because both are called to serve an epistemic purpose: they both aim to further our knowledge of the thing observed.

Embree shows that phenomenological observation is bound by three fundamental rules. First of all, the observer must take a "neutral," "distanced" attitude towards the thing observed. Second of all, the observer must focus on the thing in the foreground of the scene in front of her, and not on the entire scene. And third of all, she must approach the thing observed in categorial terms. Our tenet is that these rules can and must be followed also in didactic observation. But, we maintained, inasmuch as it is called to help students learn to teach, the observational data collected based on these rules must be subject to a reflective analysis guided by three lines of questioning regarding (i) the effects of the things observed on how the class unfolds; (ii) the alternatives at the teacher's disposal and their possible consequences; and (iii) the ethical implications of the things observed.

In the last part of the paper, we have offered a series of suggestions concerning the logistics of the process of observation.

## Appendix 1

<p>Teacher Observation Notes</p>	
<p>School: Teacher: Class: Subject: Date: Time:</p>	
<p>Background:</p>	
<p>Teacher's activity:</p>	<p>Student's activity:</p>

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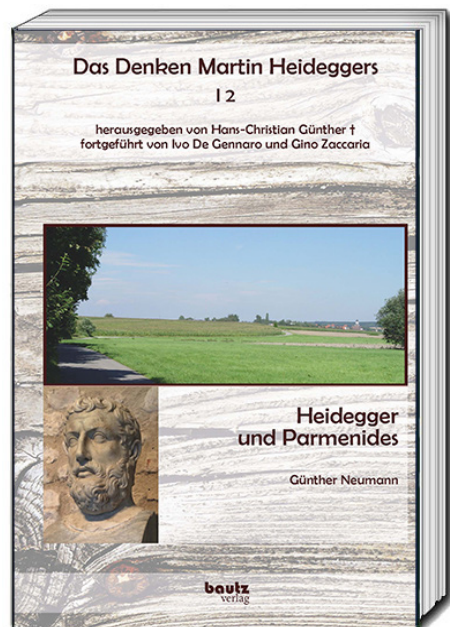
## Book Review/ Rezension

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### **„Der unversehrliche Prüfstein“... Zu Günther Neumann, Heidegger und Parmenides (2024)**

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Zur Auseinandersetzung Martin Heideggers mit Parmenides gibt es in der Reihe „Das Denken Martin Heideggers“ (Nordhausen, Hrsg. Hans-Christian Günther, fortgeführt von Ivo de Gennaro und Gino Zaccaria) ab diesem Sommer eine Neuerscheinung. Der Herausgeber mehrerer Bände der Gesamtausgabe der Werke Martin Heideggers, Günther Neumann, legt auf knappen 100 Seiten eine durchaus anspruchsvolle Forschungsarbeit vor, die anhand der drei Hauptetappen der Rezeption des Parmenides durch Heidegger auch die für die Thematik einschlägigen Interpretationen zur Diskussion stellt. „Gerade eine Gegenüberstellung und Kontrastierung der früheren und der späteren Auslegungen der Vorsokratiker, hier Parmenides, kann den Blick für die Eigenart des jeweiligen Denkens und dessen Wandlung schärfen.“ (S. 21) Den Leitfaden bildet dennoch das Lehrgedicht des Parmenides, dessen auslegende Übersetzung durch Heidegger Neumann im Vergleich zu anderen Übersetzungen (Vetter, Diels-Kranz, Aubenque, Günther etc.) darlegt und kommentiert. Der eigene, oft stark abweichende Ansatz Heideggers in der Interpretation des Parmenides stellt das Eigentümliche eines Denkens dar, das um die Seinsfrage beziehungsweise um die Überwindung des metaphysischen ersten Anfangs der Philosophie kreist. Dabei könnten, so Neumann, „zwei Fragebereiche unterschieden werden. Der eine





Fragebereich betrifft das grundlegende, die Auslegung insgesamt tragende philosophische Vorverständnis und die daraus entspringende Fragerichtung, unter der ein Text interpretiert wird.“ (S. 15) Der andere Bereich betrifft die Übersetzung selbst und sei im „hermeneutischen Zirkel“ (S. 16) mit einbegriffen, wobei die Ausrichtung der Übersetzung aufgrund der Interpretationsabsicht (vgl. ebd.) immer auch zu bedenken wäre. Was sich darin zeige, dass angesichts des problematischen Zusammenhangs der beiden Teile des Lehrgedichts des Parmenides, dem Aletheia- und Doxa-Teil für die heideggerische Interpretation gerade die sich schon früh angekündigt habende privative Deutung des Wahrheitsphänomens maßgeblich ist (vgl. S. 21). Im Umfeld der Fundamentalontologie von *Sein und Zeit* hingegen bildet die Problematik der Temporalität einen zentralen Komplex der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Verständnis von Dauer als *sempiternitas*. Parmenides Seinsverständnis als „Gegenwart allzumal“ auszulegen (vgl. Heidegger, zitiert in ebd., S. 27) bietet die Grundlage einer Kritik am Verständnis des Seins im Sinne eines „Überzeitlichen“ oder „Ewigen“: Somit stünden auch die beiden Teile des Lehrgedichtes, Aletheia- und Doxa-Teil, angesichts der von ihnen vertretenen zeitlichen Charaktere für die Scheidung von wahren und scheinhaftem Sein (s. ebd.). Im Verständnis von Sein als Gegenwart (Präsenz) liegt dennoch ein Grund für eine weitere, verkehrte Sicht auf das Sein als „pure Vorhandenheit“ (S. 29). Für Heidegger rücke hier die Wahrheitsproblematik in den Vordergrund, denn diese, als ein „vernehmendes Verstehen“ (vgl. ebd.) des Seins angesichts des Vorhandenseins geschehe immer als Privation, als „Raub“ (S. 31) am Vorhandenden, und nicht als Ausweisung desselben. Damit hinge auch die neuzeitliche subjektivitätstheoretische Umkehr des Satzes des Parmenides zusammen, denn während bei Parmenides das Denken in das Sein selbst eingebettet sei, ‚produziere‘ das neuzeitliche Denken (indem es vom Vorhandenen abstrahiere) gleichsam das Sein aus sich selbst (vgl. S. 30).

Das menschliche Denken befindet sich angesichts der Möglichkeit, der gängigen Meinung zu verfallen, in einer zwiespältigen Position: immer schon sowohl dem Bereich des Wahren wie auch der Unwahrheit zugewiesen, der Eigentlichkeit sowohl wie der Uneigentlichkeit. So bietet sich für das Verständnis des Scheideweges, vor den der parmenideische Held gebracht wird, der folgende Interpretationsansatz an: „Der Offenbarungscharakter der göttlichen Weisung im Proömium des Lehrgedichtes verweist darauf, dass *wir* vor die Ent-scheidung des Entdeckens oder Verbergens des Seienden in seinem Sein *gebracht* sind, wenn auch das existenzial-ontologische Fundament der geworfen-entworfenen Erschlossenheit des Daseins als die *ursprünglichste* Wahrheit noch ungenannt bleibt“ (S. 35 Hervorheb. i.O.). Das Angebot, zwischen zwei Wegen zu wählen (das Sein bzw. das Nichts), führt demnach über einen dritten Weg, den des Scheins, der als Schein sichtbar gemacht werden muss

(vgl. S. 36). Neumanns Weiterführung der Problematik gibt hierzu über zwei weitere Paragraphen (§.7 und §.8) eine detaillierte Analyse der Aletheia- bzw. der Doxa-Fragmente, die Aufschluss geben zu Heideggers Entwicklung der Parmenides-Interpretation nach *Sein und Zeit* (wie z.B in den Vorlesungen vom Sommersemester 1932 (GA 32) und 1935 (GA 40)).

Der dritte und letzte Teil behandelt zentrale Themen des späten Heidegger beziehungsweise seiner immer insistierenderen Auseinandersetzung mit Parmenides anhand von zwei berühmten Texten: aus den „Vorträgen und Aufsätzen“ (GA 7) der Text von 1952 „Moira (Parmenides, [Fragment] VIII, 34-41)“ und der Vortrag von 1957 „Der Satz der Identität“. Dabei bliebe laut Beginn des Textes „Moira“ das Verhältnis von Sein und Denken „der unversehrliche Prüfstein“ (S. 69) des Denkens der Geschichtlichkeit, im Kontext auch der weiteren Auslegung der Moira als „das schickende Geschick“ (S. 72) der – die ontologische Differenz ablösenden – „Zwiefalt“ (ebd.) von Sein und Seiendem. Zum Schluss wird das hochkomplexe ‚tautologische‘ Verhältnis der gegenseitigen Zueignung von Denken (Vernehmen, Mensch) und Sein in der für das Spätdenken Heideggers repräsentativen Figur des Ereignisses dargestellt. Neumann bietet im Anschluss einer Erläuterung dieses „Leitwortes“ (§ 10 c, S. 98 f.) die Möglichkeit, Heideggers Entwurf als eigenständige Antwort auf Parmenides‘ Infragestellung des Verhältnisses von Sein und Denken aufzufassen und somit auch den Vorschlag einer zwar nicht uneingeschränkten, aber zumindest unter diesem Aspekt von Heidegger selbst konsequent vollzogenen Zusammenführung seiner Philosophie mit dem „Grundthema des gesamten abendländischen Denkens“ (Heidegger GA 8 *apud* Neumann S. 99).

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