

EDITION NOTICE

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SPHERICAL JOURNEYS. ON THE EARTH, AS
WITHIN THE LIGHT

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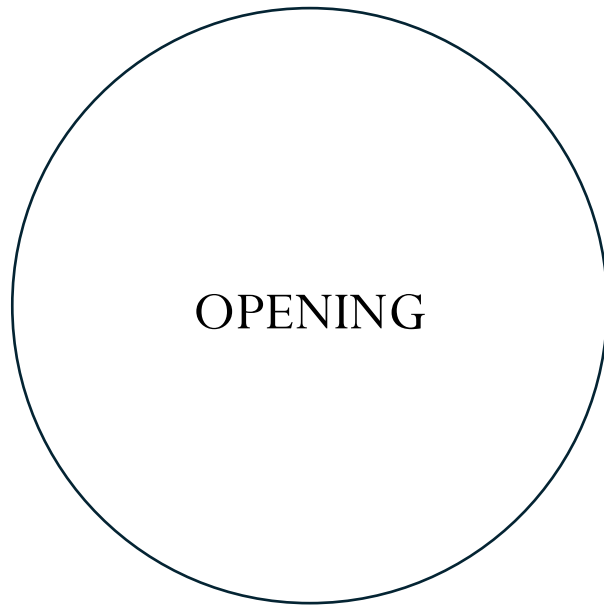
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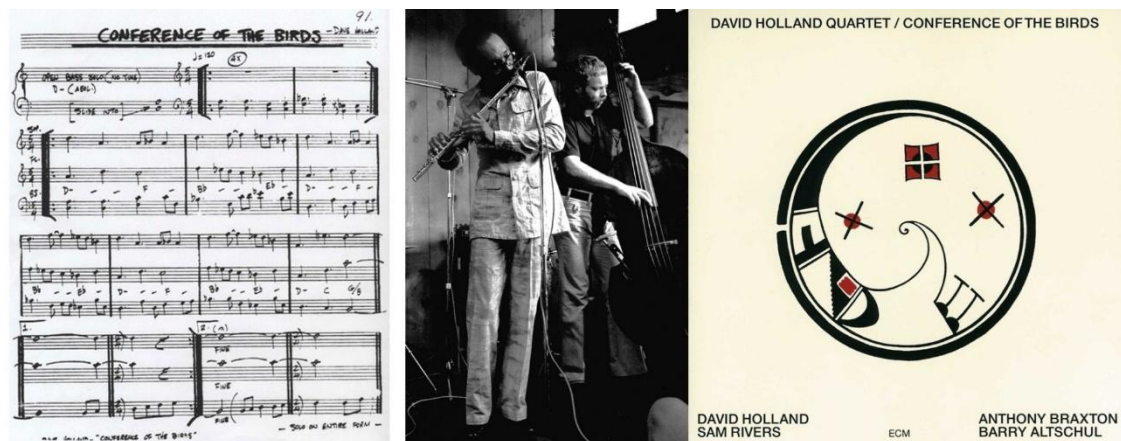
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Departure

Just as in *Art as Gestation of the Public Sphera*, this new edition of the SPHERA project, *Spherical Journeys: On the Earth as within the Light*, opens with a musical allegory: *The Conference of the Birds*. This is the title of a cult album – on vinyl, of course – recorded by the *Dave Holland Quartet* and released by ECM in 1973. Featuring Anthony Braxton and Sam Rivers on woodwinds, the quartet was completed by Barry Altschul on percussion and its leader, Dave Holland, on double bass.

You can listen to its homonym track here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYTIXJuxvgY>



Dave Holland, *Conference of the Birds*, 1973, Sheet Music; Sam Rivers & Dave Holland playing; ECM 1027 Album

The *Conference of the Birds* which inspired the theme composed by Dave Holland, is a reference to a Persian text written by Farid-ud-Din Attar, a *Sufi* master of the twelfth century, which is now adopted as a kind of "conceptual metaphor" for the present edition.

A conceptual metaphor, because, like the birds in the *Sufi* tale, human beings realize now that they are divided and lost. The *spherical journey* that emerges from the encounter between the artistic and theoretical essays, brought together in this volume, is an attempt to open a path of awareness and silence, in harmony with the whole, capable of bringing us together, rather than tearing us apart.

That was the purpose of Attar's initiatory tale, as we shall now see.

The Conference of the Birds

Written in the twelfth century by the great Sufi master Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds* is one of the masterpieces of spiritual literature. Beneath the appearance of a tale in which all the birds of the world gather to choose a sovereign, the poem unfolds as an allegory of the human soul's journey towards self-knowledge and union with the Absolute.

One day, the birds become aware that they live scattered and divided, without a true centre or guiding purpose. They assemble in search of a king who might give meaning to their existence. It is the Hoopoe, the wise bird and herald of hidden mysteries, who reveals that their rightful sovereign is the *Simurgh*, a radiant being dwelling beyond the mountains of *Qaf*, in a realm that can only be reached by those willing to undergo a profound inner transformation.

Each bird answers the summons according to the nature of its own attachments. The Nightingale cannot forsake the Rose, held captive by the fleeting beauty of earthly love. The Parrot longs only for immortality. The Peacock mourns the loss of Paradise and dreams of recovering its former splendour without enduring the trials of purification. The Falcon prefers the company of earthly kings to the invisible King. The Duck, the Partridge, the Owl and many others reveal, each in its

own way, a fear, a desire or an illusion that prevents them from setting out. Patiently, the Hoopoe answers every objection, showing that every obstacle is, in truth, a veil woven by the ego itself.

Despite their doubts, a company of birds resolves to undertake the journey. To reach the *Simurgh* they must cross the *Seven Valleys*, each representing a stage in the soul's ascent. The first is the *Valley of the Quest*, where the longing for a truth greater than all certainties is awakened. It is followed by the *Valley of Love*, where reason yields to the consuming fire of the heart. Then comes the *Valley of Knowledge*, in which each traveller discovers that true understanding grows only in proportion to one's own inner transformation.

The path continues through the *Valley of Detachment*, where ambition, possession and worldly distinction gradually fall away. Beyond lies the *Valley of Unity*, where all multiplicity begins to dissolve into a single reality. The pilgrims then enter the *Valley of Bewilderment*, where the mystery becomes so vast that thought itself falls silent before the ineffable. Finally, they arrive at the *Valley of Poverty and Annihilation*, where nothing remains of pride or individual identity, only a transparent stillness capable of receiving the presence of the Absolute.

Along the way, most of the birds succumb to exhaustion, fear or temptation. Some turn back, while others were forever lost. In the end, only thirty reach the final destination, stripped of everything they once believed themselves to be, as Attar describes:

Now the Sun celestial began to shine forth in front of them, and lo! how great was their surprise! In the reflection of their faces these thirty birds of the earth behold the face of the Celestial Simurgh. When they cast furtive glances towards the Simurgh, they perceived that the Simurgh was no other than those self-same thirty birds. In utter bewilderment they lost their wits and wondered whether they were their own selves or whether they had been transformed into the Simurgh. Then, to themselves they turned their eyes, and wonder of wonders, those self-same birds seemed to be one Simurgh! (Attar, 1924, p. 117)

So, the King they were after, had always dwelt in the depths of themselves. In Persian, *si morgh* means precisely "thirty birds". The one they sought from the beginning revealed Himself as the spiritual unity of those who had gone through all the trials and let their separate selves die.

It is in this revelation that Attar's work culminates. The outer journey becomes an inner journey; the search for God becomes the discovery of the profound identity between the lover and the Beloved, between the seeker and the Sought. The *Simurgh* is not just a mythical being. It is the symbol of the unique reality that remains hidden beneath the multiplicity of beings.

So, at the very end of the tale, Attar concludes:

Thereupon the birds lost themselves for ever in the Simurgh. The shade thus vanished in the Sun. Neither the traveller remained, nor the guide, nor the path. Finding the Simurgh they found themselves and the riddle of I and You was solved. (Attar, 1924, p. 118)

The Conference of the Birds is, above all, a profound meditation on the human condition. It teaches us that the true spiritual path lies not in the acquisition of new knowledge, but in the gradual relinquishment of every illusion that separates us from our deepest nature. Only those who are willing to lose themselves may ultimately discover who they truly are. And only when the mirror of the soul has become perfectly clear can one recognise that the light so long sought has, in truth, never ceased to dwell within.

Precedency

Conceived as a continuation of the previous phase of the *SPHERA* project – now revealed as the acronym for **SP**iritual **HE**ritage **R**esearch **A**rea – this new cycle of original works brings together artworks and theoretical essays, each created independently yet inspired by a common theme. Its purpose is to extend the gaze, apprehend the vision, and gather both sensory and intelligible impressions of the *sphera* of the natural world.

Nature, in all its diversity and complexity – in other words, in its infinitude – is not merely an organisational pattern of matter. Beyond its material envelope, Nature is also an energetic field: an active, living cosmos, a living being. As the chemist James Lovelock and the biologist Lynn Margulis argued in the 1970s, Nature actively maintains the chemical and climatic conditions necessary to keep the Earth habitable. Earth is a unified whole in which life and environment function together as parts of a living organism. Like every organism, the Earth has a purpose and continually constructs and transforms itself as an ongoing project, one whose deeper meaning remains yet to be uncovered.

Developed under the title *Theatre of Apparitions* within the framework of academic and scientific research, this process gave rise to the founding metaphor that enabled a deeper understanding of contemporary aesthetic and creative experience. As a purely intuitive and sensitive, yet consciously guided, process of gestation, this second phase of *SPHERA* emerged almost inevitably as a natural development of the first: a ripple spreading from the original stone cast into the pond.

Problematics

Whenever we speak of nature, the body or matter, we are necessarily also speaking of culture. For nature, the body and matter, even before they become objects of reflection, already belong to the realm of culture. They are not merely things to be thought about; they are, from the very outset, conceptual realities and, at the same time, ways of seeing – perspectives through which the world is disclosed. Every understanding of them arises from a particular angle of vision, one point of view among many others that remain equally possible.

If the body is animate and matter inert, then nature encompasses them both within the unity of life. Or rather, within **Life** itself – or, to express it substantively, within *the living*. Minerals nourish plants, and plants sustain animals. Just as flowers blossom and fruit ripens in the vegetable kingdom, so, in the animal kingdom, the psyche unfolds and consciousness flowers within it: the awakening through which the world first comes to be understood as a world. It is the emergence of an awareness that bears witness to spatial extension and temporal succession, both intrinsic to the shared condition of being and existing.

There is, therefore, no world without such a gaze. The grey, barren and seemingly inert Moon, even after its hidden face has been revealed, even after it has been visited by human beings, and even after it has become a repository of technology and a symbol of power, has lost none of its poetry or enchantment. And this is so because there is a gaze. An enchanted gaze, and therefore one that enchants. For wherever there is a gaze, there is also feeling and meaning – a mode of being in which the horizons of experience always exceed the objects experienced. They transcend them because they establish them as more than mere things. Indeed, things can never be *only* things. If there are things at all, it is because there is a gaze that constitutes them as things, conferring upon them identity and significance. That gaze is already something more than their mere existence.

Yet there is more than the gaze that recognises presence. There is also a second gaze – an ontological one – that turns upon the first, observing both its presence and its function. The first gaze is formative because it gives shape, and shape is the primary condition of meaning. Beyond it stands

the ontological gaze, directed not immediately towards the world but towards this primordial act of formation itself. It is this second gaze that apprehends and distils the great enigma: the miracle of being, the wonder that there is something rather than nothing. The miracle of being is the prodigy of creation – a gift of the spirit, an act of pure emanation, or, if one prefers, of pure spiritual self-giving. It is an inexhaustible generosity, endlessly enriching, paradoxically timeless, even as it reveals itself in the fleeting instant.

Portuguese is one of the few languages that distinguishes between *ser* and *estar*. If *ser* expresses a mode of being that endures, unfolds and transforms itself despite the erosion of time, while *estar* denotes a temporary state, exposed to decline and dissolution, then Portuguese liberates being from every fixed condition. It understands life as the continual emanation of *ser* and the perpetual overcoming of *estar* – that is, as a process of spiritually inspired creation. In a single word, as genesis. And gestation.

It is our conviction that this ontological gaze upon the natural *sphera* must be recovered – or rather, renewed. It is, as far as possible, a redemptive gaze. How do we perceive the natural *sphera*? As the place where things simply exist? As an extension of ourselves? As the frame within which events unfold? As a backdrop for human intervention? Or, ultimately, as a partner in a shared enterprise? Do we perceive it as a Voice? And if it is indeed a voice that calls to us, are we still capable of hearing it?

We must also ask whether the natural *sphera* can continue to assert this ontological perspective in an age increasingly governed by scientific explanation. Can science itself accommodate the kind of knowledge that belongs to being as such? A profoundly telluric, animal, mystical and cosmic intuition seems to whisper that to be a tree, a leaf, a river, a stream or a breeze is infinitely more than merely existing. Seen through the ontological gaze, these are not simply identifiable objects; they become manifestations of being itself. Can the formative gaze – conditioned by the very forms it has produced – come to dominate the ontological gaze, even though the latter both deepens and completes the former? And if it cannot extinguish it altogether, can it nevertheless distort it by dismissing it as merely subjective, dreamlike or fictitious, reducing it to an awkward metaphysical aberration? By associating the ontological gaze with the intangible, the arbitrary or the irrational, does not the formative gaze ultimately usurp its place and function, banishing it to the deepest recesses of the unconscious, exiling it to the Hades of instinct and drive?

The formative gaze, when it remains confined to things themselves, may gradually become a repressive and punitive gaze, particularly towards the ontological gaze that scrutinises and questions it. It is precisely because the latter unsettles its certainties that it provokes resistance. The formative gaze seeks to occupy the whole field of vision, reducing reality to what is merely visible, to whatever falls within the limits of the perceptible spectrum.

Yet its consequences extend beyond the suppression of the ontological gaze, which perceives things as more than mere things. By objectifying the natural *sphera*, the formative gaze simultaneously impoverishes it. If the dreamlike imagination anthropomorphises nature, projecting onto it human – or even divine – qualities, at times to the point of delirium, the objectifying gaze moves in the opposite direction: it diminishes nature, reducing it to a collection of measurable data, to quantifiable information, to what Rudolf Steiner would have called the Ahrimanic reign of number. The ontological gaze, however, is neither isolated nor defenceless. It possesses an intrinsic sovereignty, for the vision that animates and illuminates it is none other than the vision proper to art itself. It is the genetic gaze: the gaze open to creation, and available only through the creative act.

It is with this gaze that we propose to journey through the *Sphera* – the sphere of creation. We have often said that what matters is to open the eyes that lie closed within our open eyes. For eyes are

truly open only when they open themselves to creation. Within time, nothing is definitive; nothing is ever repeated. The only repetition conceivable is that of the creative impulse which, by its very nature, abolishes repetition. We ourselves are that movement: the undulation, the serpent, the spiral, the cornucopia, the shell.

It is precisely this irreducible absence of repetition that enables us to restate, now as an affirmation, the question with which we concluded the presentation of the previous project:

The idea of a spiritual Sphera, governed by the Abelian principle of universal interdependence and inspired by the imperative to live artistically, points towards a Utopian yet tangible horizon: the highest of all arts – the art of imagining society itself as a work of art, spiritually brought into being in common!

In this world, trees think, mountains sing, and rivers whisper. Only art can hear them, and only art can truly see them.

Through the *Theatre of Apparitions* (!)

José Guilherme Abreu (CITAR)

Mário Caeiro (LIDA)

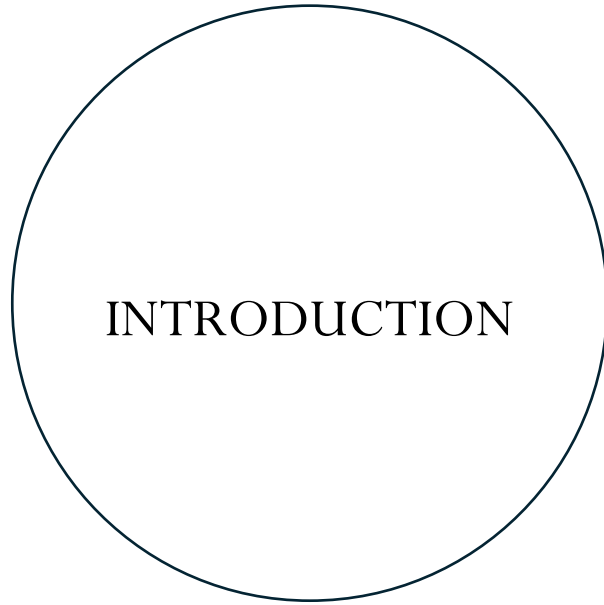
THEATRE OF APPARITIONS

The practices of astonishment in the spatial configuration of the common

Looking at the present time implies recognising a disturbing symptom: a society driven by technoscientific utopianism seeks to obliterate and forget forms of vulnerability and finitude. Dealing with this condition, which is denied and relegated to the margins, calls us to open up new dimensions of inclusivity, if we listen to the call to integrate the new and the different. Art has always known how to open up space for this to be seen – our common exposure to the fragility of existence.

The Theatre of Apparitions is a research project informed by contemporary artistic creation. Its aim is to reveal some configurations of this shared space opened up by the creation of the place of the totally other as an apparition, i.e., as a destabilising event and insurrection – a term to which Georges Didi-Huberman gave renewed meaning – creating the human (being). The aim will be to create and recreate the conditions for welcoming manifestations of wonder – recovering the broad meaning of the Greek *thaumazein* – and their relational intensities, shedding light on the emerging cartographies of the common, in a series of multidisciplinary cultural initiatives capable of revealing this shifting horizon where uncertainty and confidence, discovery and recognition are mixed.

The aim will be to reveal the constellation of the encounter between the now and the past, which brought out the critical energy of the dialectical images that Walter Benjamin spoke of. By summoning the being and knowledge of the different agents of the imagination, we will seek to undertake innovative readings of the multiple bridges and connections that can be established between the arts, sciences and humanities. For we must make wonder the first – and most original – relational technology.



Teresa Bartolomei

THE VITAL, ARROGANT, FATAL, DOMINANT X

The poetic transcendence of experience as an epistemic exercise and its ecological value

I. Experience between saturation and divergence

Through his elaboration of the category of saturated phenomena, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Marion¹ has undertaken a fundamental revision of the phenomenological notion of experience, identifying the liminal status of situations in which intuition (*that which appears*) exceeds intention (*the concept*); i.e., situations in which an insurmountable asymmetry emerges between what the subject experiences and its cognitive determination. In the saturated phenomenon, the content and the object of experience do not coincide: the former exceeds the latter, highlighting an insurmountable inadequacy of the act of signification, a kind of “intentional deficit” that compels the subject to recognise themselves not as the positor but as the posited.

However, the theoretically decisive step in this proposal is the generalisation of the category of saturation from a qualification of specific phenomena to a dimension of experience in general. This is because, as Marion observes, while we can identify a series of particular contexts (such as the event, the idol/work of art, the flesh, the icon/face) in which saturation manifests itself with undeniable force, it nevertheless must be reconstructed as a general dimension of phenomenality. The asymmetry between intuition and intention, between appearance and concept, characterises our entire cognitive relationship with the *real*, the experience of which exceeds our determination of it as *reality*.²

Recognising the universality of saturation enables us to relativise the role of intentionality, shifting it from an absolute phenomenological principle to a regional and limited mechanism. However, this does not deny that a central function of culture consists in producing languages, i.e. semantically structured frameworks that are intentionally oriented and conventionally binding, which ensure a conceptual determination of intersubjectively shared experience that is operationally efficient (functional to its strategic governance). Society needs codes – networks of signification of the real as reality – which ensure its standardised, predictable and reliable manipulation and intersubjectively shared interpretation (attribution of meanings). However, it is, necessary to recognise the limited scope of these cognitive matrices and the illusory and distorting effect of treating them as the exclusive regime governing experience. The discrepancy between intuition and concept, and between the content of experience and its semanticisation as an object, is inherent in

¹ Reflection on this theme encompasses consistently the French thinker’s entire research career, nevertheless finding two important milestones in Marion 1977 and 1997, and a synthesis in Marion 2001.

² One of the cornerstones of Lacan’s thought is the functional (rather than ontological) distinction between the real (the totality of what happens) and reality (the totality of what we signify), which he developed over the years, defining it with ever-greater precision. The fundamental idea is that the real resists symbolisation (translation into reality) and eludes cognitive determination as “impossible” – not because it is not given, but because it cannot be represented and therefore “always returns” as the ungovernable: “The core must be designated as the real – the real insofar as the identity of perception is its rule.” Ultimately, this is based on what Freud identifies as a kind of sampling, which assures us that we are within perception through the sense of reality that authenticates it. What does that mean? – if not that, on the subject’s side, this is called “awakening” (Lacan 1964, p.66) “The concept of repetition confronts us with a dilemma: either to accept, pure and simple, our involvement as analysts in the eristic nature of the discord inherent in any account of our experience – or to refine the concept to the level of something that would be impossible to objectify, except through a transcendental analysis of the cause” (ibid., p. 117) (*m.tr.*).

all experience without exception, even though in a number of specific cases (defined by languages such as technique, the sciences, law, bureaucracy, economics) the implementation of mechanisms for the phenomenological objectification of experience's contents of is institutionalised as socially acceptable or even necessary. These mechanisms programmatically take on the cognitive deficits associated with such simplification in view of the existential and social advantages it brings.³

A device such as the clock is a prime example of the coexistence of power and irrepressible cognitive limits inherent in this conventional rationalization. Our experience of time is supremely rich, indeterminable, and by no means reducible to its measurement, yet knowing what time it is is an indispensable existential and social need. Therefore, the error lies not in continuing to tell one another what time it is, adopting this cognitive shortcut for practical and existential purposes, but in ignoring the fact that this partial and instrumental operation does not exhaustively determine the “saturated” – and therefore, ultimately, unavailable⁴ – whole of our experience of time.

Highlighting the **universal dimension of experience saturation** therefore implies reformulating the very notion of culture. Culture cannot simply be conceived as a sum of signification processes and their institutional implementation, insofar as these are strategies for the symbolic conventionalisation of experience. Culture must be conceived, in addition, as the sphere in which modes are produced to reveal that experience in general entails an inherent remainder⁵ that has not yet been given meaning and may not be capable of being given meaning: that in every single experience, inescapably, a portion of intuition remains that is indeterminate and may be indeterminable as a conceptual object.⁶ The paradox of this act of symbolising the structural non-signifiability of a part of our experience is that it must not signify the unsignifiable (i.e. what is conceptually impossible to conceptualise), but rather signify that this part of experience, the content of intuition (“apparition”, in Marion’s terminology), is unsignifiable. This safeguards its unavailability without erasing it into mere ineffability. This non-designative symbolisation of saturation is the exact opposite of apophatic silence. To demonstrate how the still unsaid, and possibly unsayable as a representable object, is woven into the fabric of experience, and to highlight what is missing from a form of expression that is always asymmetrical in relation to the given, means, first and foremost, critically exploring the modes of signification activated, and reconstructing the related forms of rationality and selective functions. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the unspoken and the unspeakable. First of all, we must ask in which cases there are (and, if so, what are) the mechanisms that may produce the (reversible) expulsion of aspects of apparitions (of experiential content) as a function of utilitarian and/or ideological strategies for manipulating reality. Secondly, we must ask, in which contexts there are instead cognitive divergences intrinsic to the perceived phenomenon that make its intentional constitution as an object impossible, as occurs in relation to its temporal dimension.⁷

³ This is the thesis set out by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*: a holistic problematisation of the *worldview* (*Weltanschauung*) – the cultural infrastructure through which a society crystallises a shared interpretation of collective experience – is rationally self-contradictory. To avoid imploding into generalised anomic chaos, society must share a platform of certainties (a shared network of meanings that establish a common hermeneutic horizon for the processes of sense-attribution), which are fallible and revisable, critically contestable, yet sufficiently stable and binding.

⁴ For an overview of this concept, see Rosa 2018.

⁵ On this subject. I would refer the reader to Bartolomei 2026.

⁶ On this point, see Slavoj Žižek (1996), revisiting the insights of Schelling and Lacan.

⁷ While it is beyond the scope of our discussion to argue about this, I am convinced, in line with many other interpreters, that although Husserl (1905) carries out a profound and innovative analysis of temporal experience – particularly through his elaboration of the concept of the non-point-like present, articulated in the triad of retention, original impression, and protension – he nevertheless fails to make this the cornerstone of his notion of intentionality. In

The argument underpinning this distinction is that the first order of scrutiny identifies the contextual self-critical action inherent in culture ceaseless work of learning, development and self-correction that makes it possible to expand and improve the scope of knowledge (such as, for example, scientific progress, but also the definition of the limits of respective fields of expertise; the role of practical public discourse and its distortions). By contrast, the second order, represents a structural dynamic that calls into question the very notion of knowledge, within the rational delineation of a second-level exercise in signification. This exercise radicalizes and correctively expands the Kantian distinction between intellect and reason, by articulating the difference between knowledge and thought, and between determining and reflecting judgement. It therefore captures a sphere of experience that is essentially inaccessible to knowledge, as conceptual objectification, not because it lies within the supersensible but because its perceptual and historical constitution is already divergent (aporetic).

It is the perceptually and historically accessible sphere of the other-than-onself, that imposes itself upon the subject as a sensible and hermeneutically effective self-giving (Marion 1997). This sphere is traversed by divergences that are partly irreconcilable, and which demand non-objectifying, non-exclusive, non-univocal forms of symbolization that promote the overcoming of dichotomies such as nature⁸ and culture, subject and object, the sensible and the supersensible. This symbolisation triggers non-dualistic processes of signification that are capable of semantising incompatibilities as paradoxically coexisting dimensions: neither unifiable nor a source of paralysing nonsense.

II. The epistemic role of literature

From time immemorial, the exercise of this second order scrutiny – first and foremost in practice, and secondarily in theory – has been one of the fundamental cognitive functions of languages that civilisations have developed to complement the set of languages (technology, science, law, bureaucracy, economics) which selectively and conventionally rationalise experience through mechanisms of phenomenological objectification of its contents. Art, religion and philosophy are forms of rationality which theoretically reconstruct and/or practically expose the cognitive deficits associated with such simplification. They articulate hermeneutically the sphere of meaning that eludes such reductionist determination.

This cognitive function is clearly evident in **literature, which acts as a critical consciousness of the human episteme in its claim to totalisation and absolute conceptual control over experience**. Since the dawn of history civilisations have used literature to highlight the inadequacy of an extrinsic objectification of phenomenal content which seeks to expunge the dimension of saturation and divergence inherent in such content as irrational, marginal or irrelevant subjectivism. It also seeks to expel the unrepresentable from experience, from the relationship of the subject with the other-than-self, possibly relegating it to a mere inner movement of the ego supersensibly transcending the world, confirming the subject's will to power as sovereign rather than establishing him as the guardian of being.

contrast, Levinas (1979) emphasises that our temporal experience cannot be entirely subsumed under constitutive intentionality, which exhibits a high degree of passivity.

⁸ For a critique of this dichotomy, see Descola 2005, who challenges the term *nature* itself (which, will in fact be avoided as far as possible in this essay).

From this phenomenological perspective, the unrepresentable aspect of experience, in, is not an indicator of the divergence between the “I” and the world, between interiority as the sphere of the spiritual and exteriority as the sphere of the material (the irresolvable conflict between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*), but rather a manifestation of the fact that the inseparable symbiosis of the external and the internal (which constitutes experience, from the radically anti-idealistic perspective of phenomenology) manifests itself in an irreducible network of divergences and the impossibility of representing the world as presence (i.e. a non-contradictory convergence between the ecstasies of time, between time and space, and perception and language).⁹

From a phenomenological perspective, as exemplified in practice through literature, the world, **the real, as an indeterminable holistic container of the subject and reality, cannot be reduced to a (flexibly distinguishable) dichotomy of nature and culture**, because the subject cannot be reduced to consciousness alone. The “I” is inextricably body, thought, language and society. The external world cannot be reduced to matter, matter cannot be reduced to an entity, and appearance does not coincide with presence. The content of experience does not coincide with its object, and phenomena and words are symbiotically and divergently co-constitutive.

Within the framework of a brief reflection on the issue of the inconsistency of an unambiguously and unilaterally objectifying notion of experience, with reference to literature, it will not be possible to address the complex and intractable nature of this problem as a whole. Instead, we will illustrate how literature, and in particular lyric poetry, functions as a critical language that offers an alternative to the “naturalistic” determination of the self as consciousness and of the other (of the totality of what appears, of reality) as an object, through the analysis of a specific textual example.

The thesis developed here, based on the reading of a single poetic composition, is, in other words, that literary discourse carries out a practical deconstruction of intentionalist representationalism – which reduces the content of experience to its conceptual objectification – by highlighting what remains outside this act of cognitive manipulation, as the unsaid and possibly unseen (the specific saturation rate of experience), in order to signify it in an alternative form. This is achieved through the construction of singular, non-abstract symbolic codes that cannot be transferred outside the concrete perceptual and narrative experiences they semantically ground. This done by resorting to imaginative rather than logical mechanisms of schematisation. From this point of view, the decisive aspect, is that literary discourse carries out this deconstructive action against the univocity of objectivist representationalism not by refuting it theoretically, but by dealing solely with singular experiences: literature is metaphysically nominalist. In its universe of discourse, universals do not exist and the universality of its own figures of meaning is produced not through abstraction but through exemplarity.¹⁰

In other words, the epistemic principle underpinning literary discourse on the real is that one can only symbolically capture the saturation inherent in individual experience by remaining totally immersed in its perceptual and narrative concreteness, and by not abstracting from it. This enables

⁹ The critique of this metaphysical illusion, that has dominated Western thought by equating knowledge with representation and art with mimesis, reaches a point of no return in the reflections of Martin Heidegger (1935–1946, with the masterful synthesis set out in the essay ‘The Age of the World Picture’, pp. 57–85) and Jacques Derrida (1967, 1967a, 1972). It is not necessary to agree with (at least not entirely) the *pars construens* of these works in order to recognise the diagnostic power of their respective deconstructive operations.

¹⁰ On the category of example, see the remarks by Agamben 2001, pp. 13ff.

one to articulate the dimension that cannot be intentionally objectified, which emerges in the encounter with the world, with oneself and with the other.

Abstraction removes this richness, crystallises the real into reality, absolutizing the concept by neutralising the cognitive role of the imagination and dismissing it as mere fantasy.

In literary discourse, the work produces a text that is a unique semantic code in itself, functioning self-referentially as a meaning key solely for the specific experience it designates. This elevates the perceptual and narrative images associated with it to the status of signifiers that are not conventionally arbitrary but robustly motivated, summoning them imaginatively (through analogy and association) rather than logically to configure a semanticisation of the experience in question that diverges from its propositional, intentionally objectifying, representation. This makes it possible to reveal aspects of its content and its power to bring the real into view beyond its conventionalisation as reality – aspects that remain unexpressed, if not radically negated, in its univocally abstract-conceptual description.

The literary text does not recount history, rather it narratively semantises an existential episode in which experience becomes an event, thereby historicising itself (which is not the case for every experience). Similarly, it does not speak of “nature” but imaginatively semantises an experience of the perceptual sphere in which the subject does not externalise itself with respect to the real within a universe of discourse separate from reality. Instead, it symbolises its inherent connection to it, to the holistic complex of being-in-the-world, of being a body on earth and within society. This connection is attested to in a relational process of perceptual-cognitive¹¹ resonance, of which the subject is not the absolute legislator but rather the participant, inextricably both emissary and recipient.

But how, we must ask ourselves at this point, does the imaginative/narrative semantisation of a singular experience actually work? By renouncing its abstract-representational representation, it removes the saturation of the experience, the excess of appearance over concept, from manipulative or simply apophatic repression. It inscribes experience within a network of symbolic figures that restores it as an experience of meaning, bearing an alternative signification to objectifying dualisms, to dualistic externalisation, to epistemic reductionism?

Whilst the **narrative construction** of experience as an event, and the **historical symbolisation** of the existential condition through the insoluble enigma of its indeterminacy, is a widely explored theme in criticism and aesthetics, the reflection on **the lyrical symbolisation** of the existential condition, i.e. the **imaginative**, non-logical-conceptual **construction** of bodily experience as an interrelation with the natural sphere, as being-in-the-world in the hospitable form of dwelling rather than domination is by far less developed.

The guiding hypothesis put forward here is that *lyrical discourse* is not a means of expressing the inner self (the eponymous lyrical subject) in relation to a category of privileged (existential-emotional) content (noetic- affective), but rather a formal process of semantising experience through imaginative-perceptual devices that are substitute for logical-propositional and narrative ones.¹² **In other words, the rationale of lyrical discourse implies the radical**

¹¹ On this concept, see Rosa 2016.

¹² From this point of view, a poem that uses propositional descriptions of states of mind and narrative constructions of eventful experiences to speak of the self cannot automatically be considered a lyrical text because it does not semantise experience in an imaginative-perceptual way. In other words, it does not create intuition (the apparition) through imaginative-perceptual signification. On this point, I would refer the reader to Bartolomei 2016 (Chapter XII, pp. 328 ff.) and 2017.

subordination of logical-propositional and narrative signification to imaginative-perceptual signification, which is structured through the combined use of metaphor and metonymy. This implies a welcoming inherence of subjectivity within the real – which is not alienated to an “external” reality but integrated into imaginative verbalisation as an expressive signifier of the self. By dissolving any dualism that serves, cognitively, to strategically dominate the world, lyrical discourse articulates the self’s understanding on itself as a part (possibly divergent but not separate) of the world (the holistic complex of reality, differentiated epistemically as nature and society). In lyrical discourse, “nature” is not conceived as an external material sphere; rather, the inherent perceptual connection of the self to the world is recognised as a source of meaning. The very conceptual indeterminacy of experience – its saturation – is not viewed as frustration, setback or limitation, but as a source of richness and as an essential epistemological key to understanding and self-understanding, extending beyond the abstract-conceptual and strategic perspective.

The following examination of an example from this field aims to highlight the extraordinary **potential of lyrical literary discourse for epistemic correction in relation to a one-sided representationalist-presentialist perspective, which** schematises experience into objectivist dichotomies such as nature/culture, subject/object and perception/concept.

III. The garden as a symbolic figure of harmonious interdependence between human beings and the earth

The text in question is the poem “The Garden”,¹³ by the English metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell (1621–1678). A moderate Parliamentarian and follower of Oliver Cromwell, as well as a friend of John Milton, Marvell divided his time between literature and public life during the turbulent years of the English Civil War. A prolific author of political satires targeting court corruption, Britain’s enemies and Catholics, he is today read and remembered above all for a relatively small body of pastoral poems, mainly composed during his time at Nun Appleton Hall, near York, the country estate of one of his noble patrons. Drawing on the Horatian and Catullan tradition of *carpe diem* and the classical bucolic tradition, Marvell wrote several poems about the gardens, combining the tropes of the Greco-Latin pastoral tradition and the Renaissance-Arcadian poetry with a sumptuously Baroque rhetorical density,¹⁴ alongside imagery of biblical origin, which emerges powerfully in “The Garden” – a unique fusion of pagan myth and Christian vision, vitalistic hedonism and a metaphysical perspective.¹⁵

¹³ “The Garden”, in Marvell 1972/1987, pp. 100–101 (notes, pp. 255–258). The text is available online on the Poetry Foundation website (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44682/the-garden-56d223dec2ced>), which also provides a good bio-bibliographical introduction to the author (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/andrew-marvell>). Published posthumously in the collection *Miscellaneous Poems* (1681), alongside a Latin version (“Hortus”), the poem’s date of composition is uncertain. However, the majority of scholars agree that it was written around 1650, during the period when Marvell was away from public life, having taken up a position as a tutor in Yorkshire (see Berthoff 1970, pp. 143 ff.). For recent proposals suggesting a later date and their potential critical significance, see Davis 2011, p. 43.

¹⁴ Eliot, who, through a series of exemplary essays (1921, 1921a and 1921b; 1923), made a decisive contribution to the critical rediscovery of Marvell in the twentieth century, speaks of the poet’s expressive “magniloquence”, which is singularly and ambiguously interwoven with an ironic *wit* characterised by detached self-reflection.

¹⁵ See Curtius (1948, pp. 197ff.) for a reconstruction of the classical tradition of Vergil’s “locus amoenus” (a semi-wild, beautiful stretch of land) and its convergence – not without dissonance – with the biblical tradition of the Garden of Eden.

As W. Empson argued¹⁶ with his refined hermeneutic insight against the critical orthodoxy that had long relegated the genre to a trivial branch of existential pastime, pastoral poetry is not the product of vacuous escapism, an affected academic detachment from the dissonance of reality. Rather it is an imaginatively effective vehicle for robustly challenging dominant social and political structures, and expressing alternative visions of heroism and the sublime, which are spiritual devices associated with the intellectually and economically privileged elite. It is a space for subverting of traditional symbolic hierarchies through by juxtaposing the high and the low, revaluating the socially insignificant, and the deflating the tragic and the grandiose by elevating the “simple”. In pastoral poetry, nature and the countryside function as a ‘counterculture’ device, offering an alternative ethical and epistemological model to the prevailing one, which subordinates existence to the systemic imperatives of the social order. Not merely a vehicle for fanciful escape from the present, pastoral poetry is also a vehicle for critical antagonism. Elevating the countryside (stylised in an academically erudite manner within the Arcadian landscape) and the garden to universes of discourse, it develops symbolic figures that reverse the relegation of nature to the *background* of human life. In doing so, it restores nature to its environmental centrality and articulates the value of the natural *habitat* as an existential condition of meaning, rather than merely a reservoir of resources for material survival and profit. Beneath the mask (“disguise”) of Arcadian stereotypes, pastoral poetry is deeply marked by political and genuinely ecological concerns and as highlighted in more recent critical studies, Marvell’s work is no exception.¹⁷

In pastoral poetry, nature is a lived-in space rather than a mere material apparatus, a horizon of life rather than occupied land. The relationship with the land is not purely economic (involving the material use of its produce) or aesthetic (purely for the spectator’s gratification) but radically existential: the subject’s life is consciously defined by their relationship with *their habitat*, through which their self-understanding is mediated.

From this perspective, the garden is a key symbol.¹⁸ As Marvell explicitly states, it cannot be reduced to a place of “pleasure” but rather is idealised as a space in which to find “happiness”:

Meanwhile the mind, having had its fill of pleasure,

Withdraws into its happiness;

The experience of perfect bodily harmony projected into the concept of the garden, in its beauty and abundance (since it must be conceived, in essence, as a *hortus*: rich in fruit that grows in

¹⁶ See Empson 1938, a timeless classic of literary studies. The work’s general thesis is supported by various textual analyses, one of which focuses specifically on Marvell (“Marvell’s Garden: The Ideal Simplicity approached by Resolving Contradictions”, pp. 119–145).

¹⁷ “Green Marvell” is the emblematic title of an essay (Mcrae 2011) which analyses Marvell’s poetic oeuvre within the historical context of the social, political and cultural crisis that radically challenged the civilisational relationship between town and country in sixteenth-century England. As another scholar (Crewe 1994, p. 271) summarises: “Marvell’s poems are also those of a neoclassical pastoral tradition understood to be in a state of historical crisis, and thus thrown into confusion regarding many of its own most basic assumptions and resources. Among the well-recognised precipitating factors are the outbreak of the Civil War and popular revolt, the deposition of Charles I and Cromwell’s rise to power, the ongoing construction during the seventeenth century of the early modern political state, and the vexed political economy of land enclosure”.

¹⁸ See Beruete 2016 and Gärten 2022 for a reconstruction of the cultural history of the garden in the West and the East, which analyses its significance as a symbolic archetype – religious, artistic and anthropological – as well as its actual historical evolution as a form of intervention in the landscape constantly linked to changing social and aesthetic codes, as well as urban, economic and environmental factors,

abundance, satisfying the hunger and thirst of its inhabitants without gruelling effort)¹⁹ is, in fact, the idealisation of a relationship with the earth (not externalised as “nature”) that responds to its original representation as humankind’s home, *a habitat*, a welcoming space for life and growth, in an essentially peaceful, fruitful and mutually generative coexistence.

The garden is a. by definition particular, circumscribed,²⁰ patch of land where individuals and communities exercise their spatial integration within the environment. They receive its hospitality in the form of living conditions that are materially, aesthetically and spiritually pleasant, and actively participate in its upkeep and enhancement. The garden is not spontaneous nature, but an environment that is constantly adapted and improved by humankind. **The garden symbolises therefore the harmonious interdependence between humanity and the Earth.** This is a relationship of mutual giving, not one-sided exploitation and gratification. In the ideal garden, humanity gives back to the environment what it receives from it. This is achieved through a commitment to preserving and promoting its beauty and health whilst respecting the complex ecosystem it represents (geological structure, landscape, flora and fauna). An anthropological device transcending all cultures, the garden is an archetype of a harmonious interdependent relationship with the earth, but in the real gardens this utopia is constantly threatened and contradicted by the forced degradation of the ideal commitment cultivation and care into a stance of domination and exploitation, and of the ecstatic companionship into alienating objectification.

Thus, in the biblical tradition, the garden becomes a mythical emblem of a **freely given promise bound to a human responsibility that has been repeatedly failed.** The loss of this promise is therefore a culpable fall. Eden, the earthly paradise, is what the Earth might have been if we had cared for it as a companion,²¹ rather than degrading it into a hostile, cursed adversary in our

¹⁹ “What wond’rous life in this I lead! / Ripe apples drop about my head; / The luscious clusters of the vine / Upon my mouth do crush their wine; / The nectarine and curious peach / Into my hands themselves do reach; / Stumbling on melons as I pass, / Ensna’d with flow’rs, I fall on grass” (V Stanza).

²⁰ By definition, a garden is a circumscribed space, physically separated from its surroundings, as indicated lexically both by the original Hebrew term, “gan”, for the garden in Genesis (2:8; 2:10; 2:15; 3:23–24), and by the Greek term “παράδεισος” (derived from Persian, cf. Bremmer 2002, pp. 109ff.), into which the term is translated by the Septuagint (when not rendered by “κῆπος”) only to be transposed in turn into the Vulgate as “paradisus voluptatis”. This lexical formulation significantly changes the meaning of the term Eden (which means “delights” in Hebrew) from a proper place name to a common noun (“And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden” thus becomes “God planted a paradise of delights”; see <https://biblehub.com/multi/genesis/2-8.htm>). For the significant theological implications of this deterritorialisation, see Agamben 2019. In this work, the ambiguous status of the Garden of Eden in the Christian tradition is reconstructed as a category that drifts between history, myth and eschatology without a definitive solution. Interpreted alternately as a physically situated, historically given space, or as a condition of the “natural” integrity of corporeality – potentially recoverable at the end of time as the fullness of innocence and earthly harmonies (a thesis exemplarily upheld by Dante) – the Garden of Eden is a doctrinal *crux* in which mutually incompatible theological images of the relationship between Grace and nature are condensed.

²¹ In Genesis 2:18–19, God populates the Garden of Eden with animals to provide him with companionship: “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.” (All the quotations are taken from the King James Bible). For Adam, this companionship will not be enough, for he finds his true counterpart only in woman (2:20–23); yet the relational dimension inherent in dwelling (the garden is a source of companionship, not merely a rewarding space to be enjoyed) and its epistemic significance (naming one’s partner is an essential aspect of the relationship) are presented as constitutive.

struggle for survival.²² While this paradisiacal idealisation may be considered radically unrealistic – the farmer knows all too well that the earth is both a garden and a terrible desert – the intuition of an elusive yet desirable and necessary harmony cannot be eradicated from the human heart. Eden is forever lost behind us, yet it also lies ahead, awaiting a renewed personal and cosmic reconciliation of which the Earth is an integral part.

Between idealisation and reality, between intuition and concept, the “rich” experience of every physical garden is thus articulated within the mythical framework of the biblical figure as both a desire and a responsibility, as both a promise and a failure, as both a fact and a utopian alternative. At stake in the story of the Fall, is not only the human being’s relationship with transcendence (the divine) but also that with the immanence of their own earthly, corporeal condition, amidst the ever-lurking betrayal of exploitation for survival and profit.

Human beings – ever fallen – never cease to rebel against this historically and socially inexorable, inevitable and irreversible reduction of their relationship with the earth (externalised as “nature”). The cherub may raise the “flaming sword that turned every way” to prevent them from returning to Eden (Gen 3:24), but the idea of the Earth as a source of joy, a powerful alternative to its portrayal as an enemy to be fought and subjugated, a wasteland to be reclaimed, an object to be controlled, dwells within human beings like an ineradicable memory. This memory bears stubborn evidence of having once been there, of having been one with an Edenic Earth.²³ Literature is the privileged voice of this resistance, and irrevocable fidelity to the utopian, yet ever-defeated intuition embodied in earthly gardens, with their inexhaustible variety of forms, of landscape and architectural concepts, of philosophical and religious preconceptions, of historical and geographical contexts, of environmental and economic compatibilities, of private and public, individual and social aims.

In literature devoted to the garden, grace, wonder, admiration and pleasure are therefore inextricably intertwined, with the painful awareness of the precariousness and vulnerability of this experience of enjoyment, ceaselessly threatened not only by physical causes (such as transience: the metaphor of the reaper is the archetypal personification of death and the end)²⁴ but also existential ones. Ultimately, the gardener can identify with the reaper. How many gardens are swept away by the bulldozers of property development? How many new owners drive out the previous ones? Every inhabitant or visitor to a garden may find themselves exiled, like Adam, either through their own fault or due to a historical or social accident.²⁵

²² “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till you return unto the ground; for out of it were you taken: for dust you are, and unto dust shall you return.” (Gen 3:17–19).

²³ Even if only for a few hours, as in *Paradiso* XXVI, 139–142, Dante, through the words of Adam, expresses a view widely held in patristic tradition. According to Dante’s calculations (*Inferno* IV, 55; *Paradiso* XXVI, 118–123), after spending seven hours in the Garden of Eden, Adam lived on Earth for 930 years before enduring 4,302 years of “hellish torment” (“*infernal ambascia*”) (*ibid.*, 133) in Limbo while awaiting Christ’s descent into the underworld. The first man sees this stark chronological disparity as an intrinsic component of the punishment associated with his disobedience.

²⁴ On this metaphor, see Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s famous ‘The Reaper and the Flowers’ and two splendid poems by Emily Dickinson: F1190/J1202 and F1668/J1624 (1884).

²⁵ Marvell devotes a cycle of poems to the figure of the “mower”, offering an intriguing conceptual variation which we cannot examine here, but which develops a nuanced perspective, with critical historical elements regarding the contemporary world and the (in the author’s view, troubling) evolution of the relationship between society and the land (cf. Berthoff 1970, pp. 115ff., Malcolmson 1994, McRae 2011). One of the poems in the series, with the programmatically polemical title “The Mower against Gardens”, forcefully challenges human intervention in the habitat arguing that rather than respecting and adapting to the natural environment, humans “distort” and damage it. The mower

Therefore, the wonder of experiencing the garden's beauty is therefore inextricably linked to the grief of loss (potential or actual)²⁶ and the poison of guilt (which may be amorous, moral,²⁷ or socio-ecological²⁸) and this emotional, cognitive and symbolic complexity (saturation), traversed by the rift of contradiction, finds magnificent expression in the surprising twist of meaning crafted by Marvell's poetry. Its metaphorical structure conveys the opposite of the literal text, semantically transforming the euphoric hymn celebrating life woven into its propositional content into an elegy, a dysphoric commemoration of death.

IV. Text and counter-text

From a literal, face-reading perspective, "The Garden" is a misogynistic and misanthropic celebration of the joy of finally finding oneself alone in the bosom of a benevolent nature, savouring the pleasures of beauty and the peace of an Edenic setting (Stanza V),²⁹ "far from the madding crowd" of politics, history and social life, far from the frenzied torments of love (Stanza IV).³⁰ The search for earthly glory and erotic satisfaction, is futile, the lyrical "I" laments, as it is ephemeral, disappointing turbulent and sinful. Only the solitude of *otium*, of a contemplative existence confined to the cloistered seclusion of private life, stripped of all social ambition, Stanza I)³¹ lived in an idyllic setting can guarantee quiet and innocence (Stanza II),³² satiety and rest, in the friendly abundance of fruit and the incomparable beauty of trees and flowers unmarred by the violence of the human

denounces his own role as a collective symbol of the ecocidal power of the human presence on earth. More on this poem, infra, VI. Conclusions.

²⁶ A garden, as a figurative epitome of lost beauty, lends its name to Giorgio Bassani's famous work, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (1962). This novel intertwines the classic formula of the coming-of-age novel – as a story of loss rather than conquest (in its celebration of youth as life's irretrievable zenith) – with the historical theme of the Nazi-Fascist persecution of the Jews during the tragic period of the Second World War.

²⁷ The idea of the garden as a place of guilt and fall is a theme explored in sophisticated, unconventional short stories such as "Garden Party" by Katherine Mansfield (1922) and "Rappaccini's Daughter" by N. Hawthorne (1844).

²⁸ Marvell lived at a time in history characterised by the major socio-economic upheaval in Britain brought about by *Enclosure*: the gradual concentration of land ownership in the hands of large landowners. This was marked by the removal of common lands from public use (through the erection of fences) and the division of vast tracts of land into private holdings with a view to their intensive capitalist exploitation (high farming). This process was accompanied by the abandonment of the subsistence economy, radically transformed the British socio-economic and environmental landscape with large numbers of workers being displaced from agricultural to industrial production, and the countryside being depopulated while undergoing rapid urbanisation. The massive impact of this 'Great Transformation' (Polanyi, 1944) on the landscape and human society was recognised early on at a cultural level and received a strongly critical assessment in Thomas More's *Utopia*, in which the gradual replacement of arable land with pasture by landlords keen to increase wool production is denounced using a scathing image.: "Your sheep," I replied, "which are usually so meek and modest in their diet, have now, so it's claimed, begun to be so voracious and fierce that they swallow up people: they lay waste and depopulate fields, dwellings and towns" (More 1516, Book I, p. 76). Nineteenth-century poet John Clare (1793–1864) made the transformation of the landscape and the destruction of an entire peasant civilisation brought about by enclosure a central theme of his work. Marvell's pastoral poetry is directly embedded in the social debate sparked by large-scale land acquisition and *enclosure*. It oscillates between a critical distancing from this political-economic trend (as seen in the poem "The Mower against Gardens", which frames the issue in a meta-temporal key and condemns the very idea of the garden as an act of violence against nature) and its apologetic defence in favour of aristocratic property (see the poem "Upon Appleton House"). In any case, the eco-political dimension of this poetry cannot be ignored, and it is at the centre of a growing critical debate and interest.

²⁹ "What wond'rous life...".

³⁰ "When we have run our passion's heat, / Love hither makes his best retreat."

³¹ "How vainly men themselves amaze / To win the palm, the oak, or bays, / And their uncessant labours see / Crown'd from some single herb or tree, / Whose short and narrow verged shade / Does prudently their toils upbraid".

³² "Fair Quiet, have I found thee here, / And Innocence, thy sister dear! / Mistaken long, I sought you then / In busy companies of men; / Your sacred plants, if here below, / Only among the plants will grow. / Society is all but rude, / To this delicious solitude."

desire to leave one's mark on the natural environment (Stanza III).³³ The companionship offered by this perfect *habitat* renders all human company superfluous and indeed a nuisance, making Eve's presence at Adam's side seem like a loss (Stanza VIII).³⁴ No female can rival the beauty of the vegetation (green surpasses red and white, Stanza III),³⁵ as Apollo and Pan knew well. In the nymphs Daphne and Syrinx they sought not carnal seduction but their own transformation into plants (Stanza IV).³⁶ The sublime bodily pleasure of this solitary identification with the garden as a new Eden, where time is entirely detached from history and becomes a pure bio-cosmic process, purged of all anthropocentric primacy (Stanza IX),³⁷ produces a mental self-transcendence. In this state, the spirit is transfigured into a wondrous bird ready to take flight towards a sky of pure light, whilst the earthly horizon is relativised into infinite imaginative potentialities (Stanza VII).³⁸

However, it is precisely the sixth stanza, with its announcement of this dissolution, that explicitly reveals the semantic reversal metaphorically inscribed within the text's literal wording – its narrow-minded misogynistic and misanthropic invective – by embedding within the text a counter-text that semantically metamorphoses it like a hypogram:

Meanwhile the Mind, from pleasure less,
Withdraws into its happiness:
The Mind, that Ocean where each kind
Does streight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other Worlds, and other Seas;
Annihilating all that's made
To a green Thought in a green Shade.

Enigmatic and hypnotic, the stanza describes poetry's oximoric, "annihilating and creative", duality. Although poetry speaks of "pleasure", it nevertheless seeks "happiness", i.e. a fullness of experience that transcends pleasure, nullifying the reduction of worlds to "that which is made", to representational duplication through the web of "resemblances". The transition described here – the moment when experience is transformed into poetry – is an epistemic leap, which combines the logical, homogenising, assimilative and abstracting process of analogy (a constitutive dimension of knowledge and of the mind) with an "aversive"³⁹ annihilating, deconstructive mode of generative metaphor which differentiates and multiplies (giving expressive space to the opacity and saturation of experience), rather than assimilating and simplifying. This highlights the inadequacy of the mimetic-representational process (organisation through unifying resemblances) and the drive towards integrating it with imaginative multiplication and transcendence, not only of reality and the meanings which intentionally schematise experience ("the worlds and all that's made"), but also

³³ "Fond lovers, cruel as their flame, / Cut in these trees their mistress' name; / Little, alas, they know or heed / How far these beauties hers exceed! / Fair trees! wheres'e'er your barks I wound, / No name shall but your own be found."

³⁴ "Fond lovers, cruel as their flame, / Cut in these trees their mistress' name; / Little, alas, they know or heed / How far these beauties hers exceed! / Fair trees! wheres'e'er your barks I wound, / No name shall but your own be found."

³⁵ "No white nor red was ever seen / So am'rous as this lovely green."

³⁶ "The gods, that mortal beauty chase, / Still in a tree did end their race: / Apollo hunted Daphne so, / Only that she might laurel grow; / And Pan did after Syrinx speed, / Not as a nymph, but for a reed."

³⁷ "How well the skillful gard'ner drew / Of flow'rs and herbs this dial new, / Where from above the milder sun / Does through a fragrant zodiac run; / And as it works, th' industrious bee / Computes its time as well as we. / How could such sweet and wholesome hours / Be reckon'd but with herbs and flow'rs!"

³⁸ "Here at the fountain's sliding foot, / Or at some fruit tree's mossy root, / Casting the body's vest aside, / My soul into the boughs does glide; / There like a bird it sits and sings, / Then whets, and combs its silver wings; / And, till prepar'd for longer flight, / Waves in its plumes the various light."

³⁹ For a refined epistemological elaboration of an "aversive" mode of thought, see Cavell 1991.

of intentionality itself (“the Mind, that ocean”), which is called upon to transcend itself in new ways (“far other seas”).

Analogy is a formidable and indispensable logical category. It operates as a rational representation mechanism across various domains of cognitive conceptualisation, encoding experience through the statistical-inductive scrutiny of sensory perception and the analytical-deductive reconstruction of similarities and recurrences.⁴⁰ Analogy is essential for achieving conceptual homogeneity and consistency: difference is integrated into unity and subsumed under common qualities. From a heuristic and probative point of view, finding similarities is a royal road to science; it is a fundamental component of the “happiness” of the mind, of reason, and of the triumphant celebration of its “theoretical” unity with being. “Each kind/ Does streight its own resemblance find’ is, in fact, an elegant formulation of the Aristotelian principle of *analogia entis*, which is the main logical criterion for the ontological predication of being and acts as an equidistant mediating bridge between identity and otherness.

And “yet” - the poet observes, giving voice to the everyday realisation that experience exceeds its conceptualization -, analogy not only risks failing, it is also never enough. It is not enough for achieving the “happiness” of the mind. There are cases, situations and dimensions of experience in which conventional (or rational) and culturally standardised analogical models for describing a state of affairs are perceived as inadequate, and no effective innovative analogical tools are available. For this reason, *otium* is so important. It is the contemplative suspension of *negotium* - all the strategic relationships with the world aimed at immediate performative successes and primal, pulsional drives, (such as Eros, incapable of symbolically codifying its own biological matrix: Daphne is not codified as laurel and Syrinx is not codified as a reed). Therefore, *otium* is an essential device for scrutinising and problematising the cognitive shortcuts constituted by conventional intentionality conveyed by linguistic meanings and socially standardised epistemic mechanisms. Engaging with one’s own *habitat* in a state of detachment from social and instinctual (including erotic) necessities and imaginaries, by relating to it not as an object (of knowledge and intervention) but as a companion,⁴¹ the mechanism of analogical assimilation reveals its limitations: a dissatisfaction emerges with regard to representation, to the “ocean of the mind”, in which the “kinds” – the categories of being – find their comparative predication. While *otium*, by enabling the mind to abandon itself to a detached (“withdrawn”) analysis of its own functions, euphorically confirms its

⁴⁰ Cf. *Metaphysics* 4.2 (1003a 33–35): “The term «being» is used in various senses (*multis modis*), but with reference to one central idea (*ad unum*), and one definite characteristic, and not as merely a common epithet” (*Metaphysics*, pp. 146–147). Medieval philosophers developed a sophisticated theory of the three “types” of analogy (of proportionality, of attribution and of imitation – or participation). For a historical-philosophical introduction to the concept, see Bartha 2024.

⁴¹ Marvell’s text highlights this universal anthropological aspect of the garden, as illustrated in the biblical image of Eden (Genesis 2 and 3). This figure gives mythical expression to an ideal state in which human beings are so harmoniously integrated into the natural environment that this insertion can develop into a form of mutual companionship, despite its haunting potential inadequacy and irreducible precariousness. The garden, or *locus amoenus*, is often celebrated in art as an (Arcadian) setting for perfect, peaceful and pleasant human coexistence (one need only think, for one example among many, of the eighteenth-century pictorial variations on journeys to the island of Cythera). However, it can also be viewed (as here) as the privileged environment for a social and erotic solitude in which to enjoy nature as the exclusive source of *friendly* gratification and a catalyst for spiritual elevation. For Frank Kermode (1952), it is this intellectual eulogy of solitude (derived from Cicero and revived by Montaigne) that lies at the heart of Marvell’s lyrics: “The Garden is a poem of the anti-genre of the naturalist paradise”. The text portrays “the garden of the solitary thinker [as] argument against the libertine garden of innocent sexuality” (p. 255).

power, it also reveals its limitations: the mind is happy to celebrate similarity,⁴² “yet” it is also dissatisfied. At some point, the mind (this expanse of thought with limits but without a bottom or boundaries: a sea and not a land)⁴³ must leave similarities behind and “create” other worlds and other seas. It must embark on a gradual transcendence of itself and the “made” worlds leading to an imaginative (self-)reinvention of the given (of “all that is made”: Reality) which acts as its own annihilation, a cognitive relativization. This is enhanced by joyfully abandoning oneself to vital (“green”) identification with the plant life in the garden. Paradoxically, it is precisely by “withdrawing” from unmediated drives (“from pleasure”) that the mind rediscovers the “happiness” of its original unity with the life, and its own participation as an expression of it. This a *mise en abîme* (“green thought in a green shade”)⁴⁴ that dissolves all boundaries between the organic and the inorganic, and the biological and the spiritual.⁴⁵ Mind, world and thought are inextricably linked in a metamorphic cycle that reveals the differences in substance as mere appearances, just as Daphne and Syrinx found the meaning of their being in their metamorphic reinterpretation as plants.⁴⁶

In the magnificent fresco of “The Garden”, poetry is this extraordinary mechanism (a bird with silvery wings and feathers iridescent with light) of symbolic transcendence of primal drives (“the cruel flame” of *Eros*) and of abstract-objectivist conceptualisation (“resemblances”), enabling the saturated excess of experience to be expressed imaginatively. This is particularly evident in our relationship with the natural environment, embodied by the figure of the garden, an icon of its divergent density (an indeterminable interplay of pleasure and frustration, success and failure, abundance and scarcity, power and powerlessness, intensity and precariousness, control and unavailability, innocence and guilt, enjoyment and loss, ascent and fall). By transcending the

⁴² It so happens that “The object with which he was compared/ Was beyond recognizing. By this he knew that likeness of him extended/ Only a little way, and not beyond, unless between himself/ and things beyond Resemblance” (Wallace Stevens, “Prologues to what is possible”, from *The Rock*, pp. 437-439).

⁴³ Emerson captures this primordial dynamic of self-transcendence in experience with eloquent subtlety: “Suffice it for the joy of the universe, that we have not arrived at a wall, but at interminable oceans. Our life seems not present, so much as prospective; not for the affairs on which it is wasted, but as a hint of this vast-flowing vigor” (Emerson 1844, “Experience”, p.282). The metaphor of the mind as a “sea” is a recurring theme in poetry. For a similar poetic vision to Marvell’s, characterised by the ecstatic dissolution, see Giacomo Leopardi’s “The Infinite” (originally “L’infinito”, 1819), (quoted here in F.H. Cliffe’s translation): “I always loved this solitary hill / And this green hedge that hides on every side / The last and dim horizon from our view. / But as I sit and gaze, a never-ending / Space far beyond it and unearthly silence / And deepest quiet to my thought I picture, / And as with terror is my heart o’ercast / With wondrous awe. And while I hear the wind / Amid the green leaves rustling, I compare / That silence infinite unto this sound, / And to my mind eternity occurs, / And all the vanished ages, and the present; / Whose sound doth meet mine ear. / And so in this / Immensity my thought is drifted on, / And to be wrecked on such a sea is sweet.”

⁴⁴ “Green shade” is a Virgilian invention: “quis humum florentibus herbis/ spargeret aut viridi fontis induceret umbra?” (“Who would strew the turf with flowery/ herbage, or curtain the springs with green shade?”) (Vergil, *Ecloga IX*, 19-20).

⁴⁵ In Renaissance Neoplatonism, the notion of *the anima mundi* conveys a paradoxically anti-dualistic impulse, nourishing it with a form of naturalism that is anti-Aristotelian and anti-conceptualist, and which proves decisive in the redefinition of the subject-object relationship (cf. Cassirer 1927). It is precisely this ecstatically anti-dualistic vision that constitutes the deepest Neoplatonic core of “The Garden” (entrusted to its imaginative counter-text). In my view, this is more significant than the anti-erotic and misogynistic ideological twist with which the poem’s propositional text of the poem radicalises the ritual celebration of Platonic love that was dominant in early seventeenth-century British culture and literature, marked by the rise of Puritanism (cf. Companion 1993). Highlighting the profound ambiguity of the Neoplatonic repertoire that nourished Renaissance culture – torn between incompatible schools of thought – Kermode 1952 argues that it is a mistake to read Marvell’s poetry as a treatise on Neoplatonic philosophy, rather than as a poetic vision entirely free from the conceptual repertoire from which it draws.

⁴⁶ Paradoxically, it is precisely this supreme decreative act of thought that establishes perfect equivalence between the mind and the body, the flesh and the spirit: “In this pleasurable moment of decreation, in which the mind displays its ultimate power (or aspiration) to reduce everything to its own “coloration,” all excess, including poetic excess, is to be reduced to zero, thereby restoring perfect equilibrium (green = green)” (Crewe 1994, p. 274).

strategically selective and reductive signification of propositional referentialism, poetry articulates experience in all its irrepressible, contradictory excess, which cannot be reduced to any single unilateral externalisation. On the one hand, it celebrates the joyful paroxysm of bodily ecstasy kindled by beauty and pleasure. On the other hand, it explores the intimate contradiction of this experience – the fracture that opens up in the differentiating gesture of transcendence, in the negative act of imaginative signification. The divergence intrinsic to experience arises from the polarity between the unifying and affirmative dynamic of cosmic co-belonging (culminating in the drive towards erotic fusion, exemplified by Apollo and Pan seeking to unite with the nymphs), and the divisive and negative dynamic of symbolisation (the “withdrawing”, the “casting aside” of bodily immanence, and the metamorphic transformation of flesh into plant, of Syrinx into a reed, of Daphne into a laurel). The unconditional harmony (“quiet and Innocence”) of one’s earthly condition, promised and heralded by the garden, is ultimately inaccessible to human beings. The poetry that expresses this as a utopia of happiness also articulates its impossibility, recognising that it can be conceived only as annihilation, in that ultimate transcendence which is death.

V. From *carpe diem* to *carpe mortem*

This insoluble contradiction is the key to the antagonism between text and counter-text that characterises the semantic complexity of Marvell’s poetry, in its magnificent imaginative schematisation of the rich and contradictory complexity of the experience of exhilarating yet ambiguously alienating enjoyment of harmonious and reconciled integration into the natural environment, as represented by the garden.

It is not a rhetorical device but a dizzying quest for meaning the fact that, in contrast to its euphoric propositional tone, the imaginative content of the poem – conveyed through the metaphorical architecture of associative analogies, constructed in visual and auditory terms – presents a dysphoric vision of death as an achievement rather than a loss, a state of joy rather than mourning; the restoration of the paradisiacal bliss enjoyed before the Fall.

In a stylistic tour de force, “The Garden” cloaks the classic Baroque *memento mori* themes in pastoral garb. The traditional lament over the brevity and fragility of human life, and the distressing perception of permanent loss brought about by fleeting time, is turned into a positive appreciation of the benefits of “transcending this world” and being freed from earthly burdens. **In sharp contrast to the conventional exhortation to *carpe diem*⁴⁷, the poet invites the reader**

⁴⁷ One of Marvell’s most famous poems, “To His Coy Mistress” (in Marvell 1972/1987, pp. 50–51; notes, pp. 233–236; date of composition uncertain), is a classic example of the *carpe diem*, which has been highly popular since its inception in Greco-Roman literature and is focused on the existential experience of the passage of time, which is objectively unrepresentable, cognitively inaccessible and emotionally deeply unsettling. The metaphor of withering, of the decline of vegetation (as an alternative to the astronomical image of the setting sun and the onset of night) is such a universal, ancient and widespread literary *topos* that the archetype is easily dismissed as a stereotype. Literature and music contemporary to Marvell abound with this hackneyed conventionalisation of the poetic device of withering, trivialised into a hollow rhetorical device by the *carpe diem* specialist Robert Herrick, in popular texts such as “To Meddowes” and “To the Virgins, to make Much of Time” (which opens with an almost proverbial summary of the issue: “Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,/ Old Time is still a-flying;/ And this same flower that smiles today,/ Tomorrow will be dying”).

In a radical departure from this trend, Marvell overturns the botanical metaphor. Rather than drawing on the phenomenon of decline he turns to that of nature’s inexhaustible (cyclically triumphant) vitality, to develop it as a paradoxical and counter-intuitive image of a life happily persisting beneath the appearance of death. This imaginative reversal *annihilates* the ordinary experience of reality, reducing it to a shadow onto which creative thought is projected). The amorous *carpe diem* of the poem “To His Coy Mistress” also provides intertextual confirmation of the interpretation

to a *carpe mortem*, in the explicitly Christian conviction that there is life after death and that it will be far better than our current existence. This is because we are exiles from Paradise, a condition that was destined for us as creatures, yet we lost through our own fault.⁴⁸

The most common structure of poetic discourse involves a convergent overlap between propositional meaning and imaginative meaning, with the latter reinforcing and illustrating the former. Examples of divergence between the two are rare outside of modernist literary production, where, conversely, such a discrepancy becomes predominant. This because this device makes the text more difficult to understand, by depriving it of the immediate support offered by propositional evidence, resulting in a sort of “concealment” of the imaginative counter-text by the propositional text. This hermeneutic difficulty is particularly evident in the case of Marvell’s poem. As a matter of fact, the proposed interpretation, which reads it as a euphorically counter-intuitive *memento mori*, is not documented within the extensive critical reception of the text.⁴⁹ How can we argue that “The Garden” “speaks” of being dead (i.e. that this is the semantic content of its imaginative counter-text), when the semanteme “death” does not appear in the text, except as the attribute “mortal”, which is used as a generic marker of identity rather than a specific situational indicator? To support this interpretation, the propositional mechanism must be dismantled, and the analogical-associative schema (of both oppositional and unitive nature) must be reconstructed in detail. This imaginative schema counter-textually, weaves the metaphorical-metonymic content of the poem as a bucolic reverie on the state of being dead (death as a return to the blissful, sinless Edenic condition), and structures it as a reconstructible poetic meaning in opposition to the propositional meaning.⁵⁰

argued here of “The Garden” as a *carpe mortem*, explicitly describing the grave as a state of erotic solitude: “The grave’s a fine and private place, / But none, I think, do there embrace”.

⁴⁸ Marvell’s poetic output of is overshadowed by the imposing presence of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*; Marvell was Milton’s friend, patron and admirer, if not his literary disciple. Marvell accompanied the second edition of Milton’s work with a celebratory ode, which, however, was not without its ambiguities (see Carey 1969, p.21; Davis 2011, pp.41-43).

⁴⁹ In Crewe (1994, p. 275) an isolated comment opens to this interpretative hypothesis but is not developed further): “Yet this movement in the poem is self-negating. Not only is the liberated masculine soul an exotic figure of “feminine” narcissism – the bird of paradise that “whets and combs its silver wings” – but the zero-economy of decreation is tantamount to one of death, with the pastoral subject reduced to a thought-possessed shade”. Watson (2006, p. 111) also observes, in relation to Stanza IV, that here “the good life starts looking a lot like death. “All flesh is grass,” yet the living embrace never quite achieves the union for which it hungers – except perhaps as the union it fears”, but this is a passing remark, which will be developed into a general argument only in relation to another of Marvell’s pastoral poems, “Damon the mower”; see note 72 below.

⁵⁰ The nostalgic evocation of death as a state of blissful regained innocence is a recurring theme within the Christian tradition in general and very widespread within the cultural landscape of the Reformation. As a staunch, albeit moderate, Protestant, Marvell is directly linked to this strand of religious thought. However, It is, interesting to compare his poetry with thematically similar works, such as Bach’s famous Cantata BWV 82 (1727) (“Ich habe genug”: “I have enough”), which forms part of a group of compositions dedicated to glorifying death (“Komm, du süsse Todesstunde”, BWV 161; “Ich lasse dich nicht, du segnest mich denn”, BWV 157; and “Der Friede sei mit dir”, BWV 158). In the text of Cantata BWV 82 (whose author remained anonymous for centuries, although it has recently been suggested that it was written by Christoph Brinkmann, a theology student at the University of Leipzig at the time and the probable author of the texts for at least eight cantatas set to music by Bach, cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christoph_Birkmann), the propositional meaning literally expresses praise of death, without being articulated through a metaphorical counter-text that imaginatively transposes the idea. The text of the cantata is therefore only formally a poem, not semantically. As it has no metaphorical meaning, it is, as a discursive genre, a straightforward homiletic profession of adherence to a faith-based truth. Only Bach’s marvellous music endows the composition with its evocatively unsettling power to convincingly express the humanly incomprehensible idea that earthly death is preferable to life: “I have enough / [...]. Now I wish, with joy, this very day / To depart from here: [...]. // Thus, with Simeon, I, too, already see / The joy of that life [in heaven]. / [...]. I have enough. // Fall into [death’s] slumber, / you languid eyes, / Droop gently and blissfully shut. / World, I will remain here no longer; / [...]. But there [in heaven], there I will look upon / Sweet peace, quiet rest. // My God, when will the beautiful

It is the very opening line of the poem that reveals its central theme of *memento mori* (“disguised” as a bucolic celebration): “How vainly”. The exclamation serves as an explicit intertextual link, a clear reference to the biblical source of artistic and religious meditations on the duality of transience and mortality (*tempus fugit*). The first verse of Kohelet’s autobiography reads “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” (*Ecclesiastes* 1:2; and again 12:8) and is the aphoristic quintessence (enshrined as a proverb) of the pessimistic view of the brevity of life and the futility of human concerns for earthly goods such as wealth, glory and power. All of these are swept away by death (in accordance with the old adage: *sic transit gloria mundi*). In line with the pessimistic warning of this book of wisdom, the first two lines of Marvell’s poem convey the idea that seeking glory is a form of vain self-deception, a kind of unproductive self-delusion, a distancing from the truth of the human condition. While the invective explicitly states the poem’s central theme (we immediately recognise that we are dealing with the thematic structure of the *vanitas* literary genre, which was typical of the 17th and 18th centuries), the stanza nevertheless develops it in a surprising way. The apostrophe, entirely conventional in the religiously inspired culture at the time, is supported by the highly unconventional rhetorical device of contrasting the vanity of historical fame with the positive value of plant life, thus establishing the poem’s first analogy through antithesis. Victory, success and social prestige are “upbraided” – refuted, “prudently” yet firmly – by the “short and narrow verged Shade” of “some single Herb and Tree” (i.e., by a little “green shade”). The primary allegorical meaning of this image (immediately grasped by contemporary readers, well accustomed to the literary genre of the *Triumphs*)⁵¹ is developed metaphorically by the lines that conclude the first stanza. The “short and narrow shade” of the laurel sprig crowning the victor’s head is to be interpreted as a positive omen and not a negative one. This foreshadows the “close” of humanity’s “unceasing labours”, as “repose” in the embrace of the Earth, beneath her crown (“Garland”) of flowers and trees (an image in which death is unequivocally evoked by its metonymic designation – common in the British lyric tradition – through the grave situated in a “country churchyard”).⁵²

The pastoral reinterpretation of *the memento mori* as a blissful foretaste of freedom, peace, innocence and serenity (of being finally relieved from the “unceasing labours” of public life and the “cruel flame” of love), in harmony with nature, is expressed in this stanza through a central contrast. This brings together the rich metaphorical, metonymic and allegorical architecture⁵³ with which the poem is woven, forming a coherent whole of allusive yet converging clues and increasingly daring,

“Now” come, / When I will go in peace, / And rest [here] in the sand of the cold earth // [...] I look forward to my death; / Ah, had it already come about. / Then I will escape all the distress / That [had] bound me yet in the world”.

⁵¹ In ancient Rome, victorious generals would parade (on foot or in a chariot) through the streets of Urbs, where they would be celebrated by a jubilant crowd. During the procession, a slave held a laurel wreath aloft above the victor’s head, and at the of the ceremony’s climax whispered the ominous phrase: “Memento mori. Memento te hominem esse! Respite post te! Hominem te esse memento”. The iconic depiction of this funereal warning associated with the “Triumph” became very popular from the late Middle Ages onwards, in both painting and literature. In Marvell’s verses, it is the personified laurel wreath itself that utters the reminder of mortality.

⁵² The same ambiguous imaginative “duality” of green – a colour which symbolises both life and death, and is explored in Marvell’s poetry – is a central metaphorical theme of the Lieder cycle *Die schöne Müllerin* by Franz Schubert (1823), based on a collection of poems by Wilhelm Müller published in 1821. Green is both “the evil colour” (originally “Die böse Farbe”, D 795/17), when associated with the exuberance of plant life indifferent to human decline and suffering – insensibly alien, in its shrill exuberance, to the painful memory of moments of lost romantic happiness – and “the beloved colour” (originally. “Die liebe Farbe”, D 795/16), when it embodies the end of amorous torments brought about by death: “I shall dress in green, / In green weeping willows, / My treasure likes green so much. / I want to look for a cypress grove, / A heath of green rosemary: / My treasure likes green so much. // Dig a grave for me in the turf, / Cover me in green grass, / My treasure likes green so much. / No little black cross, no bright little flowers, / Green, everything green all around! / My treasure likes green so much”.

⁵³ See Berthoff 1970, pp. 3ff.

innovative, powerful and imaginative inventions. The reversal of the “raising, tiresome, crowded” (full of “Oke, or Bayes”) coronation of victory (the fruit of “unceasing labours”) into the “Garland of *repose*, under” which vegetation envelops man as if he were dead, triggers a chain of analogies polarised along the three opposing axes: *above* vs. *below*,⁵⁴ *labour* vs. *repose*,⁵⁵ *solitude* as *innocence* vs. *company* as *troubling sinfulness*.⁵⁶ These are traversed and linked by the semantic theme of *closure*, which repeatedly emerges directly or is evoked indirectly (as a “visual echo”).⁵⁷ The rich and varied array of splendid associations, linked in various ways to these three central imaginative nuclei, develops the idea that vegetation refutes history (that the natural environment and the historical-social context are antithetical), framing it as a description of being dead as living in a garden, as a positive state of rest, passivity, innocence, oblivion and harmony,⁵⁸ conceivable as a state of pure Edenic bliss.

In the poem, the restless instability of worldly desire (because it is transitory and illusory) and the ceaseless effort (*the labour*) to obtain material goods, historical achievements and erotic love are thus set against the quiet, vegetal permanence that constantly renews itself, with its form of passive, pre-(post-)moral vitality that guarantees rest, as cessation, as a return to that pre-worldly earth that was Paradise. This antithesis is expressed through a kaleidoscope of images so rich and coherent from an imaginative point of view that any conceptual assessment of the arguments (any agreement or disagreement with the opinions expressed) is secondary to the cognitive gain offered by interpreting the poem, i.e. by deciphering its metaphorical meaning, by reconstructing its architecture as an imaginative schematisation of the state of being dead. The text’s success as a literary work (as a marvellous work of art) does not stem from its ability to persuade the reader of the validity of the presented thesis. In other words, readers do not need to be convinced that being dead and impervious to love is a blissful state in order to recognise the text’s poetic power. This power does not arise from the ideological message conveyed, but rather from the hermeneutic activation of the reader’s imagination, which is called upon to engage in a non-conceptual, non-objectifying experience of the beauty of natural environment beauty (and one’s own relationship with it) offered by spending time in a garden.

⁵⁴ “Your sacred Plants, **if here below**/Only among the Plants will grow./.../ Where from **above** the milder Sun./.../ Ripe Apples **drop about** my head;/ The Luscious Clusters of the Vine/ **Upon my Mouth** do crush their Wine;/.../ Insnared with Flow’rs, **I fall on Grass**. /.../ Here at the Fountains sliding **foot**,/ Or at some Fruit-trees mossy **root**”.

⁵⁴ “Your sacred Plants, **if here below**/Only among the Plants will grow./.../ Where from **above** the milder Sun./.../ Ripe Apples **drop about** my head;/ The Luscious Clusters of the Vine/ **Upon my Mouth** do crush their Wine;/.../ Insnared with Flow’rs, **I fall on Grass**. /.../ Here at the Fountains sliding **foot**,/ Or at some Fruit-trees mossy **root**”.

⁵⁵ And **their unceasing labours see**/.../To weave the Garlands of **repose**. /.../ **Fair quiet**, have I found thee here,/ And Innocence thy Sister dear! /.../ And, as it works, **th’ industrious Bee**/ Computes its time as well as we./ How could such **sweet and wholesome Hours**”.

⁵⁶ For the lyrical I, solitude and innocence are inseparable (and are therefore found together in the tranquillity of being apart from human society: : “repose/ .../ have I found thee here, / And Innocence /.../ **After** a place, so **pure** and sweet/ Mistaken long, I sought you then/ In busie Companies of Men./.../ Society is all but rude,/ To this delicious Solitude”), because (as orthodox Puritanism taught) sex (erotic companionship) is a sin. The entire eighth stanza is a eulogy to solitude, in keeping with this religious and de-eroticised notion of innocence through its paradoxical assertion that Paradise was indeed Paradise only insofar as it represented an Adamic state of pre-Expulsion solitude, “naked” of erotic, sinful trouble: “Such was **that happy Garden-state**,/ While Man there walked **without a Mate**:/ After a place, so pure and sweet,/ What other Help could yet be meet!/ But ‘twas **beyond a Mortal’s share**/ To wander solitary there:/ **Two Paradises ‘twere in one**/ To live in Paradise alone.” Death is the attainment of this “post-mortal happy Garden-state” of a “double” Paradise, for it is a state of total separation from human convivence.

⁵⁷ “When we have run our Passion’ heat/.../. The Gods, that mortal Beauty chase, /Still in a Tree did end their race.”

⁵⁸ “Fair trees! where s’er your barks I wound, / **No Name shall but your own be found**.”

By deciphering the complex architecture shaped by the contrast between text and counter-text and by the chain of audiovisual associations and figurative patterns, the reader recognises the majestic bird that “into the boughs does glide”⁵⁹ and, lazily and silently, “whets and combs its silver wings”, as the poem itself. The poem turns to an image of the soul, “prepar’d for the longer flight” of death”.⁶⁰ Thus, the reader comes to read the poem as the song of this prepared being, a song that is not to be “believed” but merely listened to. The bird alights and sings, awaiting (perched, unhurried, in the certainty born of anticipation) the moment of final liberation, and flutters its feathers – (in its verses, carefully combed and sharpened, chiselled and smoothed) the “various Light” that shines “from above the milder Sun”. The bird, gliding amongst the branches, in full, fluid harmony with its plant habitat, is poetry singing the blissful enjoyment of nature. It is a harbinger of death, where adherence to the “green form of life” is an imaginative annihilation of earthly life, reduced “To a green thought in a green shade”.⁶¹ It is the poem that, “waving the Light” in its silvery verses, sketches that fragrant zodiac (Stanza IX)⁶² which constitutes a “new dial”, a new reckoning of time, quite different from the ordinary anthropocentric reckoning of fleeting time – a reckoning based on that “sweet and wholesome” prospective anticipation which is the present of the peaceful and beautiful plant life (“Herbs and Flowers”), as a peaceful duration indifferent to the turbulent succession of history.⁶³

A poetic image does not need to be “believed”; neither it need to be “true” to be authentic. The “foreign song” that the bird sings on the fringes of what is conceivable is “Without human feeling: it is sung in the distance” – an emotional separation from direct experience (in a “withdrawal of the mind”) that ensures it is a non-figurative, non-representational image (the bird being made of silver or gold, not flesh and blood)). No direct knowledge or moral lesson can be deduced from the imaginative description offered by the poem. However, the order it establishes as beauty (not as objectification but as imaginative exposition),⁶⁴ helps us to survive the divergences inscribed in experience and to make sense of the nonsensical (including death). It helps to forge a new

⁵⁹ “All things swim and glitter. Our life is not so much threatened as our perception. Ghostlike we glide through nature” (Emerson 1844, “Experience”, p.268)

⁶⁰ Very close to this image is the enigmatic figure of the bird, which appears as an omen of death in one of Wallace Stevens’s final poems, “Of Mere Being” (1954), pp. 476-477, which can be read as a refined poetic paraphrase of Marvell’s stanza: “The palm at the end of the mind,/ Beyond the last thought, rises/ In the bronze distance./ A gold-feathered bird/ Sings in the palm, without human meaning, / Without human feeling, a foreign song./ You know then that it is not the reason/ That makes us happy or unhappy. / The bird sings. Its feathers shine. / The palm stands on the edge of space. / The wind moves slowly in the branches. / The bird’s fire-fangled feathers dangle down.” The poem sings “without human meaning (beyond the last thought, on the edge of space”, at the frontier of the unrepresentable, in the divergent saturation of experience that no intentionality can semantically designate within an objectifying conceptuality. Its “golden” verses “shine”, waving the iridescent “Light of a new time – dial running Sun”.

⁶¹ “Chasing mortal Beauty” (the beauty granted to mortals), the gods Apollo and Pan (allegorical figures representing poetry as a “divine” power, the human mind that “transcends the sea”), “still in a tree did end their race”. Poetry attains its spoils of beauty through the symbolic transfiguration (“annihilation”) of the human condition, transforming Daphne into a laurel, Syrinx into a reed. This is achieved by symbolising the bodily-perceptual experience – not reductively objectified or conceptualised – of one’s place on earth, by overcoming its dualistic externalisation as nature.

⁶² “How well the skillful gard’ner drew/ Of flow’rs and herbs this dial new, / Where from above the milder sun/ Does through a fragrant zodiac run; / And as it works, th’ industrious bee/ Computes its time as well as we. / How could such sweet and wholesome hours/ Be reckon’d but with herbs and flow’rs!” (Stanza IX).

⁶³ Since ancient times, bees, which disappear during the winter months only to reappear in spring, have, been a symbol of the natural cycle of the alternation between death and life. An echo of this ambivalence, played out alongside the above/below polarization, can be found in the second stanza (replaced by a radically new text in 1861) of the first version (published in 1859 under the title “The Sleeping”) of one of Dickinson’s most famous poems (“Safe in their Alabaster Chambers” - F124/J216 (1859–1861): “Light laughs the breeze/ In her Castle above them - Babbles the Bee in a stolid Ear” (in Franklin 1998, Vol. I pp. 159-164).

⁶⁴ “The beauty of the fable proves the importance of the sense” (Emerson 1844, “The Poet”, p.253).

relationship with the world and the natural environment, that goes beyond its strategic standardisation and its representational objectification, broadening the sphere of hermeneutic reception of the saturation and mystery inherent in being in the world.

From this perspective, figurative, metaphorical, poetic (mythical) discourse is a form of “domestication” (in the Emersonian sense of the term)⁶⁵ of the chaos inherent in the opacity of the existential, intellectual and ontological content of experience, which elude linear abstract-conceptual intentionality. However, the organising, signifying and transfiguring articulation of *transcendence* proposed by this “poetic” exploration of “chaos” (transfigured into beauty) may sometimes (often) fail or prove impossible. The poet, the thinker, and human beings in general are always confronted with the tragic defeat of form in the face of a subject matter that resists articulation and presents itself as an intractable “otherness” (this is the case of suffering, as discussed in Emerson’s reflection, an of death, evoked in this poem in a gesture of reconciliation with its wound, conceived in light of life’s inherent connection to the mystery of the natural world).

Poetic discourse is therefore often the “mourning” witness and herald of a tragic (in the Nietzschean sense) failure of the human quest for meaning in the face of the “formless” (as irreducible non-meaning), the opaque, and the saturated. The Kantian dialectic of beauty and the sublime, the Nietzschean tragic dialectic of active Apollonian symbolisation and the passive expressive Dionysian abandonment (Nietzsche 1872/1886) are the systolic-diastolic rhythm of this poetic attempt to bring order to chaos, to give form to the formless, transparency to the saturated, and symbolisation to natural immanence. As Wallace Stevens puts it with magnificent imaginative power: poetry is the “blessed rage for order”,⁶⁶ a power of meaning, but also, antithetically, the “destructive force” that bears witness to the manifold triumphs of nonsense and exposes the limits of the human endeavour towards order annihilating meanings to create ever-new ones.⁶⁷

VI. Conclusion

Marvell’s poetry celebrates the joyful wonder of a vitalistic, total identification with the natural environment and the exultation at the perfect harmony between humankind and the Earth, in a sumptuous ode, iridescent with precious and luminous imagery (“silver wings and various light”), which, simultaneously denounces the unattainability of this ideal. The desired reconciliation is heralded and promised by every earthly garden, but it is a utopia – as existentially necessary as it is cognitively disruptive – that can only be conceived within the horizon of death.

Adopting a radical pessimistic stance, which is highly baroque and clearly marked by the sombre Puritan vision of a human condition irreparably compromised by sin – in stark contrast to the optimism of the Enlightenment⁶⁸ –, Marvell asserts that no earthly garden can be a paradise because

⁶⁵ On this point, see Cavell’s 1991 interpretation of Emerson, which refers to forms of thought and language that do not eliminate chaos, opacity or saturation, nor do they erase otherness; rather they reduce its alienation, enabling us to experience unapproachable difference as an experience of meaning.

⁶⁶ See “The Idea of Order at Key West”, from *Ideas of Order*, pp. 105.

⁶⁷ As set out programmatically in the title of another poem by Wallace Stevens: “Poetry Is a Destructive Force” (from *Parts of a World*, p. 178): “That’s what misery is,/ Nothing to have at heart./ It is to have or nothing./ It is a thing to have,/ A lion, an ox in his breast,/ To feel it breathing there./ Corazon, stout dog,/ Young ox, bow-legged bear,/ He tastes its blood, not spit./ He is like a man/ In the body of a violent beast./ Its muscles are his own . . . / The lion sleeps in the sun./ Its nose is on its paws. / It can kill a man”.

⁶⁸ In *Julie, or The New Heloise* (1761), the *English-style* *Élysée* garden created by the protagonist and her husband, M. de Wolmar, is a successful example of harmony between man and the environment. It is a perfect balance of human intervention and natural beauty (see Rousseau 1761, “Lettre sur l’*Élysée*” XI, Part III, pp. 470ff.). For Rousseau, this

fallen man is denied Adamic delight and innocence.⁶⁹ For Marvell, the tragic paradox inherent in the myth of the Fall (not merely biblical, but interculturally universal; cf. Ricoeur 1960, pp. 153ff.) is that the enchantment of this idyllic harmony between humans and nature can only be realised through one's own disappearance. The idea that the very concept of a garden contains the intrinsic ecocidal potential of human presence on Earth is, moreover, explicitly and angrily expressed in another, grimly pessimistic poem by Marvell:

Luxurious man, to bring his vice in use,
Did after him the world seduce,
And from the fields the flowers and plants allure,
Where nature was most plain and pure.
He first enclosed within the gardens square
A dead and standing pool of air,
And a more luscious earth for them did knead,
Which stupified them while it fed.
The pink grew then as double as his mind;
The nutriment did change the kind.
With strange perfumes he did the roses taint,
And flowers themselves were taught to paint.
The tulip, white, did for complexion seek,
And learned to interline its cheek:
Its onion root they then so high did hold,
That one was for a meadow sold.
Another world was searched, through oceans new,
To find the Marvel of Peru.
And yet these rarities might be allowed
To man, that sovereign thing and proud,
Had he not dealt between the bark and tree,
Forbidden mixtures there to see.
No plant now knew the stock from which it came;
He grafts upon the wild the tame:
That th' uncertain and adulterate fruit
Might put the palate in dispute.
His green seraglio has its eunuchs too,
Lest any tyrant him outdo.
And in the cherry he does nature vex,
To procreate without a sex.
'Tis all enforced, the fountain and the grot,
While the sweet fields do lie forgot:
Where willing nature does to all dispense
A wild and fragrant innocence:
And fauns and fairies do the meadows till,

pastoral idyll reflects an alternative ideal of civilisation to the historically predominant one, which has severed humanity's original unity with nature. The idea that interpersonal relationships can disturb and even shatter this rediscovered harmony (Julie does not survive the unhappiness of a socially impossible love) is a Rousseauian conviction that subtly aligns with the eulogy of solitude woven into Marvell's text.

⁶⁹ The contemporary pessimistic realist would argue that achieving a state of perfect ecological harmony between humanity and the environment would require the Western citizen to reset the historical and social machinery of civilisation. This would entail alienating individuals not only from the body of society, but also from the material necessities of survival and the symbolic codes of their cultural tradition. As Daniel Defoe's proto-ecological parable of Robinson Crusoe teaches us, no amount of solitude or 'zero hour' can change this. Reliance on technology for economic and productive regulation of one's relationship with the environment is integral to Western identity.

More by their presence than their skill.
Their statues, polished by some ancient hand,
May to adorn the gardens stand:
But howsoe'er the figures do excel,
The gods themselves with us do dwell

"The Mower against Gardens"⁷⁰

In "The Garden", speaker of the poem is joyfully free from the troubles of love, politics, society and economics. He is fully immersed in the Edenic jubilation of an unspoiled environment, simply because he has "cast the body's vest aside". Death is the condition for regaining Adamic "fair quiet and Innocence", for being able to conceive of the intact beauty of a paradisiacal earthly state as a real possibility rather than an illusory fantasy, restoring the Earth to itself.

On this Earth, utopia is unattainable yet conceiving it is an inescapable existential necessity.⁷¹ The mind cannot escape the joy of "transcending this world, annihilating it and recreating it in far other worlds, and other seas".

It is precisely in the service of this indispensable happiness of the *as if* – the challenge to cognitive reductionisms and representationalist simplification that reduces the world to a resource and object of a sovereign, external and detached subject – that poetry finds its role, as the supreme vehicle of transcending the given, and experience's inadequate conceptualization. Poetry is a majestic bird ready to take flight into the mystery. As the song passes through the earthly garden, it contemplates and celebrates it as an earthly paradise. It imaginatively foreshadows death as a state of bliss, of liberation from the cognitive, spiritual and biological limits that afflict earthly existence. It does not sell the imaginative transcendence of the given as an easy, gratifying and futile illusion. By imagining the world as an Arcadia that does not exist, true poetry, true art, cannot help but carve into the stone of meaning the memory of death as an indelible earthly truth: *Et in Arcadia ego*.⁷² It articulates the abyss of death as a condition of meaning, as a *mysterium* through which the human condition is revealed, in an indissoluble interplay of the *tremendum* and the *fascinans*, disorienting yet not ineffable.⁷³

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⁷⁰ In Marvell 1972/1987, pp. 105–106 (notes, pp. 260–261). The text is available online on the Poetry Foundation website (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48333/the-mower-against-gardens>).

⁷¹ Marvell wrote a century and a half after Thomas More published *Utopia*, a seminal text of modernity and a key work in the education of the British citizens during the Baroque era. They were called upon to engage in a rigorous examination of a thesis that elevates the political dimension to the level of a framework for spiritual self-understanding.

⁷² This is exemplified by works of the same name by Guercino (1618) and Nicolas Poussin (1628–1630 and 1638–1640), which are very close in date to Marvell's poem. Watson (2006, p. 129) highlights the connection between the theme of death and pastoral poetry in another of Marvell's texts, "Damon the Mower", where life and death impulses are inextricably intertwined in an erotic fantasy of self-annihilation: "Poussin's meditative versions of *Et in Arcadia ego* would sustain the same reading. Death may be present even in Arcadia, but **Arcadia may be truly present only in death, where the human ego is erased [m.e]**: Arcadia is also in me, says the Grim Reaper, encouragingly. **Come die with me and be my love, says nature to the pastoral amorist**. This is a voice that Tibullus heard," as did Pseudo-Dionysius, and perhaps Sidney. [...]. This ataraxia seems disturbingly similar to the Arcadia found in death. Oblivion is a state of nature".

⁷³ "The A B C of being [...]. The vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X." Wallace Stevens (1947), "The metaphor", from *Transport to Summer*, p. 257

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Life-in-Resonance: An Ecology of the Sensible

Rodrigo E.R. Silva

"I would leave everything here: the valleys, the hills, the paths, and the jaybirds from the gardens, I would leave here the peacocks and the starlings, heaven and earth, spring and fall, I would leave here the exit routes, the evenings in the kitchen, the last amorous gaze, and all of the city-bound directions that make you shudder, I would leave here the thick twilight falling upon the land, gravity, hope, enchantment, and tranquility, I would leave here those beloved and those close to me, everything that touched me, everything that shocked me, fascinated and uplifted me, I would leave here the noble, the benevolent, the pleasant, and the demonically beautiful, I would leave here the budding sprout, every birth and existence, I would leave here incantation, enigma, distances, inexhaustibility, and the intoxication of eternity; for here I would leave this earth and these stars, because I would take nothing with me from here, because I've looked into what's coming, and I don't need anything from here, because everything will be there, just as it has always been here."

László Krasznahorkai

We are human because we are made of the same substance as the earth: of humus, that fertile and creative substance, open to metamorphosis and transformation. To inhabit the earth is the essential condition of terrestrial humanity, a condition that is at once knowledge and art, technique and poetics. More than concepts and calculations, more than complex data and abstract models, we must think and experience the habitation of the earth as a sensible experience. We are, and we form, a dynamic continuity with the fabric of life: we belong to it and are materially woven into living ecosystems that we tend to ignore, imagining ourselves as autonomous and independent subjects, beings separate from nature.

Now that biodiversity appears to be in an advanced state of decline, under the effects of climate change and intensive agricultural practices, scientific ecology, imbued with a reductive materialist and rationalist vision, seems powerless to restore the connection with nature as an embodied experience. Activist militancy, too, often seems permeated by an anxiety-inducing catastrophism, one that instils a sense of inevitability and irreversibility, perceiving our civilisational mode of consumption as highly predatory, incurably extractivist, and grounded in a strictly productivist vision of development.

The ecological future of the planet will depend, to a large extent, on future socio-economic models; yet these must be founded upon the necessity of apprehending the living in its continuity, through a construction of meaning capable of safeguarding that condition. Reason has gone too far, isolated within a technicism that has converted nature into a mathematical abstraction, making human beings strangers upon the very earth that mothers them. We must bring forth new landscapes of the possible, and this requires an ecology capable of creating a new way of describing and inscribing the world: an ecology embodied in the sensible, in relations, and in the interdependence of beings. Our future depends intimately upon our capacity to collaborate more fully with the whole of life.

Ecological knowledge must become an art that does not restrict ecology to environmental knowledge, nor ignore the deep and sensible relations between human life and non-human life: their co-presence, their constitutive connection with the sentient weave of life, made of delicate and fragile threads that bind us to life's matrix. Scientific conceptualisation has hyper-intellectualised and virtualised, in abstract relations outside the body, outside space and time, what can only be a vital experience. We withdrew from the living world, severing ourselves from it, breaking those fine threads in the fabric of life, those inner filaments that bind us to the continuity of living beings. It is through the sensible that we must re-enchant, re-educate, reconstitute and reimagine what weaves the sensible fabric of the living and forms the substance of terrestrial life.

To lose the enlarged sense of intimacy and interlacing with the living world is to lose the very capacity for experiencing life. Without the restoration of this intimate bond, we cannot think and feel the living world in continuity with our capacity for perception and sentience, with our capacity to experience, see and hear the manifestations of non-human living beings. The reduction of our sensory faculties, and of the primordial knowledge of those first realities that they convey and transmit, is at once a consequence and a cause of this rupture.

The sensible fabric of the living is a tissue of relation and connection. Conviviality is constitutive of life: all living entities are open systems that exchange matter, energy and information with all the other beings that compose the ecosystems within which they co-evolve. They are sentient beings, perceiving and perceived, touching and being touched, in a sensible and synaesthetic continuity. We seek existential plenitude through contact and encounter, which intensify and catalyse metabolisms and metamorphoses. The alteration or interruption of these sensible continuities generates deleterious dysfunctions, replacing reciprocity with conflict, and zones of exchange and translation with zones of aggression.

Modernity has disembodied and disincarnated us, as Paul Virilio wrote decades ago, leading us to drift within a standardised virtuality reduced to the consumption of images and products. We remain, therefore, in a universal neurosis, in a world of data that accumulates quantification, digitalisation and simulacra, overloading and overstimulating our senses with sensory information from artificial sources. Yet our constitutive porosity is what opens our horizons and awakens us to other dimensions present within the fabric of life. Knowledge of the world is born with the savour of the world: with its living and embodied experience, with the sensible fabric of the living.

The sensible escapes conventional modes of inquiry, which have preferred to rid themselves of it. It represents that reserve of the invisible, filled with relations in which fundamental bonds and vital connections among existing beings are woven. In these interlacings of sensible bonds, sensible landscapes are constituted, traversed by flows of life. Everything in a landscape coursed through by life exists only by virtue of sensible and resonant relations. We cannot extract ourselves from this intercessory space of the sensible, this kind of skin that envelops us and reconnects us to one another in the resonances of the sensible fabric of life.

It is an alliance whose resonance we have partly lost, an alliance we have shattered with blows of abstract rationality, degrading our sentient perception and our vital understanding of the resonances of the sensible world. That rationality has undone, obstructed and concealed the organic radicality of intuition and thought. We must reconstitute this lost alliance, beginning with that interstitial space, that in-between, that intercessory space through which the resonances of the sensible fabric of life pass. We must rediscover not only that it touches us, traverses us, and constitutes us intimately and substantially, but above all that we rest upon the creative and fertile ground of the living.

Our intimate and substantial constitution as living beings makes us carnal and embodied beings, in intimate and permanent resonance with all these sensible alterities. The flow of the sensible, the relations it binds and nourishes, the signs it unfolds and experiences in the living universe, the information it propagates between emitters and receivers, all structure a true sensible ecology of multiple and plural living beings. Wonder before this extraordinary disposition and aptitude of living beings for connected life, for life-in-resonance, is the condition of a true habitation of the earth.

In the face of an ecology inspired by the physics of inert bodies and their material interactions, one that sees living beings merely as entities exchanging matter and energy, establishing only partial quantifications and objectifications deprived of the sensible substance of imagination, we need an ecology intimately reconnected to a resonant habitation of the earth. Not in order to conserve, preserve or sanctuarise museified remnants of an idyllic “harmony with nature”, nor merely to delay the degradation of the biosphere’s habitability conditions, but because we wish fully to embody life on earth: its astonishing synergies and syntropies, its capacity for a Poetics of the Common, its power to constitute biotopes of life, regeneration and healing.

We must reclaim our place in the great creative symphony of multiple and plural living beings, with those vast singular senses that bind us to the sensible fabric of the living, to the matrix of life of which we are part. We must, despite all that has been lost, rehearse and experience anew the apprenticeships of terrestrial dwelling, that mode of making and acting which is indistinguishable from what we most intimately are: embodied living beings, terrestrial humanities participating in the sensible tissue of life.

The place of the sensible is that of a poetics of the common, of making community with the earth and with multiple and plural living beings. For this, we must seek another education, another economy, another art of living and another knowledge of how to live, each of them a new habitation of the earth. If today so many of us wander lost and perplexed, in the midst of a solastalgic spleen – to use the term coined by Glenn Albrecht – amid successive announcements of catastrophes to come, germinating silently beneath our steps and in the apocalyptic skies said to await us, it is because we wander somnambulant, lethargic and hypnotised by the mesmerising and anaesthetising influence of our virtual distractions. Digital social networks keep us, day and night, attached to screens, duelling with spectres and phantoms that insidiously ensure that nothing decisive changes and that much proceeds towards the worse, without our consent, while the living world, outside, continues to happen.

It is because we have lost the delicate and fragile thread of the sensible, the thread that binds us within the resonant weave of the sensible world, because we have consented to the impoverishment of our sentient experience, that today we face the immense work of reconnection and reunion with the constitutive inseparability of multiple and plural living beings. Fragile though it is, this thread still vibrates and is perhaps, today, our thread of Ariadne: the first thread that binds living beings to one another.

Science and rationality have consented to become instruments of domination in the service of the interests of those who finance them. We cannot allow them alone to preside over our way of inhabiting the world. Life cannot be reduced to its materiality, to the laws of physics and chemistry. Environmental policy, even when scientifically informed and normatively formulated, must be rooted in the sensible and embodied realities of human life, there where we anchor significance and collectively create meaning for our lives.

The ecology of the sensible communicates existentially and assumes a metaphysical and spiritual dimension. It seeks to overcome the nature/culture dualism by surpassing it within an affective ecology of multiple and plural life. To embody perceptions in affects and emotions is to open oneself to an animism of the sensible: to see living beings as animated entities, beings that exist by expressing a biotope of which we are at once guests and allies, and which permanently co-creates the conditions of our vitality and well-being, of our physical and psychic health in its most everyday expression.

Life is traversed by the resonant fabric of the sensible; it is animated by this fabric, which promotes an elevation of being, not a material abasement. The fabric of the sensible is the resonant and sensory connection with that which animates living matter, and not a closure within the dimension of the body. It is rather excessive confinement within rationality that has closed us off from the sensory world and aggravated our maladaptation to the world. To bring the sensible into our knowledges and arts is to lead them back to embodied life, to a life made of paths and places, a life of matters and materials that constitute the eco-places and eco-spaces through which we move as resonant and inhabited biotopes.

An ecology of the sensible would be an ecology of the sensible continuity of multiple and plural living beings, interlacing living entities within one and the same sensible organic web. The act of attending to living beings, of perceiving a more-than-human world animated by multiple forces of life, is an act of presence. Such attention, such enlarged perception, is a way of being-present-in-the-world.

To imagine and embody an ecology of the sensible is to become attentive to a world of relations and interdependencies. It means seeing and perceiving the world, the whole of beings, species and their lifeworlds, as interlaced and interwoven realities which, if removed from these bindings, these entanglements and intricacies of life-flows, from this co-relation of reciprocities and reciprocal acts, from this permanent exchange that forms the metabolism of life, wither, decline, become depleted, dissipating and irreversibly consuming their resources of vitality.

This sequence of impoverishments, born of the loss of exchanges and relations, of encounters and contacts, without that tangible and regenerative conviviality, leads mortally to the exhaustion of vitality and of the regenerating power of co-vitality. Transmuted into abstractions, taken as autonomous and isolated from the rest of the living, such realities become inert matter, mineralised, petrified, like a bloodless remnant, a mineral inertia, inanimate matter. This inanimate matter, placed outside the metabolism of transformations and metamorphoses, is an unanimated inertia. Stagnant and bloodless, without the thread of life that would integrate it into the fabric of the sensible, it becomes the desolation and devastation of a lifeless earth, an inert and inanimate world.

The living world is the resonant world of the fabric of the sensible: the world constituted by co-relation and co-presence, by the co-vitality that animates the creative metabolisms of life. An ecology of the sensible begins from the recognition that the substance of relation is what constitutes us as living beings, open and resonant with all that with which we are in co-creation and co-evolution.

An ecology of the sensible is an ethics of inhabiting the world as the fabric of multiple and plural living beings. To root ecology in the sensible also means rooting our knowledges and arts in this ethics of habitation. It is not merely a search for paths towards the restoration of our well-being or the regeneration of our essential being. It is, first of all, the form of an awakening: the opening of a more conscious and sensitive gaze, a gaze cast upon living beings near and distant, different and similar, as belonging to one and the same participated and participating condition. It is the restoration of our existential plenitude within the fabric of the sensible that constitutes the living matrix of life on Earth.

Living beings, by virtue of their sensible dispositions, adjust to change better than we do: their whole existence is sentient and perceptive. To feel the living, we must open our capacities of perception, we must become present within the living fabric of the sensible. This presence within the fabric of living beings, within the sensible continuity in which we are inscribed and within which

we co-exist, is also the way in which we co-create terrestrial life. The different modes of existence of multiple and plural living beings are sensible alterities with which we maintain a permanent dialogue – if only we know how to listen.

It is from our lack, and from our failure to recognise the sensible continuity of living beings, that we suffer above all. To allow oneself to be inhabited by another use of the world, to recognise the other as subject, as another point of view and as another form of inhabiting the fabric of the sensible, makes the ecology of the sensible an ecology of sensible alterity.

If our culture has dissociated us from nature, our embodied body bears witness to this inseparability. We are living matter insofar as we become conscious of our vulnerability, of the care and nourishment that sustain us and keep us alive, without which we would founder; of the permanent nourishment of breath and living foods that we constantly require in order to remain healthy and psychically, animically and physically vital. It falls to us to rediscover that living matrix which, from our birth onward, presents itself as the extension of the maternal matrix, the amniotic biotope in which we first began to live.

The living fabric of the sensible is the externalised maternal matrix from which we draw the essential nourishment that keeps us alive. The earth is our maternal matrix, and in it we feel the eternal nostalgia for a return to the primordial womb: not merely an unconscious desire, a projection or phantasmatic delirium, but the indelible mnemonic trace of our origin, the unforgettable umbilical bond by which we share the biosphere with all living beings and by which all are traversed by this shared belonging.

They are not only our originary home, but better still, the initial and initiating garden in which we began to exist, from which we have never departed and cannot depart. What perfidious illusion, what insolent arrogance, to think that we could survive in an artificial or recreated biosphere, when we are entirely indebted to our belonging to the sphere of the living, that sphere for which we must care like the most devoted gardener – we who are the form of life most unequipped for naked, purely biological existence.

To rediscover this matrix of the sensible fabric of the living is to burst the semi-invisible artificial bubble we have constructed within our consumerist individuality, imagining that it could be sustained by life's tireless availability to provision us, as though the resources and regenerative capacities of ecosystems were a set of goods and services eternally at our disposal, infinitely available and transactable, without any charter of ethical obligations to care for and nourish the systemic balances of the biotopes and ecosystems from which we predatively extract an infinity of materials.

It is the sensible continuity among multiple and plural living beings that creates the wonder of the world, and the enchantment that conviviality with an enlarged perception of the sensible can open. Without wonder, without enchantment before the astonishing diversity of living beings, there can be no ethics of inhabiting the Earth. Only an ecological approach to the sensible, redoubled by a sensible approach to ecology, can enable us to understand and reflect upon that fine weave of signs and subtle communications emitted by all emanations of life.

These signals, these resonances travelling along the invisible threads of the sensible fabric of living beings, must be received and listened to with attentive delicacy, with a gentleness of welcome and hospitality. We will then be led to intuit and understand the way other beings, within that same fabric, inhabit the world according to their own sentiences, within a web of permanent interactions with what surrounds them, restoring the torn and interrupted tissue of sensible continuity.

We live fragile and exposed within a “nature” too strong and, in large part, too unknown for us. Yet with our machines and artificial constructions we have become too strong for a nature that we have weakened and plundered, a nature from which, through acts of extraction and uprooting, we believed we could take without limit. Having interrupted the continuity of the living fabric of the sensible and torn the living tissue of our matrix, we are today forced – by successive ecological catastrophes, increasingly amplified and damaging for certain more exposed terrestrial zones and humanities – to recognise that we must compose our vital biotopes with the nature that we are as multiple and plural living beings, beings-of-relation.

From now on, we must act-with and no longer act-against, respecting this sensible fabric. We must therefore manage to decentre our point of view, to share it and allow it to be traversed by that of other beings, respecting their sensible substance. To see the landscape of the living as a great tissue of symbioses, mutual aid, associative bonds and synergies; to see it as alliance, in its metabolisms and synergies; and to see ourselves as elements of those regenerative synergies: this is to rediscover, in our gestures, actions and forms of consciousness, a new ethics of inhabiting the earth, a new way of recovering the sensible continuity of living beings and their primordial unity.

It is to live as a peopling of solidarities and not of solitudes, as a network of living interlacings and imbrications whose substantial unity inhabits us intimately. We are an enlarged community, porous and without sealed borders, where crossings and exchanges are permanent and recurrent.

Goethe considered the tree an integrated federation of shoots, at once singularised as organism and pluralised as ecosystem. Perhaps, prolonging his intuition, we might see the whole of multiple and plural living beings as the extension of that invisible tree rooted in the earth, that invisible “tree of life”, deeply rooted in the terrestrial, of which we see only the shoots that emerge on the surface of the visible. Each one of us participates and belongs, at once singularised as organism and pluralised as ecosystem, within one and the same sensible continuity of life.

The cosmic union of multiple and plural living beings is given and co-created by the relational tissue of life, by the sensible relations that constitute its terrestrial reality. Every ecosystem is a teeming space of relations, encounters and exchanges. To be deprived of this exuberant sensoriality is to be deprived of what revitalises us. Today, screens have taken the place of the astonishing diversity of the living, of that exuberant profusion of life, placing us inside a disembodied bubble of information and endlessly succeeding images, devitalising and desensitising us.

The ecology of the sensible is an ecology of immersion in a living and sensible matrix. It is not merely a matter of connecting; it is a matter of becoming embodied and immersed in the sensible continuity of life, nourishing oneself from the point of view of other living beings. This entails a radical transformation of our own point of view: opening it to other sentiences, imagining and understanding them as forms of inhabiting the world, apprehending them as relational flows and systems that permanently exchange energy, information and matter with the whole of other living beings.

To nourish oneself on other sentiences and other imaginings, to enrich and revivify the forms of our feeling with other modes of knowing and understanding, may begin, perhaps, with recognising our radical rootedness in the sensible fabric of the living. We must restore this lost continuity, this rupture between spirit and nature, and also restore the complementarity between the sensible, the intuitive and sensory apprehension of the vital, and the experiences of thought and culture.

Perhaps the most accurate name for the ecology of the sensible would be an animist ecology: to see all living substance as animated, as open and relational matter, as emanating and resonant, as communicative and sentient. Multiple and plural living beings are constitutively beings of correlation and interdependence. The human is summoned to re-inhabit the Earth, not as the strictly human world of culture and of the synthetic and artificial abstractions that surround it, but as “living among the living”.

An ethics of inhabiting the earth is therefore also an ethics of translation and contact: between the multiplicity of worlds that compose it, the multiplicity of voices that traverse it, the multiplicity of dialects that render it communicative and meaningful. To become human is to become humus: fertile leaven which, lacking humility, becomes infertile and toxic, virulent and malignant, like a formless life that knows only its own propagation and proliferation. To transmute poison into leaven: this is the task of the cosmic gardener that we are called to become by the questions life addresses to us.

We must relearn how to establish alliances with living beings, learning from them what they can teach us about the coexistence of different forms of life, about the synergies and symbioses that configure this fabric of mutual aid and sensible reciprocity. Our future depends upon our reinscription in terrestrial embodiment and in the multiple and plural forms that sensibly singularise it. To recover the sensible fabric of living beings, their vital continuity despite the discontinuity of individuations and embodiments, is to open oneself to the world-to-come on the Earth we have always had to relearn how to inhabit.

The pioneer of American ecology Aldo Leopold once wrote that “we can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in.” The image of ecology as a mechanics of data is incapable of reproducing the vital affects of relation with a place, or the sensible bonds that constitute it. Ecology ought to begin with an “aesthetic revolution”, making us feel that ecology is an ethics, but before that, that it is an aesthetics: a form of sensibility in which the sensible is embodied.

Ecology would then be the path of humanity’s ethical realisation, fulfilling the movement of its self-consciousness insofar as it participates in the movement of creation. In order to create an ethics of inhabiting the earth, we must invent a sensible relation with beings and with the multiple and plural forms of life. We must create a common space, a place of encounter where ecology and the arts may initiate a new alliance and share tasks, exchanging their reciprocal roles: to make visible, through the embodiments of the sensible, the concrete perception of the ecological continuity of life; and to infuse art with the consciousness that its forms of materialisation bear an originary commitment to a creative continuum with the realm of the living. The arts and knowledge must be revived by one another, uniting our thought with ways of knowing rooted and embodied in the thickness of the sensible.

To criticise the modern scientific project and the instrumentalisation of technoscience by capitalism entails rethinking ecology as a science of the relations between humans and the whole of living beings. It means thinking multiple and plural living beings as what we ourselves are: as a constitutive dynamic in which we bathe and are immersed, which we traverse and which traverses us. We accumulate data and predictive models, yet we need to communicate in order to act; we need embodied emotions and must resist the widening gulf in the way ecological consciousness is perceived: not as a distanced communication of alarmist and diffuse threats, but as something concerning both our lifeworlds and the earth as a whole.

The thought of Gilles Clément is one of the essential references in this reflection. His work teaches us always to relate to a landscape and a territory as a living biotope, where we establish sensible bonds. The art of landscape and gardens is not the projection of forms upon a landscape, but the constitution of a sensible relation with a community of living beings, an entry into resonance and dialogue with a biotope. Every act of gardening is an invitation to understand that relation to a space presupposes relation to living beings.

What we call art is a certain technique for manipulating the sensible, which should not so much be the manipulation of inert and dead materials as the entry into relation that we weave with other beings and living forms in a given location, in a given space-time. It is a form of sharing and sensible dialogue with living beings. “Garden” is that place of relations that evolve together, the movement of life with which we work: not an act of imposing form, not a permanent desire to remodel the world in our own image, but a dance of life, a shared dream, an inhabited co-creation, a poetics-in-common, a work-in-common.

This work arises from embodied emotions, not from an abstract and formalist exercise. Perhaps we might say: ecology is a poetics. The first pioneers of ecology, the authors of nature writing, were travellers of the sensible: walkers, writers, thinkers who were moved and who sought to move others – John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Thoreau – placing the experience of life into emotion. Not as an aestheticised landscape contemplated from a distance, but as a form of inhabiting and immersing oneself in a landscape, with an embodied body and an imagination fully attentive to the smallest movement of living beings. An enlarged anthropology, an aesthetics of ecology, a thinking imagination of multiple and plural living beings.

An ecology of the sensible would reintegrate all the senses in order to attempt to experience and describe the manifestations of living beings. Boundaries are always boundaries of the mind, created by the mind itself: active imagination, poetic reverie and dream occur in order to cross borders, to expand consciousness, rediscovering the embodied body, the living, synaesthetic and resonant body. To enter into resonance with what is animated is to enter into resonance with what bears the sensible movement of multiple and plural life.

To relearn how to inhabit the earth begins by seeing it as a garden in motion, one for which we must care, so that we may live in conviviality with the rest of the living beings with whom we must cohabit and coexist. David Abram reminds us that we are not the existential plenitude that life has inscribed within us if we step outside ourselves and become bound to the narrow limits we so often construct. Embodied life is an ecosystem of e-motions: vital movements that express the inhabiting and communicating forms of life which actualise their existential potential there.

When we are immersed in the living, we leave the logical space of reason; we see invention and permanent metamorphosis. Life possesses a luxuriant creativity; it is continually reinventing itself according to its intimate forms of the self-organisation of complexity, according to its systemic equilibria. Everything changes, all the time: this is the law of life, the law of metamorphosis, which governs the creative mechanism of evolution. Life is unpredictable: we never know what will happen tomorrow. Like a gardener, each day something new appears in the garden, something other and unexpected. To place oneself within the temporality of the present is perhaps the first form of presence.

An ecology of the sensible becomes embodied as the gardening of the world: as a habitation of the earth. It is not an aestheticising or merely artistic practice, but a sensible relation established with multiple and plural living beings. It is an opening of the five senses to other subtle senses, but also

a sensible relation because it is a relation of care and affection, of attachment, selfless devotion, contemplative reverie, of love for life as infinite transmutation and transformation. To produce an ecology of the sensible, we do not need machines or devices; we need to renew our love for the earth.

It is a way of being present in time, a presence in time embodied in a place. The time of presence is the time of others: of that sensible alterity that appears and reveals itself in embodied time. We must not impose our calendar, our chronological time, but open ourselves to the time of others, welcoming it. We must recognise that those beings we encounter in a sensible relation within the “planetary garden” – to use Gilles Clément’s expression – within the garden that is our planet, those beings we touch, see and feel, are also endowed with sensibility, perception and intelligence.

To recognise that sensible alterity is endowed with sensibility and intelligence, that living beings are sentient, that they have an embodied body that feels reciprocity: when we touch a leaf, the leaf touches us, feels us. We touch and are touched; we look and are looked at. We must move beyond materialist mechanism: we are the product of permanent sensible exchanges with other living beings, within the continuity of this sensible fabric, within the constitutive inseparability of living beings. We are intimately constituted by this sensible reciprocity, which occurs when we are fully present.

An ecology of the sensible is an ecology of presence. Merleau-Ponty said: “*science manipulates things and gives up living in them.*” It models trajectories and simulates them in mathematical equations; it observes phenomena, describes physiological processes which it transcribes into biochemical reactions, reducing them, reductively, to physics and mechanics. Yet life is unpredictable: it is always opening new paths, bifurcations, quantum co-evolutions born of coexistence and synergy among beings and elements. “Life is freedom insinuating itself into necessity,” said Bergson – and one might also recall René Thom on chaotic states. Life inflects matter, causing it to bifurcate. Life is this impulse, this impetus of the sensible expressing life’s potential. Living beings are not merely subject to their environment: they co-evolve with it, permanently modifying it. Life is the sensible embodiment of freedom within necessity.

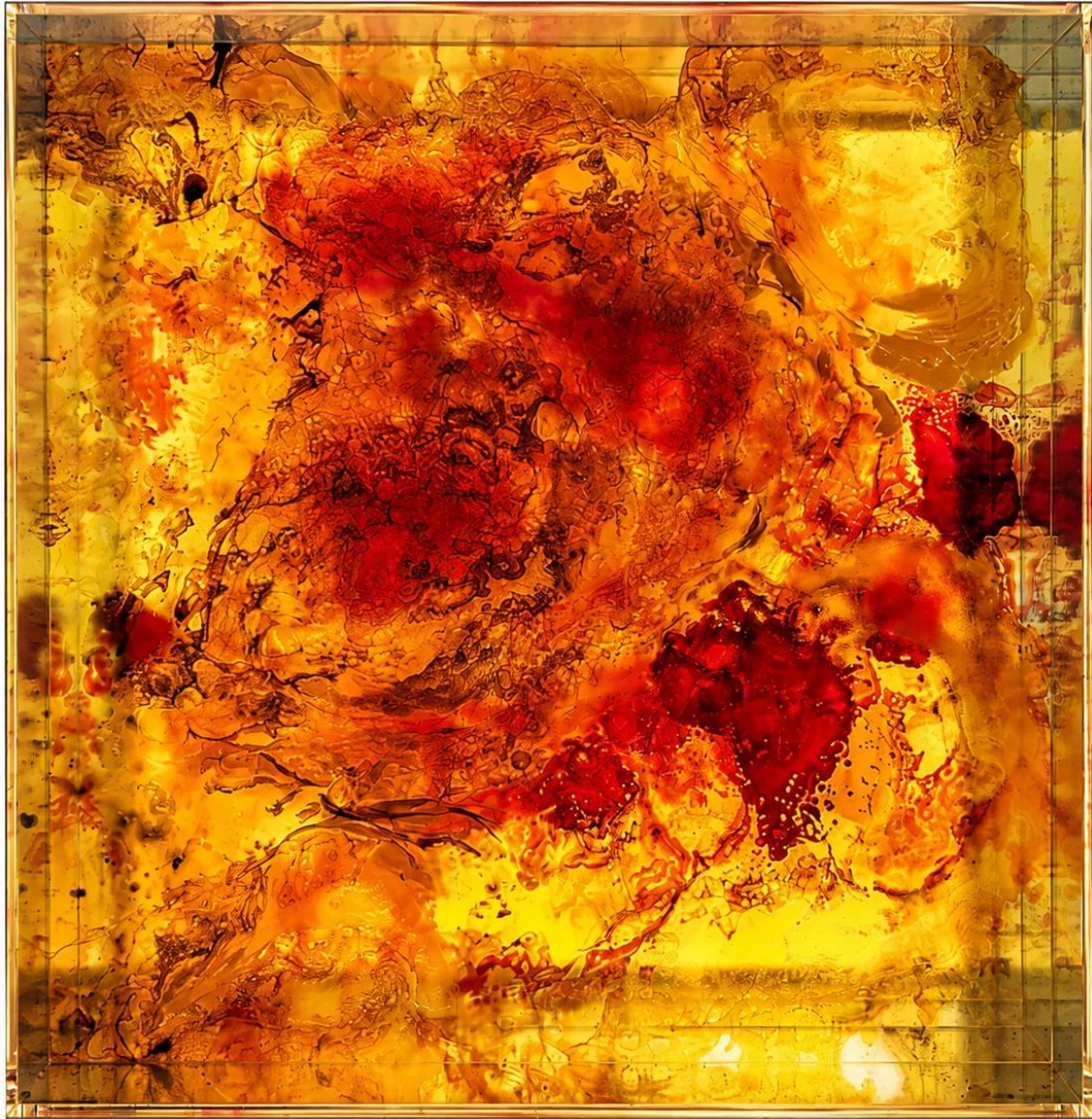
The gardener of the world, the cosmic gardener, is a translator of the sensible, of the delicate threads in the fabric of the sensible. The human, as Emanuele Coccia suggests, is “*the gardener of the world, the cosmic gardener*”: a sentient gardener who inhabits the earth by inhabiting its transformations and metamorphoses, immersed in the overflowing flow of sensible exchanges. The ecology of the sensible is the consciousness of the garden of unpredictable metamorphoses, the garden of sensible exchanges, a meteorology of the sensible: a certain light, a certain humidity, a certain density of time, an atmosphere, an energy embodied in a place, a communication that life whispers and murmurs to us.

“*Every gardener is gardened by what they garden*”, as Byung-Chul Han suggests in his beautiful *In Praise of the Earth*, if they accept entering into the reciprocity of co-creation. To recognise the freedom of other living beings is to accede to their freedom, to their capacity not to obey systematically a fixed order: to recreate order, to bring forth the emergence of new orders, new creative relations, new sensible ecosystems, and to ally oneself with the infinite metamorphoses of the sensible fabric of multiple and plural living beings.

To inhabit the great ecstatic and sentient garden of our passage through the terrestrial world is to live, incessantly and interminably, in a *life-in-resonance*.







César Barrio, *Light Box*, 2025, Three layers of painted acrylic and LED, 65 x 65 x 28 cm

TECHNICAL SHEET

Title: Light box;

Dimensions: 65 cm x 65 cm x 28 cm

Materials: three layers of painted acrylic and LED inside the acrylic box

CONCEPTUAL REFERENCES

One cannot speak of the contact between the image and the real without speaking of a kind of fire. Therefore, one cannot talk about images without talking about ashes. (Georges Didi-Huberman)

The vestige witnesses a step, a march, a dance or a jump, a succession, an impulse, a relapse, a coming and going, a compromise. It is not a ruin, which is the crumpled remnant of a presence, but only a touch on the ground itself. (Jean-Luc Nancy)

“How can we read a burnt page of a burning book,” writes Jabés, “if not by resorting to the memory of fire?” A word that is reborn from its own ashes to burn again. Incessant memory, residue or sing remainder: “Singbarer Rest”, in the words of Paul Celan. For, in the final analysis, the whole book must burn, be burned, leave only a residue of fire. (José Ángel Valente)

The metastases of fire. Fire as a principle

José Guilherme Abreu

My dreams, lions of fire and wonder tamed to pull
The golden tower that was my Soul's chariot,
Will stray through the desert, dying in the moonlight –
And I will only remember in the swaying of a palm tree...

Mário de Sá Carneiro (1937:15)

Instead of opening the text by writing 'In the beginning it was fire,' I prefer to write 'Fire is the beginning'. Or even better, 'Fire is the principle'

How can this be? Is fire not the combustion of the elements, the force behind telluric eruptions, the heat of the sun, the fever of passion, the transformative energy of the arts, and even cosmic radiation? Does not fire therefore presuppose the prior existence of the elements? Is fire, then, an emanation or a manifestation? Is it the source of genesis or the agent of annihilation?

To address this dilemma, I must first make a fundamental confession: in my personal mythology, there is no place for annihilation. Is not the very purpose of mythology to overcome death? As Fernando Pessoa wrote, "*Neophyte, there is no death*" (Pessoa, 1932, p. 2).

If annihilation is inconceivable, can we still speak of genesis? More specifically, can genesis be understood as *creatio ex nihilo* – the coming into being of existence from absolute nothingness? Put differently, can being emerge from non-being if non-being is conceived as pure nothingness?

Yet this formulation immediately gives rise to a paradox. The very notion of *non-being* already exists as a concept. But can a concept truly belong to nothingness? Does not the very act of conceiving non-being already confer upon it a mode of being? If so, the idea of an absolute nothingness from which being could emerge becomes philosophically untenable.

This line of reasoning exposes the limits, labyrinths, and illusions of language. Language does not fail because it lacks words, concepts, or expressive power, nor because of any deficiency of form or content. Rather, its limitation lies in its dependence on temporality. Language necessarily unfolds in a linear sequence, both in its expression and in its reception, whereas reality presents itself as an intricate web of simultaneous and interdependent relations.

This dissertation itself exemplifies that tension. Although it must necessarily be written and read in a linear order, it seeks to convey a reality that is fundamentally interconnected and simultaneous. Like a ball of yarn, its threads are inseparably woven together, even though they must be unravelled one by one.

But is not existence itself intrinsically temporal? At first glance, the answer appears to be yes. Yet is that the whole truth? Is existence nothing more than temporality? Do we truly understand the nature of time, or only our experience of it? Can time be apprehended in itself, or is it ultimately a construction of human consciousness: a framework through which we order experience and relate to the world?

At this point, it is worth returning to Spinoza. In the *Ethics*, he writes that "*time is not an affection of things, but only a mode of thinking*" (Spinoza, 1961, p. 138). Time, therefore, is not a property of substance itself but a product of consciousness. It is the framework through which we perceive, order, and interpret reality. If we were capable of an immediate and complete apprehension of substance, we would no longer be confined to the temporal perspective through which human consciousness ordinarily experiences the world.

This insight is inseparable from Spinoza's metaphysics. The philosopher identifies substance with God or Nature, expressed in the well-known formula *Deus sive Natura* – God, or Nature. For Spinoza, these are not two distinct realities but two names for the same infinite substance. Thought and extension are therefore not separate substances, but two of the infinite attributes through which the intellect apprehends the essence of that single, infinite reality. The attributes are thus the modes by which the essence of substance becomes intelligible to thought.

God and Nature are not distinct entities. There is only one single, infinite substance. God is no longer considered a personal entity, a transcendent being or a creative power in the classical theological sense. Nature (*Natura*) is immanent: everything that is, and everything that exists, is in God and through God.

So, things (beings, thoughts, bodies) are modes of the single substance. In other words, in Spinoza's understanding, *Natura* contains two dimensions. On the one hand, there is the dimension of *Natura naturans*: *Natura* as active power, cause of itself (God). On the other hand, there is *Natura naturata*: the series of existing things and their modes (the world).

Raymond Abellio, an author who greatly inspires our project, had the merit of converting a distinction that initially appeared to be classificatory, into an opposition, or rather, a dialectical articulation. Articulation, because, for Abellio, instead of being contradictory, both terms are related to each other, involved in a genetic process, as the author observes:

Spinoza clearly hierarchised the successive modes of the single substance, but he hierarchised them linearly, he did not associate them and oppose them two by two in their perpetual dialectical confrontation, he saw only their unitary resolution as always potential, not their dualistic tension as always virtual. (Abellio, 1978, p. 255).

Abellio not only glimpses the dialectical tension between the terms, but also unfolds this tension into a *double dialectic*, opening Spinozian immanences to Husserlian phenomenology through the incorporation of the transcendental plane.

For if Nature, according to Spinoza, unfolds in *extension* and *thought* as attributes of substance, this introduces two new orders of variables into the equation, which are also opposed: variables in degrees of quantity – *amplitude* – and variation in grades of quality – *intensity*.

The first category concerns measurable, quantitative magnitudes, which are objective and discrete. The second concerns qualitative magnitudes, which are non-measurable, subjective, and continuous. On the one hand, material objects occupy space and can be described, analysed, and quantified. On the other, lived experiences unfold in time and resist reduction to numerical parameters.

Consider the example of a piano. Its physical characteristics – its dimensions, materials, acoustic properties, and frequency response – can all be measured objectively and reproduced with considerable precision. By contrast, the experience of hearing Claude Debussy's *Clair de Lune* cannot be captured in quantitative terms. While the instrument itself can be objectively described, each performance of the piece, and each act of listening to it, differs in expressive depth, emotional intensity, and interpretative nuance. These are qualitative dimensions that admit grades of intensity but cannot be meaningfully parameterised, because they belong to the realm of lived, affective, and ultimately transcendental experience.

While the piano's tone or tuning are instances of *Natura naturata*, the performance and the listening of *Clair de Lune* are instances of *Natura naturans*. To that extent, they are 'symbolic or meaning

entities' in the mind of the performer or listener. They are an act of creation-recreation that preforms a genetic instance, which gives rise to the constitution of the musical spectacle: an experience that is often repeated without ever being a repetition.

At this point, it is important to recognise that we are not dealing with two separate realities, but with two inseparable dimensions of the same reality. One belongs to the order of **having** – the realm of things, products, and manifestations, which Spinoza calls *Natura naturata*. The other belongs to the order of **being** – the realm of generative power, becoming, and desire, which he calls *Natura naturans*. These two dimensions are intertwined in human experience.

The first apprehends the world in terms of extension and measurable form; the second experiences it through intensity and lived meaning. Consider once again the example of a piano chord. As a physical event, it can be objectively described by its acoustic properties and measured with precision. Yet the experience of hearing that chord belongs to an entirely different order. Its significance depends on the listener's sensitivity, knowledge, and attention. Can the listener distinguish a major chord from a minor one? Can they recognise a diatonic harmony from a pentatonic one? Beyond such recognition, what memories, emotions, or associations does the chord awaken?

These questions cannot be answered by quantitative measurement alone. A chord becomes meaningful only through an act of informed listening. In this sense, hearing is not merely the passive reception of sound but an active process of constitution, through which the listener recognises the sound *as* a chord and invests it with aesthetic and emotional significance.

What is important to state is that every experience is an entangled event. Whether we are seeing, listening, tasting, or touching – even if we are simply hearing the harsh sound of jackhammers in a quarry – experience always combines objective stimuli with subjective impressions. Every perception is intertwined with memory, association, and imagination.

This is precisely the insight on which *musique concrète* is founded. It draws on the expressive intensity inherent in every sound, even the most ordinary, raw, or unexpected. No sound is experienced as a mere physical event. Once lived, it becomes part of a web of meanings, emotions, and recollections that continually recreates the world for the listener.

Every experience is therefore an act of recreation. It unfolds within the convergence of two simultaneous currents. One connects the present moment to its origins through memory and accumulated experience. The other opens the present toward what has not yet been heard, understood, or imagined, allowing new meanings and possibilities to emerge. Between these two movements, the apparent linearity of experience gives way to a richer and more complex fabric of interconnections.

We call FIRE the prodigy that allows us to transpose the labyrinths and the alleys of linear evolution. An internal and immanent fire, which is at the genesis of the transmutation of the elements, bringing the wonder, if not the paradox, of original recreation.

Fire is the principle of transformation. It fuses and it separates. It creates and it destroys, only to make new forms of union possible. Yet nothing is ever absolutely created, and nothing is ever completely annihilated. Fire does not produce *ex nihilo*, nor does it reduce to nothingness. Its true art is that of transformation through intertwining.

The myth of Prometheus, one of the foundational narratives of Greek mythology, offers a powerful expression of the symbolic meaning of fire. Prometheus – whose name means “the one who thinks

ahead” – is the Titan, son of Iapetus, celebrated for his intelligence, ingenuity, and creative skill. Moved by compassion for the fragility of humankind, he steals the divine fire from Zeus on Olympus and gives it to mortals. In this myth, fire signifies far more than physical heat. It is the gift of *technē*: the power of craftsmanship, artistic creation, knowledge, foresight, and civilisation itself.

Enraged by this transgression, Zeus cruelly punishes *Prometheus*. He chains him to a rock in the Caucasus, where an eagle devours his liver every day. As *Prometheus* is immortal, his liver regenerates at night, making his torment eternal. Thanks to the intervention of *Heracles*, however, the torment is interrupted. The hero kills the eagle and frees *Prometheus* from the chains with which *Hephaestus* had bound him to the rock.

Symbolically, Prometheus embodies the creative spirit, intellectual foresight, and the human quest for knowledge. The fire he brings to humanity represents far more than physical flame: it symbolizes knowledge, *techné*, artistic creation, and the awakening of consciousness. Zeus, by contrast, embodies divine order, sovereign authority, and the law that preserves the established cosmic order.

It is therefore significant that the enforcement of Zeus's will requires more than his own command. The punishment of Prometheus depends on the intervention of Hephaestus, who forges the chains that bind the Titan, and on the presence of Kratos (Power) and Bia (Force), who compel the sentence to be carried out. Their participation highlights a defining characteristic of Greek mythology: gods and personified figures do not merely represent abstract ideas but embody the very powers they exercise. As will become clear later, this feature is essential for understanding the symbolic structure and deeper meaning of the Prometheus myth.

For the Greeks, the myth of *Prometheus* explains the birth of human culture. In modern times, Prometheus embodies the creator, the artist or the thinker who dares to challenge the gods. Let us look at Goethe, how at the end of the poem *Prometheus*, he rails against Zeus:

Here sit I, forming mortals
After my image;
A race resembling me,
To suffer, to weep,
To enjoy, to be glad,
And thee to scorn,
As I! (Goethe, 1777)

Hardly will one find a better interpretation of what fire is: the flame of audacity and the fever of rebellion. The transgressive act, as a means of denying repetition, in creation.

If we accept the opening maxim of the *Tabula Smaragdina* as expressing a fundamental principle – “*That which is below is like that which is above, and that which is above is like that which is below, to accomplish the miracles of the One Thing*” (Hispaniensis, 1140) – then the fire below, physical fire, may be understood as corresponding to the fire above, metaphysical fire. The two are not identical, but equivalent manifestations of the same principle, linked by a relation of correspondence grounded in the unity of being.

The model of the *One Thing* is the *Sphaera*. As early as 1537, Pedro Nunes, chief cosmographer of the Kingdom of Portugal, when translating and commenting on the *Tractatus de Sphaera* by the cosmographer Johannes de Sacrobosco, wrote:

The Universal *Machina Mundi* is divided into two parts: Celestial and Elemental. (Nunes, 1537)

The expression *Machina Mundi* (Machine of the World) is indeed curious, insofar as, on the one hand, it presupposes that the world displays a mechanical behaviour and, on the other, that this mechanical behaviour is not, so to speak, autonomous. It is governed by a device: the *Machina Mundi*, which at the time was the armillary sphere.

For Pedro Nunes, however, the *Machina Mundi* is not a mere device. It is not, because its nature is dual. On the one hand, it is celestial; on the other, elemental. On one side, the ethereal essences; on the other, the natural elements.

Luís de Camões, in *Os Lusíadas*, takes up the idea of the *Machina Mundi* when, in Canto X, narrating the episode of the dialogue between *Tethys* and *Gama*, he writes:

<i>Uniform, perfect, in itself upheld,</i>	<i>You see here the great machine of the world</i>
<i>Even as the Archetype by whom it was conceived,</i>	<i>Ethereal, and elemental, which fabricated</i>
<i>Gama, beholding that celestial sphere,</i>	<i>Thus it was of high and deep knowledge</i>
<i>Stood there in awe, possessed by wonder and desire.</i>	<i>Which is without beginning and limited goal</i>
<i>The goddess says to him: The reduced model</i>	<i>Who surrounds this rounded</i>
<i>In a small volume here I give you</i>	<i>Globe, and its surface so smoothed,</i>
<i>From the world to your eyes, that you may see</i>	<i>It is God: but what God is, no one understands</i>
<i>Where you go and will go, and what you desire</i>	<i>As so far the human ingenuity does not extend.⁷⁴</i>

Again, we recognize the *Machina Mundi* is both ethereal and elemental – at once spiritual and material. It is without beginning or end, and therefore unbounded and eternal. God encompasses the sphaera, indicating that the *Machina Mundi* belongs to the divine order, while its ultimate nature remains beyond human comprehension.

If it is true that “human ingenuity does not extend” to the Divine, it does not follow that knowledge of the *Machina Mundi* is without value. In *Os Lusíadas*, Tethys presents Vasco da Gama with the *Machina Mundi* not simply as a model of the cosmos, but as a metaphysical instrument of revelation.

Its revelatory power operates on two levels. First, it is temporal: it unveils both the present and the future, revealing “where you go and will go.” Second, it is existential: it brings together the outward and inward dimensions of the journey, disclosing not only “where you are” but also “what you desire.”

It is no coincidence that, immediately after this vision, Tethys begins her long prophetic discourse, revealing to Vasco da Gama the future achievements of the Portuguese navigators. The *Machina Mundi* thus serves not merely as a cosmographical representation but as a symbolic device through which knowledge of the world becomes inseparable from knowledge of destiny and of oneself.

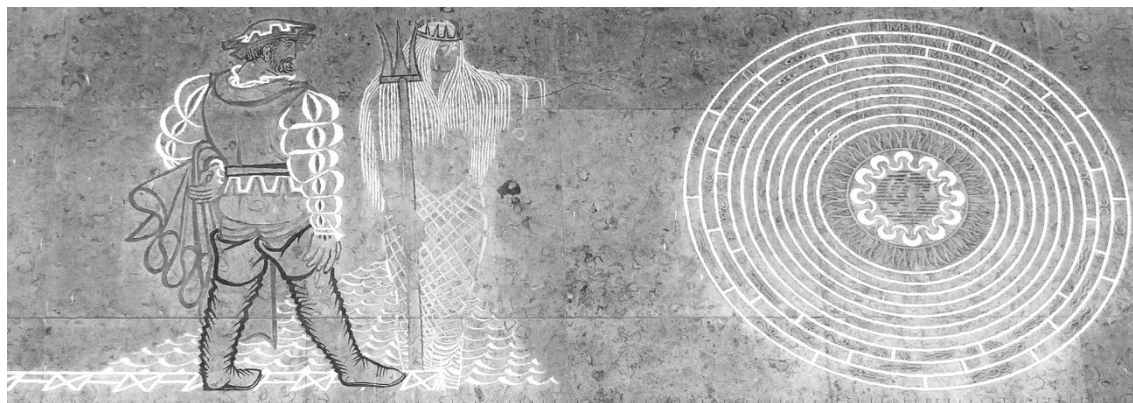


Fig. 1- Almada Negreiros, *Tethys shows the Machina Mundi to Gama*, 1961, Polychrome incised relief. Entrance to Faculdade de Letras. Cidade Universitária, Lisboa

⁷⁴ Camões, *Lusíadas*, Canto X: Stanzas: LXXIX LXXX

A polychrome relief by Almada Negreiros, placed above the entrance to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, in Lisbon's University City, illustrates the scene.

If the *One Thing* is the Sphera, and if the Sphera is the device that articulates, if not commands, what is below and what is above, since it is elemental and spiritual, then as Abellio used to say, it is where 'the immovable motor that commands movement' is located, thus establishing the correspondence between physical and metaphysical fire.

In my personal mythology, this correspondence constitutes a principle. Principle, not in the sense of a moment or initial impulse, but in the sense of a perpetual foundation.

Metaphysical fire is that which burns without being seen. That which burns without combustion. However, if combustion requires fuel and oxygen, what does metaphysical fire burn without combustion, if a sole principle governs both? In other words, what are the metaphysical qualities that correspond to the material constituents that feed physical fire?

Later, we will discuss these considerations. For now, we will limit ourselves to calling for a suspension of judgement, before we understand where they might lead us.

If fuel and oxidiser are the constituent elements of *natura naturata* – the realm of created things – what are the constituent principles of *natura naturans*, the realm of creative becoming? Lacking a more appropriate term, I shall retain the word **essences**, already introduced to describe both the attributes of the gods and the qualities revealed by the *Machina Mundi*.

Just as physical fire arises from the interaction of the elements that sustain combustion, metaphysical fire emerges from the interplay of the essences that manifest it. The parallel, however, is not exact. Physical fire consumes the very elements that produce it; its fuel is finite and eventually exhausted. Metaphysical essences, by contrast, are inexhaustible. They are governed by principles of intensification rather than depletion. Because of their universal character and intrinsic purity, they are not bound by the contingencies of space and time, but retain an autonomy that transcends every particular circumstance.

At the dawn of the 20th century, Henri Bergson had already outlined his vision of the presence of a perpetual, dynamic and creative principle that was the driving force behind creative evolution, which he called *élan vital*.

When analysing biological processes, instead of observing a linear progression, built through a continuous succession and accumulation of novelties, Bergson observed a succession of ruptures and divisions, as he states:

Life does not proceed by the association and addition of elements, but by dissociation and division.
(Bergson, 1911, p. 94)

For Bergson, evolution is not linear precisely because it is creative. Rather than being driven by a purpose, and rather than obeying a mechanism, life constantly devises new solutions by altering the range of possibilities at its disposal. Summarising his thinking, the author states:

Life, we have said, transcends finality as it transcends the other categories. It is essentially a current sent through matter, drawing from it what it can (Bergson, 1911, pp. 279-280)

In my personal mythology, fire is an active principle equivalent to Henri Bergson's *élan vital*: a beam of energy that inscribes itself in matter, animating it with the wonder of life, if it is not, after all, the flow of life itself.

At this point, the discussion reaches a critical threshold. Rather than remaining within the domain of reflexive questioning, it becomes all too easy to slip into premature answers and to construct a theory that intends to solve the problem. This is the path typically taken by science, which advances through provisional explanations. Here, however, the aim is not to resolve the question by proposing another explanatory model, but to remain attentive to the question itself and to the horizon of meaning it discloses. In this regard, Raymond Abellio used to say, recommending:

I believe, then, that in this domain [science], we are faced with a dialectic of perpetual overcoming. On the contrary, in *gnosis*, we are faced with the insurmountable; this is the drama, but it is an enlightening drama. It is therefore necessary to put into practice a dialectic of the *perpetual overcoming* before the *presence of the insurmountable*. This is where the inner conflict lies, that of the wise man (Abellio, 1987, p. 47).

Abellio's strategy for overcoming the drama of perpetual conflict and the persistence of the insurmountable is therefore dialectical. It seeks to illuminate this inner tension through the interplay of *science* and *gnosis*, allowing each to disclose what the other alone cannot.

If we designate the energetic principle that animates matter as the **principle of fire**, and distinguish between **physical fire** and **metaphysical fire**, the initial duality expands into a quaternity. Physical fire stands to the combustion of material elements as metaphysical fire stands to the inclusion of essences. The former is governed by the principle of entropy: it separates, homogenizes, and ultimately reduces matter to ash. The latter is governed by the principle of negentropy: it unites, differentiates, and gives rise to ever more complex forms of organization and life.

However, if combustion, on the one hand, separates the elements aggregated in bodies, entropically generating ash, on the other hand, it makes elements available for new associations, providing raw material for their recomposition, induced by the inclusion of essences, generating negentropy.

The way in which this current intervenes in matter is twofold. In its constructive aspect, it is intertwining. In its deconstructive phase, it is dissociation. Intertwining integrates and fixes. Dissociation detaches and liberates.

Thus far, our reflections have remained on the plane of processes, viewing reality from the perspective of temporal becoming. To borrow Abellio's image, we have stayed on the equatorial plane of the *sphera*: the plane where elements interact, where actions are performed, and where creative intentions take shape. It is the plane in which existence unfolds within space and time. Yet this is only one dimension of the sphere; to understand the whole, we must now turn to its vertical axis, where temporality gives way to a different order of intelligibility.

Yet life is not constituted solely by the horizontality of existence – the plane of interactions, actions, projects, and empirical experience. Beyond this horizontal dimension lies another, complementary one: the vertical dimension. Whereas the horizontal plane is the domain of becoming, where beings encounter one another in space and time, the vertical plane is the domain in which meaning is generated and knowledge takes root.

It is along this axis of verticality that the spiritual becomes inscribed in matter, and the sensible is transfigured into spirit. Here, experience is no longer understood merely as a sequence of events, but as a process of interiorisation and elevation through which existence acquires meaning.

The most profound journeys within the *Sphera* take place along its vertical axis. Like the ladder in Jacob's dream, this axis forms a bridge between earth and heaven, along which souls ascend and

angels descend. What sets both movements in motion is desire: for souls, the desire to be liberated from the constraints of time; for angels, the desire to become incarnate in matter.

To travel along this vertical axis is to discover that between the sensible and the intelligible there exists an intermediate realm. Access to this realm is not gained through sensory perception or discursive reason, but through the cognitive power of the imagination. It is this domain that Henry Corbin designates as the *mundus imaginalis*: an ontologically real world of images, where symbolic forms mediate between material reality and spiritual truth. Imaginative perception is therefore not a subjective fantasy, but a genuine mode of knowledge, capable of revealing dimensions of reality inaccessible to the senses or to abstract thought alone, as the author says:

As a world beyond the empirical control of our sciences, it is a suprasensible world. It is only perceptible through *imaginative perception*, and the events that occur there can only be experienced by imaginative or imagining consciousness. Let me emphasise again that what is at stake here is not imagination as we understand it in our current language, but a vision that is *Imaginatio vera*. And this *Imaginatio vera* must be recognised as having entirely noetic or cognitive value (Corbin, 1964, p. 15).

So, imaginative perception is neither illusion nor fantasy. Rather, it is a legitimate mode of knowing. What it reveals becomes perceptible only when consciousness moves beyond the confines of ordinary sensory experience, allowing access to a dimension of reality that cannot be grasped by the senses alone:

Of course, there may be topographical correspondences between the sensible world and the *mundus imaginalis*, one symbolising the other. However, it is not possible to move from one to the other without interruption. This is pointed out by many accounts. One begins, but at some point, there is a break in the geographical coordinates found on our maps. Only the “traveller” does not realise this at that moment. He realises it – with consternation or astonishment – only after it has happened. If he had realised, he would have been able to retrace his steps at will or show the way to others. However, he can only describe where he has been; he cannot show the way to anyone else (Corbin, 1964, p. 12).

The *mundus imaginalis* is the intermediate realm where matter is spiritualised and spirit becomes manifest. Access to this realm requires what might be called an inner awakening: “*opening the eyes that remain closed within your open eyes*”, as I once wrote somewhere. It is not achieved by withdrawing into fantasy, but by cultivating a mode of perception that transcends ordinary sensory experience while remaining fully attentive to reality.

To cultivate this form of perception, and to make oneself available for such a journey, is to enter the domain of art. For art is governed by the metaphysical fire that animates its unmoved engine: the creative force through which the visible and the invisible, the sensible and the spiritual, continually meet and are transformed.

To devote oneself to this exercise. To make oneself available to experience this journey is to devote oneself to art. As art is ruled by the metaphysical fire that runs its “*immobile engine*”.

Wim Wenders constructed a sublime metaphor for what means to travel through the verticality of the Sphera, in his 1987 film *Wings of Desire*. Able to hear the thoughts of human beings, *Cassiel* and *Daniel*, anthropomorphic angels who inhabit the skies of Berlin, are sensitive witnesses to human sorrows, and although they intend to comfort them, they are unable to do so because people do not feel, nor even suspect, their presence.



Fig. 2- W. Wenders, *Der Himmel über Berlin (As Asas do Desejo)*, 1987.

This film is significant because it reveals the profound divide between the horizontal plane of worldly processes and the vertical plane of spiritual reality. Modern consciousness has become highly sensitive to the destructive and transformative power of physical fire, as evidenced by the increasing frequency of wildfires and the spectre of global warming. By contrast, metaphysical fire remains largely imperceptible. It is concealed behind a kind of symbolic smoke – a pervasive noise that obscures awareness of its presence and prevents recognition of its creative and transformative power.

In *Wings of Desire*, Cassiel remains beside a young man overwhelmed by despair, yet, despite his compassion, he is powerless to prevent the man's suicide. Daniel, by contrast, becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the immaterial condition of angelic existence. He longs to be incarnated, to experience the sensations, limits, and joys of a human body.

His passage into human existence is made possible through Peter Falk, a former angel who has renounced eternity in order to live among humans, while retaining the ability to sense the presence of angels. Perceiving Daniel nearby, Falk enters into an invisible dialogue with him, gently encouraging his desire for incarnation until it is finally fulfilled.

Once embodied, Daniel experiences the world with childlike wonder. The simplest sensations – drinking a cup of coffee, feeling the weight of his body, tasting the ordinary texture of everyday life – become revelations. He wanders through the streets of Berlin, seemingly untouched by the political drama of the divided city, although every step is accompanied by the silent presence of the Wall, which separates East from West just as the body marks the boundary between spirit and matter.

In the desolate expanse of Potsdamer Platz, he encounters a travelling circus and is captivated by the aerial grace of the trapeze artist Marion. Watching her suspended between earth and sky, he falls in love, discovering in that encounter the human experience he had long desired.

In the film, Marion personifies art through the mastery of her body, the beauty she brings to her movements, and the perfection with which she maintains her balance, showing that there is an intermediate plane between remaining immaterial, without interacting with the world, and embodying matter, allowing oneself to be entangled by the sensations of the world. This intermediate plane is the plane of art, i.e., it is the *mundus imaginalis*.

Raymond Abellio was one of the few twentieth-century thinkers to regard art as more than an aesthetic or ethical practice. Without diminishing its role as an expression of beauty or perfection,

he attributed to art a further, distinctly gnostic dimension. For Abellio, art is a mode of knowledge: it transforms the way reality is perceived and, in doing so, reshapes consciousness itself. Artistic creation thus becomes the culmination of the dynamic sequence *vision-action-art*, in which a renewed vision of reality gives rise to action, and action finds its highest expression in art:

... the uniqueness of any 'present moment' can only be evoked by a spherical sequence of three senaries, corresponding respectively to vision, to action itself, and to the art that crowns the action and constitutes another vision, this triple senary representing the smallest and most general structure of any 'quantum' of time (Abellio, 1965, p. 143).

For Abellio, art is far more than an activity or a technical skill that produces cultural objects called "works of art." It is a power of integration that, through creative action, transforms an initial vision of the world into a new mode of seeing. Art does not merely represent reality; it reconfigures perception itself. In this sense, it effects the decisive rupture of which Henry Corbin speaks – a break with ordinary perception that opens access to a deeper order of reality, as Abellio explains:

This integration must also take place at the level of germs. It is the artistic part of the act, the part that transcends its intention and which, apparently, is also a gift, an unpremeditated game about the world. Thus, if the action, when limited to fulfilling its naive and natural intention, has a double senary structure, it is, on the contrary, a triple senary that calls into question the art achieved, when it adds to the realisation of the act its unpredictable margin of realisation. This opens to a "new" time. The work of action is constructed; the work of art is constituted. Art makes us change time (Abellio, 1965, p. 150).

Art is a mode of knowledge because it enables us to see beyond what was previously visible. By integrating unpredictability into action, it transforms perception and opens new horizons of understanding. I have called this capacity **spiritual intelligence** – a form of intelligence that, as Abellio suggests, is essentially free (Abreu, 2025).

For Abellio, art is always the threshold of a new epoch. In this sense, he maintains that there are three domains of human existence that ultimately resist every attempt at political, social, or cultural control: *sexuality, art, and death*. History repeatedly confirms their irreducible autonomy. *Sexuality* belongs primarily to the *physical plane*, *art* to the *spiritual plane*, and *death* to the metaphysical plane. Together, they reflect the classical triad of *body, soul, and spirit*.

We began by proposing that the fundamental principle is FIRE. We can now formulate this more precisely. FIRE becomes fully manifest only when it is activated simultaneously on two levels: as *physical fire* and as *metaphysical fire*. Their conjunction gives rise to the creative principle itself.

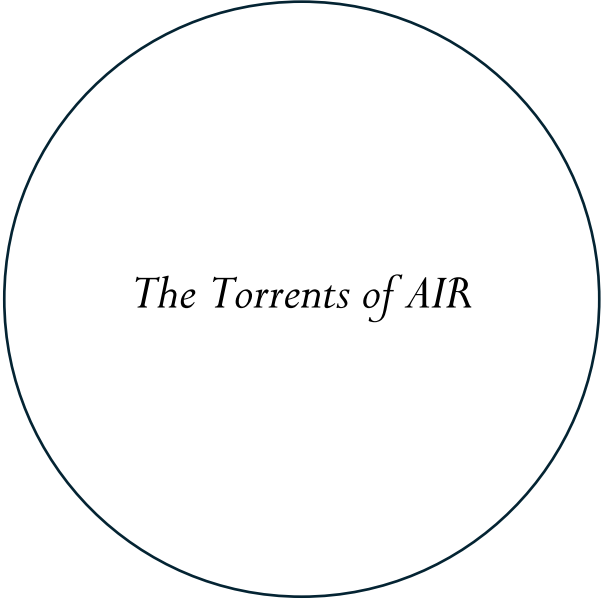
Only this double activation constitutes the FIRE of creation. And its highest manifestation is art.

José Guilherme Abreu
Óbidos, Mars 2026

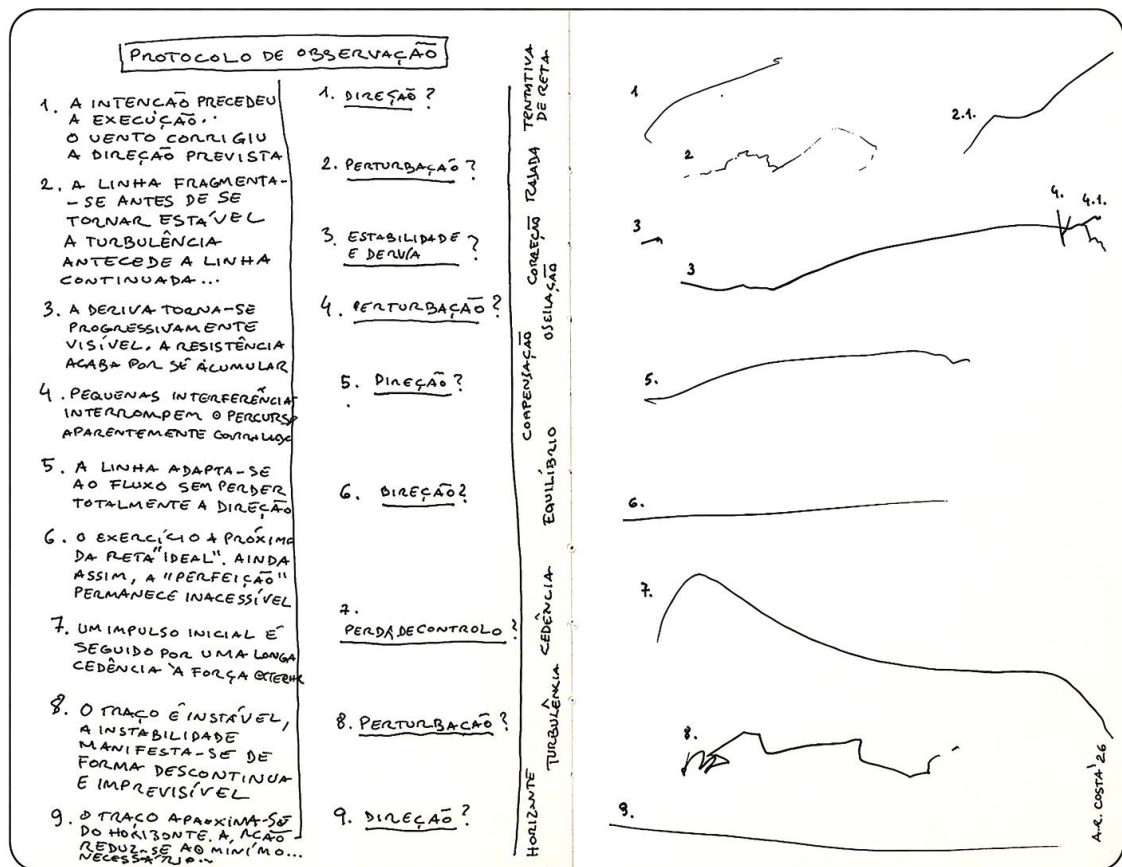
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The Torrents of AIR



Alexandre Costa, *Nine attempts to draw a straight line & Observation Protocol: Air currents in the field diary*, 2026, Black ink pen on paper. Artist's sketchbook, 34.5 × 26.5 cm. Digital photo taken with a Sony α7 III.

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL		
1. The intention preceded the execution. The wind altered the intended direction.	1. Direction?	Vertical
2. The line fragments before becoming stable. Turbulence precedes the continuous line.	2. Disturbance?	Tension
3. The drift gradually becomes visible. Resistance gradually accumulates.	3. Stability and Drift?	Oscillation
4. Minor disturbances interrupt the apparently continuous path.	4. Disturbance?	Correction
5. The line adapts to the flow without entirely losing its direction.	5. Direction?	Balance
6. The exercise approaches the "ideal" straight line. Even so, perfection remains unattainable.	6. Direction?	Yielding
7. An initial impulse is followed by a prolonged yielding to the external force.	7. Loss of Control.	Horizontal
8. The line is unstable. The instability manifests itself discontinuously and unpredictably.	8. Disturbance?	Turbulence
9. The line approaches the horizon. The action is reduced to the minimum necessary...	9. Direction?	

Technical Sheet:

Title: nine attempts to draw a straight line. Observation Protocol: Air Currents in the Field Diary

Author: Alexandre A. R. Costa,

Year: 2026

Materials: Black ink pen on paper.

Dimensions of the open sketchbook: 34.5×26.5 cm.

Digital photograph of the open sketchbook, taken with a Sony $\alpha 7$ III.

Synopsis of the artwork

In this work, drawing is understood as a record of an experience, a trace of an action and an index of the relationships that constitute it, rather than as a representation of something extrinsic.

Comprising elementary freehand drawing exercises, I explore the relationship between what I initially set out to do – to draw a simple straight line on paper freehand – and the results actually obtained.

Carried out over nine (non-consecutive) days, in different locations and under gusts of air of varying intensity, the records constitute both a graphic inscription and a testimony to the interference of air forces in this process.

Each attempt takes the form of an observational protocol, highlighting the way in which intention is shaped by the actual circumstances of its execution. The force present in these surges of air acts as an interfering agent, introducing disturbances, oscillations and instability, resulting in unpredictable outcomes in the organisation of the line. Here, this force is not approached as an object of representation; in other words, it is not a matter of representing the natural phenomenon. The attempt to produce a straight line becomes, rather, an exercise in observing the relationships between an intention, the actions and the repeated event. In these brief moments of interaction, uncertainty manifests itself between the focus of the action that produced a stable line and the conditions involved in its execution. Uncertainty is understood here as being intrinsic to the experience itself. In other words, the act of drawing is understood precisely as an uncertain practice, carried out between an intention and a series of attempts under different circumstances, and also functions in itself as a medium and instrument of inscription – highlighting the relationships and elements of indeterminacy present in the exercise.

Drawing is proposed here as a broad field of inscription and observation. The composition brings together different modes of recording produced from the same experience: on the right-hand page are the marks made under the direct action of the gusts of wind; on the left-hand page are notes (script-graphic elements) produced in the studio – in a constructive and progressive manner – at the end of each outdoor session. Far from constituting autonomous moments, both pages form part of a single composition, in which different languages participate in the same process of observation and recording. This movement between exterior and interior, between the field and the studio, seeks to frame the body of inscriptions produced throughout the experience, understanding drawing not merely as a line, but as a device capable of accommodating multiple forms of recording (from the experience of drawing in the field diary).

Porto, 30.05.2026

Alexandre A. R. Costa

The Torrents of Air

Stela Maris Sanmartin

How do we see the natural sphere? Do we see it as the place of things? Do we see it as an extension of us? Do we see it as a frame that surrounds the happening? Do we see it as a scenario that supports our intervention? Do we see it, finally, as a partner in a common project? Do we see it as a voice? And as a voice that challenges us, can we hear it?

The environment in which we are immersed increasingly takes on a leading role in our lives and is an integral part of the creation processes. The natural sphere, as a partner in a common project, has a voice and, by listening to it, we dialogue, adapt, but we also create from and with it. We transform nature and build culture through our creative action. The knowledge arising from our relationship with things and people is the starting point for human creativity that, based on the known, responds to the most diverse situations or stimuli that are not foreseen or programmed.

The creative imagination, like air currents in which thought flows, projects the intended into new forms and allows the creator to perceive and make visible his subjective apprehensions about the world. By creating solutions to problems, the creative person travels paths, always new, that unveil phenomena, producing theories (science), creating languages (communication and art), services, products, technologies... and in these actions it constitutes different cultures over time. Creative action, therefore, is a way of understanding and signifying life, as it intervenes and modifies the way of being in the world.

When creating, in any field of knowledge, singular marks are left, because creations are extensions of man in the world, and in this context, creativity is configured as a way of existing, as an open and latent potential that will manifest itself whenever the emergence of the new is necessary. It is through the creative imagination that reality is faced. Through different materials and languages that meanings and projections of the transforming and constructive action of the real are established.

Therefore, knowing the inner dimensions of creative processes is a way of bringing to consciousness what is lived, as a diary and a work of the continuous and non-linear time of creation. To investigate the movement of the creative act, the implied ripple between chaos and order, between consciousness and the unconscious, divergence and convergence... it is like "sculpting time" (Tarkovsky, 1998) of the possible trajectories built throughout the processes of creation.

The title of this essay "The Torrents of Air" is an opportune metaphor to relate aspects of nature such as air currents, winds, winds, hurricanes with creative processes.

The creative process

Considering the classification of the creative process proposed by Wallas (1926), composed of four phases: preparation, incubation, *insight* and verification, Torre (2005, p. 113-115) emphasizes that preparation allows "knowing the terrain and being willing to cross its limits", emphasizing that anticipation and commitment are important attitudes. Once the preparation phase has been overcome, in which we bring a lot of information about the theme closer, the incubation or distancing from the problem is necessary to make room for the unconscious to "work", articulate ideas and allow "enlightenment" or insight to emerge. However, the creative process will not yet be complete, as it will be in the last stage, verification, that the idea will be evaluated, elaborated and verified.

In an extension of Wallas' thought, Sanmartin (2017) comments that George Kneller (1978) includes a phase prior to preparation, which the author calls "first apprehension". It is true that a process of generating ideas does not begin without a concern, a question or a problem to be solved. Thus, the author suggests that, in general, from perception there is an issue to be investigated, the difference between the *intuitive flash* in which the creator initiates the creative process and the *insight* in which he generates the idea of a solution. These moments are followed by the lengthy phase of conscious preparation for data collection, followed by the incubation phase, in which intuition acts again, until it reaches *insight*, understood as "a solution that presents a clear and explainable logic with words, numbers, or images" (Sanmartin, 2019, p. 77).

Still, regarding the beginning of the process, Amabile (1999) presents two types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation is linked to stimuli from the sociocultural environment such as speech, images and sensations, while intrinsic motivation is related to desires, ideas or personal goals, dreams and intuitions as apparently random captures, but which say a lot about what moves and interests the creator. All these stimuli that cross life are stored in the unconscious, a large collection that holds ideas, images, sensations... building a treasure trove for creative processes.

Kneller, by saying that the first apprehension gives the creator the notion of something to do, seems to indicate that intuition also occurs in the stage prior to data collection and indicates a direction. This understanding is close to the perspective addressed by Abrantes and Sanmartin (2017, p.71) when they state that "intuition presents different ways of manifesting itself (at the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual levels), communicating with us through subtle and individualized messages".

Through these theoretical contributions, the following analysis proposes analogies between the different concepts related to air and some moments of the creative process, especially those specific to divergent thinking and idea generation. As a reference, the first intuitive apprehension, the period of conscious preparation in which processes of daydreaming and creative imagination enrich the creative processes, the classical *Brainstorming or Torbellino technique of ideas* (brainstorming) that is intentionally used in the ideation processes and, finally, *insight* as an idea of creative solution.⁷⁵

Air Currents/Wind/Wind/Drilling

We find in Chevallier (2008) different concepts related to air, such as air currents, wind, hurricane, wind, elements that show promise to establish analogies with creativity and, in particular, with the fluidity of divergent thought and imaginative processes.

Perceiving a draft is as subtle as listening to intuition that can emerge as a thought, image, or sensation. This inner listening is essential to capture opportunities or cracks that open up towards discovery and signal the future solution or creation.

Bachelard (2001, p.1) tells us that the difficulty in researching imagination is due, in the first place, to the 'false light of etymology' that indicates imagination as the faculty of forming images (mnemonic imagination). On the other hand, when referring to the creative imagination, he says: "Now, it is rather the faculty of distorting images provided by perception, it is above all the faculty of freeing ourselves from the first images, of changing the images." And so, instead of image, it

⁷⁵ For Sadler-Smith (2011), *insight* allows us to "see" new connections and creative intuition allows us to "feel" new connections.

brings the imaginary word closer to the term by its open and evasive nature in the experience of openness and novelty. In his words: "a stable and finished image cuts the wings of the imagination". This one that flies towards the air of reverie or the winds of thought that transport us to the past or to a probable future. In this way, instead of occupying itself only with the constitution of images, it stops at their mobility, its creative imagination whose fecundity allows it to abandon the ordinary course of things.

To feel the imaginative role of language well, it is necessary to enumerate all the desires to abandon what is seen and what is said in favour of what is imagined. Thus, we will have the opportunity to return to the imagination its role of seduction. Perceiving and imagining are as antithetical as presence and absence. To imagine is to be absent, it is to launch oneself into a new life. (Bachelard, 2001, p. 4)

The reverie transports. It leads the creative being to drift in the course of the winds, as well as those who intentionally experience the hurricane in *brainstorming*, which stimulates the generation of numerous ideas, often strange, and apparently distant from the theme worked, expanding the possibilities of the paths to follow. Sometimes, it is these deviations that lead the creator to establish new connections and to the new.

After the wind, other times arrive: those of calm, of diving into the unconscious. A kind of dormancy, an interval of unconscious elaboration that allows the emergence of *insight*, like a gale that indicates the direction of the currents to be followed in the planning and execution of the good idea of solution.

Some considerations

Sisyphus (Camus, 1989) assumes his destiny with happiness, even though he knows that when he reaches the summit of the mountain the stone will roll back to its base. He undertakes the journey certain that by repeating the action, a new experience happens and both the stone, the mountain and Sisyphus himself arrive transformed. Seeing, reviewing, seeing again, through the creative imagination, establish vitality and new airs to the dynamics of life.

Like Sisyphus, assuming creativity as a vital principle, in addition to constituting an attitude towards one's own existence, transforms us and influences the people around us. Developing personal creativity means, therefore, maximizing intrinsically human traits, streamlining them, improving them, and reverberating in the context in which we live our valuable contributions. Living creatively makes it possible to be aware of opportunities, understand one's own thoughts, signify feelings, emotions, intuitions and perceptions about the world to be better people and influence our surroundings leaving unique marks in the places we go.

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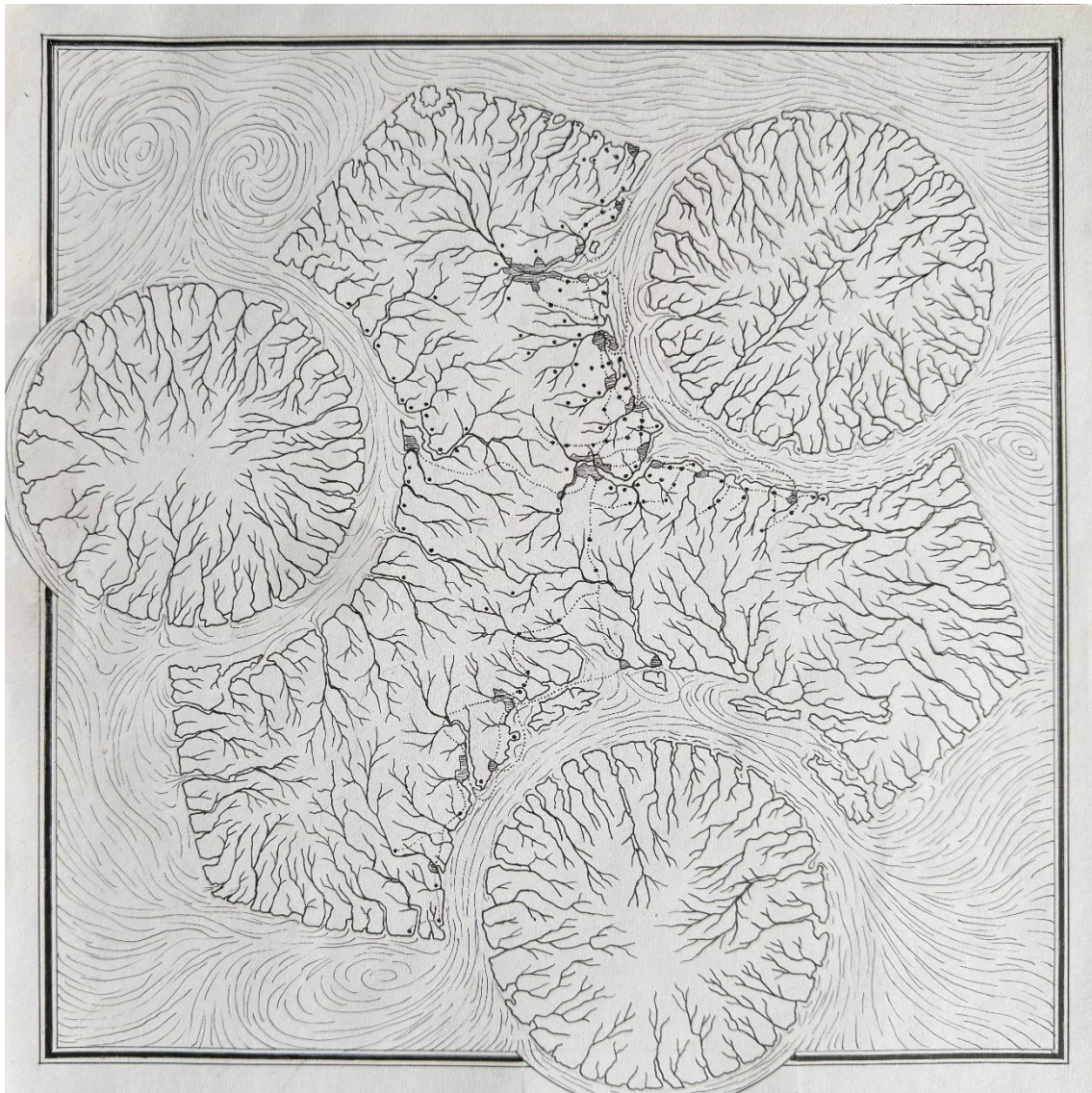
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The Metamorphoses of WATER



Simeon Nelson, *Mundus Medimarenea*, 2026, Ink on paper, 30 x 30 cm

Lamentatio Medimarenea

An island risen in anger
Out of the churning sea.
A river carving a valley,
From mountain to mead,
Meandering lazy pastures,
Like lymph, it drains the land.

The road winds on wearily,
Past the old stone door,
A signpost's painted hand,
Points the road on its way,
To the hilly distant haze
The sky's edge, the hinterland.

The town wincing in silence,
Grips the cold dark shore.

Wind-whipped ships,
Ride the chopped foam,
That slaps the docks,
And slams a deck door.

A bagpipe skirl rings out,
Over the harbour wall,
gulls hover lamenting,
A true love lost,
So long ago,
To the sliding green swell

Simeon Nelson, 2026

TECHNICAL SHEET

- Title: Mundus Medimarenea;
- Dimensions: 30 x 30 cm
- Materials: Ink on paper
- Year: 2026

The Metamorphoses and Metaphors of Water

Laura Castro

To the theme of metamorphosis, which was inscribed in the project of this book, I have added that of metaphor. What is materially transformed is also transformed symbolically; what acquires new forms also acquires new meanings. To this initial remark I add another: I shall, for the most part, refrain from referring to artists' names, titles of works, and places, as well as from providing detailed contextual descriptions and complete historical accounts already addressed in specialized literature. Finally, I should note that I revisited a text written in 2007 and published in 2009 on the subject of water and art. These decisions shaped this collage-like text and my participation in a project difficult to define due to the blind dialogues that organize it.

Uses of Water I: Matter and Technique

The first encounter between water and art is of a workshop-based nature: water is one of the materials, an active agent in various technical processes known across different cultures through the millennial circulation of people and customs, materials and ways of making. Water, whether ocean or river, is also a vehicle of transport and influence; it is both a traded material and the medium through which that exchange takes place.

Art operates within the native environment of materials and requires knowledge of their properties: lightness, density, weight, texture, weave, volume, rigidity, flexibility, opacity, transparency, colour, solubility, and compatibility.

Among the technical processes in which water is fundamental are watercolour painting, printmaking, ink washes, and fresco painting. Watercolour employs water as the solvent for a mixture of ground pigments and other substances whose origins have varied over time, although the essential technique has remained unchanged. Parallel to this technique is the ink wash, traditionally obtained by mixing distilled or boiled water with India ink. Several printmaking techniques involve water, such as etching, in which the process is carried out through the corrosive action of an acid diluted in water. The term originally referred to the metal plate on which the artist drew, the acidic solution into which the plate was immersed, and eventually the artwork resulting from the process itself. Aquatint, similarly, designated another type of intaglio printmaking based on a different chemical solution. In fresco painting, water is likewise a primary material. Frescoes require a perfect combination of three ingredients: lime, sand, and water. In appropriate proportions and with the full integration of these materials, the wall is formed layer by layer, with varying thicknesses, until the final layer is ready to receive drawing and paint applied to its still-moist surface. Water also participates in the technical processes of sculpture. It forms part of plaster mixtures used during the preparatory stages of works ultimately executed in stone or cast in metal. Clay comes from places associated with water, such as clay pits and riverbeds, and artists knew how to remove excess water. In sculptors' workshops, water was used to moisten clay models at the end of each working day.

Beyond being a vital technical component of art, water may simply be a necessary condition for artistic existence. In exhibition contexts, many contemporary art installations incorporating living plants require irrigation in order to survive. Some artists have included trees in their projects and transplanted them into landscaped environments, something made possible only through sustained watering that enabled the continuation of their life cycles.

Rather than being controlled by artists, the alliance of water and art may also occur unexpectedly. Watercourses that covered engraved rocks for centuries contributed to their preservation. In this sense, water itself may be regarded as responsible for a cultural and artistic legacy. Conversely, the absence of water, resulting from changes in river flow, can pose a significant threat to conservation. The rock engravings of the Côa Valley in northeastern Portugal exemplify this unstable condition, having lost their submerged state and become fully visible during the construction works of a dam. Water lies at the centre of this process of patrimonialization, conservation, and deterioration.

In other cases, the role played by water in nature has been imitated for artistic purposes. This occurred in long-term geological phenomena in which water shaped rock formations, producing forms of sculptural value, or at least forms perceived as such. Technological progress later harnessed this transformative capacity through controlled water jets for cutting stone.

Yet water may also oppose the interests of art and its institutions. Humidity, that is, water present in the air, together with condensation processes and the growth of fungi and bacteria, contributes to the deterioration, corrosion, and structural alteration of many works of art. Artists' studios, museum galleries, cultural centres, and private art collections may all offer environmental conditions detrimental to conservation. Water does not cooperate with the objectives of art collecting aiming at permanence, as political act of showing power, and as a sign of wealth. On the contrary, it operates as a force of destruction and disintegration against such forms of power.

Many artists, however, appropriate these very processes of deterioration and embrace ageing, fading, and even the disappearance of their works, assigning conceptual value to the role of water and accepting the metamorphosis it entails. Accepting change and decay, artists challenge the activity of conservator-restorers and the obsessions of collectors. Water becomes an instrument of counterpower and critical questioning of the perpetuation of the author's name through the artwork.

This final use of water differs considerably from those identified at the beginning of the text. From the technical and material uses of water to its aesthetic uses, another path opens up. It is a two-way path, because the technical premise participates in an aesthetic dimension, while the aesthetic dimension explores matter and inhabits a specific technical proposition.

Uses of Water II: Representation and Information

Do you know what Mexicans say about the Pacific? That it has no memory.

From the film *The Shawshank Redemption*, directed by Frank Darabont, 1994.

The second encounter between water and art is aesthetic in nature and concerns a representational condition. The artificial and technical simulation of natural elements has long constituted a challenge for artists committed to conveying a faithful vision of the world. Technical virtuosity fostered recognition of natural elements and persuaded viewers of the truthfulness of representation. Representational art rests upon the order of the visible.

As part of an aesthetic paradigm with profound implications for artistic practice, representations of watery places are also sources of information that viewers receive with curiosity. Images of places associated with water may signal communal life, established customs, and ways of living, thereby conveying anthropological information. Many scenes from painting and photography bear witness to the communal use of an essential resource: peasants crossing streams where cattle drink; farmers and their animals returning to quench their thirst at the village square fountain; fish unloaded on the beaches of fishing communities while local inhabitants help drag boats ashore; seaside leisure and its social practices; gatherings around fountains from which populations draw water; washerwomen working along streams

or at public washing places. These scenes, captured through the artists' picturesque sensibility and offered for collective observation, reveal the establishment of forms of sociability structured around water. At the same time, they evoke a society ordered by economic means, in which those who look and those who are seen project their social expectations.

Places of water also provide historical information. Naval battles, great maritime voyages, and shipwrecks are common themes in historical painting, serving as records of victories or disasters for posterity. Such places were also depicted through representations of waterways and oceanic coastlines in a form of cartographic painting that mapped the conquest of territory from the sea or the occupation of lands taken from their native inhabitants. Water accompanies the metamorphoses of history and politics.

When history is shaped by biographies, individual accounts are woven into the collective narratives. The character's speech, quoted in the epigraph, reveals a connection to the ocean in a seaside setting where one can live without a past. The poetic form of this sentimental geography does not erase the physical space and the anthropological place.

Uses of Water III: Symbolism and the Inner World

VENICE

*What music would you be
if you were not water?*

Eugénio de Andrade (1974). *Escrita da Terra*.⁷⁶

When the representation of water becomes intertwined with other motivations, another encounter emerges. The order of the visible gives way to the order of the symbolic, the utterable and the unutterable. Intellectually coded narratives differ profoundly from descriptions of observable reality above mentioned.

In religious scenes, conceived and organized according to iconographic conventions, water is associated with birth and rebirth, sacred bathing and baptism; it signifies purification and the spiritual rediscovery of nature and the world.

In mythological scenes, mythical beings emerge from the waves, and aquatic creatures populate large scenographic sculptural compositions. Dolphins and mermaids pour forth water or allow themselves to be bathed by it; nymphs, tritons, and allegories of rivers appear in urban fountains in private and public parks. They tell erudite narratives.

In secular scenes, still and unsettling waters evoke death or sleep. They are a source of ghosts and gentle apparitions, evoking tears and melancholy.

As part of the magnificence of nature and of grandiose compositions, water contributed to the emergence of new aesthetic categories, such as the sublime. Torrential rains and storms, dense fogs, monumental glaciers, wild waterfalls, seas of clouds, and the vastness of nocturnal oceans may inspire admiration and ecstasy on the one hand, and submission and terror on the other. Water becomes the protagonist of a prodigious and inaccessible nature inhabited by forces, energy, and spirit.

The physical properties of water evoke its freshness, the springtime of all births, its maternal nature, and its role as the universal, primordial water. They also evoke depth and the existence of fantastical worlds

⁷⁶ Original version: *VENEZA / Que música seriamos / se não fossemos água?* In Eugénio de Andrade [1974] (2005). *Poesia*. 2nd edition, p. 211. Porto: Fundação Eugénio de Andrade.

beneath the calm appearance of the surface. Waters may be heavy and subterranean, traversing mysterious realms, serving as the setting for funerary ceremonies, seas of darkness and terrifying experiences.

Although artists may produce verisimilitude, symbolic and allegorical uses of water in art can disrupt such readings. They draw upon identified, idealized, or invented places belonging to physical geography, the geography of thought, and spiritual geography. Rather than recognition, they privilege contemplation; rather than observation, meditation; rather than the visible, the invisible. Water insinuates itself into other processes of power and knowledge.

One of the most significant dimensions is the symbolism of water as a mirror, as a surface that returns to us a dematerialised image, a reflection, an illusion. Water as desire.

Another symbolic image is flowing water as an image of temporal flux, the transience of life, and the ephemerality of existence. In literature and the visual arts, one can think as a river thinks and embody a place of water. Eugénio de Andrade shows how in his very brief poem – the epitome of a city of water that sounds like music.

Uses of Water IV: Critique and the Future

[...] the Vassivière site takes shape and is understood through its hydrological system: springs, rivers, peat bogs and lakes. Biological diversity, along with the diversity of landscapes and land uses, is directly linked to this system. For this reason, and because the landscape's harmonious character depends on water – both in its form and in its capacity to sustain life – we have titled the study for the Vassivière Landscape Charter: 'Drinking the Water from the Lake'.

Gilles Clément (2002). *Boire l'Eau du Lac. Charte Paysagère du Pays de Vassivière*.⁷⁷

When questions of visual representation are replaced by the direct use of water, a new aesthetic paradigm emerges, one that leads to non-representation, anti-representation, and presence. In art, water exceeds its material and technical dimensions, returns to its primary state, and offers itself in its natural condition. Artists retrace the paths of water. Rather than observing it from a distance or simulating it through pigments, alabaster, or marble, they engage directly with the places in which it exists. Water is no longer an illusion crafted from artistic materials. It becomes natural matter, ephemeral process, and site-specific installation. It becomes central in practices that emphasize the its relationship with societies.

Some approaches are poetic and meditative: ice or snow sculptures that vanish in the first hours of the morning; records of the circles created by a stone thrown into water; vegetal elements carried away by water. Others are critical and confrontational: the miniaturization and containment of bodies of water within galleries; the creation of purification systems for polluted rivers; extreme performative experiments in which the body is subjected to torrents of water; performances in which water's purifying capacity evokes memories of war; installations on the water cycles of contamination and death in the systems that sustain hydroelectric and nuclear power plants.

Artists become ethnographers, activists, and researchers. They follow technical and scientific processes, study abundance and scarcity, immerse themselves in rivers, frequent their banks, observe life within

⁷⁷ Original version: [...] le site de Vassivière se dessine et se lit à partir du système hydrologique : sources, rivières, tourbières, lacs. La diversité biologique, des paysages et des usages se trouve directement liée à ce système. Pour cette raison, et parce que la résolution heureuse du paysage dépend de l'eau dans sa forme et dans son aptitude à dispenser la vie, nous intitulons l'étude pour la charte paysagère de Vassivière : "Boire l'eau du lac". In Gilles Clément. (2002) *Boire l'Eau du Lac. Charte Paysagère du Pays de Vassivière*. Étude opérationnelle paysage et environnement pour le Lac de Vassivière.

these environments, reflect and imagine its future. They adopt a critical stance, incorporating marginal voices from urban spaces that remain excluded from circuits of power, in pursuit of social justice.

Many projects function as metaphors for the present, interrogating politics, economics, society, and the environment. Themes such as water and biodiversity, the impact of the Anthropocene, and ecological reconfiguration establish an eco-politics of water. The aforementioned document by Gilles Clément on the uses of water strikes a balance between technical and scientific, aesthetic and pragmatic, contemplative and political perspectives. His perspective shifts from visibility to sensoriality, from the visible to the primal act of drinking and the sense of taste. This shift reflects a critical and forward-looking stance.

Water Imagination

[...] direct images of matter. Sight gives them names, but the hand knows them. A dynamic joy manipulates them, moulds them, lightens them. These images of matter are dreamt of in a substantial and intimate way, setting aside forms, perishable forms, vain images, the ceaseless becoming of surfaces. They have weight; they have a heart.

I cannot sit beside a stream without falling into a deep reverie, without reliving my happiness... It is not necessary for it to be the stream of our home, the water of our home. Anonymous water knows all my secrets. The same memory rises from every fountain.

Gaston Bachelard (1942). *L'eau et les rêves. Essai sur l'imagination de la matière*.⁷⁸

Bachelard wrote about formal imagination and material imagination as creative and inspirational forces. He explored these forces in myths, literature, art, alchemy, spoken language, beliefs, rituals, cultural and artistic conventions, and addressed the ways in which they travel across different periods and cultures. He examined their psychological, psychoanalytic, moral, and aesthetic implications. His work is foundational to thinking about water and its many manifestations, arguing in favour of creative imagination over reproductive imagination.

Throughout his book on the material imagination of water, he establishes a catalogue of categories of liquid-based imagination: verbal, visual, discursive, poetic, de-objectifying, dynamic, open, impulsive, sentimental, melancholic, powerful, unconscious, organic, and ever-becoming...

The imagination of water is endless, and the creation of watery worlds belongs to creators, artists, and philosophers.

Laura Castro

⁷⁸ Original version: [...] *des images de la matière, des images directes de la matière. La vue les nomme, mais la main les connaît. Une joie dynamique les manie, les pétrit, les allège. Ces images de la matière, on les rêve substantiellement, intimement, en écartant les formes, les formes périssables, les vaines images, le devenir des surfaces. Elles ont un poids, elles sont un cœur. [...] Je ne puis m'asseoir près d'un ruisseau sans tomber dans une rêverie profonde, sans revoir mon bonheur... Il n'est pas nécessaire que ce soit le ruisseau de chez nous, l'eau de chez nous. L'eau anonyme sait tous mes secrets. Le même souvenir sort de toutes les fontaines.* In Gaston Bachelard. [1942] (2016). *L'eau et les rêves. Essai sur l'imagination de la matière*, pp. 12, 19. Édition numérique réalisée le 10 juillet 2016 à Chicoutimi, Ville de Saguenay, Québec.

https://classiques.uqam.ca/classiques/bachelard_gaston/eau_et_les_reves/eau_et_les_reves.pdf





Johannes Pfeiffer, *Das Grosse Schweigen* (*The big silence*), 1995, Installation, monastery of Eberbach, Germany

Technical Sheet

Author: Johannes Pfeiffer

Title: Das Grosse Schweigen (The big silence)

Year: 1995

Media: Installation

Place: Hospital cellar of the Cistercian monastery of Eberbach, Germany

Material: Forty Robinia trunks stripped of bark and sapwood - Illuminated by black light.

The Robinia trees were felled in the woods near the monastery, processed and then transported to the monastery's hospital cellar, where they were set up.

The heartwood of this tree species has a fluorescent property that oxidises and fades when exposed to sunlight.

The tree trunks are untreated, without any addition of colour.

Conceptual References and Reflections

The Roots of the Earth – The Spiritualized View of the Earth

The starting point for dealing with this topic can only lie within us, within our socialization and within the reciprocal relationship between us and the world surrounding us. My socialization and the specific path I have taken and that has led me to art is the decisive factor for my creative work.

Thus, every action and every created form contain the effects of my accumulated experiences.

I assume that artistic creation arises from a need, an inner need. Either I feel this need or do not feel it. It is the artists' trigger. Only if the inner need to make art is strong enough can art be created. Art is not a unique act, but a way, a development, a creative process over a certain period of time.

What are the roots of the earth? What does this expression mean?

The roots (of a plant) primarily serve to absorb water and the minerals dissolved in it as well as to fix a plant at its site. Frequently, the roots also take over other functions, most frequently that of a storage organ for reserve substances. (from: Wikipedia)

Figuratively, it means that it is due to the roots of the earth that we have life. Man is able to rely on the energies lying in the ground and to change or rather adapt them so that they help him to survive.

- Only the earth enables nature to sink roots in it.
- Roots are the communication between the earth "under the earth" and the earth "above the earth."
- The roots provide us with support.
- The roots provide us with nourishment. They serve as a means of transport for the nutrients of the soil.
- The roots have different forms. The roots of fungi cover big areas of the soil.

The mycelium is a threadlike, mostly invisible web under the earth consisting of the cells (hyphae) of a fungus, which represents the actual organism. It supplies the absorption of nutrients, grows in the ground

or in the wood and can take huge proportions, whereas the visible fungus is only a fruit body that releases spores for reproduction.

Fungus can reach huge proportions and is considered the largest living organism on earth. The largest known mycelium of a honey fungus (*Armillaria ostoyae*) in Oregon covers an area of over 9 square kilometres (about 1200 football pitches) and is approximately 2400 to more than 8000 years old.

During my research I came across the Gaia-Principle by way of the mycelium.

Marco Pogacnik, geomancer and artist, went on a hike through the Slovenian primeval forest with a well-known biology professor. Huge trees dominated the forest. These ancients of the primeval forest can live as long as 300 years. Being incredibly high and wide, they claim almost all the sunlight and most of the space for themselves. They appear unwavering, indestructible in their power as rulers over the forest.

Underneath them young trees have grown from seed. As far as possible, they are doing their best to grow among the giant trees. The limits of upward growth are quickly reached, there is not enough sun, not enough room. Often these young trees stay small and medium-sized seemingly unchanged for many years, nothing happens to their outward development.

Marco Pogacnik asks his companion what this apparent standstill in nature could mean: "It just seems as if there will be no development. If only a limited growth in height is possible for these young trees, they will invest in the growth of their roots! If their upward and sideways expansion do not work, they will expand downwards and into the depths! For many years almost all their energy flows into the strengthening of branches and the deepening of roots. During this process they connect and lay powerful underground foundations. A dense loadbearing root system, a second soil underground is created.

And some day, sometimes due to a storm, sometimes simply due to infirmity or trunks that have become hollow inside, the all-occupying jungle giants collapse as if by themselves. This can happen relatively fast and unexpectedly.

As soon as the space towards the sky has become free and with the sun shining on their crowns the young trees start to direct their energy growth from the roots to the branches – and in no time they take possession of the space their ancestors previously held.

This abnormally fast growth and taking possession of the space is only possible because prior to this a long and intensive investment was made in the training and connecting of the roots. This means that they can grow to full size at the right moment and take over the new tasks." (Quote translated from: Gaia-Prinzip.com - <https://www.gaia-prinzip.com/news/im-ganzen-verwurzelt-sein>)

As far as I am concerned, I would consider this principle to be applicable to me. This means, for different reasons, while waiting for a first step to take action before the beginning of a project where energy cannot be immediately realized the energy goes into the depth. The energy compiles roots or rather enlarges the network of roots. It creates a solid fundament so that the circumstances that block the project create solid foundations for the execution and further development of a project. The development or rather further development of the roots could be equated with a development on the spiritual level.

This brings us to the spiritual view of nature: the outwardly invisible development of the spiritual level, of the spiritual faculties and energies, which first build a network of roots in the depth and then continually spread into different areas, before they can, like the projection of a previously abstract thought, develop freely to the form of an image, a word, a sound, a beam of light, a material object. If this phenomenon comes into the open and becomes more or less visible, new relationships can be formed. Then the

foundations are laid for a prerequisite, or even better, for dynamics that permanently create new relationships that in turn create new relationships etc.

Thus, systems, communication- and connection systems of greatest complexity are created, which, like a universe, compose a large whole.

One could describe it as the breathing of the earth.

This being rooted I have already spoken about is the prerequisite for artistic work. The artist must be able to fall back upon an extensive network of knowledge. Consciously or unconsciously.

I assume that an artist who occupies himself with spaces, with exteriors and interiors must fulfil three conditions:

- He must have access to Unconscious Knowledge.
- He must have a language, a form of expression (form, colour, sound, word, movement).
- He must be able to express in his own language what he has experienced in Unconscious Knowledge.

During my research I have come across a quotation: It is impossible to reach real identity without being rooted in the whole. (David Bohm, quote translated)

Thus, I assume that the deeper, the wider the artist's rooting in the earth, the more authentic and expressive is his work. He is the one medium that can give expression to the power of the earth lying in the ground. It is exactly this possibility of having access to the accumulated energies of the earth, which forms the relationship between us human beings and nature. This act of exchange, of access to the energies of the earth is not a single action, but a permanent interaction which is continuously being renewed and updated. This way, the artist is always involved in a permanent process, which influences not only his work, but also his personality.

What remains? What fascinates me with my artistic work so much is experience. The experience I have when building up a site-specific installation. The experience that includes everything, earth, men, atmosphere, weather, the history of the place, the social network of relationships, communication, culture and much more, in short, the immersion in the site and finally, the result of one's own artistic intervention. This experience is the only thing that remains, probably the only thing that really remains that constitutes the rootedness, that constitutes communication. Experience means interaction with sites, people, cultures and stories of the sites; it means immersion, getting involved with something, it means communication and finally rootedness. Real experience also means that some part of oneself, of his own mycelium has remained at the site of the experience. I would like to state that experience is only possible through the rootedness with the respective site.

Experiencing is the source and starting point of the rootedness with the earth.

Johannes Pfeiffer, January-February 2026
Translated by Barbara Pfeiffer-Schultz

Ecologies of belonging: public art and nature between the rural and the urban

José Cirillo

1 - Introduction

Talking about the art system in terms of spatiality allows me to say that, among the various changes in the artistic phenomenon in recent decades, the debate on art has progressively evolved from the discussion about physical location in closed spaces, such as museums, galleries and the like, to understanding the relationships they establish with territories, communities and the ecological processes that sustain them, forming another aesthetic ecosystem that can be called public art. So called, not only because it occupies the collective space, but, above all, because of the political dimension of the public sphere that surrounds the public space.

If for much of the twentieth century public art was often understood as the insertion of sculptural objects in open spaces, contemporary production has shown that its public dimension depends less on the place where the work is installed, than on the forms of interaction between themes, landscapes and modes of habitation it enables.

This change makes the debate on art carried out in spaces of nature, especially those located on the border, in the roots of the earth as an active matter in art, particularly fruitful: the interstice between the rural and the urban. In these circumstances, the landscape ceases to be a passive setting and becomes an active agent of the creative process. The work begins to continuously negotiate with ecological temporalities, collective memories, cultural practices, and environmental dynamics that escape the artist's exclusive control. Producing public art, in this context, means participating in the construction of relational ecologies in which nature, culture, and experience become mutually constitutive.

In this article, we propose to understand these relationships through the concept of *Ecologies of Belonging*. The term designates systems of affective, environmental, cultural, and political bonds that articulate subjects, communities, and territories in the shared production of the landscape. More than a feeling of identity with a certain place, belonging is understood as an ecological practice of coexistence and co-responsibility, built on the continuous interactions between human beings, natural environments, memories, and historical processes. Public art, from this perspective, ceases to produce only objects, for it produces relationships, activating forms of care capable of simultaneously reconfiguring physical spaces and the ways of inhabiting them.

This understanding is close to the notion of topophilia developed by Yi-Fu Tuan, for whom the affective relationships established between subjects and places constitute a fundamental part of the human experience of space. However, it is intended to broaden this perspective by understanding that such bonds do not remain restricted to the psychological dimensions of affection for the place, but constitute true ecological networks that involve cultural practices, political actions, environmental temporalities and collective processes of memory construction.

In this sense, landscape ceases to mean simply that which offers itself to the gaze. As Milton Santos and Javier Maderuelo argue, it constitutes a cultural elaboration produced by the interpretation of space. There is no landscape without intentionality. What you see is always the result of what you learn culturally to recognize. The landscape is, therefore, less an objective reality than a relational condition between subjects, environment and culture.

It is precisely at this point that reflection on public art acquires relevance. Its function is not only to occupy a certain space, but to produce new ways of perceiving that space. When an artistic intervention is capable of modifying the ways in which a community perceives, experiences and shares its territory, it

ceases to act as a simple object inserted in the landscape to become a constitutive part of the production of the landscape itself. The work becomes a mediation between nature, memory and collective experience.

This perspective allows us to understand that different *public art projects* establish different *ecologies of belonging*. Some proposals maintain a modern logic of intervention in nature, in which the territory appears as an available, passive support for the realization of an idea previously conceived by the artist. Others develop collaborative processes in which the project itself is continuously transformed into a dialogue with the environment, incorporating its rhythms, its contingencies and its inhabitants.

More than methodological differences, these procedures reveal different conceptions about the relationship between art and nature. On the one hand, there persists a tradition that understands the landscape as a space to be occupied, transformed or dominated by artistic action. On the other hand, practices are consolidated that understand creation as an exercise in negotiation between multiple agents – human and non-human – capable of sharing the authorship of the construction processes of the work.

This second perspective is close to the discussions developed by Joseph Beuys around *social sculpture*, in which every aesthetic practice is equally a political practice of transformation of human relations. He also dialogues with Tim Ingold, when he understands that inhabiting a territory does not mean occupying a geographical surface, but continuously participating in the flows that constitute the life of that environment. In a similar way, Félix Guattari proposes to understand ecologies as inseparable systems that articulate the environment, social relations, and the production of subjectivity, indicating that any effective transformation requires simultaneously considering these three dimensions.

It is in this horizon that the notion of *Ecologies of Belonging* proposed here is inserted. It seeks to show that public art, nature and community constitute inseparable systems of relationships. Belonging ceases to be a territorial identity to become a daily practice of care; the landscape ceases to be a scenery and becomes a process; and the work ceases to represent an autonomous object to become a relational event.

Based on these premises, this article analyzes two projects developed in Brazilian rural contexts that exemplify different ways of understanding public art. The first is *Mesa* (1997-2000), by Nelson Felix, whose intervention highlights a predominantly objectual relationship between work and landscape. The second is *Entre Saudades e Guerrilhas* (2012), by Piatan Lube, whose collaborative construction allows us to understand the emergence of an ecology of belonging based on collective memory, environmental recovery and community participation.



Fig. 1,2- Nelson Felix, *Mesa* (1997-2000), wood, trees and corten steel sheet, 51 meters



Fig. 3,4- Piatan Lube. *Environmental intervention. Dialogues with the community*

The comparison between both does not seek to establish a simplifying opposition between two artistic practices, but to highlight different ways of understanding the relationships between art, nature and territory, demonstrating that the contemporary possibilities of public art increasingly depend on the ability to produce shared landscapes and ecologies of care.

2. From intervention to relationship: two paradigms of public art in nature

The *Ecologies of Belonging* allow us to understand that public art carried out in spaces of nature does not constitute a homogeneous field of practices. Although many interventions in nature share the same physical environment – the countryside, the forest, the coast or the mountain – they differ profoundly in terms of the ways of understanding the territory and the relationships they establish with the subjects who inhabit it. More than aesthetic or formal differences, it is a question of distinct ontologies of the landscape, in which nature can be conceived sometimes as a support for creation, sometimes as a participant in the artistic process itself.

This distinction reveals two recurrent paradigms in contemporary production. The first understands the work as an autonomous element whose insertion reorganizes the landscape, according to a logic previously defined by the artist. The second understands that the work emerges from the shared experience between territory, community and environment, making creation a process of ecological mediation. Both operate in the public space, but produce radically different forms of belonging.

2.1 Nelson Felix and the ecology of intervention

The work *Mesa* (1997–2000), developed by Nelson Felix as part of the *Cruz na América* project, represents an exemplary traditional conception of artistic intervention on natural environment. Consisting of an extensive steel plate supported by a wooden structure and flanked by trees, the work was conceived so that plant growth would slowly deform the metal structure over centuries, transforming time into sculptural matter.

At first glance, it is a project that seems to incorporate natural rhythms into the constitution of the work. However, a closer observation reveals that nature participates only as an executing agent of a previously established idea. The territory does not produce the project; he only receives it, passively. The landscape functions as a material support for a proposition whose logic remains outside the ecological dynamics of the place.

This condition becomes evident when one observes that the originally chosen location could be replaced by another without compromising, according to the artist himself, the meaning of the work. The spatial displacement does not significantly alter the project because its conceptual structure does not depend on the environmental, cultural or historical singularities of that territory. The place is necessary as a physical location, but it does not effectively participate in the poetic construction of the work.

From the perspective of the *Ecologies of Belonging*, it is perceived that authorship remains concentrated in the figure of the artist. Ecological processes are called upon only insofar as they contribute to realizing the predicted behaviour of sculpture. Nature becomes an involuntary collaborator of a narrative that is external to it.



Fig. 5,6- *Mesa* (detail of the growth and fencing with barbed wire). Photo J. F. Alves, 2012

Paradoxically, time has revealed another story. The growth of the trees began to suffer restrictions imposed by the sheet metal itself, producing bottlenecks, deformations and possible physiological impairments of the plant species used. The narrative initially imagined – trees moulding steel – began to coexist with another, unforeseen one: steel violently moulding trees. The inevitable stranglehold on nature.

This displacement highlights a central issue for the contemporary debate on art and ecology. Natural processes do not passively respond to human expectations. They have their own agency, specific temporalities, and often unpredictable dynamics. When the work seeks to control these forces, it ends up revealing the permanence of a modern rationality based on the idea of domination of nature.

The subsequent decision to surround the facility (with barbed wire) to protect it from cattle further reinforces this logic. The landscape ceases to be a living space to become a controlled environment, carefully regulated to ensure the survival of the artistic project as originally conceived. Instead of continuously negotiating with the environment, the work seeks to stabilize the conditions necessary for its permanence.

It is not, of course, a matter of disqualifying the aesthetic power of *Mesa*. Its relevance to contemporary art remains unquestioned. What matters here is to understand that its relationship with the landscape produces a specific ecology, centered on the permanence of the artistic object. Nature participates in the work but does not share its authorship. The territory welcomes sculpture, but hardly redefines its conceptual foundations.

This configuration can be called *the ecology of the intervention*. In it, ecological relations are organized around the centrality of the work, while the other elements – trees, soil, climate, time and territory – appear as necessary components for its realization, but not as agents that equally produce meaning. The belonging produced by this practice focuses on the permanence of the artistic object, preserving the distinction between work and landscape.

2.2 Piatan Lube and the ecologies of belonging

If *Mesa* evidences an ecology organized by the autonomy of the work, *Entre Saudades e Guerrilhas*, developed by Piatan Lube during an artistic residency in Viana (ES), points to a practically opposite direction. Since its origin, the project has not been structured as an intervention on the landscape, but as an investigation of the affective, historical and environmental relations that constitute that territory. The aim was to build a small forest by controlled reforestation in a degraded area for animal pasture.



Fig. 9,10- *Entre Saudades e Guerrilhas* (2012) Digital design of the initial environmental intervention

Initially conceived to monumentalize the word “SAUDADE” on a hillside through the planting of thousands of native trees, the project suffered a decisive interruption when the owner of the area refused to carry out the intervention. Under a traditional logic, this event would mean the failure of the work. However, it was precisely this impossibility that allowed its true birth.

Instead of simply transferring the proposal to another location, the artist was “welcomed” by the residents; He and the community began to reconstruct the meanings of work. Having taken the proposition that generated the intervention, preserving the memory and recomposing part of the environment, together, they triggered the memories of the residents, their narratives about old disappeared springs, their knowledge about environmental transformations and their expectations regarding the future of the municipality, became the very material for the creation of the new aesthetic object under construction.

The work ceased to pursue a previously determined form to assume the form of the process.

This transformation constitutes the turning point between the two paradigms discussed in this article. In Piatan Lube, the territory does not function as a support for the work; becomes its co-author. The springs, the vegetation, the residents, the technicians, the students, the public institutions and the local memories become part of a single network of aesthetic production.

From this perspective, authorship dissolves in favour of a collaborative system of relationships. The artist ceases to occupy the position of a subject who intervenes in nature to become a mediator between different knowledges, temporalities and ways of inhabiting the territory. Its function is close to what Joseph Beuys called social sculpture: a practice in which artistic creation coincides with the reorganization of relationships between people, institutions and environments.

The *Ecologies of Belonging* become fully visible here. The planting of trees, the recovery of springs, community meetings, audiovisual documentation, the continued care of seedlings and the reconstruction of collective memory do not represent preparatory stages of the work; constitute the work itself. Its materiality is distributed among ecological processes, social relations and shared sensible experiences.

Unlike the traditional sculptural object, this production remains unfinished. Its continuity depends precisely on the permanence of the relations that sustain it. Each tree that grows, each spring recovered, each new resident who takes care of that environment prolongs the artistic process. The work is transformed into a landscape because it no longer has clearly delimited borders.

In this sense, Piatan Lube proposes something that goes beyond environmental art or ecological intervention. His production is close to what Tim Ingold calls a way of inhabiting, in which to create means to follow the flows of life instead of imposing an external form on them. He also dialogues with Félix Guattari by inseparably integrating environmental ecology, social ecology and the ecology of subjectivity. Belonging ceases to be an individual feeling and becomes a collective practice of care.

The *Ecologies of Belonging* manifest themselves, therefore, when art, nature and community cease to occupy hierarchical positions and start to constitute a network of co-responsibilities. The landscape is no longer contemplated but is continuously produced. The territory ceases to represent a scenario and becomes a subject of the artistic process. The work ceases to exist as a monument and becomes a permanent practice of reconstruction of common life.

3. Inhabiting the landscape: public art as an ecological practice of belonging

The analysis of the experiences of Nelson Felix and Piatan Lube shows that the debate on public art in natural spaces goes beyond issues related to the location of the works or their formal solutions. What is at stake is the way in which different projects understand the relationships between artistic creation, territory and life. More than producing objects intended for public space, these practices produce different ways of inhabiting the landscape.

Throughout this article we have sought to demonstrate that the landscape is not a previously given reality on which art intervenes. It is continuously produced by the relationships that articulate memory, culture, nature and experience. In this sense, public art ceases to represent an element added to the territory to become a practice of territorial production, capable of simultaneously reorganizing perceptions, social bonds and ecological processes.

This perspective allows us to understand that the differences observed between the analysed projects do not result only from aesthetic options, but from different conceptions about the very role of art in contemporary times. In *Mesa*, the power of the work lies in the affirmation of a sculptural structure whose temporality is carefully designed by the artist. Although it dialogues with natural processes, its organization remains centered on the permanence of the object and the authorial conduction of the aesthetic experience. The landscape constitutes the physical condition of the work, but it hardly alters its conceptual structure. In *Entre Saudades e Guerrilhas*, on the contrary, the work does not precede the territory. It emerges from the relationships established between community, environment, and memory.

The episode of the impossibility of implementing the initial project, common in both poetic propositions, reveals precisely the epistemological difference of the works. While an interventionist conception tends to preserve the autonomy of the work by displacing it to another place, the other work allows the territory itself to radically transform its configuration. The owner's refusal does not represent the failure of the project; it becomes the founding event of a new collectively constructed aesthetic proposition.

It is precisely in this displacement that what we call *Ecologies of Belonging* manifests itself.

It is proposed to understand the *Ecologies of Belonging* as relational systems in which artistic creation results from the co-production between human subjects, natural environments, collective memories and ecological temporalities. Unlike approaches that understand nature as a support for the work or a plastic

resource available for the artist's action, the *Ecologies of Belonging* understand that the creative process distributes its authorship among multiple agents, human and non-human, whose interactions become the very materiality of the work.

From this perspective, belonging is no longer just an affective bond between individual and place, as traditionally suggested by the idea of topophilia. It comes to designate an ecological condition of co-responsibility. Belonging means participating in the processes of maintenance, transformation and continuity of shared life in a given territory. It is less about occupying a space than about taking care of the relationships that make that space habitable.

This broadening of the concept allows for the approximation of different theoretical traditions that, although developed in different fields, converge to a relational understanding of the landscape. In Yi-Fu Tuan, belonging is born from the sensitive experience of the place; in Milton Santos, the landscape constitutes a historical production inseparable from social practices; in Javier Maderuelo, it results from the cultural intentionality of the gaze; in Joseph Beuys, artistic creation becomes social transformation; in Tim Ingold, to inhabit means to participate in the flows that constitute the environment; and, in Félix Guattari, environmental, social and mental ecologies reveal themselves to be inseparable.

The *Ecologies of Belonging* seek to bring together these contributions from an aesthetic perspective, understanding public art as a practice of mediation between these different dimensions of experience. The work ceases to produce only meanings to produce conditions of coexistence. Its permanence no longer depends exclusively on the material conservation of the object and is sustained by the continuity of the relations that it is capable of establishing.

This shift has important implications for the very concept of public art. Traditionally associated with monumentality, physical permanence and the symbolic representation of power, contemporary public work tends to progressively move towards collaborative, procedural and environmentally situated practices. The monument gives way to the process; contemplation opens space for participation; individual authorship becomes distributed authorship; formal stability becomes continuous transformation.

From this point of view, the landscape ceases to be a scenery and becomes a method.

It is not only about producing works inserted in nature, but about producing forms of knowledge that emerge from permanent dialogue with ecosystems and the communities that inhabit them. Artistic practice is thus close to environmental restoration actions, education, cultural mediation and the construction of care policies. Aesthetics ceases to operate exclusively in the field of representation to act directly in the reorganization of the relations between society and the environment.

This perspective seems particularly relevant in the face of the environmental transformations that characterize the present. In a context marked by climate crises, the accelerated loss of biodiversity, and the growing rupture between society and nature, public art can play a decisive role in rebuilding bonds of belonging capable of bringing communities closer to their territories. Not because it produces technical solutions to such problems, but because it expands the collective capacity to perceive, feel and care for the landscapes that sustain life.

The *Ecologies of Belonging* are therefore less an artistic model than an ethic of creation. They shift the focus from the finished work to the processes that make it possible; they replace the logic of intervention with the logic of mediation; understand the artist less as an author of forms and more as an articulator of relationships. Public art ceases to occupy space to learn to inhabit it.

Perhaps this is precisely the main contribution that the experience of the rural environment offers to contemporary discussions on public art. Far from the speed of large urban centres, the countryside makes visible long temporalities, ecological dependencies and community forms of existence often made invisible by metropolitan culture. It is not a matter of idealizing rurality, but of recognizing that experiences persist in it capable of putting back into evidence what modernity has often relegated to the background: the interdependence between human beings, nature and memory.

In the end, it is understood that the landscape is not what remains after the work. In many situations, the landscape is the work itself when it is realized as a shared experience of belonging. Public art then ceases to add objects to the world to participate in the continuous production of habitable worlds. It is in this horizon that the *Ecologies of Belonging* can be understood as a conceptual key to thinking about artistic practices committed not only to the aesthetic transformation of places, but, above all, to the reconstruction of ecological, cultural, and affective relationships that make common life possible.

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The TREE, Living Knowledge



Samuel Rama, Raft, 2025, Drawing on cotton paper, 140 × 95 cm.



Samuel Rama, Raft #2, 2025, Drawing on cotton paper, 140 × 95 cm.



Samuel Rama, Raft #3, 2025, Drawing on cotton paper, 140 × 95 cm.

Authorial statement:

Pressure, Temperature and Gratitude

A series of drawings that take their cue from the calligraphic rhythm of drawing, which is the twin of writing and of thinking. Detailed drawing or writing that seeks to distil the search for the idea of the tree,

of each individual tree. Many trees, the forest, the symptom of loss, but simultaneously the urge to plant that the drawing seeks to follow, perhaps guided by the words of Jean Giono, or by childhood memories of accompanying my grandfather, a carpenter by trade, as he tended to be planting his woods, the man who planted trees. Uncovering the essence of nature!

The drawings are always made from the centre outwards; there is no hierarchy or defined sequence. Each tree, as it falls onto the support, erases the one before it, fossilises the space, becomes eternal like a rock and dissolves like a body or fire. What each drawing is, results from cycles of configuration and deformation, inscription and erasure.

The attention to detail is so obsessive that, whilst working, the direction of the drawing's movement has as its magnetic centre the tiniest particle of sepia dust, charcoal or graphite.

In this degree of movement of the material imagination, in the pursuit of the drawing, light is of great interest. If I have a surface heavily marked by successive lines, the more I mark it, the less the original white of the sheet of paper remains visible, and thus the more this sense of penetrability is enlivened by light as density.

I am inspired by the atmospheric density found in Andrei Tarkovsky's films, and by the legacy of the many drawings from the 15th, 17th and 18th centuries, which I have seen in museum collections.

I often observe certain 17th-century Dutch engravings closely and at length, trying to guess the impulsive, rapid gestures with which they were usually made, using a very fine nib, gliding over a metal plate previously coated with smoked wax.

These drawings are smudges, they are vertical landscapes, perhaps imbued with the idea of the 'world landscape' pioneered by Joachim Patinir or Pieter Bruegel the Elder. They are a search for temporality.

Perhaps they seek the impossible; the drawing of the tree in landscape compositions has always served to push the space into the background. But to draw, in a calligraphic and obsessive succession, every possible tree – those evoked, those seen, those invented, those that are now mere gesture. A conflict arises in the drawing between surface and depth.

Is this a way of giving form to the connection between the outer and inner worlds? The interior of the body may be a twin of the branches of the outer world, a place one can enter through the imagination burning with desire. The macro and the micro.

Samuel Rama

There is Still a Mango Tree in the Backyard of My Childhood

Daniela Brasil

There is a mango tree in the backyard of my childhood.

It still exists somewhere inside me.

Every now and then it blossoms in my dreams. Sometimes it returns as the taste of the *manga-rosa* – plump, fragrant – the ripe fruit we reached after a small expedition into the canopy. During recess, we would climb toward that hidden corner to pick the most beautiful, mouthwatering mango: the one slowly blushing from yellow to pink, – the one that ripens like the sun rises.

Those warm, humid mornings beckoned us into a world of shade and leaves. The schoolyard was mostly concrete, softened by a broad patch of sand in the middle. From that sandy ground, our mango tree rose exuberantly, taking over the schoolyard with its generous canopy. A world of her own. A refuge. An adventure.

Beyond the school wall stretched Rio de Janeiro, suspended between the Atlantic Forest and asphalt, the dirty waters of the Maracanã River, the *bem-te-vis* and those who had "seen you well." The rattling buses, the invisible cicadas, and the murmur rising from every other street corner all coexisted within that tropical tangle. I did not know then that mango trees (or as scientists call them, *Mangifera indica*) had come from far away, crossing oceans and empires, carried from Asia along the routes of colonialism. To me, she was as Carioca as the hills after the rain, as inevitable as the salty smell that sometimes arrived with the wind. Perhaps because cities, too, are made of grafts, of traveling seeds, of unlikely encounters that eventually put down roots.

What remains is the bite into a mango still warm from the sun, picked in haste before someone could say it wasn't ripe yet. The fibers between my teeth, the juice running down my wrists, the thick perfume clinging to my skin. And then, without warning, everything returns. Not the orderly memory of facts, but that Proustian memory – the one in the folds of the senses. The body remembers before words do. The tongue rediscovers a forgotten sweetness, and suddenly the calming shade of the canopy returns, the golden light filtering through the leaves, the buzzing of my school friends pretending to be bees. The children reappear, Luis, Marcela, Danielle, Guiga, Guga e Maringá, all suspended above the world, convinced that the forest began right there.

Perhaps it did.

Perhaps every childhood needs a tree to teach that there is a time different from the clock – a deeper time, a vegetal time, made of filtered light, of waiting, of climbing into the unknown and getting lost, and, before anything else, a time of abundance.

I wish I could write a letter to you, my dear Mango Tree teacher.

Today, I see you as one of my most important teachers – not human, but a good friend, nonetheless. You were the Mango Tree growing from a patch of sand between the two houses that sheltered our little primary school. The school was called *Vivendo e Aprendendo – Living and Learning*. What a fitting name. That is exactly what we did.

Looking back, I recognize the privilege of having been sent to such an open-hearted, experimental place of learning. We wandered through the city, learning wherever life unfolded. Our human teachers were less instructors than facilitators, gently guiding our curiosity. Now, as I return to the moments we spent together, beneath and inside your canopy, I realize how much I learned when nothing was being taught. During recess, when no activity was planned, when no one expected anything from us, I simply stayed with you. And, perhaps, that was one of my deepest lessons.

Maybe it is a reinvented memory. Those were the years 1982, 83, 84, 85, and Brazil was still living under a fading military dictatorship. They were years of fermentation. And I was a happy child, growing, living, and learning with your soft steadiness.

Maybe I was learning in the pauses.

Or in the silence.

A couple of years later, I started to grasp what the dictatorship had really meant. By the age of thirteen, I had joined the movement for democratization through the student association at my new school. That school, by the way, had no trees – only concrete and the hum of airconditioned classrooms. I still remember my beloved history teacher, Ana Lúcia Iorio, who brought Luís Carlos Prestes to speak to us there, in the middle of that concrete courtyard.

But that is another story.

Now let me try to write you a letter.

A Love Letter to you, dear Mango Tree

Graz-Wörthersee, June-July 2026.

*

Why do I long for you?

Who is longing for whom?

I wish I could learn to grow
the way you do.

Upward and downward,
outward and inward.

To root myself in order to reach the sky.
To dance with the wind and weep with the rain.
To expand and retreat with every season,
without pretending everything is fine.

Without pretending I don't need to stop.

Yes, a long rest.

**

I wish my body knew more about photosynthesis.
To turn sunlight into breath.
To open myself to warmth.
and be whole, even in pieces.
Green and alive, yet also dry, grey, and dropping.

I wish I could learn with you
to let time strip away my petals and my leaves
scatter me across the ground
until I become part of it.

I wish I could learn to grow
the way you do.
Upward and downward,
outward and inward.

To grow without the violence of a straight line.
Without the illusion that living means moving forward.
To grow like someone who listens.
Like someone who knows that every height
depends upon an equal depth.

To root myself in order to reach the sky.
To sink into the earth in order to take a bath in the clouds.

You know how to wait.

You know that time is not a ladder
but a spiral.
That returning is not failure, but a cycle.
That retreating, too, is a gesture of growth.

While we count days,
you count rainfall.
While we measure productivity,
you measure light, humidity, silence.

**** /

I wish my body knew more about photosynthesis.

To turn sunlight into air.
To receive light as daily practice.
To produce oxygen for whoever might need it.
To become shelter.

**** / /

You do not pretend.

You do not pretend to stay forever green,
much less forever in bloom.
When the time comes, leaves, flowers, and fruit fall.
They do not bargain with the season.
They do not insist on remaining the same.

There is a radical honesty in knowing how to let go.
A gentle refusal to perform permanence.

I am slowly learning that too.

Not to hide my dry seasons or my winters.
To welcome movement without mistaking it for threat.
To bend without breaking.
To sway when the storm comes,
without confusing flexibility with weakness.

To receive the rain in its entirety,
without protecting myself from being wet.
To let the water run through the branches of memory
and find the places inside me that have grown dry.

To expand and retreat with every season
without pretending everything is all right.
A pause in which no one asks me for flowers
when my only work is simply to survive.

A long pause.

Deep.

**** / / /

Why do I long for you?
Who is longing for whom?

Dark as the earth where the roots converse.
Because roots converse.
Perhaps through fungi. Perhaps through memory.
Perhaps through something that does not need to be named.
Beneath the ground there is an intelligence
that cannot fit within human haste.

A profound intelligence of listening and reciprocity.
No tree grows alone. And neither do we.

**** / / / /

I wish I could learn from you
how to trust the invisible.

Only recently did I realized
what you had been teaching me all along.
The elders say that every leaf carries its own *axé*,
its own word.

You never explained the invisible.

You simply lived it.

Your leaves knew. Your roots knew.
The earth beneath you knew.

**** / / / / °

And finally, I understood your oldest secret:
nothing ends when it falls.

The leaf feeds the soil.
The soil nourishes the roots.
The roots hold the trunk.
The trunk lifts the branches.
The branches welcome new leaves.

Life continues.

Not despite the falling,

but because of it.

**** / / / / °°

Why do I long for you?

Who is longing for whom?

What is this force that keeps drawing me back?

Perhaps it is not I who longs for you.

Perhaps it is the child I once was, still sitting in your shade.

Perhaps I am not returning to you at all.

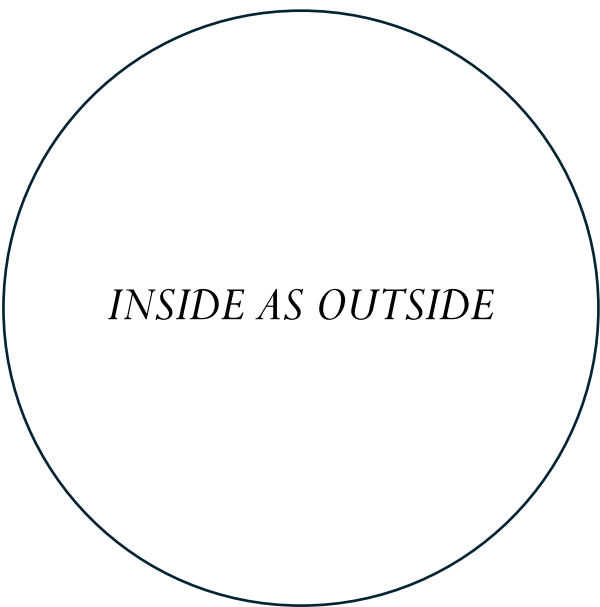
Perhaps I am returning to the places you planted inside me.

**** / / / / °°°

Obrigada por me sussurrar tudo isso quando eu nem sabia que sabia te ouvir.

Thank you for whispering all this to me before I knew I was listening







Witold Riedel, *Contemplations on a wet universe 1 & 2*, 2026, Portuguese clay, 21 x 21 x 12cm

Technical Sheet:

Author: Witold Riedel (*1969)

“Contemplations on a wet universe 1 & 2”

Dimensions vary by installation but generally are
21x21x12cm (12x07x13cm & 21x12x9cm)

Hand carved ceramic stone ware, using Portuguese clay, glazed and fired multiple times.

The discovery of the unconscious and creative *pathos* –

Reflections on the *dialectic of loneliness*

Fernando Rosa Dias

The Devil is a reflexive effect: he is born when anything that is already ego has to become *Id* again.

Peter Sloterdijk, *Crítica da Razão Cínica*, p.459

We are going to propose that the construction of modernity has launched a new transcendence, not to the outside of me, which I must access by elevation of my spirit, but to my deep interior, like an abyss that I do not reach with my consciousness. It emerges as a subjectivity that is foreign to me, which seems to have its origins in the temptation of the Devil, as a perfidious and malicious *Id*: that this evil “*Id*” can also be a for-itself, this is the true metaphysical scandal that has been discussed since the end of the Middle Ages, in the form of innumerable analyses of the Devil.⁷⁹ It is like Faust’s Mephistopheles, a personalization of Evil that wrests morality from metaphysical comfort to come into play with the subject to disturb his discovery of Self, within his own anthropocentrism in order to lose himself there, in this adventure.

In the Enlightenment advance towards the light, which was a project and a path, it is the world itself that gains as much opacity as the subject itself, in an ego that loses unity and shatters, but agonistically, before the darkness that becomes part of it, not as a possession of the Devil, but as repressions of a Faust complex.

Peter Sloterdijk states that the illusion of transparency of human self-consciousness begins to be destroyed at least in the 16th century: “In magnetic lucidity, a zone of knowledge is expressed that remains inaccessible to surface consciousness. (...). That thing follows consciousness like a shadow or like a doppelganger that never accepts to meet the firstself. But it follows it without ceasing without saying its name.”⁸⁰

“But the Enlightenment is dissatisfied,” says Peter Sloterdijk⁸¹. On the other hand, we can rather consider that it was fatal that the Enlightenment was a failed project when it began to know man himself, because he would inevitably fail and there is no Enlightenment without him. He himself sets foot on this path, especially with the two losses of innocence of Reason, between Schopenhauer and Marx, or between the principle of the *Id* (of the unconscious), interior and profound, and the principle of the real, of history and the class struggle. The ego cannot be fully pure and free.

It is the first one that will interest us here. The enlightened and enlightened Enlightenment discovered a psychological Enlightenment that is an imperfect Enlightenment, in which reason was confronted with the darkness from which it did not detach itself because it was added to the very discovery of the Self. But what was a trace of the evil one, a threat, emerged unfathomable to challenge, like an intrepid vertigo, the modern subject. To discover Man in the recent invention of the Self was to immerse him in that strange guise of spirituality inside out that, instead of ascending to heaven, descended into hell like Orpheus – who we know cannot look at his beloved again, because what is found in that immersion has no return to the light. And this is the profound universality that we can disenchant him. If the lights were what separated me from the world, the darkness was what merged me back into it.

We will propose this journey in three moments: 1) the discovery of the individual Man in the Enlightenment as a *subjective* (and *receptive turn* in art); 2) the shattering of the subject into several layers

⁷⁹ Peter Sloterdijk, *Crítica da Razão Cínica*, Lisboa: Relógio d'Água, 2011, p. 454.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p.83.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p.132.

where he compared himself with his unconscious as an opaque abyss (*Id*); 3) and the subsequent cultural and artistic adventure in this abyss, where he lost his individuation (*ego*) to echo a deep collective expression.

1. Subjective and receptive turn

“(…) producer and consumer are two essentially separate systems (…) the ideas that both have of the work are incompatible”

Paul Valéry⁸².

In the interweaving of historical displacements that have been substantiated since that century, we are interested, in a preliminary way, in the context of some in the field of the arts, which for us are implied: a) a *subjective turn*, whether in the relationship between the author and production, or in a relationship with the valorization of reception, c) an *autonomy of the artistic sphere* b) and the passage of *authority (and the predominance of discourses) from production to reception*.

We also consider that these changes, articulating multiple processes of socio-cultural transformation, structure a passage that we consider decisive: from a time of the «Fine Arts» to a time of «Art». As a hinge, this paradigm shift underlines the question of the *autonomy of the artistic sphere*⁸³, or the constitution of a «world of art»⁸⁴, «field of art»⁸⁵ or a «system of art». As Michel Guérin says, the regime of autonomy is inseparable from the destiny of modern art⁸⁶, launching this articulation that can be summarized in the following sequence: autonomy of the sphere of art, after the medium of art, then of «art» as an institutional dimension.

The Academies of Fine Arts, born of the *culture of the palace*, were undermined by the very success of their *Salons*, an exhibition instrument with which an authority beyond the training and production of the artist was asserted in the public space: the «*Grand goût*» of the *Salon*, previously guaranteed in production, would be confronted with the small tastes of the public sphere: liberalism (social, but also economic) and subjectivity (individual) advanced. The *Salon* was born inside the Palace of Fine Arts, but its discussion passed outside. Throughout the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth centuries it was a place of social formation of tastes by determining the quality of the works of the artists it trained. But by arranging this exhibition place, they opened a receptive and public dynamic, which experienced the process of subjective turning while shifting the authority of art from the institutional places of production of works to new institutions of exhibition and consecration of works already conceived, therefore, of reception.

From the prior authority of the value of works in the institutions of artistic production, we moved on to the judgment of works in another institutional dimension of art centered on the places of exhibition and reception. This is a first and decisive subjective turn: the one that is affirmed in the valorization of tastes in the receptive sphere. As Michel Guérin points out, it is a passage between classical rhetoric and the age of aesthetics, or between the age of Beauty and the age of Taste⁸⁷. It was the predicate of *the aesthetic experience* that was linked to the pleasure of the *subject*. The focus became the effect of the work on the

⁸² Paul Valéry, apud Michel Guérin, *Les Temps de L'Art. Anthropologie de la création des Modernes*, Paris : Actes Sud Éditions, 2018, p.227.

⁸³ For a synthesis of this historical "institutional consolidation of the system", cf. José Jimenez, *Teoría del arte*, Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 2006, pp.92-103.

⁸⁴ Cf. Nelson Goodman, *Manière de faire des mondes*, Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 2006.

⁸⁵ Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Editions du Seuil, 1998; Pierre Bourdieu, *Langage et pouvoir symbolique*, Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 2001.

⁸⁶ Michel Guérin, *Nihilisme et modernité. : Essai sur la sensibilité des époques modernes de Diderot à Duchamp*, Nîmes: Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, 2003, p.196.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p.13-14.

subject. No longer the work as the mediation of an ideal Beauty (and of a metaphysical nature), but the aesthetic effect on the subject that must be stimulated from the work itself⁸⁸. There is another reason for the work, another place of the subject and another valorization of the temporal circumstance of reception that were consolidated.

Registered was another journey. That of the artistic centres of Florence-Rome-Italy, the place where the Fine Arts was founded, to the birthplace of the *Salon*, the Academy's public exhibition: Paris. David is for us a paradigm of this change, between the old authority of production and the new authority of reception: the *Oath of the Horatii*, which had appeared in the theater and Diderot considered a good *subject* for painting⁸⁹, was painted in Rome (1794) but exhibited in Paris, at the *Salon* of 1785 – and, as the first pillar of the dialectic of *the isms* of the adventure of modern art, it was also the first *ism* born in historical consciousness of itself: Neoclassicism. Against this emerged shortly afterwards Romanticism. The dialectic of “isms” began, a dynamic proper to this public sphere of reception.

The protagonism of discourses in the field of the arts also changed. The discourse of treatise was emptied, with its rules that sought to guide the good production of the work. Treatise was a discourse that incorporated dimensions of demand in function of *know-how*. On the other hand, something emerged that escaped the domains of academies and studios. In this eighteenth century, Diderot already criticized the artifice of the poses of academic painting, defending the need for another dazzle and capture of natural gestures⁹⁰. Art emancipates itself from the authority of legitimation in production, therefore, from a power of consecration in the hands of master producers, therefore, of artists (in relation to the patronage power of commissions), to expose itself to another emerging public sieve with new dynamics and agents. Another gap opens up between production and reception.

Thus, the crisis of Beauty (guided by an Ideal⁹¹) is also the first of the work of art: if in the Modern Era, in what we call the time of the Fine Arts, it was the well-made object, the work in which beauty participated, that justifies art, with the turn of the eighteenth century the work was going to throw itself more and more into the decisions, judgments and effects of public reception. The guarantee of the ability of the maker to launch itself into the game of an art system begins to be lost. From the concept of «Beautiful», which guided artistic reason rooted in the works, which were the ones to justify art, we moved on to that of «Art» as a judicial system where *the quality of the work* is discussed in reception.

In fact, the work of art is a reality, while art is a concept. The concept is in fact based on the definition of the work. It encourages us to think of the work not as the work of an *artist*, but as a work of *art*.⁹²

The pole of reception was affirmed as a new jurisdiction of the value of art. Michel Guérin quotes Paul Valéry: “(...) si le producteur fait de l'art une machine à produire des effets, le consommateur, lui, est « un producteur de valeur » (Paul Valéry)⁹³». To de-center the production of the work is also to say that it is no longer a matter of legitimizing the work from something that is *artistically well done*, but from its *aesthetic effect*. We could speak of another control of the common imagination, in a kind of “économie du

⁸⁸ "The aesthetic experience does not treat the religious statue and the painting that is on the altar as a mediating factor". Valeriano Bozal, *Historia de las ideas estéticas I*, Madrid: Historia 16, p.19.

⁸⁹ The theme was treated by Corneille, a play whose performance David attended. Diderot praised the dignity of the theme. David himself would say about the painting: «Si c'est à Corneille que je dois mon sujet, c'est à Poussin que je dois mon tableau.». Cf. Jean-Jacques Lévêque, *La vie et l'œuvre de Jacques-Louis David*, Paris : ACR Editions Internationale, 1989, p.74-80.

⁹⁰ Cf. Denis Diderot, *Salons* (Texts chosen, presented, established and annotated by Michel Delon), Éditions Gallimard, 2008, pp. 173-175.

⁹¹ Cf. Erwin Panofsky, *Idea. Contribution to the History of the Concept of the Ancient Theory of Art*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1984.

⁹² Hans Belting, *L'Histoire de l'Art est-elle finie?*, Nîmes: Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, 1989, p.85.

⁹³ Paul Valéry, apud Michel Guérin, *Les Temps de L'Art. Anthropologie de la création des Modernes*, Paris : Actes Sud Éditions, 2018, p.227.

visible” as “choix politique”, an “économie” dans “le commerce des regards”, to use Marie-José Mondzain’s felicitous expression⁹⁴. We can then say that the social and economic liberalism launched in the eighteenth century was also the liberalism of the gaze, altering this “commerce des regards” with the possibilities of *the subjective turn* in art.

In this paradigm, we can say that art ceased to be ontologically sustained by the work – or the being “art” justified from the entity of the “work”. The previous authority of the Beautiful, relativized by decentralization or overflow, was deprived⁹⁵. The work no longer carried “in itself” a good execution (production) that manifested itself in it as guaranteed *to be fine arts*, exposing itself (reception) in a field with other tensions and dynamics to be judged (and discussed). This is not a space of rules or guarantees, but of discussion. The effects and impacts of the work in this new liberal and public dynamic were different – no longer blasphemy, but scandal; no longer the refusal of the commission, but the refusal to enter *the Salon* or its judgment... that is, criticism.

The “critical and creative spectator” epitomized by José Jiménez emerged⁹⁶. And we could talk about the ways of the aesthetics of reception (made famous by Jauss, but which was already a matter of great authors of the first Frankfurt School, or even in the history of art, as in Pierre Francastel), of open work (Umberto Eco), among others of contemporary hermeneutics, such as Gadamer, or the possibilities of a relational aesthetic, from the situationists to Nicolas Bourriaud. The work escapes the artist: It is part of that subjectivation that accompanies the famous “invention of Man” referred to by Michel Foucault⁹⁷, where the “subject” of the monarchy was replaced by the “citizen subject” of the bourgeoisie, a paradoxical process in the Modern Era, between his affirmation as a rational subject, a first process of the subjective turn that brought with it a power of domination, of legislator and master of his destinies, while a second process was discovered, the plunge into his inner subjectivity that was the shattering of the unity of the first⁹⁸: “The moment it [work of art] is created, it detaches itself from its creator”.⁹⁹ The author puts the cards on the table, but he is no longer the one playing¹⁰⁰.

At this crossroads, there was not only a change in the models of discourse, but also the emergence of new concepts. It is due to this century that Aesthetics, Art History and Art Criticism were formulated, at least in their modern forms. Aesthetics (Baumgarten) was born, and no longer the philosophy of beauty, just as art criticism (Saint-Yenne, Diderot) and the history of modern art (Winckelman) were born, which replaced the praise of the lives of artists as illustrious citizens (Vasari’s model). Michel Guérin refers well to the relationship between art criticism and the “*goût du public*” with marks on romance literature, connecting that the era of the *Salon* and art criticism coincides with the great novels, with fame on a European scale, and with «an autonomy of aesthetics and a specificity of the judgment of taste indexed on pleasure, freedom and imagination»¹⁰¹. The devaluation of the traditional authority of *Beauty* valued the

⁹⁴ Cf. Marie-José Mondzain, *Le commerce des regards*, Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 2003,

⁹⁵ Simón Marchán Fiz proposes a “disorganization” and an “overflow of the beautiful”, especially from the first manifestations of Romanticism. Simón Marchán Fiz, *Aesthetics in Modern Culture. From the Enlightenment to the Crisis of Structuralism*, Madrid: Alianza Forma, 1987, p.243

⁹⁶ Through authors such as Duchamp, Gadamer, Jauss, Umberto Eco or Jacques Derrida. Cf José Jiménez, *Teoría del arte*, Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 2006, p.226-231.

⁹⁷ Michel Foucault, *As Palavras e as Coisas*, Lisbon, Edições 70, 1998, p.421.

⁹⁸ Cf. Hélène Védérine, *Le Sujet éclaté*, Librairie Générale Française, 2000.

⁹⁹ Bernard Berenson, *Esthétique et Histoire des Arts Visuels*, Paris : Éditions Albin Michel, 1953, p.28.

¹⁰⁰ We are based on an expression that Peter Sloterdijk explores from Adorno in *Minima Moralia* (aphorism 140: «Consequences»). Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, *Crítica da Razão Cínica*, Lisbon: Relógio d'Água, 2011, p.461.

¹⁰¹ Michel Guérin, *Les Temps de L'Art. Anthropologie de la création des Modernes*, Paris : Actes Sud Éditions, 2018, p.191-192.

effects in the sphere of reception: «The discussion about beauty shifts to the search for rules to produce or recognize it in the consideration of its effects that it produces (...).¹⁰² »

We underline three fundamental concepts, which became dominant in artistic theories from that eighteenth century onwards and all of them relevant in the process of valuing reception as an *aesthetic experience*: *Taste*, the *Sublime* and *Aesthetics itself*. All of them are placed, with greater or lesser intensity, more at the pole of reception than at that of production. Just as the *cultic dimension* passed from the church to the museum¹⁰³, so the privatization of aesthetic contemplation seemed to pass into the relationship «not only private, but interior, intimate»¹⁰⁴ with the artistic object. More than the understanding of the reason of forms to justify the quality of the work, what came to dominate was its effect on the subject, allowing art to become a way of understanding human passions¹⁰⁵. From the centrality of the foundations in art in the work, there was a relationship with the subject, and the modes of this relationship became determinant, ranging from sensory and emotional apprehension to judgment in relation to the work, as a «form of rationality coming out of the sensible»¹⁰⁶. Basically, it was an appreciation of the subject's aesthetic experience and, consequently, of aesthetic judgment¹⁰⁷, which came to relativize Beauty. In principle, none of these three concepts can function *without* a subject, since the determination of art passed from the presence of the object to its *agreement* with the subject:

«(...) the aesthetic experience is the privileged site where this hypothetical equality of rights intuition and intention is in fact untenable; and insofar as we agree to confer the status of truth where the adequacy between what is aimed at and what is given as such is accomplished, the work in its anamorphosis, according to its rise and its form, according to whether the movement seems to be perpetuated from me to the work or from the work to me, is the framework that compromises this equation»¹⁰⁸.

A guise was inscribed in the adventures of Modern Art and the Artistic Vanguards. It will be accompanied by a crisis of criteria for the good conception of the *perfect work of art*, and consequently of the traditional processes of teaching to *be an artist* (which had to be reformulated from the paradigms of the previous rules of treatise and principles of good execution: no rules to follow, no masters to imitate), as well as the failure of definitions for *what is or is not art* (a subsequent crisis, now criteriological, of art).

2. The intimate abyss of the shattered Subject

“(...) the will is the substance of Man, the intellect is his accident; (...)»

Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and as Representation*

“I have moments when enthusiasm grows to the point of madness or prophecy”

Vincent Van Gogh, Letters to Théo, no. 562

Let us come closer to our question. The discovery of this liberal place of the subject, this invention of Man, has a parallel with the freedom of the artist who no longer wants to respond to orders from the

¹⁰² Umberto Eco (Director), *História da Beleza*, Lisbon: Difel, 2009, p.275.

¹⁰³ Cf. Walter Benjamin «A Obra de Arte na Era da sua Reprodutibilidade Técnica», in *Sobre Arte, Técnica, Linguagem e Política*, Lisbon: Relógio d'Água, 1992, p.82.83.

¹⁰⁴ José Jiménez, *Teoría del arte*, Madrid: Editorial Tecnos, 2006, p.147.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Fabienne Brugère, *Le goût. Art, passions et société*, Paris : PUF, 2000, p.11.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁷ The idea that experience is a necessary stage prior to judgment, especially in its conscious fullness, was defended by Michael J. Parsons, whose theory of the «five stages of aesthetic development» was based on an interaction between the medium of expression and the effect on reception, in this case in the context of pisco-cognitive studies. Cf. Michael J. Parsons, *Understanding Art. An Approach to Aesthetic Experience from the Point of View of Cognitive Development*, Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 1992.

¹⁰⁸ Alain Bonfand, *L'expérience esthétique à l'épreuve de la phénoménologie. La tristesse du roi*, Paris : PUF, 1995, p.20.

palace and the church. If between the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern Era the consciousness of the author was discovered, the eighteenth century is the one that legally invents "copyright". In the field of a *sphere proper to art*, the artist decided more and more about the entire *poetic process* of the work, from the choice of motifs to the ways of doing, in order to, on the other hand, with this freedom have to risk its exhibition and legitimation in a public sphere of reception. It is the invention of the *critical power of the work*, parallel to the *power of the criticism of the work*.

But the very place of the subject provoked by the century of the Enlightenment, with its desires for emancipation, opened up risks that shattered the subject itself. The history of Western philosophy in the Contemporary Era, starting from the modern rational matrix of Descartes, and with immediate continuities in the Enlightenment, is also the history of both a crisis of absolute and universal truth, and of a disturbance of the freedom of the subject that Kant had worked so hard to guarantee. We consider that in the middle of the nineteenth century there are two decisive losses of innocence in Western thought, two philosophical projects that launch two distinct paths of determinism on the subject, making the emancipated Enlightenment subject hostage again:

1) On the one hand, with Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), the internal order of the rational ego was shattered, placing its essence in the blind and irrational Will. The rational and one subject was stiolate from within. For Schopenhauer, the satisfaction produced by a thing can only result from its relation to our "Will".¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, for the philosopher, it was the world as "Will", as "intuition", which preceded the world as "Representation", the latter being an "abstraction" derived from the former, so that the latter could not substantiate an abstract and prior universality that decided things: "Nous le savons : le monde comme volonté est le premier (*ordine prior*), et le monde comme représentation le second (*ordine posterior*)".¹¹⁰ Will is aspiration and pain which, as the essence of the World, is an absurd and profound, blind and irrational will. Representation is an abstraction without pain, the surface of the World and a mere mask of the Will. More than a relationship with Truth, the Will is essence insofar as it becomes blind, never realizing itself (even when it is satisfied). The subject ceases to coincide with the order of Reason, which is no longer its essence, to become a mere artifice, the mask of the *persona*. Its essence is determined by a blind vigor, whose opacity and obscurity do not allow it to be revealed to the conscious exercise of Reason. The subject shattered into layers that escaped itself.

2) The other, with Karl Marx (1818-1883), confronted us with a determinism that came from outside, from the outside, as a result of the class struggle and a sentence of the victors of History. Truth results from history and imposes itself from those who overcome it: it is not absolute, but determined from the outside, from the context and from power. If for Schopenhauer "the entire rational sphere of man is produced by the Irrational and Unconscious Will", in Marx this irrationality is attenuated, in the sense that it is the *praxis* of "life (the economic structure) that determines consciousness (i.e., the superstructure)".¹¹¹ In Marx's famous sentence: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being; it is its social being that, conversely, determines its consciousness."¹¹² The "Idea" is the product of human consciousness, and the Absolute is built from below, from the infrastructure, and from outside the subject. "Truth" is an instrument of alienation because it represents the ideology of those who dominate the structure of production – it is an instrument of power. Philosophy emerges from a state of

¹⁰⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer, "Esthétique et métaphysique du beau", in *Esthétique et métaphysique*, Paris : Librairie Générale Française, 1999, p.165.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 171-173.

¹¹¹ Cf. Emanuele Severino, *A Filosofia Contemporânea*, Lisbon: Edições 70, 1987, p.65.

¹¹² Karl Marx, *Contribution to the critique of political economy*, Lisbon: Estampa, 1973. p. 28.

innocence and *self-belief*; and it could only save itself by assuming a critical position within the superstructure (of consciousness). The subject is trapped in a condition of social and historical context.

From these *losses of innocence*, neither the subject is one and pure reason, nor can “truth” be universal and absolute. If criticism and doubt already had a philosophical tradition, as a way of arriving at truth, now these dimensions are installed in the mode of *Being* of Truth made critical. The absolute truth of traditional Western ontology, with a rational basis, was thus discussed by contemporary philosophy itself, while philosophers are increasingly interested in Aesthetics and Art as means for new questions and understandings of themselves and the world.

In the face of art, these two losses of innocence provoked two distinct explorations. The first forced art to probe deep areas of the subject, as a pleasure from the unfathomable abyss of the indomitable unconscious. The second to a necessary emancipation that would free the deepened subject from external limitations. It is the first that we will be interested in deepening here. The subjective and perceptive turn of art was to be found with this disturbance thrown at the unity of the rational subject. While the subjectivity of reception and an aesthetics of effects were valued, creative production itself was absorbed by an *author* who was increasingly opaque to himself.

A primordial dimension, with an increasingly deepened and desired sincerity and subjectivity, emerging at the end of the seventeenth century with the question of feeling and taste, debated in the following century and expanded throughout the eighteenth century, with the romantic and symbolist paths, would be intensely researched in various movements of the first avant-garde, as pure creative forces with an anti-rational basis, fascinated with primitivism, infantilism, the unconscious or even madness. Romanticism would destabilize the classicist order of the traditional Beautiful, preferring imbalances, due to lack or excess. If it explored in the sublime a mode of positive unmeasure, it also achieved the immeasurability of a negative abyss by temptation by the unconscious and irrationality. The classic History of Art exposes several examples of this immersion, at least since Goya, who figured asylums and states of ecstasy and dementia, from Géricault’s portraits of psychological illnesses (*Monomane series*, 1819-1922) to Füssli’s nightmares. This would continue in the twentieth century with various *aesthetics of the unconscious*, from the beginning of the fascination of “art” with *naïve* expressions at the beginning of this century (the “modern primitives” of Wilhelm Uhde), such as Henri Rousseau or Séraphine Louis, through movements fascinated by manifestations that disturbed rationality, such as Dada or Surrealism, to the “Art brut” consecrated by Jean Dubuffet, many relationships and complicities were established between art and the unconscious or even madness. Negative inordinateness analogous to those of the sublime emerged, not as a function of an infinity of elevation, but rather, as if its inside out, a downward dive, a kind of dive into a place of the subject where rationality neither decided nor¹¹³ acted.

It was the valorization of *the naïve look* of the artist. This would have a fruitful history in the field of the arts, especially due to the disconnection from academic rules and its most rational principles. In the eighteenth century, the issue was already addressed by Diderot in the appeal to a kind of *naïve dazzle*:

«In addition to the simplicity which he [*naïve*] expressed, we must add to it the innocence, the truth and the originality of a happy childhood which was not constrained, and then the naïve will be essential to all production of the fine arts; (...); the naïve will be very close to the sublime; the naïve will find himself in

¹¹³ These are questions that interested us and developed in: Fernando Rosa Dias, «Editorial: Institutionalization of madness and autonomy of the artistic sphere», in *Convocarte – Revista de Ciências da Arte*, Lisbon: Faculdade de Belas-Artes da Universidade de Lisboa, CIEBA, n.º 11 (Thematic dossier: *Art and madness - Art in Asylum, Art Brut and Art History*), December 2020, pp.10-28.

everything that is very beautiful; in an attitude, in a movement, in a drapery, in an expression. It is the thing, but the pure thing, without the slightest alteration. Art is no longer there»¹¹⁴.

The *naïve gaze* also became a mark of a dimension of openness in aesthetic contemplation:

«A naïve gaze, a primitive gaze, a gaze that begins, without prejudices, without blinders, are often referents of the aesthetic experience. In all of them, the effect that is proper to it occupies the foreground, and there is nothing particular about the fact that the artist has often been compared to a child or a primitive, such is the sincerity, authenticity and originality of his way of seeing-representing things. A naïve gaze discovers unprecedented aspects of objects and also discovers the conventional gaze that turned over them, now offering an equally original figure of it. The naïve gaze refers both to the object contemplated and to the gaze with which it was perceived. The aesthetic experience rejects the closed and given of the things contemplated, the naïve gaze opens, in its rejection of the given, new and endless interpretations»¹¹⁵.

The invention of the Man of modernity of which Foucault spoke to us, carried in the end several figures of the subject, precisely because it went beyond the classical *subject-substance* of ancient thought to open itself to a modern *subject-cogitos*, a passage from a time of formal metaphysical reason to instrumental reason as an exercise in the mastery of nature¹¹⁶. This first rational subject of the subjective turn brought with it a power of domination, of legislator and master of its destinies¹¹⁷, while discovering its subjectivity. But self-consciousness was not a knowledge of itself, so fatality would be a confrontation with an introspection in the modes of contingency of this *subject-cogitos*. The discovery of the Self unfolded the rational ego into layers of unconscious drives (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Freud), immersed it in the becoming of *Dasein* (Heidegger), in the nausea of existentialism (Sartre), in the impossibility of disintegrating from flesh (Merleau Ponty) or emotion (Antonio Damasio), etc. \u2012 therefore, ways in which *reason is always drive* and circumstance. The ego shattered while the subject revealed itself as a mystery before the effort of consciousness of a knowledge of itself. It accused a plural and opaque alterity of the subject in the effort of transparency of itself.

In this process, art allowed itself a paradoxical movement in the relationship with madness. Closing and completing this relationship: while Enlightenment reason isolated the voices of disorder from “madness”,¹¹⁸ it let out another voice that acquired greater autonomy and cultural expression in order to free itself from a previous dependence on reason: *the voices of immeasurability and disorder moved to place themselves under the protection of the autonomy of the sphere of “art”*.

This openness to a *non-rationality* allowed for a whole exploration of the destinies of art and aesthetics. The great contemporary aesthetic theories not only went beyond the good measure of the work but also the agreement with the subject, still desired at the origins of the process of *aesthetic subjectivation*, the sublime being a first great moment of an aesthetics of *disagreement* and *imbalance*. Opening a challenge to both order and agreement, it triggered a time of transgression dynamized under the sign of *agon* (agonistic). The *subjective turn* was followed by its intensification with a dive into that opaque and blind intimate depth. If the aesthetic field became a place of socio-cultural transgression, this was undoubtedly also due to the fact that it was accompanied by a necessary process of diving into the less rational dimensions of the self, with which the subject simultaneously confronted and explored. The transgression

¹¹⁴ Denis Diderot, *Salons* (Textes choisis, présentés, établis et annotés par Michel Delon), Éditions Gallimard, 2008, p.468.

¹¹⁵ Valeriano Bozal, *Historia de las ideas estéticas I*, Madrid: Historia 16, 1997, p.20.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *La Dialectique de la raison – Fragments philosophiques*, Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1974.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Hélène Védérine, *Le Sujet éclaté*, Librairie Générale Française, 2000, p.24.

¹¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1972 ; e, sobretudo, "A casa dos loucos" ["La maisons des fous" (1975)], in *Microfísica do Poder*, Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1979, pp.113-128.

was not only outwards, but inwards, destructuring the unity (and authority) of the ego. For art, the combination of the scrutiny of the two was one of the most striking paths of art in the contemporary era, in a crossing at least since Romanticism, followed by various movements such as Symbolism, Futurism, Expressionism, Dada, Surrealism, Art Brut, Informalism, etc. In these movements, in different ways and intensities, a pressure of *Pathos* (from the Greek *πάθος*, meaning “suffering, passion, affection”) in which pathetic and tragic are united¹¹⁹.

As a lyrical way of explaining this dive, let us explore as a metaphor the mythological narrative of Orpheus, who plunged into Hades, a place where he could not contemplate his beloved Eurydice whom he wished to bring to the surface. Orpheus was not refused to see, but to look towards Eurydice, his beloved who followed behind him. Eurydice was the very past or desired reminiscence and, for Orpheus, there was no future without her. This is Orpheus’ contradiction. His fatality was not being able to resist that gaze that was in the past to place it in the light of the future. Orpheus could not see Eurydice and prove his presence by looking; seeing her was his disappearance. But it was precisely the fear that she would disappear, that she was not the one who was there, that made him look back. The return to the surface, the return to the light, is paradoxically the place of Eurydice’s dissipation to visibility, where Orpheus can already look, but where Eurydice disappears. Too late for the gaze as confirmation, leaving the perpetual doubt of when can I look? Orpheus could never contemplate Eurydice face-to-face. But the question remains whether Eurydice was ever there, if she was not always a spectre of shadows, because it is exactly when she arrives at the surface, at the light, where the gaze can be tried, that she disappears. All the way back, Orpheus touched Eurydice and heard her footsteps, but he did not look at her. Orpheus could never contemplate Eurydice face-to-face. The gaze (the arrival at enlightenment) was the place where everything escaped.

This is the metaphor we want. Just as Eurydice’s spectre does not return to the light for Orpheus’ gaze, so too do the dives into the unconscious remain there – just as Nietzsche’s Apollonian allowed us to give a mask and visibility to the tragic background, which could not be faced, of the Dionysian. What remains is this journey of signs (in the case of Orpheus and Eurydice never optical, but only haptic and auditory challenging the gaze; in the case of the Apollonian, only in the optical appearance) that are never face-to-face with the subject’s consciousness. There is no light, there is no transparency. What remains is the melancholy of loss and the intangible. It is with this consciousness that we are interested in this relationship with the dimensions outside the control of rationality and it is with this that we are interested in its manifestation within the arts. The artist’s plunge into unfathomable zones is important precisely because of its richness and difficulty, in the awareness of its disappearance and irreversible loss, and not in the illusion of being in front of these dimensions in the luminous fullness of a face-to-face – just like Eurídice. Orpheus knew that his beloved was there in the darkness of Hades, and ventured into her search and impossible return to the transparency of light. In this metaphor, art acts as Orpheus’ journey, in contact with deep desires and reminiscences. The *id* is like the deep darkness of Hades. However, where interpretation does not dominate, there is a challenge to the effort of language that fascinates art. In the delirium of hermeneutics, in the abstract primacy of interpretations, there is a separation with the “primacy of the object”, which always resists with this remnant of the opacity of an “in-itself” closed to our knowledge. Here is this attraction that emanates from the things that make the artist move:

“The artist, the critic, lives under the impression that it is things that want something from him more than he wants from things, and that they are what embark him on the adventure of experience. He goes towards them, surrenders himself to their impression and, as a true researcher, is fascinated by them”¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Cf. Valeriano Bozal, *Historia de las ideas estéticas II*, Madrid: Historia 16, 1998, part «Sublime pathético», pp.91-98.

¹²⁰ Peter Sloterdijk, *Crítica da Razão Cínica*, Lisboa: Relógio d’Água, 2011, p.451-452.

Projected by the subjective turn, plunged into the abyss of this unconscious (of the Self) opaque to rational consciousness, the artist increasingly had fewer external dictates for the know-how of the work, to let inner enthusiasms happen. To allow this unconscious “it” to be expressed, to give visibility to its blindness, to bring to light the expressiveness of its opacity, this is the new adventure that had always been there, like a new spiritual journey of art like a walk in Hades. That what returns to the surface are only torn remains, indirect samples of these reminiscences, or other emotions and pains, is part of the regrets of this journey. What will interest us now is that we do not return from this journey with a collection to be displayed in the light, but that from this depth, individual as ever, a voice will no longer be individual but collective, because it is viscerally human and more intense and profound than the individual constitution of consciousnesses.

2. The Universality of the Deep Individual

“But I, who never begin and finish, I was born
of the love that is between God and the Devil.”
José Régio, «Cântico Negro»

We have pointed out how Schopenhauer’s philosophy was one of the great modern foundations of an irrational aesthetic, which accompanied the strength of Romanticism and anticipated the great paths of Expressionism or Surrealism. It founded that place where Aesthetics found a marked detachment from the integral and rational Subject. Cartesian Reason ceased to justify the subject and he plunged into an internal abyss where he shattered into layers, with striking continuations in the thoughts of Nietzsche or Freud. It is this new mode of the subject as an artistic author of the Contemporary Era that we underline as a new line of scrutiny and discovery of the Self. What we will extrapolate next is this proposal of a dimension of spirituality, more in fall than in flight, more to scrutinize in the darkness than to reach the light, but where the author’s strength escapes the limits of the consciousness of his own egotic apprehension. We know that without this trait almost everything would disappear from the art of the Contemporary Era. To close this question, as a corollary of the adventure of the invention of Man, and of the subjectivity of the Contemporary Era, we will attend to Adorno’s thought.

We are interested in *Nietzsche’s proposal* regarding the breaking of the principle of individuation¹²¹ that characterizes the Dionysian spirit. The *principle of individuation* existing in the *Apollonian spirit* and annulled in the Dionysian. Nietzsche affirms:

“Contrary to those who apply themselves to derive the arts from a single principle, which would be the source of life necessary for every work of art, I gaze fixedly at the two artistic divinities of the Greeks, Apollo and Dionysus, and recognize in them the living and striking representatives of two worlds of art so different in their deepest essence and their highest ends. Apollo hovers before me as the transfiguring genius of the *principle of individuation*, the god who can really arouse liberating joy through the cloak of aesthetic appearance; while by the cries of mystical jubilation of Dionysus the yoke of individuation is broken and the way is opened to the Mothers of being, towards the very essence of things.”¹²²

Apollonian imposes a necessary distance to his oneiric and contemplative dimension, and it is this distance that determines the principle of individuation, because subject and world are separated, or because the sign separates from the subject. We would say that it is the mark of the consciousness of the sign, of its formal materiality that undoes the psychic experience that connects man to the world. Contemplation

¹²¹ We retrieve ideas from the texts: Fernando Rosa Dias, «Introduction to Expressionism», in *Proceedings of the Conferences «Ciências das Artes», n.º 1: The Visual Arts and the Other Arts - The First Vanguards*, University of Lisbon, Faculty of Fine Arts, 2007, p.11-28; Fernando Rosa Dias, «O Expressionismo e a Estética do Feio», in *O Feio Para Além do Belo*, Lisbon: Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa, 2012, p.147-155.

¹²² Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *A Origem da Tragédia*, Lisboa Editora, 2002, parte 16.

implies what is and what is seen (the sign), and presupposes the two poles as the support of their relationship in distance: _it is *noese* and *noema*, which will mark the destiny of a fatal separation. For Nietzsche it is the separation and autonomy of the beautiful appearance, that illusion of *the veil of Maya* that covers the chaos and enigma of the world, the measure and fantasy that erases the pain of the world. It is the sign that becomes symbol and form, that makes culture, separating the subject from its animal matrix to erect culture.

Dionysus wants to break this distance, merging the subject with the whole, recovering that intense experience of things, in which there is no sign, no form or symbolization, but intensification of life until it is no longer stopped from the world. There is no longer separation, but there is also no principle of individuation, no harmony or beauty. Harmony is replaced by an intensification of life that has a tragic background. Beautiful measure is replaced by delirium. There is no protection from contemplative distance, but a convulsion that breaks poles and oppositions. The ego annuls itself to live the intensity of a soulful and rapturous present. There is no consciousness, but delirium. There is no image or symbol to contemplate, but participation. There is no subject or points of view, but experience. Instead of separating the *author* from *his* individual voice, we merge with the world in a collective voice.

In this fusion, beauty and harmony lose their place. There is no longer an extension of space and time for beautiful forms and their relations of proportion, harmony and composition, but intensity. If the Apollonian was a figurative and dreamlike instinct, functioning in *the sensorial extension* of the world, the plane of distance and contemplation, the Dionysian plunges into *intensification*. Hence the Apollonian is sustained in a *sensorial* dimension while the Dionysian is thrown into an *emotional dimension*. One refers to an *external world* from which he demarcates himself as a subject; another prefers to plunge into ecstasy into an inner world *breaking the boundaries with the external*.

In *the Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, written by Adorno and Horkheimer,¹²³ we sought to analyze what we could call a meta-history of Western reason in its contradictory course: by defeating myth - a primordial discourse about the real, constituting, as such, a prehistory of rationality - the enlightening thought of the Enlightenment also becomes a kind of new mythology, because it repeats the same procedures of the magical act; worse, reason remains mythological by not supporting an exteriority of itself, a moment that could oppose it as *another* within its modes. It is in this sense that the Enlightenment is seen as totalitarian. Myth surpasses the Enlightenment, but the latter regresses towards mythology in its own desire to seek to be its most decisive opposition.

The Enlightenment as *thought in continuous progress* is *a movement of thought itself*. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the danger of the *dialectic of the Enlightenment*, as a dialectic of instrumental reason, is the very separation with dominated nature, that is, the substitution of the relationship with a living nature for a “still-life”, a “mimesis of death”.¹²⁴ The original relationship between man and nature that myth nourished is lost, in order to superimpose a logical discourse on myth, mythology as systematization and separation. Instrumental reason acts in a quantitative dimension that dominates over the qualitative dimension of things, coming to dominate technique, operation, efficiency, economy, etc. Between the work of Prometheus, the curiosity of Faust, and the rational astuteness of Ulysses, the mythical figures of this dialectic of the domination of the Enlightenment that passed through the expulsion of Orpheus were defined.

¹²³ Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *La Dialectique de la raison – Fragments philosophiques*, Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1974.

¹²⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *La Dialectique de la raison – Fragments philosophiques*, Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1974, p.70. For synthesis and problematization of this perspective, cf. Albrecht Wellmer, *On the Dialectic of Modernity and Postmodernity. The Critique of Reason after Adorno*, Madrid: Visor, 1993, p.139-148.

Totality, Universality and Unity ¹²⁵are the modes of control of instrumental reason. Alternatively, Adorno defended the end of prior meaning and a reality without intentions, highlighting a hermeneutic of the world based on the enigma and the small focus (micrologia), defending the fragment as resistance and insubordination to such totalitarian principles of reason. Hence, dialectics must be the consequent consciousness of *non-identity*, a negative force, opening a passion for possibility as a contestation of truth.

For this reason, for Adorno, just as in philosophy truth is fragile and not lasting, alterable and not perennial or absolute – and hence the search for difference as ethics or non-identical as a principle – so its aesthetics will be negative and of refusal, in the continuous demand for critical activity. The strength of art is exposed in the “irreducible sensibility” of its materiality, which underlines the immanence and autonomy of the work of art as the basis of an opacity that imposes difficulties of understanding as a negative mode of a hermeneutic horizon. Art illuminates meanings in the confrontation with the opacity of its materiality and its intransigent refusal of the transparency of signification. Just as dialectics can only be negative, art is the attention of this place of withdrawal of hermeneutic opacity: to be *an enigma* is the poetics that is based on its negativity.

“The enigmatic character of art is not the same thing as understanding its works, that is, objectively, producing them, so to speak, from one’s internal experience, (...). In comparison with the enigmatic character, understanding itself (*Verstehen*) is a problematic category. Whoever understands works of art by the immanence of consciousness in them does not truly understand them; and the more understanding increases, the more the feeling of insufficiency also intensifies, blindly inscribed in the spell of art to which the very content of truth is opposed. (...): works of art that are presented without residue to reflection and thought are not works of art”.¹²⁶

For Adorno, the “survival” of works “lies between the refusal to let themselves be understood and the desire to be understood”.¹²⁷ The opacity of the material (and the attached enigma of art) is not what prevents its meaning; rather, it is what nourishes and founds it, negatively and critically. The enigma results from this interplay between the objective immanence of the work and the subjectivity of reception in the very effort to apprehend it: “Also in reception, subjectivity mediates objectivity”.¹²⁸ For this very reason, it is not immediate and founds the spiritual dimension:

«Aesthetic objectivity is not immediate; (...). If it were something unmediatized, it would coincide with the sensible phenomena of art and conceal its spiritual moment; (...). Aesthetics means the search for the conditions and mediations of the objectivity of art»¹²⁹.

For Adorno, the aesthetic subject is not reduced to the empirical subject and the thing-like materiality of the work does not yet make it artistic. If it is from material immanence that the aesthetic is founded, it is precisely because it finds there that irreducible dimension where the subject confronts the limits and possibilities of the spiritual dimension, that is, it is the *thingness* of the work that acts as a «medium of its own overcoming» – in a mutual mediatization in which the «spirit of the artistic works is elaborated in its thingness, and its thingality, the presence of the works, emanates from its spirit»¹³⁰.

If “art *aims at truth*” it is because it does not coincide with it. In the effort of the works to be self-sufficient, they encounter what they are not – hence the expression that in art their “own reality seems unreal to it”, because it is itself and at the same time another different from itself¹³¹. This “other”, from which the whole

¹²⁵ Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Actualidad de la filosofía*, Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós, 1991.

¹²⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Teoria Estética*, Lisbon, Edições 70, n.d., p.141-142.

¹²⁷ Idem, *Experience and Artistic Creation. Paralipómenos à «Teoria Estética»*, Lisbon, Edições 70, 2003, p.75.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*, p.16.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*, p.17.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*, p.35. See also, idem, *Teoria Estética*, Lisbon, Edições 70, n.d., pp.239, 288-289.

¹³¹ Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Experiência e Criação Artística. Paralipómenos à «Teoria Estética»*, Lisbon, Edições 70, 2003, p.43-45.

spiritual dimension is propagated, where subjective and intersubjective interference is founded, has as its mediating element this presence of the work of art, the mark of a subjectively imagined “in-itself”.¹³² The spirit of the works is not what they signify, but what “appears in them as truth”,¹³³ which is their *critical content*. What interests us in these reflections is that they suppose that no discourse can be made, as *another* of the work, without a link to that irreducible place that is at the origin of the subsequent developments, which is the work. Between the thingly presence of the work and the subjective relation, the immanent reflective process of aesthetics is elaborated.

But if «what is intellectually known in the work radiates to its sensible perception», it is because this dimension ratifies as a previous presence the paths of the first. Therefore, if every critique needs a meta-critique to protect itself from the abstract character of the categories with which it feeds, this same critique also needs to link itself to the work, seeking to apprehend itself from what it can never become and which is to become an *immanent critique*¹³⁴ – it is a matter of, on the one hand, resorting to a second reflection and, on the other, of pointing to the plane of immanence. One can never consider a pure immanence, to which the work is reduced, but the way in which, by prostrating itself with its presence to sensible perception, it founds and dynamizes reflective planes of subjectivity. Concluding this perspective, it is from its objective sensible irreducibility that the work becomes affective reception, a possible cogitation in discourse, therefore, subjective spirit; It is from her anti-hermeneutic rebellion that she feeds hermeneutics – it is there, on this material threshold of silence that she provokes emotions, challenges comprehension and attends to this subjective spirit.

The whole of Adorn’s aesthetics defended a position of art as a critical exercise and a negative force: “The truth content of works of art merges with their critical content. That is why they exercise criticism among themselves. (...); one work of art is the mortal enemy of the other”.¹³⁵ The unity of art history is the dialectical figure of a determinate negation. Adorno’s consideration of art as negativity goes beyond the historical dimension from which it arises as an avant-garde situation. It belongs to a dimension of art that is self-referential for reasons of self-awareness and of its history. The “power to forget” lies in the strong awareness of tradition. It is not the quotation of those who ignore what there is to forget and deny, but the reorganization of what is remembered and known, as a dialectical process. Only in this way is a process of *negative cultural dialectics* possible. It is a destruction of the existent in the consciousness of its existence, a way of *constructing* through destruction (negation), dialectically harboring a positive only after this negation. Only by inverting the Enlightenment light is the negative of Enlightenment society revealed. That is why Adorno was against the word experimentation, which was confused, resembled something worse: anarchy. Therefore, a deception of the dialectical negativity of avant-garde art¹³⁶.

In the uncompromising defense of a dialectical and reflexive avant-garde art, Adorno defends a radical individualism in which Art manifests itself as opposition to the social to reveal the expression of the collective. The Universal takes place through personal language, where any possibility of authorial style is founded, and the individual is ecumenical. In *The Philosophy of New Music*, he makes an analysis of the confrontation between the composers Schönberg and Stravinsky that helps us to understand their readings of the defense of individualism. To defend the *individualism of the author* (as he will also defend, symmetrically, that of the receiver), Adorno is very critical of the «connivance with the auditor», in «guise of humanism»¹³⁷. For him, the taste of the public and the quality of the works diverge and the quality is

¹³² *Ibidem*, p.46.

¹³³ *Ibidem*, p.47.

¹³⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-95.

¹³⁵ Theodor W. Adorno; *Teoria Estética*, Lisbon, Edições 70, n.d (1970, original edition), p.49.

¹³⁶ Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie de la nouvelle musique*, Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1962, p.16.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.16.

safeguarded only in the author himself or in the competent critic. The dictatorship of profit over culture isolates culture while accusing the avant-garde of intellectualism¹³⁸. For Adorno, the possibility of being understood by many is at the basis of *musical objectification*, which is reduced to something almost fictitious, falling back on the arrogance of the aesthetic subject who says “we”, when it can only be “me”. Advanced music (art) must act without concession to this “human” who, where it continues to exercise its charm, it recognizes as a mask of humanity. Following the general trend may expose the social, but it does not transform it. Art reifies itself when it exists for something else to better serve consumption, therefore, to be an article of consumption, dragging with it the reification of all that is spirit in the market society¹³⁹.

Attention must be given to the material. The transformation of musical material into expressive elements from external contents endangers its own expression, which is impenetrable. The very idea of *method* is about discovering the implications between technical processes and works. Adorno refers to an “immanent method”, not in the transcendence of the object, but in that immanence of the material that gives shape to contradiction, and reappears in the marks of *imperfection*. It is a matter of exposing the demands of the material to the subject’s gaze, but of a material understood as a “sedimented spirit”, which already has traces, of history and of the social. Hence, precisely for this reason, it should not go in search of a purely external and heterogeneous element, as a consumer or opponent. The genuine author is confronted with the material in an “immanent interaction” and not in front of something external (auditor, market, critic, etc.)¹⁴⁰.

Hence the «dialectic of loneliness»¹⁴¹, which can be underlined in the aforementioned irrational paths of Aesthetics, from movements from Romanticism to Expressionism (the latter referred to by Adorno). For Adorno, Schönberg’s music is «an expression of anguish», as a «presentiment», which manifests the «impotence» that removes us from comfort. It is by insisting on loneliness to the point of paroxysm that Schönberg reveals the social character: «Solitary discourse “says more about the social tendency than communicative discourse”».¹⁴² Trata-se de uma “solitude as style”. Nela “o monada absoluto” na arte é simultaneamente: “and resistance against bad socialisation, and disposition for even worse socialisation»¹⁴³. The absolute subject is not, after all, absolute, and it is in its isolation that the social appears. And quoting Schönberg himself, in one of the verses that he himself set to music:

«leugne doch, daß du auch dazu gehörst! bleibst nicht allein.»
 [deny that you are one of them! You don’t stay alone.]
 (Sechs Stücke für Männerchor op. 35. Texte: Arnold Schönberg)

But this impossibility of remaining alone in this individualism is evidenced by the fact that the pure expressions of the material, in their closure, free the elements of aesthetic objectivity and, therefore, of social intersubjectivity. By rejecting communication, in refusing to communicate outside itself, it insists precisely on this autonomy that can only be affirmed in the very consistency of the work. Hence this aforementioned anti-hermeneutic mark of Adornian aesthetics, which functions as an enigma in function of the irreducibility of the material. It is a refusal of subordination installed in this *being-there* of the work. By freeing itself from the social, the particular of the work assumes a strong relationship, polemical and dialectical, with the collective.

¹³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p.20-25.

¹³⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*, p.28-35.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 1962, p.45.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p.52-58.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁴³ Cf. *Ibidem*, p.57-59.

On the other hand, out of a desire to identify with the collective, Stranvisky is the manifestation of a false collective. The individual stimulus that yields to conformity with an integral and blind society, “almost a society of castrated and idiots”, leaves nothing but the denial of oneself, a crushing of individualization, in a magical regression to collective power in which the subject, also of reception, identifies himself with the collective in order to be a victim of it¹⁴⁴. As Adorno states, “imposing style on the material is the will to style that replaces style and sabotages it”¹⁴⁵.

«Perhaps this art alone would be authentic, which would have freed itself from the idea of authenticity itself, of being-so-and-not-otherwise»¹⁴⁶.

Philosophical language itself takes on the mythological form as an allegorical mode, to construct arguments that do not end in rational explicitness. Such is in the exploration of the myth of *Ulysses and the Sirens* by Adorno and Horkheimer¹⁴⁷. Ulysses is rational and cunning humanity. The song of the sirens is the return to the deep and intense man-nature meeting (recalling the tragic Dionysian rapture, our cold abyss). Ulysses wants to listen to the song of the sirens, but on the other hand he wants to control it. Hence the idea (the cunning of Reason) of tying himself to the mast of the ship. To resist the song is to maintain the control of Reason, of man over man, therefore, to maintain relations of domination. Ulysses’ cunning, as the “light of reason”, as order (homeland, family...) pretends to be the overcoming of the false sacrifice to Poseidon, a dissimulation to escape. The deception is in the word (“Nobody”), because the word frees itself from the thing designated, it frees itself from its spontaneity that binds it to the background of reality, the word becomes a *concept-idea* that begins to deceive reality itself and the gods.

However, Ulysses does not resist and cries out to be freed from his moorings to immerse himself in the deep relationships of Nature. But the rowers have been protected with wax in their ears so that they do not listen to the sirens and they do not listen to Ulysses’ orders either. The boat, symbol of technology, follows its indomitable path. For its part, art as an insolent enigma remains obscure. It confronts the enlightened-technological consciousness of the world from its own darkness in the abyss. Isolation (that dialectic of solitude), just as Ulysses had to isolate himself, is irreducible to technology and the consumption of the Cultural Industry. Only in this way does culture act as rupture and redemption, in negative force. On the other hand, affirmation and pacification are the end of art.

The question has its nerve in the desire for a broad reception, of masses, interfering in the creative decisions themselves. This cult of the horde is collective as leveling, but it annuls the self, which is devoured by this formless collective. The subject must decide in terms of a reception without subjects and not think of a social space of reception, where he is not in function of a social effect of reception, of intersubjectivities, but of an abstract general mass – therefore, not *social* or *anti-social*, but *without social*. Because in this production *without social* the subject of creative decision is removed in direct relation to its material, which has placed itself in function of a collective alien to the abstract exteriority, and not alterity, so that no individual mode of reception is being considered either. In the mass, like a swarm, there is no *other*.

The production of the “*Cultural Industry*”, for Adorno another mark and legacy of the Enlightenment, does not deserve the (authentic) name of Art (but only of “culinary art”), it is pure, gratuitous and blind delight. Ethically compromising, it presents itself as a mere distraction from repressive mechanisms, not criticizing or evaluating them, but only resting on them to better sustain them. Confusing the mere

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p.164-166.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*, p.218. [tradução nossa]

¹⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*, p.220.

¹⁴⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *La Dialectique de la raison – Fragments philosophiques*, Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1974, capítulo “*Digression I: Ulysses, ou Raison et morale*”.

virtuous effect («trick») with true value, it is repeated in a false originality, a useless oscillation of the same homogeneous and tyrannical dimension. It presents itself as an antidote to dehumanization, a compensation (balm) to robotization – a false light that hides its own darkness. The art of “cooking” is served as a *dessert of the Enlightenment*¹⁴⁸.

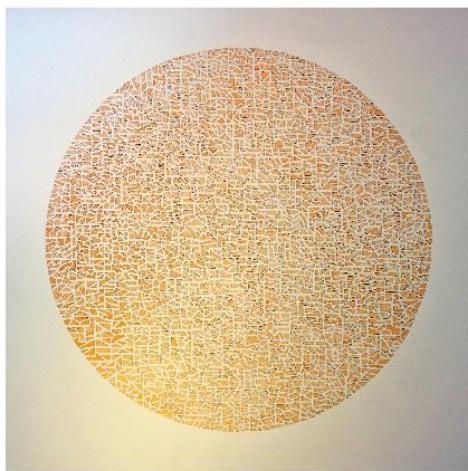
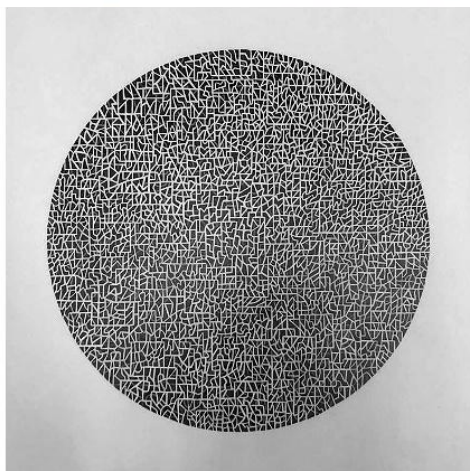
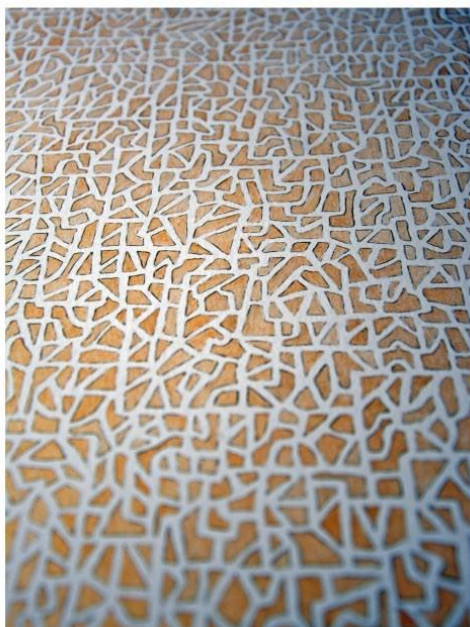
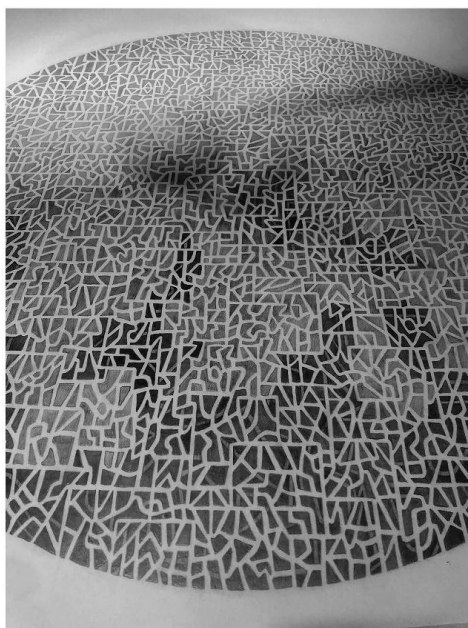
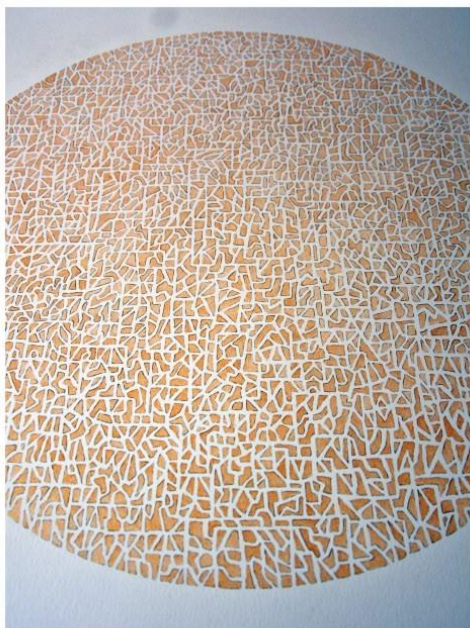
Man becomes a customer and an employee, pursued by industrial cultural production to his innermost consciousness. The more he believes that he emancipates himself from work by *enjoying it*, the more he reproduces and maintains the presuppositions in his consumption of his cultural goods of the commodity-cinema, commodity-television, commodity-music. *Mimesis* and behavioural passivity are suitable for reproduction: he ceases to think autonomously, everything is replaced by automatisms of adherence. What is lost is critical consciousness, which would be the basis of the movement of an authentic culture: leisure in leisure time is what is gained. The worker is guided by production until his leisure time as a consumer. Freedom of thought is replaced by an uncritical summary of the commodity. “Authentic art” does not fit into the totalitarian unity of the system of industrial production: it can only be external and radically critical of it. The consumer is not a perceptive subject of art, because he is part of the very structure of production from which he does not free himself. Emancipation can only be outside, be a critical or negative moment. On the other hand, the consumer subject of industrial culture only *consumes consensus*¹⁴⁹.

Adorno contrasts the reception of the masses, with the production of a few, to an individual reception, centered on the subject, as collective expression. This is how his proposal of the dialectic of solitude moves, as a solitary protest, in which the individual ego manifests the opposites of the social, being both *social* and *anti-social*. Collective expression (“we”) is sheltered in the ideal of the subjective artist, while creation destined to the collective voice is suffocated as individual fantasy, a moment in which the hasty desire of this “we” is strangled in the self-forgotten self that forces the ontological authenticity of the material into an exteriority to itself. The human social is lived in art as a negative of humanity, in an inhumanity as an individual artistic expression that is an authentic and profound aspiration to humanity.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. José Guilherme Merquior, *Art and Society in Marcuse, Adorno and Benjamin. Critical Essay on the Neo-Hegelian School of Frankfurt*, Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1969, p.57.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Theodor W., *Sobre a Indústria Cultural*, Coimbra: Angelus Novus, 2003, p.99.

Crossing the landscapes of
SILENCE



Filipe Garcia, *Para Labyrinth – sub ek (in) doxum*, 2026, Acrylic and graphite on paper, 70/70cm x 2

Technical Sheet:

Author: Filipe Garcia

Title:

Year: 2026

Materials: Acrylic and graphite on paper

Measurements: 70 x 70cm x 2

Conceptual Note:

'*Para_Labyrinth – sub ek (in) doxum*' explores, philosophically, poetically and visually, the possibility of the paradoxical image and its infinite intellectual conceptualities. Through drawings and texts shaped by redundant searches, it works performatively and adrift on the equilateral circularity of the triad comprising the point, the line and the rhizomatic plane.

Its itinerancy wanders aimlessly between the impression of appearance and the realization of white and black, of presence and absence, of the utopian non-place and its respective antagonist, so as to develop, within the depths of the hollows and the immanence of representation, paths, passages, boundaries, hinges and bridges between perception and (a)perception, the body and the mind, the object and the subject, with the genius to illustrate, through the poetics of the sublime, the observed possibility of a conscious return to the transcendence of the real.

Through the principle of subjectification, it presents itself as an intuition of an invisible yet ancestral relic, beyond the boundary of the meaning of identity and experience, inscribing itself as anointed and signifying in the pontificated presentation of the golden ratio and its indelible and absolute centrality.

It fruitfully explores, endlessly and subtly, all the dynamism and stillness of the path back to the absolute present (sub ek – all one), in an unceasing dance of infinity; it traverses the landscapes of silence and allows itself, through the restlessness of inquiry, to be disciplined as an observer, on the precipice of vanishing, far beyond illusion, in the inner, monadic contemplation of the measure of action.

'Spontaneity in good faith is wisdom'¹⁵⁰

Crossing the landscapes of silence
in a mauna¹⁵¹ flight that knows no weariness,
non-duality beyond all knowledge
to the scream that calls from the air,
shallow quality.

Circumambient chimeras in a single soul
in the infinite designs of the verb word.

Through the language of creation, the king speaks
to the whisper of the fearless sky
the sap of an expressed line that weaves
the northern white, from the pivotal point
if anointed.

And if, at the dawn of the end breaks

¹⁵⁰ Garcia, Filipe, (2023), Poesia à solta, pp. 1 & 17.

¹⁵¹ Silence in Sanskrit

no vision comes from the eye,
the gaze

sits motionless, o merciless ace
in infinite space,
you are vital prana

breathing in the air,
a labyrinth without ground.

Echoes of Silence

Abílio Oliveira

There is in silence such a profound wisdom that sometimes it becomes the most perfect answer.

Fernando Pessoa



Silent Vigilante.

In the beginning was the Silence and, in his mantle, cradled in the breath of the Eternal, the Word was manifested.

These words could preface any Holy Scriptures. They are associated with Pessoa's reflection, where silence conveys a full, ancient wisdom, and not an absence. To listen to it, it is necessary to stop listening to worldly absurdities and learn to observe with closed eyes.

In a world of noise, reheated ideas, automatic speeches and forms of thought tainted and repeated to exhaustion (or submission), appreciating silence and reacting silently is a gesture of resistance, lucidity and even reverence – it is a retreat to rediscover the essential. Living in silence requires effort, as we are pressured to give our opinion and react... Without having a single idea of his own. To be silent is to give back to words and to listen to their value. Wisdom is dynamic. It results from what one meditates, concentrates and intuit, and not from what one knows, memorizes or repeats. It requires love, willingness to learn and receptivity to renew and evolve, continuously, in silence, in tune with plenitude (which is achieved internally). To share at the right time.

Silence is also a mirror: it reflects fears, truths or hesitations. There are those who fear it because it forces intimate confrontation with oneself and loneliness, but it is there that discernment is born. Silence requires total presence. It is the temple of listening, where 'the other' exists without interruption or separation. So, silence is humility in the face of mystery. Gratitude. I long to touch the Essence and recognize oneself in it. It is the highest answer, because in the face of the Mystery any word is insufficient. True understanding is born of silence, in the midst of which the Soul scientifies and inspires.

Primal Silence – From Chaos to Order

It is said that before the Word, or the vibration that separated the heavens from the earth, there was silence. Not as an inert void, but rather as a matrix of possibilities – a cosmic womb where chaos effervesces before order is built in it. Physics describes it as a “quantum vacuum,” an undifferentiated plenitude where all matter and energy existed in potency. Certain spiritualist traditions focused on this principle millennia before Jesus Christ: the *Rig Veda* sings of a state of absolute rest, or “a breath without wind”; Genesis speaks of the Spirit of God who hovered silently over the primordial waters, to which the philosopher Max Picard alludes (in the book “World of Silence”): Silence is the beginning of all things. Before the word, there is silence and after the word, there is silence again.

The metaphor of clay in the hands of the potter – present in Plato (*khôra*, in the dialogue of the *Timaeus*), in Rumi's Sufism (reed flute) or in Jung's psychology (*Unus Mundus*) – advocates silence in order to capture ideas and conceive all forms, as a requirement of creation. It is from the primordial silence that chaos

emerges – not as a negative disorder, but as the starting point (with the raw material) for the birth of order, from which it generates everything. Chaos theory in modern physics confirms that seemingly random systems cover up subtle orders. Chaos is fertile. Without it, order would be only repetition, boredom and death. Take DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) – the spiral staircase, or double helix, formed by sequences of four chemical bases (Adenina_A, Timina_T, Citosina_C and Guanina_G) – an organic compound whose molecules contain the genetic instructions that coordinate the development and functioning of all living beings, in a unique structure in each being. Silently, from an apparent chaos, an infinite diversity of code is generated – organized – that allows each being to have unique attributes.

In human life, crises, confusions and ruptures are like dense silences that precede new inner orders. Just as it is in the darkness that the light is most noticeable. Sometimes, the encounter with anguish precedes genuine creativity. The artist faces the score, the blank sheet or canvas – a silence that frightens – and then, through the chaos of sounds, traces or scribbles, gives it an organized form and arrives at the work. Absolute silence would be mortal, but living silence oscillates and breathes, like the musical interval that is not the absence of sound, but its intimate breathing. Taoism (described in Lao Tzu's “Tao Te Ching”) designates this movement as *wu-wei* – a non-action or effortless action, which involves acting in harmony with the natural flow of the universe, avoiding coercive force, stress, and unnecessary resistance.

Thus silence is the house of all beginnings, the condition of all emergency. He teaches not to fear chaos (for it is silence in motion) and not to idealize static order (for true order is the harmony of opposing tensions).

Types of Silence

To classify silence is daring. “Silence is not said, it is silenced” – wrote the poet Alberto de Lacerda. It is not an absence of words, it is an active space of contemplation, where attention is focused on the core of life. Even knowing that the types of silence can be mixed, complete or superimposed, remembering Bernard Dauenhauer, Bernard Picard and Erling Kagge – thinkers who wrote about the nature and relevance of silence, comparing it with mundane noises – we notice some types of silence:

Sensory – in the absence of measurable sound stimuli (e.g., in anechoic chambers (or without echo), deep caves, or snow-capped mountains). It is culturally variable: in Finland it may be comfortable, but in a Mediterranean country it will be hostile.

Psychological – cessation of the mental flow, by meditation or deep concentration; it can be lucid (meditative) or opaque (depressive). It is associated with states of inner peace and alertness.

Relational – between people, with a communicational meaning, revealing dependence, intimacy or tension – is associated with complicity, tension, respect, seduction, power or therapy.

Spiritual – encounter with the divine or the ineffable, refers to inner transformation, in various traditions, e.g., such as *hesychia* (Greek term for inner peace, adopted in Christianity), *satori* (term associated with enlightenment in Zen–Buddhism), or *wu-wei* (in Taoism).

Creative – tension that precedes, assists, or culminates in the creative act. Silence for inspiration to germinate – noise or agitated mind – hardly accesses the deepest levels of creativity.

Pathological – arising from fear, trauma, violence or censorship, by suffering and not by choice, like an invisible shackle – linked e.g. to selective muteness, domestic abuse or totalitarian regime.

Ecological – the silence of healthy nature, threatened by noise pollution. Bernie Krause, musician and ecologist, found that half of the natural sounds of the 60s are no longer heard. Sustaining the ecosystem and biodiversity is preserving human and planetary health.

Therefore, there are many ways to perceive silence. A cave can be sensory for some, spiritual for others, or pathological for those with claustrophobia. We have to understand the importance it has for each one of us, what opportunity and role we attribute to it, how we seek it, use it or neglect it. Without silence, without listening to each other, will we be able to hear anything?

Solitude, Immensity, Peace – Proface of Silence?

Solitude, immensity and peace are closely associated in the demand for silence. Chosen solitude opens the portal of immensity in search of a peace that is not found in a crowd. It takes courage, determination and emotional intelligence to start this search, without fear or hesitation.

Loneliness can be torment or privilege. Abandonment, contempt, indifference, forced isolation or social exclusion generates pain, sadness or anguish, not always easy to integrate and overcome, with a severe impact on health. It translates a silence that oppresses or suffocates. Chosen solitude, however, is a natural necessity or discipline. Some mystics, monks or hermits seek it to find God and not out of misanthropy. Already in the Middle Ages, solitude was associated with “feeling complete” and *solitude* translated the experience of being one with God. The loneliness that is essential on the evolutionary path. Ester Bucholz (in “The Call of Solitude”), emphasizes how it helps us to understand ourselves and not to remain isolated, even from ourselves. An ancestral parable also alludes to this: the human being was born to live in a group, however, the meaning of living in a community can only be discovered in the company of solitude. And Jean Genet associates it with liberation: “Solitude is not granted to me, I am led to it by an interest in beauty, I want to define myself in it, to outline its contours, to emerge from the confusion. In short, to put myself in order.” I'm better off with 'the other' if he's well 'with me', in silence, and that's a premise for knowing how to love.

Immensity is when silence pierces the vastness, suggesting a cosmic sensation – the shiver when looking at the starry sky, the stunning landscape or the endless ocean. The philosopher Gaston Bachelard reminded us that the contemplation of the vast acts as an expander of the soul. We feel small, but in a liberating way, because something broader than the ego blossoms and expands. The immensity induces an awe, a deep admiration, humility and respect, with some awe and a sense of smallness before the vast and grandiose – like an ocean of silence.

Peace is not the absence of conflict, it is a calm that does not depend on circumstances. Unlike boredom (a negative emptiness) or boredom, peace is quiet plenitude. We speak of physiological peace (relaxed body), psychological peace (mind without rumination) and spiritual peace (feeling of unity, that everything is or will be fine). Peace is a dynamic balance with chaos, in an infinite spiral – if we are at peace with ourselves, we will more easily have peace at home, in the organization, in the community, in the country, in the world... Peace is a path to universal harmony.

Solitude, immensity and peace symbolize an inner ecology that projects us into the infinite cosmos – solitude is the soil, immensity the horizon and peace the environment, in and through which the inner voice emerges. In short, solitude connects us to ourselves and reveals to us the importance of 'the other', immensity reveals 'our place', without self-centeredness, peace is the breathable atmosphere that makes contemplation and life itself possible. In the realm of silence emerges the voice of the soul, the fifth empire spoken of by poets and mystics, the breath that allows us to create, transcend and love.

[Tip ☺: Try moments of solitude (20 to 40 minutes without screens, e.g., relaxed, running or walking), immensity (with open horizons, contemplating the sky) and peace (with diaphragmatic breathing, acceptance, shared silence).]

The Inspiring Silence – The Voice of the Soul

The aforementioned expression, “voice of the soul”, is millennial. Plato spoke of the *daimon*, a silent voice that listened, or an intermediate spiritual entity between gods and men. In Hinduism, the *ātman* is the deep self that is listened to with the senses silenced. St. Augustine designated the voice of God as a *speaking silence*. Jung called it the *self*, the archetypal center that is perceived in silence. So the poet R. M. Rilke suggested: dive into yourself and probe the depths where your life springs.

Something that neuroscience proves: deep creativity occurs when the brain is in default *mode network* (DMN), the resting network that is activated when we wander silently. This can result in *insights*—unexpected connections between distant memories that project themselves into 'visionary' ideas. Even in the shower or in a race we have seen how pure ideas emerge when the brain roams free. The voice of the soul is also revealed in these 'intuitions', fragile and profound, which require silence to listen and great lucidity to perceive. Several historical examples confirm this: Newton isolated himself in silence during the plague and discovered gravitation; Beethoven, deaf, composed symphonies adorned with pauses and empty spaces; John Cage composed 4'33" of absolute silence; C. D. Friedrich created meditative and contemplative landscapes with an intense existential and spiritual silence; and Einstein found himself traveling in a silent ray of light.

The voice of the soul—speaks quietly, once and is silent—differs from the noisy ego, which speaks loudly and is repetitive. Silence allows us to observe thoughts like clouds – some pass, say nothing to us, others stay, make us reflect – and between them, the clear sky, where the *anima* breathes. But, after listening (or *immersing*), it is necessary *to emerge*, to translate silence into word, image, invention, gesture or work. Silence that does not generate action can become sterile or fade away. Perhaps this is why some people spend time in creative silence (in various areas of activity) – the musician Arvo Pärt spent years without producing and one day emerged with the *tintinnabuli* style (from the Latin “bells” or “bells”), a minimalist music made of long pauses and solitary notes.

The inner voice is the most precious experience that silence offers. One listens alone, to hold back the noise and pay attention without knowing what one will hear. Anyone who listens to it, even for a mere instant, knows that it is worth it. Because that voice, as Thoreau said, is the very tone of the universe.

Immerse and Emerge – From Dive to Action

In a civilization of noise (physical and symbolic), forgetting tiredness, facing emptiness (between fears, insecurities and doubts), ignoring the opinion of others, facing boredom and immersing oneself in silence, is – more than a refuge – once again, a courageous act.

Some practices of meditation, concentration and visualization – which would require much more than this text to be properly addressed – allow us to immerse ourselves in silence and gather in it the fruits that, only in its bosom, can be found: at the physiological level (by reducing cortisol, or improving sleep), psychological (reducing anxiety, increasing creativity), spiritual (connection to something greater – remembering that religion comes from *religare*, which presupposes the effort to re-establish the connection with the sacred or the divine, uniting the material and spiritual world) and relational (with improved listening, greater tolerance to ambiguity). Silence is a plunge that regenerates—to inhabit the world more fully and inspired, whether to create, heal, give, and evolve, or to contribute to a greater good, a joint project, humanity as a whole.

Introverted or traumatized personalities can immerse themselves without emerging—they see silence as a cesspool rather than a spring (like the hermit who won't come back, the patient who can't speak for years, or the artist who stares hopelessly at the canvas without painting). Silence is an immersive experience:

we dive to catch shells, but if we stay at the bottom, we die. It is necessary to go up and share them. This means translating stillness into visible language. This can happen through speech (e.g., when the word, not reactive, is born from listening and can save a relationship), action (in non-impulsive gestures, e.g., when a leader is silent before deciding, or a therapist is silent while the patient cries), creation (in the work that is born of calm, be it a poem, melody, painting, play, algorithm or invention) or love (loving without possessiveness, with small but touching silent gestures: making coffee, listening without interrupting, holding hands, or simply being present).

We know, from our own experience, how essential it is to have silence in some situations – e.g., when we want to concentrate, we have something important to do or decide, in a family discussion, we feel excited, before an exam, a test, a competition or a work. The action to be taken can involve many people or a global destiny, which increases the responsibility to decide lucidly. Gandhi was an example that it is possible to have regular days of silence, and to emerge with speeches of immense moral force.

There are practices that we can try to follow in everyday life, e.g., pause 3 seconds before responding to someone; maintain 1 or 2 minutes of silence before an important conversation; write or draw right after meditating; do a good deed, in silence; quiet moments in support groups; and many others. Immersion and emergence are like the diastole and systole of spiritual presence. The sensible person cultivates this cycle and knows that silence is a means or way of affirmation.

From Emptiness to Wholeness – The Spiral of Life

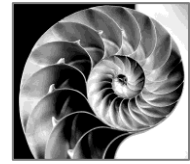
Is it possible to conceive of nothingness? No. Can anyone imagine the void? No. There is always something. A tension. A presence. A while. A space. A vibration. An echo. Since emptiness is philosophically inconceivable, unknown, why does it often cause terrible fear? Perhaps this is also why we have so much hesitation, reluctance or difficulty in getting to know ourselves, in understanding who we really are, where we come from or what we have to accomplish.

“Know thyself” (*gnōthi seauton*) is an ancient maxim, divulged by Socrates – engraved on the portico of the Temple of Apollo, in Delphi, Greece, it was the first advice given to pilgrims, warriors, everyone: before consulting the oracle about the future, the human being must scrutinize, in silence, his own nature, limitations and qualities. Antônio Alçada Baptista, one of 'our' illustrious writers, alluded to this in a simple, brilliant and enigmatic way, in the *Preface* to 'my' book “Olhar Interior”: “Lembro-me muitas vezes de Simão, o Mago, um gnóstico, que criou uma heresia que não me deixa indiferente. Ele dizia que nem todos temos alma, que nascemos com uma pequena chama que podemos ou não alimentar e desenvolver. Quando não fazemos isso, ela apaga-se e retorna ao nada” (<https://abiliooliveira.weebly.com/livros.html>).

Emptiness is not absence, it is something that remains or is, that pulsates, invisible (to our gaze), that develops, expands and transforms. Silently. Strictly speaking, it is pure potentiality, where all forms, all faculties, and all things can be generated, from the tiniest being to the infinity of the most magnificent universe—in the splendor of manifested plenitude.

Nāgārjuna (Buddhist philosopher and monk) taught that all things are void of independent existence, as they always exist in interdependence. Thus, emptiness is the condition of plenitude: a thing is only complete because it is empty of a fixed essence. Meister Eckhart adapted this idea to the Western Christian tradition, stating that “in order for God to enter the soul, the soul must become empty of all creatures.” The mutation of emptiness into plenitude is not made in a straight line, nor in a circle, but in a spiral – the emptiness that seemed to be a lack reveals itself, in silence, a source.

The spiral is an ancient symbol of evolution, continuous growth, and expansion of consciousness – the mathematical Fibonacci spiral (linked to the golden ratio, approximately 1,618) represents perfect harmony in the evolution of shapes, present from galaxies to the most diverse forms that we find in Nature, such as simple sea shells. Due to our natural inclination for harmonious forms, we have also represented this magical spiral sequence in different achievements, namely in art, architecture, design and even in the psychology of behavior.



Note that the circle repeats indefinitely, while the spiral passes through the same planes at progressively higher levels – one advances a little, after which one retreats, but in the next advance one arrives a little higher, deeper or farther than at the point reached by the previous advance (a bit like the rising tide – there is a larger wave and a series of shorter waves follows, until at the beginning of a new series comes a wave even bigger than the one that occurred in the previous cycle, and so on, until the tide reaches its maximum and fills the beach – in a given cycle, of tides, in an infinite spiral).

Biologist Ilya Prigogine has shown that open systems, such as living organisms, evolve through fluctuations (or pauses) and chaos that gradually lead them to more complex levels of organization—by dissipating energy and entropy into the environment—mathematically justifying biological self-organization and the universal tendency toward order. Silence works like those pauses that allow progress or evolutionary leap. Each descent into deep silence increases our ability to be in the void without fear, to listen to the soul without haste.

Darkness – as an existential crisis, a difficult loss or grief, a painful breakup or failure, or a lack of meaning in life – is often experienced as hostile silence. But when crossing the dark night (as St. John of the Cross wrote), without fleeing into the noise or confusion, one realizes that it invites us to dismantle false certainties, insipidities, illusions and dissolve the ego. The light does not return from the outside, it emerges from the bosom of emptiness, passes through the darkness and bursts forth crystalline and regenerating. As Rumi sang, “The wound is the place through which the light enters you.”

Even “music, as an art of sound, owes as much to silence as to notes. However, the pause is not a void between sounds – it is a living organ of the composition, because without silence, the music would be continuous noise, where nothing would stand out. It is silence that gives rhythm, contour, breathing, and emotion. Silence is not the opposite of music, it is its habitat. For C. Debussy, “music is the silence that is found between the notes”. Each note emerges from the silence, vibrates for an instant, and submerges itself again into silence. Their beauty lies in their relationship with what surrounds them – before and after, it is silence – giving meaning to the emerging melody. Aldous Huxley would have thought about this when he said: “After silence, music is the closest thing to expressing the inexpressible”.

Plenitude is not having everything, it is being present, or, ontologically, it is being everything. Silence, more than a means, is fullness itself in power and action. When we are deeply silent, nothing is missing. The breath and the moment are enough. David Steindl-Rast said, “Gratitude is the key to wholeness,” to happiness and transforms our perception. It is important to value the present moment as a gift, through the daily practice of stopping, observing and acting with kindness and gratitude. And gratitude only resonates in silence. For Antônio Ramos Rosa, the poem is born from silence and gives him a voice: “Silence has no end, it is an island without a beach where what matters most is never to arrive”. Silence is a pure space from which word and life emerge. Immortal silence is not destiny, it is the journey seen from within.

Friendly Silence – Silent Watcher

Is silence the beginning of listening and not the end of sound? Is it the fullness of attention and not the emptiness of the mind? Is it the intimate presence of two and not the absence of connection? Is it a call for freedom? “No Silêncio – só no Silêncio – no vazio que é repleto – só no vazio que é repleto – no nada que é tudo – só no nada que é tudo – há Liberdade” (Morya, no livro “Sementes e Pérolas”, CLUC, 1989, p. 9).

“The continuous breathing of the world is what we hear and call silence,” wrote Clarice Lispector. Here we are. From emptiness to eternal plenitude, on the celestial path, here, but with the mind on High, in this spiral of life, on a spiritual path, inspired by the echoes of the immortal silence that encourages and pacifies us, in a beautiful endless story, respecting the divine, with gratitude for what is given to us, with faith and commitment for a better world! For God willed it so! Well, we want it that way!

Do you really want to know what silence is? Sit with me for about fifteen minutes, without talking, without cell phone, just breathing in and out, feeling the air enter the lungs and exit after internal filtration, quietly and deeply). We can look at each other, quietly, or remain with our eyes closed. Then you may find an answer.

For me, silence is the Whole that whispers when nothing roars anymore, the bond that connects us to the sacred essence, the voice that awakens to the beauty of life. And life is all that remains when nothing else remains.

Confucius summed it up this way: “Silence is a friend that never betrays.” Fernando Pessoa is absolutely right, there is in silence a profound science, the unique and ancestral *Ageless Wisdom*, which in us, by us or through us, can become the most perfect answer – if we allow it, are vigilant and are prepared to think, feel and act.

Planet Earth, July 12, 2026
Abílio Oliveira



***IF MOUNTAINS COULD
SING***



Melanie Manchot, *Inversions*, 2026, Black & white Giclee print on *Hahnemühle* paper, *Mount Makalu*, Himalayas, Nepal



Melanie Manchot, *Inversions*, 2026, Black & white Giclee print on *Hahnemühle* paper, *Mount Makalu*, Himalayas, Nepal

Technical Sheet:

1. *Inversions* (Mount Makalu basecamp with lake)

Location: *Mount Makalu*, Himalayas, Nepal

May 2026

Black and white Giclee print on Hahnemühle paper

Edition of 5

2. *Inversions* (Mount Makalu high camp helipad)

Location: *Mount Makalu*, Himalayas, Nepal

May 2026

Black and white Giclee print on Hahnemühle paper

Edition of 5

Authorial statement:

Started in January 2021 in the midst of a hard Covid lockdown, the ‘Inversions’ are a series of photographs made in response to specific locations and environments. One set is made continuously in London, my home town, the other in response to nature, often in relation to mountains. The gesture enacted in each image remains constant: turning myself upside down, standing on my hands, to draw a line into landscape or cityscape. Based on iconic feminist performance histories, especially from the 1970s, each inversion is a form of physical tagging, or graffiti – albeit momentary, fleeting and archived through the photographic document.

The images for SPHERA were made in May 2026 on Mount Makalu in the Nepalese Himalayas. I was there working on a docu-drama centred on my brother Karel, who became the first Czech mountaineer to reach the summit of an 8000 meter + peak. He never returned.

Melanie Manchot

IF MOUNTAINS COULD SING

Mário Caeiro

In the morning the chorus of birds. Then the bleating of the sheep.
The continuous resonance of the waves of the sea.
Sighs from the breeze.

Wind whistled.
Human metaphorology projects an arsenal of terms onto Sound.
But I can't find a poetics that tells me how the *Adagietto* of Mahler's Farm
topples me into a vortex of emotion in subtle rotation. Or the way *Jarrett's*
My Song rescues me from sadness. Or the way the *riff* of *I can't keep from*
crying, decade after decade since adolescence, reconnects me with what I
imagine the *original blues*. Okay, along with *In my time of dying*...

Alentejo, 2025

Preliminary point

Music has a mysterious power: that of affecting the soul at the very core of its vibrational essence. I paraphrase the physicist (and musician) Stephon Alexander, who, in improvising his own life and through his intuitive leaps which he describes as irrational (I would add: transcendental) – found in the music of the Universe something that works (or does not): *function*.

The planets touch their harmonies and dissonances, their mysteriously chaotic identities, into mathematical equations. The most integrative Physics and integral Spirituality tell us that there will be a cosmic genealogy literally in the background when we think of music in a broad sense, the same dimension of *cosmic background radiation* that led *aeons* to coalesce into radically creative stars.

Musicians, whether they are aware of it or not, are forces of nature, the latter through such channels reiterating and no less erasing provisionally perennial laws. Gravitations. To play music, and perhaps to listen to it, is the *tuning*, in moments, in the *momentum* inherent to each sound experience, of the instrument that is that of Life itself. We listen to it, we listen to it, we accompany it, we play it, that natural instrument that prolongs our being. In the truth of artifice, and no less when we sing the breeze between the leaves of the mountain and we realize it.

Echoing the way we opened the first SPHERA, via Albert Ayler, Alexander asks, rhetorically: – *What if the universe was like a jazz solo?* Listening, doing, understanding, creating music – including that of silence – is of the order of the celebration of existence. Being part of the orchestra, the choir, the combo, the one-note samba school (re)creating itself, transcending itself in myriad rhythms, melodies, scale and cycles.

Does this imply an idea of time to which I do not necessarily want to add this text? I assume the principle and hypothesis that music is par excellence the expression of time, that *other* of space and conniving *gravitational gravitas of gravity*. *Another* of the mountainous matter. *Intro* to the discovery of the intimate truth of *the groove*. This does not prevent that each record we keep on the shelf, each artist we obsessively (pre)listen to or each song we preserve in memory are not strictly sound planets in a universe that is already and for now expanding. In these terms, mapping the sound experiences that cross us is to make planets aware of their atmospheric ecosystems.

Intro

When the Creator fashioned the human body, the human soul refused to enter because it didn't want to take on the body's limitations. The Creator then began to play music. In order to feel the fullness of this music through the senses and receptivity of the human form, the soul was coaxed into the body.

Russill Paul relaying an ancient Sufi story

There is something about music and facts. If they co-exist, something happens to the information. And it lasts.

Neil Young

The decisive moment of human development is continually at hand. This is why those movements of revolutionary thought that declare everything preceding to be an irrelevance are correct — because as yet nothing has happened.

Franz Kafka

The Sufi myth tells deep truth in the sacred *praxis agenda*. Young, a giant, asserts the transmutation of matter into an etheric event. Kafka seems to yield to agonistic nothingness, but he is aphoristic, if not cathartic, a demonstration that the consciousness of genealogy is a step on endless celestial staircases... *stairways to heaven...*

Kafka, capable of understanding his creative process deeply, is *in his own way* saying the opposite of what he says (so I read him, this giant on whose shoulders we creatively sit often). These two voices, in short and decontextualized topics, opened a text I wrote a few years ago about Situationism. I reread them because they inhabit the helix of (free) rise/fall in a conscious and operative way, in a *sphere* of the common, of community and communality, beyond the socio-political plane.

This text, proposing to think of music as spiritual knowledge, a true path and a path to itself, seeks to do so in the orbit of a personal essayistic reflection, on the part of someone who has sought a lot in public art, urbanism and critical theory registers for the elevation of the *socius* to subtle vibrations. Someone who in the meantime thought of the mythical and the mystical in the same logic of the rise of the common and who is now invited to pay attention to music in a *spherical register*. Someone who does not hesitate to associate structures of what he perceives when thinking passionately. *Theorein*.

If in this previous text — *Situating Situationism* — I tried to highlight topicality in the action in the urban environment that wraps our being, and of the poetic-discursive action in particular — within the society of the spectacle — here I am challenged to reflect on music as an experiential channel. As a portal. This universal and cosmic, absolute dimension was already referred to in that text, mirroring the mental intricacies of a *retentive chronic rock* fascinated by the messages and *soundbites* of a revolutionary generation, which in the society of the spectacle intertwined the inherent suspension of values to the experience of creative freedom:

I'd add, in the spirit of Bergson, that only a few artworks in the city — or songs in rock — mystically interpret Life. This is related to a problematic which is today more alive than ever, the one of socio-political empowerment, of life as *molecular* production. It's a crucial one in public art and critical urbanism, precisely underlying one of the key aspects in Contemporary artists' productions I find in Debord's book: participation, in the sense of involvement.

In other words, there may be a connection — I refrain from defining it as necessary or sufficient — between the critical tradition (in which the Habermasian or Lefebvrian humanisms are key references) and the mystical one, the latter underlying the *ever-mergent argumentarium* of SPHERA, which in Abellio was precisely structured, in a famous diagram. A sphere. In the transdisciplinary spirit that moves me and in the *allegro-essayistic way* in which I move (*d'après* Montaigne, Barthes, Bergson or Massumi), this is vital food for the present to intuit. Emerging co-presence. Let's say that I work at the same time on scales that I risk composing, surrendered to the music that I know how to pluck from the noisy white silence that is the page. Or silence (where when I can I see instrumental theme and song).

What follows is therefore an intuitive reflexive drift, admittedly *intermediate*, about music as a spherical journey. Where the problematics of politics and power, of social representation, key themes of the previous text, are rhetorically kept at bay to focus on a Human of *another dimension*: divine, mediumistic (the implicit media in an open and poetic sense) and magical. What follows is thought triggered by the hearing of music in public space-time *in the greater sense* that is Nature. For the *appearance* of music in the (dis)concert of the world. So, listening to and interpreting music brought me to *walking around here*. Anyway, *What appears is good; what is good appears*,— Debord asserted.

If Greil Marcus is of the opinion that the power of *rock 'n roll* lies in the jumps from here to there, in the impossibility of making transitions, it is no less true that theories of movements long before *rock* already found leaps (qualitative, aesthetic, formal, etc.) between creators and approaches to musical matter. Of the music that mattered. I see such leaps as subtle continuities. Contiguities. And I glimpse in the hearing of anything, I believe because my intelligence tends continually towards analogy and comparison, towards the interactive recognition of echoes and resonances, connections and affinities in an infinitely variable geometry.

Such connections, perceived, explored, experienced, ensure monumentality to the Human. In the choir of lighters lit in a stadium undulating to the rhythm of an anthem, in the room of a teenager looking for the first original chords on the guitar, in the International sung with a raised fist on the 1st of May, when we hear bars whose sequence suddenly leaves us speechless, in a trance, moved, rescued, crying; or, of course, in imagining — it occurs to me Mike Scott dreaming his *Big Music* or Phil Spector raving about the experiential notion of the *wall of sound*...

In the long term, evoking Jung, I live *some music* as a presentification (updating and reinvention) of archaic, if not eternal, or even sudden, emergent, sound monads; in the medium term, I am surprised when a melody, a timbre, a sequence of chords resonates another time that has historically passed, vivifying the two points of comparison; in the short term I enjoy understanding how the invention of a performative gesture generates in its *phenomenologizing* an aesthetic, paradoxically physical virtual place. Music has to do with Light. And mountains.

All this seems evident to me when I find in Black Sabbath the existential thunder that revolves my underbelly forever, when the Irishman Rory Gallagher sweatily translates the Blackest for working-class Belfast, when Chris Squire invents a strumming of the electric bass, letting the reed incision the roundness of the thumb and thus making the instrument the true Fifth Element in an orchestra of egos...

Musical creators reverberate here on earth *the sounds in the world, the sound of the world*. The sounds of complexity in *audio* mode. Distant and near, immediate and imagined, timelessly timely, temporarily timeless.

The older ones will have dealt directly with the chirping of birds and the rustling of leaves on the trees, then the impressive rumbling of locomotives and cannons, or the astrological vibration of the planets; today that more than 50% of the world lives in cities, unemployment and exclusion motivate *beats* and the bits of the digital inexorably enter *the house and head*. That said... we are what resonates in us. *Listen*...

From the animal nature of the flame. Silence

Years ago I read somewhere — in Novalis, via Rui Chafes — something like "the animal nature of the flame". *Arguably* metapoetic fragment depicting the divine and inner nature. In the light of the flame (of a candle), a piece of sun, I write about what will exist that is luminously animal in the music, in the sound. (The flickering candle). If "natural" comes from Nature and Culture is something else (Eagleton), nature being thus codified (if not previously and in the meantime stigmatized), the reflection on *the natural music*

of music offers itself to me as an exercise to become aware of *how a mountain could sing*. The sentence presupposes a question. Also in the present tense.

Hermann de Vries (b. 1931) is a Dutch artist who makes his contemplative drifts a recognition of the natural – clod of earth, rag of cloud, leaves of trees – of the surrounding natural world (let's say that of this natural remains today). His art is rooted in an ancient genealogy, that of the journey-presence (St. Francis, Richard Long, Francis Alys). Walking around, *being*, is for this artist of the order of topicality. "Nature is always topical." In a *good place, if for a fraction of a second we bring to the fore the creative ethics as diagrammed by a priest-poet (Father José Frazão Correia), art can generate the intensification of being and being in a good place.*

In de Vries, the poetic drift is affirmed in the collection, documenting, archiving and framing of what is the world around him. Literally in (apparently) cold (mere) appropriation of the *wonderfully common*. The work bears witness to the natural, in a manner less of *Wunderkammer* or *cabinet de curiosités* than of a pocket mirror. The consistency of his creation will result from this simple poet. From revelation to revelation, in continuity. This does not prevent the sudden explosion of the *genus* – gene/genesis/genius – where it is least expected. De Vries is silence – the most natural of noises –; or how much discreet and humble to stumble. Just as there are those who pick flowers, or buy them, to give soul to a room or a grave, killing them in the long term but recognizing their function as a living vibration, de Vries picks up whatever it is that reminds him/us of the poetry of what it *naturally is*.

For de Vries, nature is the primary reality, culture the secondary, and virtual reality the most distant reality. His work of restricted simplicity is maintained in the material to convey (and not so much compact, shelve or even museologize) the complex, endless and abundant spherical.

Silence.

Late into the night. I continue to write by candlelight (in fact, I also edit by the light of *led* Christmas lights and to the sound of Alabaster de Plume – and *the like*, via Spotify and *bro* algorithm; while outside the birds rest in total silence. The dawn still in suspense I feel that leads me to become aware, feeling it, of the relationship between silence and sound. Between the radical subjugation to listening to the material and the creative act that invents sounds – in the ether. A tango will never be pure code. In flamenco I don't believe that anyone can conceptually tame *el duende*.

Dialogic, naturally more than dialectical relation. When the greatest respect is required of us in a painful situation, before a symbolic moment to demarcate this segment of time, sublimating a gaze, silence is imposed. As so often when an atmosphere conducive to the channeling of a spirit in a *séance is required*. Or at the dawn of the act of praying. When something hurts us and it is imperative to breathe. In a comma, in a period. In the performativity inherent in the arranging and unarranging of ideas.

Le silence à ma tête et le bruit au dehors. The verse in *Silence* by (*voilà*) Telephone has never ceased to reverberate in my mind, in my process of progressive audiophilia, of neophyte adherence to the art of music. The silence in the meditative or contemplative act has never ceased to dialogue with the noise *outside*, as well as inside, of my clumsily *noisy being*. Feedback, when it entered the map of my hearings, will have had this function, that of seducing me into the silence-noise of *noise*. The other side of silence. And the noise itself, on the margins of musicality

Of the instrumental screech to which the cry will give the body. And here I realized that just as in meditation it is essential to let the world sing – in silence, because in silence – there is secret music in the noises of the world, in its sounds. Interrupted noises in which the mind, surrendering to them, recognizes flow. And antenna. To the limit of the flow can be edited, either by closing the bathroom door so as not

to hear the flushing cistern, or to turn some of these sounds into a fragment of the sound narrative. The riff of *Satisfaction* sprang from this penumbra. Just like scratching in the voids of hip-hop.

Sampling gave these ghostly narratives co-presence, between the truth of *beats n'bits* and the lie of what at the beginning of this aesthetic we jokingly called the *Japanese drummer*. The truth is that, historically, musical noise has become part of music, if only so that it is kept at a safe distance and at the right time. Like in elevator music, which is purified... *background noise*. Or in maddening electronic loops. Perhaps less melodic than the sound of rain from the television set in the era when the night began early.

Sing, sing, friend sing

In the life of sounds we learn that, beyond and within the creative tension between silence and sound, there is the human voice. The infinite spectrum of voices that are sometimes noise, sometimes disarming, the song of humanity. The singing of Cante (we don't go any further) is the being landscape in the voices. In Bulgarian Voices, polyphony smells like roses.

Just as, in a historic urban intervention of public art that I had the opportunity to curate at *Luzboa 2006* (Fado Morgana, by the Belgian collective *Het Pakt*), a choir of voices (whose owners had no focus on the words of musical formation), duly equalized, sounding individually on different speakers, singing two of the oldest *fados* in Lisbon, transmuted a staircase in *Alfama* into an immersive anachronistic experience of the city in all its socio-cultural ancestry, because of the topicality of those laments; Each spectator could circulate between voices and orchestrate the relative intensities of each timbre, becoming a silent co-creative participant in the choir. That same piece would later be reinterpreted, translated into a long alley in the city of *Torun*, Poland, as part of the program of the *Skyway Light Festival*. There, the cliffs to experience were the words of the poet Wisława Anna Szymborska.

Voilà (this is how a discursive cane is unveiled by a fraction of a second *musical leitmotiv* to move on to the next bar of a text). Another pause to breathe, already out of parentheses. If you practice yoga, pause for the magical and mantric singing of *yoga nothingness*, capable of calming my restless mind.

Bridge dixit.

Voices, perhaps more *directly* than instruments, channel emotions and feelings. *They invoke*. Joy, surrender... Pain. But these human conditioning factors of being are naturally found in the sequence of notes of a passionate composition - or excellently interpreted. When we listen to *Mozart's Requiem*, as long as it is interpreted that this composer's final testament returns the dimension of intimate revelation, we will not feel Pain in the same way again. Expanding the feeling in the pretense of feeling. *Voila*, Pessoa.

On the other hand, in the mystical choir – in the *Hebrew nobody*, in the devout refrain of a *qawwali*, even when at Fatima a *Hail Mary* is chanted by thousands of voices, or in an intimate and loving Hare Krishna ceremony we enter into a joyful and familiar trance – there is a truth of faith in search, spread, more than confirmation. The voices, together, pray, sing the prayer. They call us to fall into the vortex. That's what happens in a full stadium, in the chorus of that song.

The voice of the person is the human in maximum topicality. Vibration of vocal cords that relativizes and at the same time monumentalizes the common. Callas, mute in Pasolini, intones in silence what we imagine as the silence of the voice. And José Mário Branco, sung by other voices, will have difficulties in being present. Elvis is unrepeatable.

What seems evident to me is that if we ever heard Camões, it was precisely when Branco intoned “*Mudam-se os tempos, mudam-se as vontades*”? And that something procedural in the sentence that is *Restlessness* we have – and we have – more heteronyms, Pessoaans. The voice seeks vital resonance, from the universal,

in the individual. Like when Patti Smith is just – and so much more than – *grungy murmur*. Or Cesária – only and so much more than – bare feet.

Power Age

I am coming to another key dimension of these intuitions. Music as the *output* of processes of channeling a superhuman Force, Energy, Source. The song, the phrase, the echo, the symphony, the concert, the reverberation on the walls of a club, *orchestrate* the being in being there listening. Combining sudden congeniality.

Conductors and divas, virtuoso instrumentalists and *pimba singers*, singer-songwriters and *outcasts* on the corner with empty caps at their feet, sprout like flowers in the world of sounds, and it is up to each pair of ears to discover to what extent those sounds *at that moment* channel (*voila*, if that is the case) in a spiral what is above and what is below, and the way in which each gesture – each change of agreement, each melodic inflection, each harmonization – transmutes matter. Complexity is not necessarily higher here than puerility. Not even virtuosity ensures anything.

Part of the task of *reading* these multiple dimensions has to do with the mental and sensitive capacity to *feel* music, to surprise it in its relationship with time and surroundings, to glimpse it in the noise of existence; which the popular expression "music for my ears" so well summarizes. Sudden ethereal rise and fall into sound – is that why Karajan seems possessed? Or that devilish kid from *Staff Benda Bilili* looks like a mad magician, extracting from the stretched metal wire an unprecedented function? – that the configuration of the notes tears into the real, music gives the spectrum of existences – in the natural in all senses – an ever-mergent... soundtrack.

I may be falling (again) into abstraction. It will be inevitable because I am on the score, in the text. To diagram through words an experience in the labyrinth of my own auditory experience and sensitivity. But to this operative abstraction, didactically schematic and which provisionally gives names to things, I juxtapose without any desire for forced synthesis the living chaos of the Universal in Flux, of the Spirit in its diverse and multivocal states. This conviction points to a couple of pieces of evidence.

I will stick to one that pierced me. Music, music... only the one that is done live. The rest is a record of what happened (tombstone, monument, document, proof, message). Hearing a friend scratching an out-of-tune guitar will not necessarily be of the order of the sublime, but if that amateur musician does it in an act in sacred childish search, such co-presence will inspire consciousness for future channeling. We see (hear) the fingers looking for the right note, the rhythm, the intensity. Hence, the music-product, even when extraordinarily well designed in the studio, no matter how excellent it is in some specific dimension, does not surpass in affection the singing of a grandmother putting a baby to sleep. They are things apparently of the same order, but different in the reverberation of Life. AI doesn't get pregnant.

With the caveat, the music to be played is the result of a ritual of articulation between the pure being in energy (this sensation of participation) and the plastic decisions (from the German *Plastik*, a term that Beuys preferred to *Kunst* or *Art*) – there it is, artistic – that by channeling this energy become a magical and mystical device, in the Bergsonian sense, through which the relationship between faith in the beginning is assumed, which leads – because it derives from it – to the unconscious courage to continue. *Afrobeat* or *Funaná* demonstrate this in hypnotic delays that then manage – for as long as – to keep at bay the technological codes that shape them. It remains to be seen to what extent his magic is distorted by the arimanicly conspired (no longer just luciferically perspired) hertz. And it remains to be seen how a rhythmic logic – let's think of the reaggae, which in turn was born from ska... – transmute its original essence (its origin), when the combo explodes on digital platforms.

Longer silence.

In the orbit of Faith, it occurs to me as a sudden audio-sound image the ecstatic whirling in Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, a sublime superhuman voice, on the threshold of infinity and staying there; or the sun-drenched desert of the *gnawi* music of North Africa; music (of the world) to my ears, precisely because *and when* These tune songs into availability to access a (their) spiritual frequency. There are days when I try to feel, experience, relate, understand or diagram these transcendences by *sphering*.

On certain mornings, someone will sing *Ohm* whatever I *want*. In many breakfasts, it will be the spaced rhythms of Kruder & Dorfmeister's *beats* that suit me – excellent music to vacuum the house. At dinners I offered to friends, it was so many times the sound of Oscar Peterson playing Sinatra (hallelujah, without the Voice!) that generated the appropriate atmosphere for socializing. What is certain is that, in other t(r)opics, there is at this very moment an aborigine reciting his *songlines* and a young Finn rehearsing the *tango* (Finland is, after Argentina, the place where this world of sounds is communally lived by many people). In homes near and far, I even know that someone listens to the *Blue Danube* aware that it is instrumental rendition of the healing energies of the *Violet Flame*.

There is therefore music that, in these moments, redeems us the being in flux, the transcendence of sound, rescuing our spiritual vibrations, our becoming and no less our hunger for new aesthetic and cultural horizons. As an intellectual – who someone defined as the one who uses his head (and not just for the occasional *headbanging* to the sound of *Smells...*) – I feel that *I learned it with music to like music*, in continuous mapping of topicalities that generate new topicalities. What concerns the afore mentioned issue of genealogies.

World Music is, therefore, a spherical term that has prevailed in this integrative drift and averse to the waves of sound invasions that put at risk all places and geographies of sounds organized by different cultures. In the same way that investigating biographies and the bodies or physiology of the performers explains other things. Including the hallucinated power that led fascists to cut off Victor Jara's hands.

Mapping, contemplating.

For those who, like me, music are omnipresent lovers, this solo cartography is of the order of an active contemplation (I evoke an anonymous mystic of the century that is read today with the same grace as *Rick Rubin's The Creative Act*, both curiously pedagogues of self-consciousness) also of my own *personhood*. With music I learned to recognize emotions and feelings, to honor them in an instant of catharsis, in prayer, in the party, in the celebration, in the inter legacy (-cultural, -classist, -generational...), in the oracular truth (so often a state of mind and an emotion finding *in that moment a kairotic echo*). In recollection, in confession, in mourning. In death and in life. And to stimulate them so that the creative channel, poetic in the broadest possible sense, is activated. The music calms down, even in the most heated sessions. Garbarek – Norway, mountain, sky, fog – serene. *It works*.

Pause. Silence.

In this landscape of reverberations, echoes, cross-references, in this network of sounds, a *heavy riff* from Entombed insists on remaining valid access to a restless zone of the soul (for how long, is an underlying question, not least because of the creative tension between tradition and innovation – between revering a well-defined aesthetic-place and stimulating the multiple fusions that expand it); the first chords of Mozart's 40th symphony will one day have to be put aside so as not to be make inert *déjà vu* of joviality.

And there you have it, what music do we need to heal wounds and illuminate shadows? Will coda in D major? The soil in Dorian mode? It is through the transtemporal community – the we sometimes in the strict sense of the social sphere, but also broad (the various selves in me, the multiple Self, multiplied by

the open and punctually interconnected portals) – that the spherical journey of each musical genius, each artist, each genre and each culture, also becomes the gestation of a more rounded collective consciousness.

New silence

Now, the vital migrations in the music that connects *others* (from fusion, from endless *crossovers* and *remixes*) into criollo miscegenations, and even the borrowings or even thefts and flagrant shrieks that animate careers – Hotel California d’après Tull –, when a genuine search for the *sonorous* future, not only capillarily animate the ether, they also sediment *sonically* [sic] the above-mentioned design of a collective spiritualization; whether of noise, or of silence, or of the voice, or of things, or of the world as a common experience.

Such a spherical pan-topical totality then leads us to the ends of the Universe. This happens when in the fragmented continuity of sounds a theme emerges to finish off the experience... In Fade Oct... as if entropy were entangled in gravity to teach us something. Breathe closing The Dark Side of the Moon, the other disarmingly simple (mere lowering of the volume) of the last movement of Supper’s Ready... Such quotation marks on the overflowing audio device are equivalent to the moment when listening to one side of a vinyl record is over, it is time to decide whether to turn the record over and play it. Or if it’s time to end the session and silence the mountains.

Magic Scales

I have no idea how, but I feel that the mathematics of sounds has to do with the music of the spheres mentioned above. And I know that scales, in turn, are paths set up over millennia, *trekking* musical *oblige*. Craggy, when Howe takes the Telecaster off the obvious in *Relayer*, liquid when Abercrombie circles around what seems to have nothing to do with it. In the voice, Cesária’s chanting betrays bare feet, while Titina’s lordly serenade in Praça Nova. The scales are fixed serpents whose undulation makes melodies and timbres luminously significant. Tempered by dance, sadness, faith and desire, they become a mirror here of culture, there of personal innovation; the same scale transmuted into a scream, sigh, prayer or lesson of the is-so-and-so-must-be type.

The rhythm scores illuminate the points of the serpent of the notes, especially when the matter already transmuted by the intention is eternalized into a definitive version of the ideate. Godard recorded the moment when Sympathy was still in the belly of the Stones, waiting to be born in the white blackness of those congas and after the falsetto that whistles in the *ginga*. Generation after generation, this terminal gimmick imposes itself on the song itself when, today, live, anxiety moves thousands of uh-uh before the moment originally imagined. Perhaps Sympathy is not exactly a song in these terms. Or perhaps it is an open-ended song, open to the end of repetition, surrendering to the coda without reticence. In fact, as it happens in the layered structure of *Sultans of Swing*. There are songs that are particularly eloquent in demonstrating the elevations that the scales are offering us. Duration is where the human ear meets itself beyond what is perceived, bringing the soul to a deeper awareness of music as an enchanting device, as an assertive pattern in which matrix delighting in its temporal meaning. *Bésame, bésame mucho...*

Pause.

I am sorry, reader soul, that the text is drenched in metaphorical allusions, but the present text, precisely because in a rehearsal register – seeks to give, of what I feel to be music, a living idea. The words seek to performatively equate the naturally musical. The poet of sounds. In my curious and dilettante spiritist spirit, in the *jazzy automatism* that circulates between memories and ideas, intuitions and acquired convictions almost watertight (*thanks, Virginia Woolf, for your flow of consciousness*), music is strictly

something that certain works, more than others, assume as a *magical act*. The *Adagietto* of Mahler's 5th, in a couple of versions, will be a historically unsurpassable moment; and hearing it in *Uri Caine*, ironically destroyed, gives it the status of a transtemporal symbol. Symbol of what? Every pair of genuinely open ears will seek to live that symbol beyond any meaning. When I listen to Carlos Puebla in *Hasta Siempre*, it is not an ideological pandora's box, but political love.

To feel that vibration, beyond any sense... Hence music, despite occasionally raising flags, in the cases of activism and *cultural animation*, functions above all as an epigraph of the text of life and the world. It is at the same time an ephemeral piece of time, but never, as long as we hear it, more than a shadow (Plato, *ouch!*) of something impossible to darn. Of an idea-horizon paradoxically present and without words.

And there, in the musical experience, there is a sublimation of emotions and feelings, of intelligence and aesthetic sense in action. Math-rock will move the amateur mathematician, in the same way that *Blue Monday* buries a depressive era and drags the same generation into clubbing – something happily danceable for some, but for others more melo-dramatic mortals a luxury coffin to Dor that was closing a cycle. That musicians so often have no idea of this kind of impact... It happens, *por supuesto*.

It is in these terms that the music once imagined is for a long time after the moment of creation a natural remedy for the broken heart, a game for play, a pretext for fun, an atmosphere for eroticism, a condition for religion and spirituality. A love always comes first. A top recognition. *Music, I was born for music...*

Muses

For some reason the word music itself derives from the Ancient Greek *mousiké techné* – the art of the muses. The goddesses themselves are musical instances, functional *themes* that interfere in the development to which the most original compositions in the world have arrived. The way in which music in Africa or the East connects sound, dance and speech-word-language itself reminds the West of how Music is less an art than a dimension of Creation, specifically complex in its sempremergence and at the same time permeating a way of vibrating/activating space-time.

In a radically innovative project, which I tried twice without success, we devised an urban lighting plan based on the concept of musical score. Geir Johnson was the guest composer. He has since passed away. In the silent peace of the skies, he will be in a mute jam with Orlando Pantera, who on the Island of Santiago gave birth to so many songs, without having had the opportunity to give them shape – the form that would inevitably dirty them with their primeval power, as Mário Lúcio was able to explain in Catarina Alves Costa's recent film.

Brief waiting. Two minutes of silence.

Without wanting to go into pathetic resonances, and much less into arid and absurdly hypothetical definitions, what I feel and reiterate is that the consciousness of music is a specific dimension of the consciousness of/in *being and being here*; and that in this dimension of being and walking around here something happens through music, through its composition, interpretation, improvisation. There is in music a thematization of sound that makes it, under certain conditions, a spiritual experience, a human way of transcending the *givens* of the sound world. A plane where understanding, wonder, study and evidence of otherwise intangible harmonies in the cosmos. Music is like a ticket to the opening of the being to its expansion precisely as *an* ephemeral arrangement in the infinite interaction between the fundamental waves that make up sound and the fundamental waves that make up everything else, as Stephon Alexander suggests – there it is, physicist and musician. *Voilà*.

In his work *The Jazz of Physics* (2024), the author intones the theory that it will be in musical experience, in his laboratories, that we see the rotating cosmos itself, "the volatile personality of quantum mechanics,

making the boundaries of cosmology and quantum gravity reverberate.” They are metaphors, in the book’s synopsis – borders, reverberation... – to say the way everything is music, so that this dimension of being is made explicit – in an authorship, in an arrangement, in a sudden inspiration, in study. And in the iconic passionate corner in the shower.

The *qualia* of the mind at stake – musically *played* – into the cosmic structure and which a spiritual visionary like John Coltrane transmuted into method-freedom-aesthetic-political act. Paths that the harp of another Coltrane – Alice – and the saxophone of Pharoah Sanders will fly over in *possessed*, guruwise *grooves*, to *Satchidananda*.

When we listen to the best music – the purest, the most intelligent, the most spiritual, the most transcendent – we thus access cosmic codes and their performative malleability, integrating us. Crying or laughing, commotion or panic are to some extent collateral damage. In this emotional and sentimental surrender, in this participation in *the certain understanding of the uncertain*, something appears that elevates the cognitive and even the philosophical to the poetic – *wordless*, *speechless*, in a new dance step between silence and sound, chaos and order, matter and life.

Pause. I think of the fall upwards on *Sunset Mission* by Bohren & der Club of Gore.

The musical gesture can be far-fetched, rehearsed, it can be talking noise, time managed by a blind heart or a decided metronome. It can be left over or sublimated, failing, absent. What I do know is that in the search for the moment that *speaks* – that bleats, moans, cries, screams, recognizes... – a wrong time kills the place opened by inspiration, a delicate-sweet melody ruins a *stoner trip*. Musical ethics becomes a perceptible ticket to eternity.

At the right time, the journey becomes a language of movement not so much of the mind as of the body – whether in a devilish dialogue between bagpipe and harmonica or in a diabolical techno. The ray of metaphors chirps thin in the face of what is sometimes a sound moment. And the point misses, whether what we are listening to is not even... real music. Whether when it is a bastard, libertarian or free sound. Killing in the name of.

I am a witness to this when I heard John Zorn play live at the CCB a theme inspired by Chinese torture... when I programmed Dror Feiler in Lisbon and I don’t know if anyone stayed in the room until the end of a deafening *continuum* of *noise*... or when one day I was confronted with the disarming near-silence of a concept on the subject of the stars... (days after Sonic Youth in Campo Pequeno).

The fact that the mountains can sing (thank you Terje Rypdal) has to do with the fact that pieces of music appear to me as soundscapes that can reflect emotion, feeling, intelligence, reflection, knowledge, consciousness. Something natural that subsists in the artificiality of played-recorded music. Or faith. I think of Garbarek as a consistent ethereal place that I return to whenever I need a little mental freshness.

Music will have to do with the search for and the encounter with resonances – some visible, instinctively snapped up; but other energy foci without a name. Like muses, who once recognized – the musicians offering themselves to them – guide the various approaches to sound. The time dedicated to the search is a vital point in this process.

I therefore speak not so much of perfection – which I do not know if it exists, first of all because the virtuosity associated with it takes me away from the idea – but of grace. Of volatile but also memorable experience of beauty. I know, and I can prove it, that there is no record in the history of humanity as perfect in terms of the economy of notes and sounds as *Communiqué* by the Straits – that is, the ability to avoid *too many notes* to Mozart and at the same time the excessive-sublime (Peter Hook’s methodically inexpressive bass in *Heart and Soul*, from *Closer*... that is, of the Beautiful, which is virtually impossible to

ignore in the Beethoven of the Ninth. Such moments can occur in a couple of bars achieved from a band of friends in a jam without a defined direction, or of course, more evidently, in Strauss's waltz that surrounds the ship in Kubrick's 2001.

To a certain extent, the music that is inspired and breathes in the Beautiful, the Sublime and the Graceful, when it is integrated by the individual or the community in its reception, is SPHERA in co-creative co-existence. This explains the air guitar, a ritual that one day a hairy man turned into a performance design of an auditory experience at the Marquee in London (Iron Maiden were taking their first steps). Or the assertiveness with which in *rai* we are called to clap our hands together, in pure verticality.

Going back and continuing to return to circularities, to what extent is the introductory riff of *Smoke on the Water* from the same batch as the intro of Quinta Sonfonia? To what extent are the similar, the inverted, the expanded, the shortened, mechanical disasters or extraordinary operations? The question will have to do with the question of music as a function. Hence Rory Gallagher in the temple of *attack* and the aesthetics of sweat sounds more genuine to me than any *Disney Fantasia*; at the same time that Mendelsohn, in Wednesday, introduced me to the metal that will come to me via *War Pigs*. Music is inevitably *a dent* and *mass*, so let us know how to "hearsee" the differences

Music as human culture is therefore a palimpsest, where *layers* and dimensions rise to the surface in the most subtle of details. The *pastoral* that unites Genesis to Beethoven is of the order of an invisible but experiential language, even as a refounding myth. The way Clapton, Zeppelin emulate, steal and, in the end, pay homage to the soul of a sonority is the way an original encounter, emerging, becomes Voice (Individual, Cultural, Cosmic). Topicality.

In the same way, pure values are channeled in this way: Satie channels 'something like' simplicity, Debussy something like a lake... These are cases of place-authors. Different to a large extent from authors-vehicles, such as Yes in topographical oceans – spiritual – or Genesis fascinated with a lamb lying on Broadway – surreal?

Poetics is here – I reiterate, insist, reinforce – as *poeting*. To the limit, generating places for the mind to rest from the world. You can do it in a myriad of holy places stored on vinyl or digital. I can think of the amorous purity of Joni Mitchel's Blue, no less than *Annete Peacock's full New York* flair irreverence in *x-dreams*, or Marianne Faithful's seductively macaronic languor – to name a few female souls... On the manly side of the image, the *Freebird biker* mesh comes to mind...

These portals originally take place only at one point on the planet: where a creative consciousness, alone in the group, takes responsibility for assuming bleed, roar, tide, mountain. These places derive from the possible or possible conditions, which condition a grammar of the sensible. The hills are alive...

Pause

Outside, the trees are resounding. Elective affinity with the sounds of the world leads attention to an encounter. Being/between sounds that the composition mirrors. That education shapes.

A good friend who led me to the *Glimmer Twins* explained to me at the time: *music is born of cocaine* – Keith Richards actually took the heroine in his buttocks, not by the arms. Alvin Lee had an unconscious mission: to prolong his father's obsession with instrumental jazz on guitar. Here the question of biography arises. As Amadeus knew how to recreate so well. That is, individual motivations – traumas, drives, deviations, temptations, desires, paranoia, missions... The grammar of meaning, of the intuited, becomes a boat for the Babel of sounds: Liverpool, Manchester, Vienna, Jamaica, Cape Verde, Mali – of departure-arrival-departure. Glimpsing these connections consciously or unconsciously makes us music lovers, lovers of their spectral geographical richness.

In a journey that is currently Ahrimanic, Humanity may be losing its voice, body and soul. For many purposes, the imaginary archive of the infinite music in the world remains, integrating the obscure musician into an altarpiece of incensed stars, integrating a child into the room's playing drum, the thunder in the sky, the thunder of the motorcycle without a carburetor, the chewing of the drunk at dinner. The musician in us plays by listening, by imitating, by recognizing, and finally by sublimating: composing.

Here comes the issue of mediation. In recording, in producing, the alchemy of apparition occurs on a different plane than that of playing well or even assuming community in a choir (see the cultural mediation of AMPAGDP). It is the magic dust of a curatorship of sounds that turns the FMM into a geo-spatial spaceship, just as the velvet and wood design turns the Gulbenkian room into a multisensory chapel. Mediation in the sense of a device for aligning the material with the experience. As when in the flowers or in the desert, in the field, trance is not necessarily silencing sheep but perhaps making us stars in the sphere of the celestial. That celestial that in the old rock concert was reproduced in the sea of lighters. And in which with our eyes closed we immerse ourselves in a classical music concert when all the factors called for correspond to: direction, interpretation, acoustics, atmosphere, program. It was precious to say this about musical temples. And of priests lost in them such as Lee Scratch Perry or Manfred Eicher at ECM, who added flow to the original channels.

The word and the phrase

I take a deep breath.

I will not know how to experience operatic recitatives in the same way as arias with their immediate melodies. Where in the sung song the idea of conciseness assists me is in popular song. Bob Dylan or Sérgio Godinho, or Léo Ferré, are voices, yes, and their moments of intonation are punctually enormously ennobled by the arrangements that frame the word-poem. This is another lever that generates emotional resonances that bind us to places of affection.

The lyrics – for some reason, in English, *lyrics* – in their semi-autonomous musicality, are the music of words, of words, of prosody, almost always living in the space between images and episodes – voids that those who listen fill with the resonance of their reading-experience. Imagining. *First we take Manhattan...* Going down the stairs four by four at the ternary rhythm.

The truth is that there are musical works – themes, records – that close epochs because new eras are glimpsed in them. And they are not always masterpieces. And each era comes to us through what was previously heard. The process leads us to an elliptical conversation. He proposed it, and back to the framework of instrumental music, once I heard a pianist friend rehearsing a piece by Beethoven for examination. At the end, jokingly, he played an entire section again but in the rhythmic dynamics of a syncopated blues. The notes essentially the same. Sounded strangely familiar.

The musical phrase is in this framework another minimum unit of meaning to consider when we play or think about music, and it is equally crucial to consider it in the creative process, consciously - or unconsciously. Perhaps therein lies a rhetorical dimension of musical expression, or at least 'linguistic'. This would explain the speeches of fado, tango, rumba, a ghazal, a souk, as if a subtext resided in the phrase and its chaining. 'I am this, now I will tell a story'.

Crescendo, staccato, piano, allegro... Classical music had time to stabilize discourse and language, and their signs as a cue for the performer's dance with the score. The *drop* in dance music is an element that, like those, frames the experience triggering a reaction. Something similar inhabits the *break* in classic *hard rock*.

The phrasistic is therefore crucial for the construction of the musical experience. Ravel, in Bolero – there it is, transcending a formula, a genre, the canon – takes the phrases to an orgasmic extreme that in the

last measure opens heavy doors of sound. It is no coincidence that Stravinsky is the phrase that worked as an invitation figure at the beginning of Yes' concerts. Igor lit the flames that – the composer could not guess – would burn in contiguity with the fiery entrance of the church organ in *Parallels*, propelling us out of the suite. The *riff* in heavy rock is, in these terms, the assertive, consistent, and not always eloquent phrase that drags the heart into a vortex. *Taratata tata taratatata...* throw us Benny Goodman's clarinet... in a phrase that announces the entire Post-War.

Epilogue | or the true sound in art that I came across as a curator

Last night, a dj saved my life opened my first and only rehearsal (*Life and the Monster*) more than two decades ago. It was a way to recover an existential maxim.

Returning to this topic after the excursion to the *off* tradition of Greil Marcus (situationists *vs.* punk), was justified because this text was written in trance mode, deliberately without recourse to sources. I improvised from what I was envisioning: music as a tool and *output* of *sphering*. Sound palimpsest, noise turned into work, works-noise, places-people elevated to Forms.

Reflection on aboriginal songlines was *left out*. But in the drift, I tried to show how music is a particular dimension of connection – of the Human with himself reconnected, in multiple registers and regimes of affectation. Catharsis and freedom are records of a grid of sounds that sometimes asserts itself and sometimes is diluted in noise and silence.

Decades ago, when visiting Nuno Cera's exhibition at *Luzboa* in 2004, whose images were portraits of the Sun, I was struck by the ambient sound, with an evident physical impact, which I 'read' as something at the same time unique and absolutely universal... it was a real sound. When the artist explains to me that it was the sound actually emitted by the *Astro-king*, I was speechless. Today, I reiterate the conversation with this moment: – Will there be music for ears other than humans? A way to recover the provocation from the beginning of this text. Well, yes, there it is, if the mountains sang... And it's not that they sing?

In another installation, also at *Luzboa* in 2004, Daniel Schläepfer proposed the experimentation of a cistern in the Fado Museum, from a drop of water that fell there day after day, minute after minute. In fact, a drop of water that the artist surprised in space, and that with a team of sound designers he transmuted into a quadriphonic immersion that he put in dialogue with the images projected on the walls. If in Cera I experience the recording of a brutal energy, in *Undae* by Schläepfer I experienced the transmutation of the invisible – the in practice inaudible – in a chaotic composition that did not let me find any other nexus than that of my own willingness to stay there in hypnosis.

There were two moments pregnant with abstraction – but, in fact, absolutely concrete – that I put in dialogue with the role of music in the art of the Belgians *HetPakt*. And I will stick to two pieces in which the experience of sound is spatially and performatively deconstructed and thus radically present in terms of the perception of how there is music beyond any interpretation or recording, specifically in the crossing of reality through the body.

In *Fado Morgana* – the work mentioned above – and *El Sol*, which I curated in another edition of the *Skyway Festival*, the sources of each instrument – in the first case the human voice, in the second the instruments of a band – meet the listener-spectator as he moves; thus, he reconstructs, step by step, the complexity of the whole from the isolated fragment. Something like a *social symphony*, therefore, emerges not from the sealed object, but from a theatrical staging that celebrates music as a puzzle. Despite their apparent simplicity, these two works have both been repeatedly presented at festivals, each time as conceptual and performative variations on an original idea. They thus belong to a kind of *moving pedagogy of listening*: a practice that draws us out of the apathy of consumption.

The music we sing to the mountains I believe is a sound palimpsest that humanizes being and being; and it is when one can speak of creative truth and aesthetic engagement. I couldn't get a soundtrack a la Bernard Hermann or Miklos Rosa for reading this article – perhaps such sounds would give color to the dryness of the typeface. This text, I am aware of this, did unveil itself as a spiral story that sought its musicality in a fluid structure, in a *jam* between myself and my (weak) consciousness. In the center of the vertiginous off-center mandala, I underline then: the creative tension noise/silence inhabits the musical language of sounds. In its expansion, rhizomatically linked living patterns sprout, exposing in the ether – for us, who are not mountains – the most *connected language* of the universe in which we have incarnated.

The music we sing to the mountains, I believe, is a sound palimpsest that humanizes being and existing; and that's when you can talk about creative truth and aesthetic engagement. I couldn't order a soundtrack a la Bernard Hermann or Miklos Rosa for reading this article – perhaps such sounds would give colour to the dryness of the typeface. This text, I am aware of this, did unveil itself as a spiral story that sought its musicality in a fluid structure, in a jam between myself and my (weak) consciousness. In the centre of the vertiginous off-centre mandala, I underline then: the creative tension noise/silence inhabits the musical language of sounds. In its expansion, rhizomatically linked living patterns sprout, exposing in the ether – for us, who are not mountains – the most connected language of the universe in which we have incarnated.

Mário Caeiro

Spoiler alert

Below I explain, in order of appearance in the text, the full names of songs referred to and their reference interpreters, as well as the songs from which I have taken textual fragments. Other titles and verses of songs in Portuguese, which I integrate into my language, and which I deliberately refuse to make explicit, so as not to lose the appropriative logic of *sampling*, I punctually put in italics.

I can't keep from crying | *I Can't Keep from Crying* | Ten Years After
In My Time of Dying | Led Zeppelin
Listen | *Awaken* | Yes
Satisfaction | (*I Can't Get No*) *Satisfaction* | The Rolling Stones
Smells... | *Smells Like Teen Spirit* | Nirvana
Hotel California | The Eagles
Breathe | *The Dark Side of the Moon* | Pink Floyd
Supper's Ready | Genesis
Relayer | Yes
Sympathy | *Sympathy for the Devil* | The Rolling Stones
Sultans of Swing | Dire Straits
Bésame, bésame mucho... | *Bésame mucho* | Consuelo Velázquez
Música, eu nasci para a música... | *A Minha Música* | José Cid
Satchidananda | *Journey in Satchidananda* | *Journey in Satchidananda* | Alice Coltrane
Killing in the name of... | *Killing in the name* | Rage Against the Machine
Mannish Boy | Muddy Waters
Smoke on the Water | Deep Purple
Quinta Sinfonia | *Sinfonia n.º 5 em Dó menor Op. 67* | Ludvig van Beethoven
War Pigs | Black Sabbath
Freebird | Lynyrd Skynyrd
The hills are alive... | *The Sound of Music* | Julie Andrews
First, we take Manhattan | Leonard Cohen
Last night a dj saved my life | Indeeep

*IN THE CLEARINGS OF
DWELLING*



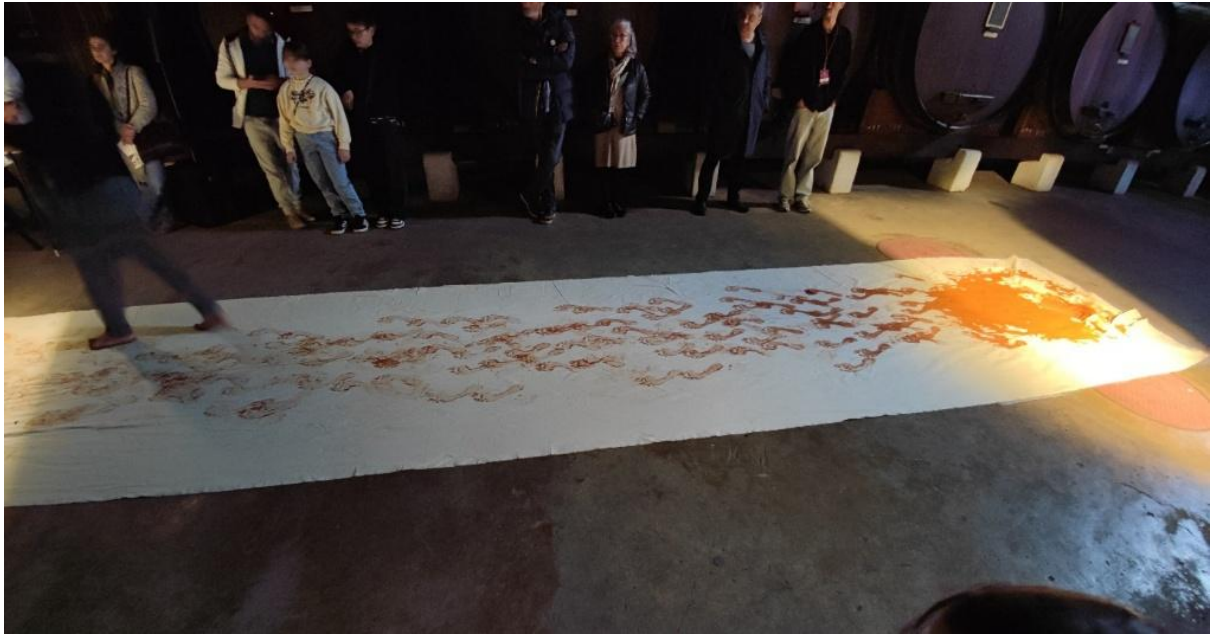
Thierry Ferreira, *In the Clearings of Dwelling*, 2026, Performance · Installation · Video



Thierry Ferreira, *Walking on Earth*, 2026, Performance · Installation · Video



Thierry Ferreira, *Walking on Earth*, 2026, Performance · Installation · Video



Thierry Ferreira, *Walking on Earth*, 2026, Performance · Installation · Video



Thierry Ferreira, *Walking on Earth*, 2026, Performance · Installation · Video

Dwelling may be the body's most ancient gesture.

Before the house, before shelter, and even before the idea of place, there is a body that walks. A body that comes to know the world through movement; that transforms matter while allowing itself to be transformed by it; and that, in crossing a territory, opens up places where previously there was only space.

Walking upon the Earth emerges from this primordial condition.

A body moves repeatedly between two points: the earth and its elevation. It carries, deposits and returns. The action recurs without seeking mere repetition. Each passage leaves a trace; each footprint subtly alters the ground beneath it. Time ceases to be a measure and becomes visible matter.

Walking is no longer simply displacement. It becomes a way of dwelling.

The work understands dwelling not as permanence or possession, but as a relationship continually formed between body, matter, time and territory. To dwell is to bring place into being through presence; it is to allow the world to transform us as we transform it.

The body ceases to be the mere executor of an action and becomes a mediator between what endures and what changes, between memory and event, between construction and disappearance. The sculpture does not emerge as a preconceived object, but as the consequence of an accumulative process in which each gesture extends the one before it and prepares the next.

Earth – both origin and destination – is the work's central material. It carries within it geological, historical and symbolic time. As it passes through the hands and the body, it ceases to be mere substance and becomes language: a site upon which the gesture is inscribed and where matter, in turn, responds, receiving the presence without ever fixing it permanently.

A video unfolds alongside the performance. In it, a small house made of clay slowly dissolves, returning to the matter from which it emerged. The house ceases to be architecture and becomes a question.

What remains when form disappears? Where does dwelling reside when shelter no longer exists?

The work does not seek to answer. It keeps the question open.

A recited poem runs through this sequence of images. The voice neither explains what we see nor directs its interpretation. It dwells in the interval between body and matter, extending the experience into the realm of listening. If the body writes upon the earth, the word inscribes itself in memory. Just as gesture leaves traces in matter, the voice leaves traces in the inner time of the listener.

Body, earth and word cease, therefore, to be autonomous elements. They become distinct modes of the same inscription.

It is within this interweaving that the clearing emerges.

Not as a physical location, but as an interval in which something becomes momentarily visible: a space of suspension where dwelling ceases to mean occupying and comes instead to mean entering into relation. The clearing is not the destination of the action. It is what the action itself makes possible.

At the end of the performance, the material remains available for the audience to engage with. The accumulated earth no longer belongs to the initial gesture and opens itself to the actions of other bodies. The work extends beyond the artist, transforming an individual experience into a shared practice of making, listening and transformation.

Dwelling is thus revealed less as a solitary act than as an experience of the common.

Walking upon the Earth does not present a completed form. It opens up a process. It proposes an experience in which each gesture ceases to assert a presence and begins instead to rehearse a relationship.

Perhaps dwelling in the world begins precisely here: not in the construction of a place in which to remain, but in the capacity to open a clearing where matter, body and word may, however briefly, recognise one another.

Walking upon the
 earth...
 It is not just moving
 forward.
 It is to remember.

 Before our names,
 before the cities,
 Before the borders
 drawn by the human
 hand...

 The earth already
 existed.
 Silent.
 Patient.

 Waiting
 For the weight
 of the first step.

 The earth sustains us
 long before
 we learn
 to sustain it.

 Dark matter.
 Fertile.

 Ancient dust
 from crumbling
 mountains.

 Slow memory

 Breathing on it...
 it's to return
 to the origin.

 Because we too
 are earth.

 We carry it in our
 hands.
 On the skin.
 Within the bones...
 bones that one day
 will return
 to your slow stillness.

 And as we walk
 Conveying Matter
 of a place
 for another...

 The earth changes shape.
 But never
 Lose your memory.

 It stands on hills.
 Crumbles into powder.

of forests,
 seas,
 and creatures.

 The earth is not just
 ground.
 The earth
 is time.

 Time stored in grains.
 Time that breathes
 in silence
 beneath our feet.

 Every handful
 that the hands raise ...

 It is a fragment of the
 planet.
 Each grain
 a tiny trace
 of what we once were.

 We walk upon it
 as if it were a surface.

 But the earth
 is depth.
 Our feet touch it...

 and she answers.
 Leave us your dust.

 It receives our footprint.
 An old gesture.

 It accumulates.
 Disperse.

 Like us.
 Maybe that's why
 We touch the earth.
 To remember
 that we are not
 above the world...

 But within it.
 Every step
 It is a question.

 Every footprint
 an answer
 that is incomplete.

 And in the repeated act
 of walking...
 of carrying...
 of touching...
 of returning ...

 The Earth teaches us
 Something old.

A silent pact
 between the body
 and the world.

 The human being
 walks...
 But it is the land
 that remembers.

 Remembers
 the weight of the step.
 The insistence of the
 gesture.

 The slow
 repetition
 of time.

 Hence the footprint
 It's not just branding.
 It is writing.

 A writing of the body
 on the skin
 of the planet.

 Walking
 is to draw.

 To move earth
 is to sculpt
 time.

 That all the movement
 Leaves memory.

 That the whole body
 leaves territory.
 And that even
 The lightest step...

 It is already an
 inscription
 on the living skin
 of the planet.

 Concept and authorship:
 Thierry Ferreira
 Performer: Thierry
 Ferreira

 Text: Thierry Ferreira

 Declamation: Sabrina
 Coco

In the Clearings of Dwelling

Carlos Lampreia

Earth

On the stony escarpment the pebbles move
That allows the circumference of balance
Through the forest we flee the clearing that burns the sun
In the Dark a flower opens on a path

Tree

Trees that run to the sky
Bridges that lead to the same place
Rivers that deceive other rivers
Animals getting tired

Trees that talk to each other
Trees that like to be on the other side
A tree that talks to itself
A flower lands on a butterfly

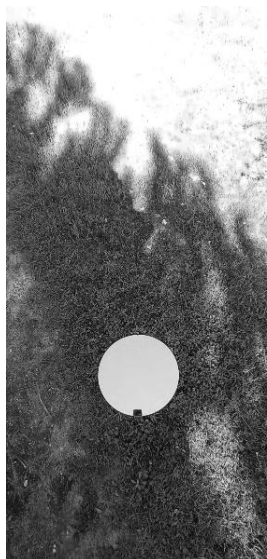
House

My house is wet
Temporary shelter reclaimed by the water
A bush came in and closed the door
The house enfolds me and keeps the sky all to myself
Space tears the earth with violence
Finding Calm

I walk along fine lines
Water seeps into my shoes
There is urgency in this corner
But it's enough for my moment
A brick floats to dry the feet

House with doors that cannot be entered
I killed a tree to make a bed
I placed it in the water to see the sky reflected

No one comes to my house
The house where there is no floor
The bed floats between the lines
We cannot fall into the water



Ponta Ruiva (Red Tip)

A perfect and geometric white line is drawn on one of the many black basalt stones that inhabit the beach of Ponta Ruiva. It looks like a human gesture made of paint, but its depth betrays its natural provenance.

Crushed line of white crystals that, for obscure reasons, intruded into the blackness of the rocks that define the small, deserted bay.

I walk over them slowly, trying to avoid the certain and unexpected fall with which the round surfaces provoke my feet. The force they exert on each of them forces all the muscles of the body to rare designs that reflect the undulating shape of the stones inside me.

I notice all these movements and tensions because in the last few days a red pain has taken over my body, in such a way that when the ground becomes more curved and summons those muscles touched by pain, it spreads my legs to the brain.

Perhaps that is why I was so sensitive to the white line on the stone, because it is also conditioned by the black grip that surrounds it. Thus, it is as if my muscles were compressed into a chromatic intermittence of a bright red in those moments and in those points, just as the stone of the white line is compressed among the basaltic blackness.

And I thought, if the brain could be considered a muscle, it would be like having a whole body sometimes of tight of ideas, sometimes tight, sometimes relaxed; and i, here on Ponta Ruiva beach, could let myself be carried away in an exercise of muscular thoughts that breath in rythm with me.

Something similar seemed to be happening all around, since the said Ponta Ruiva was also a part of the immense mass of reddish land that curved in a circular bay against the water... a boundary where basalt stones were embedded,rolling everywhere, sonorously pressed by the sea, and in turn compressing the white line.

The white line and my muscles were compressed by the black stones, which in turn were compressed by the red earth and the sea... all geological and organic elements committing.

They were clearings of dwelling.

It was nature becoming aware of itself.

NOTES

About the words, the drawings and the photographs

The texts, drawings and photographs were produced in the context of walking, either solo or in the company of other multidisciplinary and wandering beings who propose to inhabit and think about the humanized landscape, more specifically, in the context of the project 'Collective Atlas, inventory of a landscape', a project developed by the Terra Corpo collective with the support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Landscape Museum, among others.

On spirituality, language and art

Spirituality is an awareness, a transcendence, which is placed before us as a search for our order in the cosmos; what I am and what I do here. To meet this demand, the soul would have to ascend from the world of matter to the world of ideas (Plato).

If in Cartesian rationalism the superiority of the mind is still conceived as a grace separate from the body, with idealism and the *Zeitgeist* (Hegel), the spirit evolves over time, contributing to a

collective human self-consciousness. Thus, and since human reason is part of the natural world, we can say that it is a means for nature to be aware of itself. (Schelling)

In Romanticism this relationship between man and nature will be celebrated, the spirit that wants to be visible nature, and man delights in it, whether in the search for the balance of beauty, or in the tensions of the sublime (Burke) felt in the work of Caspar David Friedrich or in Novalis in the search for the blue flower.

However, human singularity is cruel, because the effort that the human being makes in the search for the meaning of things will lead to excesses, as in phenomenology where it is stated that being and consciousness exist, but objects may not (Husserl). With this skepticism in relation to matter, reality was reduced to the way human beings perceive slavery of the senses where nature only existed "for us".

Existentialism will add, however, that the human being is also shaped by site, *Dasein*, Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world'. In the text 'building, dwelling, thinking' establishes a relationship between the word be (*ich bin*) and build (*baum*). He will say that before a bridge exists, there are many positions along the river that can be occupied by something, but it is the bridge that gives rise to a site.

With existentialism, the phenomenological idea of considering man and his perception as the source of all knowledge is completed, in order to admit that place interferes with his perception; that is, man is while he inhabits, occupying and transforming nature, in the double condition of observer and intervening.

With human beings, the cosmos developed the ability to translate matter and to think about itself (Sagan). The universe without man would be like a dense forest at night: things exist, but they are in total darkness. Human consciousness is the 'clearing' where light enters and things finally appear as things, the 'clearing of Being' (Heidegger).

What helps to build individual consciousness and allows collective consciousness is language, an imperfect code of symbols, for all philosophy is a 'critique of language' (Wittgenstein). The way we think is unclear, we use many other languages, it is an intermittent collage of impressions produced by the senses and articulated through codes, which enables moments of awareness, which we could call 'clearings of feeling'.

In the same way that being and acting are part of the human condition, the 'clearings of feeling' only occur in the face of the 'clearings of inhabiting'. Human beings who look at the darkness of nature with an open flashlight from a tiny planet in the universe.

Art as a way of feeling and inhabiting that occurs through a complex system of languages, a metalanguage, has been expanding its field of action in recent years. Art in the expanded field (Krauss) enabled radical experiments that allowed artists to broaden context, and act in the 'clearings of inhabiting', contributing more and more to the understanding of the natural and universal phenomenon.

About Minimal art

In the early 60s, suspending modernism and abstract expressionism, something began to change in the art world. Donald Judd proclaims that a painting is not a rectangle with an image, but rather a plane more or less distant from the wall, that is, an object that establishes a relationship with it. He thus invented the concept of 'specific objects', in which artistic objects must be adapted to the gallery, the so-called 'white cube' space, which will make his pieces gain volume on the wall and also occupy the floor.

Art, against the idea of an illusionist flat painting, thus begins to become spatial and contextual, since it should be three-dimensional like everything else. Carl Andre and Dan Flavin, among others, will contribute to developing these principles by activating the entire gallery space, either through a focus on materiality or the manipulation of light. Critics would call this type of space art minimalism, but none of these artists saw themselves in the term.

5.4 About Land art

In the second half of the 1960s, some of these artists, inspired by the spirit of the beat generation and the new ecological ideals, extended their activities to the abstract outer space, and the American deserts became witnesses to experiments that would ridicule minimalist spatial expansion. Sculpture in the expanded field replaced the abstract space of the 'white cube' with huge real spaces. Walter de Maria launched the principles in 1960, through texts such as 'art yard' and 'on the importance of natural disasters', where he proposes a set of spatial actions to be carried out outdoors, such as an artistic performance in which an immense courtyard is excavated by bulldozers, and declares his entropic passion for great natural disasters saying that nature is always grander than art.

He will move away to the desert to make his territorial marks such as 'Mile long drawing', geometric marks that guided us through nature and '*Lightnig Field*', a total work of art that only nature is able to complete, in which a mesh of spikes placed in the desert awaits some storm. In 1966, Robert Smithson began his regular work with his earthworks, and after studying the entropic processes of the industrial structures of the New York suburbs, wrote his seminal text 'a sedimentation of the mind, earth projects'. In it he will say that all art corresponds to denaturalization, calling the interventions he carries out in the desert as 'in-site', and the displacements of material to the gallery as 'non-site'. He argues that everything is subject to cracking and oxidation, and for this reason he produces works in which leaks of raw material in various places accelerate entropy. Minimalism and Land art expanded the concept of context, site, and matter from the abstract space of the white cube to the natural space of the desert, but this expansion would soon move into the urban place.

About Conceptual art

At the end of the 60s, mainly due to the difficulties that Land art posed in terms of exhibition and communication of works, the registration, representation and idea of the object would gain decisive importance. The artists took their concerns with the context to the limit and became aware that the great human transformation was taking place in the urban compact and began to monitor their behavior in society. Following the ideas of Henry Flint, who used the word as an artistic form, and who produced the first approaches to concept art, dividing it into linguistic approximations (concept art) and mathematical approximations (structure art), they began to measure and collect evidence of these behaviors. Lawrence Weiner, also a New York artist, sold linguistic descriptions of actions as art, which he wrote on gallery walls, and the buyer could produce the art himself. He used to say that the artist may not build or have his work built, he just needs to enunciate it. Conceptual art abolished the object, because it was concerned with the things and situations that man produces in society, defending a compromise between making and the passion for conception, something between Sol Lewitt's 'the concept is the machine that makes art' and Huebler's position saying, 'I don't want to add one more object to the world'. Thus, if minimal art approaches architecture as a producer of artificial space within the white cube, and Land art approaches urbanism, questioning the way we mark and structure the territory in order to walk and inhabit, conceptual art questions the processes of conception of our ideals and the things we produce, that is, another way in which nature asserts and transforms itself.

5.6 On Ideas, place, and matter

Man, always exists and thinks from a certain place, where his actions, with greater or lesser consequences, end up manifesting themselves. These inhabited and manipulated places are the expression of different cultures, and their sum is part of what we consider our world, a planet transformed by its own organic, making man part of it and being one of the beings that most affects it with its interaction. When man thinks, he thinks about something, so his interiority is a process of reflection, an awareness of what is external to him and of the self, which is acting, creating a universe of ideals and objectives that characterize him in an autonomous and unique way. The interaction with the surrounding place, people and things determines the expression of this interiority, a dialectical process of perception and expression, an interaction that will condition the place where we live. Man is thus constituted as an idea, place and matter that is transformed, and this trilogy as an operative tool develops in three distinct times, that of the self, that of the place, and that of the world, and contributes to the opening of the clearing of understanding of the universe.

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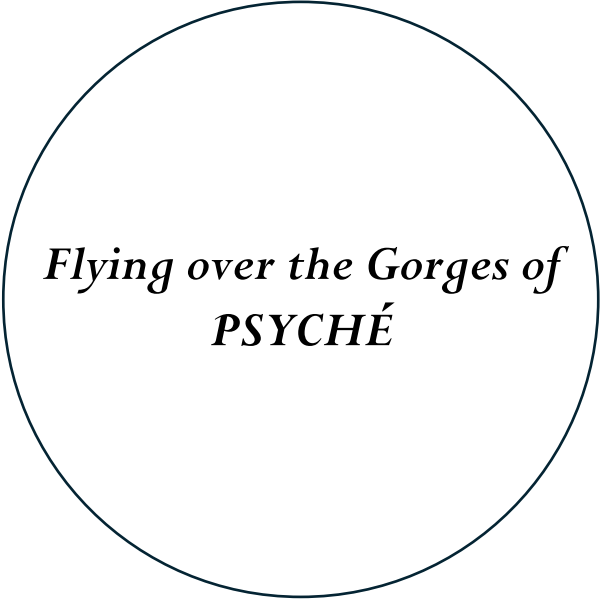
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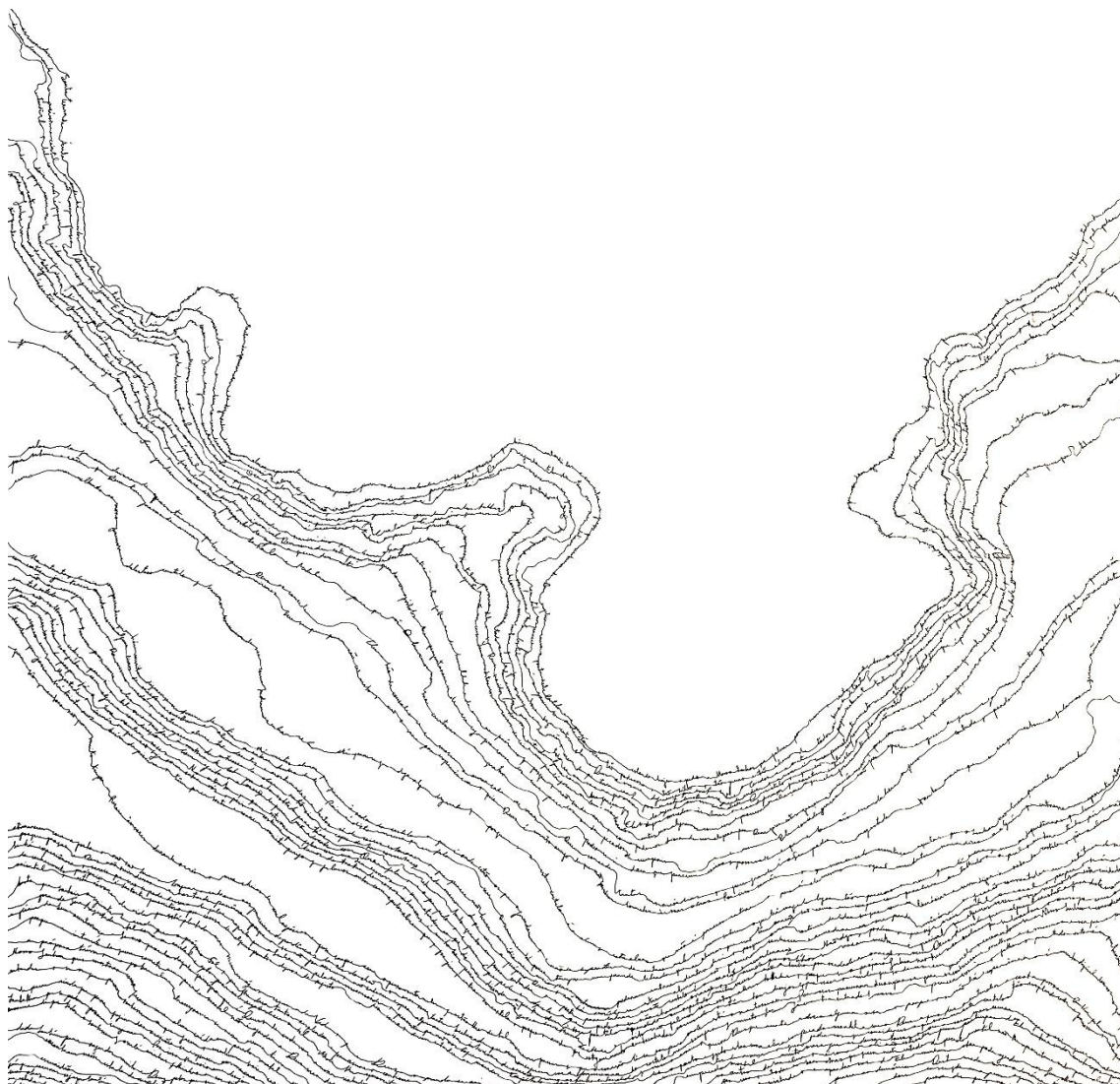
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In the Clearings of Dwelling



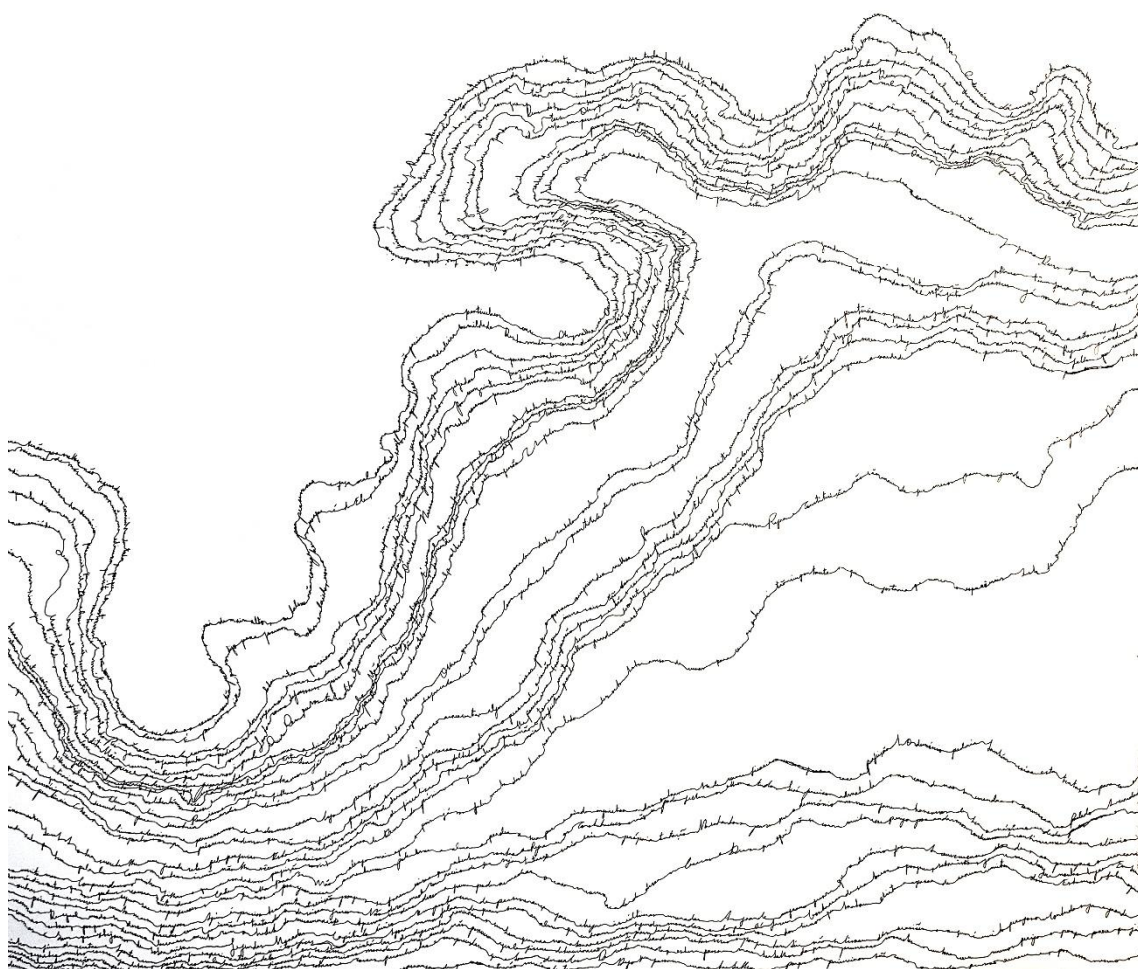
Flying over the Gorges of
PSYCHÉ



Adélia Santos Costa, *Moradas*, 2026, Drawing, ink on paper, 57 x 77,5 cm



Adélia Santos Costa, *Moradas*, 2026, Drawing, ink on paper, 57 x 77,5 cm



Adélia Santos Costa, *Moradas*, 2026, Drawing, ink on paper, 57 x 77,5 cm

Technical Sheet

Author: Adélia Santos Costa

Title: Moradas (Dwellings)

Year: 2026

Measurements: 57x77,5

Technic: Drawing

Materials: Paper, ink

Authorial Statement

Dwellings is an artistic work that derived from the theme "Flying over the canyons of the psyche", proposed by the SPHERA II project. Each drawing is a continuation of the other and seeks, at the same time, an idea of interior landscape. The text written in the artistic piece is based on the mystical masterpiece entitled "The Mansions" or "Interior Castle" by Saint Teresa of Avila, written in 1577

Adélia Santos Costa

Flying over the Gorges of Psyché

Michelle Nahon

This theme, suggested as the title for one of the chapters of the book “*Spherical Journeys. On the Earth as within the Light*”, brings to mind the Greek word ‘*psuché*’, whose primary meaning is ‘breath’. The newborn, if it is to live, must take its first breath – often difficult and laborious – a cry of life, a victory over death; it is the moment of the first use of its lungs – the breath – and its throat – the cry – it is its first participation in earthly life as an individual, living and independent.

This breath will be present throughout the being’s life, throughout the life of each of us; it is the sign of our relationship with the Earth, Mother Earth; this breath that animates us and binds us to her through the oxygen she produces, particularly in her oceans. It is the ‘breath of life’, as the Greek term specifies, and also the ‘principle of life’.

Then, in the translation from Greek into French, we find a second meaning for ‘*psuché*’: the soul. But what is the soul? The Greeks, the masters of philosophy, asked themselves many questions in an attempt to define it. We can trace the evolution of its meaning through the definitions given for ‘*psuché*’ and the examples of its usage. For the pre-Socratics, it was primarily a vital principle linked to the Cosmos. Later, it became more individualised; it was the seat of a human being’s emotions, feelings and passions. However, a question arises in the quest for a precise definition: is the soul mortal or immortal? A central question that remains relevant to this day! Plato (c. 428/27–348/47 BC) arrives and establishes his school. ‘*Psuché*’ is then seen more in terms of rationality than of feelings, and Plato settles on the immortality of the soul in a text, a dialogue, entitled *Phaedo*, which recounts Socrates’ final words and his death. Why the name *Phaedo*? Let us pause for a moment, as it is a very beautiful title for a dialogue. It is composed of two Greek words: light and to give: the one who gives light.

Little by little, the term *psuché* became problematic because of its immaterial and elusive character, and anthropomorphism led to a new use of the word: *Psyché* came to mean “a living being, a person”, since what remained fundamental in the background were breath and life.

But what becomes of this soul at death? In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the word *psuché* refers to the soul of the deceased which has descended into the underworld and become a shade. It should be noted in passing that the ancient underworld bears little resemblance to the hell described in the Christian religion. It is simply the subterranean realm to which the soul goes after death, separating itself from the body of the deceased person. Yet there, as in earthly life, the soul undergoes trials and transformations. The five rivers of this underworld have evocative names: the Styx, the tributary of hatred; the Phlegethon, a river of flames; the Acheron, the river of sorrow; the Cocytus, the torrent of lamentation; and the Lethe, the stream of forgetfulness.¹⁵²

How, indeed, can one translate the immaterial and airy quality of the breath of life? A more cheerful and symbolic usage is also found in Greek texts: another meaning of *psuché* is “butterfly”. Bailly’s Greek–French dictionary specifies: “a symbol of the immortality of the soul among the ancients, because of the transformation of the caterpillar or chrysalis into a butterfly.” The breath that inhabits human beings changes throughout life: it becomes more defined and undergoes transformation. In French, there is the expression *c’était une belle âme* (“she/he was a beautiful soul”), which pays tribute to a person’s human, moral and spiritual qualities. And this beauty of the soul possesses the lightness

¹⁵²<https://www.google.com/search?q=psyché%2C+nom+d%27un+fleuve+%3F+%3F&oq=psyché&aqs=chrome.69i59j69i57j0i512l4j0i20i263i512j46i512l3.6890j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> (11/01/2026)

of a butterfly, with its vivid colours and graceful flight carrying it delicately and joyfully from flower to flower.

One can only emphasise this symbol of the soul chosen by the Greeks, which opens the way to many developments to which we shall return, for the dictionary offers yet another meaning: *psuché* is also a plant, known in Greek as *tripolion*. In French it has been given the evocative name *aster*, since it bears small star-shaped flowers.

These latter two meanings of *psuché* – butterfly and plant – clearly refer to the beauty of the soul and to its affinity with the air and the heavens.

Finally, when written with a capital letter, *Psyché* is a female mythological figure: the personification of the soul, depicted with butterfly wings. A single, relatively late author, Apuleius (c. 125–after 170), a Middle Platonist poet, published in Latin a work that became famous, *The Metamorphoses*. In it he introduces us to the myth of *Psyché* – translated into French as *Psyché* and into English as *Psyche* – which was probably based on an ancient oral tale and recounts the life of a mortal woman who became immortal. The title chosen by Apuleius aptly highlights the transformations undergone by *Psyche* during her earthly life and throughout the centuries. In this work we find the theme of the soul made immortal through the intervention of the Greek gods. Briefly summarised, the story runs as follows: *Psyche* is so beautiful that no suitor dares approach her, and she arouses the jealousy of *Aphrodite*, goddess of Beauty, one of whose attributes she embodies. Jealous of *Psyche*'s beauty, *Aphrodite* orders her son *Eros*, god of Love, to make *Psyche* fall in love with a monster. Instead, *Eros* himself falls in love with her. After many incidents, some of them dramatic, *Eros* obtains *Zeus*'s permission to marry *Psyche*, who, by becoming the wife of a god, herself becomes immortal. Here again we encounter the central theme of the myth: the immortality of the soul.

A twentieth-century psychologist, Carl Gustav Jung, devoted his life to understanding the workings of the human psyche, and he was fascinated by the Greek meanings of *psuché*. He frequently returned to them and, for example, in *Symbols of Transformation (Metamorphoses of the Soul and Its Symbols)*, he writes: "...the butterfly is both allegory and symbol of the psyche."¹⁵³

Indeed, a thousand images come to mind when one evokes the soul-butterfly: its many colours, its delicate and wavering flights, its choice of fragrant and brightly coloured blossoms. The soul is linked to the organs of the senses, for it consists of emotions and images. It fulfils the role of the butterfly in the subtle connection it establishes between body and spirit, fluttering from one to the other, bringing the refined nectar of the spirit to the energy of the body, while nourishing itself through this continual movement that transforms it into presence and light.

Jung was right to insist upon the phrase "both at once". Allegory belongs to the rational level which it stimulates. Symbol belongs to another level of consciousness; it is never wholly explained. Returning to it allows one, with each new encounter, to perceive a fresh aspect of its inexhaustible mystery.

Starting from one of his patient's dreams, Jung presents a particular aspect of the transformation from chrysalis to butterfly – an image that does not immediately come to mind, since we tend to imagine or paint a colourful, radiant butterfly. Yet there are countless kinds of butterflies, and his patient's dream featured a small butterfly that emerges in houses: a moth. It is true that all butterflies undergo this transformation, and imagining a tiny, drab-coloured moth emerging from

¹⁵³ Genève, Librairie de l'université, Georg et Cie, 1973, p. 421.

its chrysalis also evokes and emphasises the vital energy required to attain a new stage in the development of consciousness.

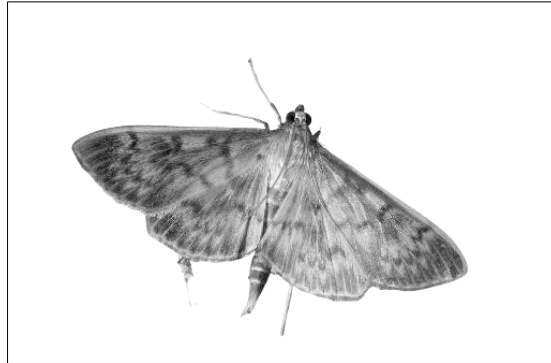


Fig. 1- A moth

Jung's patient awoke with the image of the butterfly vivid in her mind, and suddenly a poem imposed itself upon her. She sent it to Jung, who entitled the chapter in which he presents it **"The Song of the Moth."** The poem is addressed to the Sun:

The Moth to the Sun

*I longed for thee when first I crawled to consciousness.
My dreams were all of thee when in the chrysalis I lay.
Oft myriads of my kind beat out their lives
Against some feeble spark once caught from thee.
And one hour more — and my poor life is gone;
Yet my last effort, as my first desire, shall be
But to approach thy glory; then, having gained
One raptured glance, I'll die content.
For I, the source of beauty, warmth and life
Have in his perfect splendour once beheld.*

This is followed by Jung's own translation, entitled **"The Moth to the Sun"**, wrote bu Jung: *I yearned for you from the first awakening of my worm-like consciousness. I dreamed only of you when I lay within the chrysalis. Countless multitudes of my kind perish as they fly towards some faint spark that has emanated from you. One hour more, and my frail existence will be over. But my final effort, like my first desire, shall have no other aim than to draw near to your glory. Then, having caught sight of you in a moment of ecstasy, I shall die content, for once I shall have contemplated, in its perfect splendour, the source of beauty, warmth and life.*

The Greek word *khrysallis* is derived from *khrysos*, meaning "gold". This protective envelope awaiting birth is striking because of its colour, but it also symbolises a potential in gestation; and — whether by coincidence or not — the golden chrysalis gives way to an insect seeking the gold of the sun. Yet such a transformation takes place in darkness, and the butterfly enclosed within the chrysalis must expend all its energy in order to emerge from the cocoon.

Jung studies the metamorphoses of the soul as it seeks fulfilment, gradually rising beyond the earthly plane and "taking flight" towards heaven, towards the divine. The energy deployed by the soul is not physical but psychic, and Jung uses the Latin term *libido* to designate it, a word whose primary meaning is "desire" and whose secondary meaning is "voluptuous pleasure". This term brought him into conflict with Freud, who had already adopted it, but Jung greatly broadened its meaning to encompass all psychic energy, whereas Freud tended to restrict it to sexual energy. In several of his books, Jung argues for the importance of this spiritual energy, which he regarded as the very source

of human life. He compares it to the physical energy studied by physicists and stresses that it is universal and immortal, both immanent and transcendent. In constant activity¹⁵⁴, the libido spiritually impels us towards the transcendent, just as the moth is drawn to the sun, ready to die for the chance of beholding it.

The dreamer later wrote to Jung again. Re-reading a philosophical article she had encountered the previous year, she “came across these words”, as she put it: “The same passionate yearning of the moth for the star, of man for God.”¹⁵⁵ Consciously she had forgotten the passage, yet it had remained imprinted within her, and her unconscious brought it back to her through a dream and a poem.

The forces of psychic energy, constantly at work, were there to remind her of the path in life she was called to fulfil, expressing themselves through dreams, poems and synchronicities, and revealing the interdependence of the personal and the universal.

Our personal *Sphera* is created, unfolds, blazes forth and becomes illuminated, with its moments of darkness and rebirth.

Therefore, in our search for wholeness, let us continue to soar above the “Gorges of the Psyche”, so revealing of our inner richness, bearing within them joy, peace and love.



Fig. 2- The butterfly emerging from its cocoon

The mind reasons; the soul resonates.

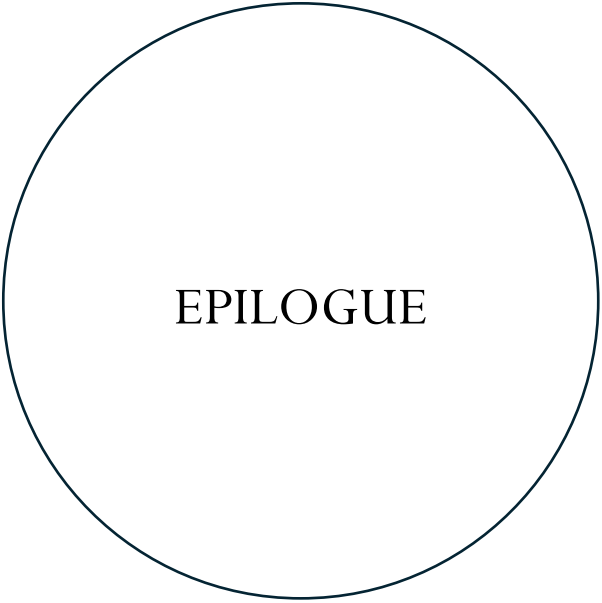
The mind moves; the soul is moved.

The mind communicates; the soul communes.

François Cheng, *De l'âme, sept lettres à une amie*, Ed. Albin Michel, 2016.

¹⁵⁴ *Métamorphoses de l'âme et ses symboles*. (Cf. note1).

¹⁵⁵ *Id.*, p.163.



EPILOGUE

Art as a process and crowning achievement

The Work of Covenant of Man and the World

Eric Coulon

The modern tendency to multiply symbolic and technical intermediaries between human beings and the world has today led, notably through the omnipresence of digital technologies of communication and virtualisation in everyday life, to a critical distancing from reality. Human beings are increasingly both the agents and the unwitting victims of a loss of contact with reality. The harmful effects are as much individual as they are collective. To this situation must be added the underlying existence of a universal tendency – at least within the modern Western world – for human beings to keep the world and things at a distance from themselves, owing to a pre-reflective attitude of objectification and reification towards them. Within this subject–object dualism, representation, while undergoing a profound crisis for more than a century, has become overabundant and has imposed its screen of mediations at the expense of a relation of presence.

Art, this open field of experience in which behaviour, skill, creation, and works are all at stake, is implicated in more than one respect. We shall, however, retain only two essential points. First, it appears that an art founded upon solipsism and/or derealisation is inconceivable, or else capable only of generating empty and hollow forms. For there can be no art worthy of the name except as the fruit of a real, living, and consciously embraced encounter between the human being and the world. More precisely, art possesses substance and significance only as a singular and disciplined confrontation between a human being and something that is genuinely there – something that presents a certain density, resistance, and opacity, and which may equally well be the human being himself or herself.

Art is not an escape but a trial of reality, and in this lies its rarity and preciousness. The general conception of art that we defend leads us to highlight a second important aspect of its involvement, no longer within but rather in response to the contemporary situation described above. Might not art itself constitute a possible – and perhaps even an eminent – resource, enabling us not only to rediscover the path towards the real world and all the presences that inhabit it, but also to enter into resonance and communion with both the world and those presences through the exercise of an appropriate mode of conduct corresponding to the fulfilment of that path? It is this problem, at once ethical and aesthetic, since it concerns both the beauty and the truth of the world and of things, that we shall address here.

Our aim is to rethink the meaning of art, but also its end, in the double sense of the term, from the perspective of an art concerned with the constitution and embodiment of meaning through a seeing (*what is*) and a doing (*bringing into fulfilment what is*). This art, understood as a way of being and a personal mode of conduct, open yet irreducible to the creation of works, and pertaining equally to immanent and transitive action, is potentially available to all, though actualised only by a few. Such an art should be both the agent and the revealer, both the witness and the celebrant, of the dynamic alliance between humanity and the real world – in other words, of their correlative transformation.

In order to examine the conditions governing the existence of, and the factors contributing to the actualisation of, such an operative art of alliance, we shall draw both upon the methodological resources of Husserlian phenomenology¹⁵⁶ and upon the major insights of the gnosis established by

¹⁵⁶ Let us recall the extent to which Husserl's philosophical thought renewed reflection on art during the twentieth century. It opened an unprecedented, rich, and fertile path for approaching and interpreting aesthetics, the creative act, and works of art alike.

Raymond Abellio. Our analysis will unfold through five key moments, each corresponding to the disclosure of a necessary modality of creative activity. Although the art under consideration appears to emerge explicitly only at the final stage, it is in reality already present from the outset. We shall begin with Husserl's twin demand for the reduction of the objectivist natural attitude and for a "return to the things themselves". There then follows the pivotal moment in which things are transfigured into "hyper-things" (*surchoses*) through the agency of the true operative principle underlying these processes: transcendental constituting consciousness. Finally, at the culmination of our enquiry, we shall seek to disclose the meaning of a universal, integral, and sublimated art, which we call "pure art", understood as a personal "lived vision" of the world and of things.

I. Purification, or the reduction of every dualism and natural objectification

For art not to remain mere *mimesis* – a more or less faithful imitation of a world or of things presupposed as objective – but to become genuinely creative, *poiesis* as much as *praxis*, it is imperative to interrupt what Husserlian phenomenology calls the "natural attitude". This attitude alienates individual consciousness through a spontaneous, underlying, unreflective, and dogmatic belief in the existence of a world independent of ourselves, imposing upon the subject its objects, forms, spatiality, temporality, meanings, and laws. This implicit and objectivist "general thesis" unconsciously postulates that there is constantly present, "*facing me, a single spatio-temporal reality of which I myself form a part, together with all other human beings.*"¹⁵⁷ To break with this thesis, with the belief it entails and the attitude it engenders, is to adopt a mode of conduct that makes possible the overcoming of the subject–object dualism and the alliance of humanity and the world.

For there can be no true and free relation to the world and to things, no fruitful and fulfilling alliance with them, no edifying and revelatory art, except through the establishment of a relation purified of every obstacle, every illusion, every disturbance, every falsehood, and every form of alienation. It is therefore necessary to purify our relations with them, and this is precisely what follows from breaking with the natural attitude. This act of purification, which Husserl calls the "phenomenological reduction"¹⁵⁸, must be regarded as the first condition for a fruitful rediscovery of the world and of things, but also for the successful establishment of union and expression. In reality, this reduction comprises two complementary sub-moments: first, a "suspension" or "bracketing" of the "general positing of the natural attitude"; second, a transcendental reduction that discloses the entire field of the transcendental life of consciousness, within which the meaning of the being of the world and of things in fact originates. Before becoming a properly artistic mode of conduct, this reduction must be conceived and lived as a "*spiritual attitude from which the phenomenological way of working proceeds. This attitude is nothing other than the will for a radical absence of prejudice at the outset.*"¹⁵⁹

This founding gesture is radical and revolutionary in at least three respects. First, through the "phenomenological epoché", the aim is to bring to an end our blind adherence to the thesis of the objective existence of the world. In doing so, we discipline ourselves no longer to accept as self-evident any pre-established belief, opinion, prejudice, presupposition, or previous knowledge¹⁶⁰.

Among the best-known representatives of the application of the phenomenological method to the field of art are Martin Heidegger (*The Origin of the Work of Art*), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*Eye and Mind*), Michel Henry (*Seeing the Invisible*, on Wassily Kandinsky), Henri Maldiney (*Art and Existence*), and Mikel Dufrenne (*Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*).

¹⁵⁷ Husserl, *Idées directrices pour une phénoménologie*, Livre premier, Gallimard, coll. « Tel », 1985 p. 95.

¹⁵⁸ Husserl, *La crise des sciences européennes et la phénoménologie transcendantale*, Gallimard, coll. « Tel », 1989, § 39 à § 44.

¹⁵⁹ Eugen Fink, *Proximité et distance*, Jérôme Millon, 1994, p. 26.

¹⁶⁰ This 'garment of ideas' or 'symbols' referred to by Husserl (Krisis, p. 60).

The goal is thus to “free ourselves from the tyranny of what is taken for granted”¹⁶¹, to put an end to “a kind of blindness within seeing itself”¹⁶², whose cause is the fascination – one might even call it idolatrous – exerted by pre-existing forms upon consciousness. The objective is to experience a “fresh encounter with being itself”¹⁶³ rather than with its spectres.

The phenomenological gesture of “suspension” therefore amounts to turning away from objectivist obsession and setting out towards an encounter with the world – not as it is imposed upon us through supposedly objective facts and forms, but as it gives itself from itself. It is not a matter of denying the existence of a reality-in-itself, but rather of refusing to fall into the objectivist and positivist trap into which the necessity of presupposing such a reality may lead us. There is indeed something rather than nothing; the question, however, is how this something is given to us, how it acquires meaning, and how we may enter into communion with it. The art we seek therefore has as its condition the (re)discovery of the world and of things through an approach to them – by sight, but also by hearing, smell, taste, touch, affection, and reason – that has been made virginal once more, purified of imposed structures, logics, propositions, validations, and mental constructions. As Husserl would say, I no longer make these my own; they no longer serve as my “foundation”.

This “creation of a fresh gaze upon the world”¹⁶⁴ requires a conversion and transformation of vision to take place, constituting the second aspect of this radical and revolutionary gesture. As our analysis progresses, it will become apparent that seeing differently also means seeing something different. This conversion inaugurates a new way of seeing the world and things, but also a new way of understanding them, *understanding* being taken here in its fourfold sense of gathering, recognising, integrating, and relating. Not only the senses, but also thought, reflection, knowledge, and meditation are renewed through the “putting out of play” of the thesis of the natural attitude and through conversion to the new mode of givenness of the world that it discloses. We shall see that these transformations also entail, for the new subject, who has become a seer once more, a phase of rebirth into the world and into things.

This reduction is therefore a deliverance of consciousness, to be understood in the dual sense of liberation and donation. To purify here means to liberate oneself from facticity and from fascination with facticity by reducing – that is, by bringing to light, delimiting, isolating, and rejecting – the intermediaries that obstruct my access to, and union with, the world and with things. Symbolically, this operation bears affinities with methods of chemical purification, but above all with the *alchemical opus albedo*, the “work in white”. Yet purification also means unveiling the existence of a pure domain of being, and this unveiling constitutes the third radical and revolutionary aspect of the reduction. In this second phase, the latter becomes “transcendental reduction”. If we know from what the *epoché* delivers us, we must now ask what it delivers to us. What remains and imposes itself at the culmination of this reduction-as-purification is in fact a new “region” of being: the “transcendental field”, the domain of what Husserl calls both “pure phenomenological seeing” and “pure consciousness”¹⁶⁵. The barrier that limited consciousness has been shattered, “releasing its absolute scope”¹⁶⁶, as well as its power, hitherto concealed. We thus find ourselves brought back into the presence of the immanence of pure, non-factual conscious life, revealed as the indubitable

¹⁶¹ Fink, *Proximité et distance*, op. cit., p. 70.

¹⁶² Paul Ricœur, « Introduction à *Ideen I* de Husserl », *Idées directrices pour une phénoménologie*, op. cit., p. XX.

¹⁶³ Fink, *Proximité et distance*, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁶⁴ Natalie Depraz, *La crise de l'humanité européenne et la philosophie* (il s'agit de la traduction et d'une présentation du texte de Husserl), Hatier, 1992, p. 25.

¹⁶⁵ Husserl, *Idées I*, op. cit., p. 106 + chap. III.

¹⁶⁶ Paul Ricœur, « Introduction à *Ideen I* de Husserl », op. cit., p. XVIII.

foundation of every donation of meaning, the original locus in which the being of the world and the being of things manifest themselves to us in their truth. It is within this “transcendental field” that the “theatre of appearances” unfolds – not the theatre of mere appearances or phantoms, which have now been reduced, but that of the “self-givenness of things”: immediate, intuitive, originary, and self-evident. Once the obstacles have been removed, “it is appearing itself that becomes the object”¹⁶⁷, in other words, the manner in which the world and things show themselves, and as they show themselves.

Husserl’s choice of, and radical commitment to, the transcendental orientation leads to “one and the same intentional fabric, indissolubly that of consciousness and of the world.”¹⁶⁸ In this way, the dualisms of interiority and exteriority, of subject and object, are brought to an end. For Eugen Fink, this “tendency towards originality is ... the return of life to itself within itself, and thus a radical movement of life towards itself.”¹⁶⁹ It then becomes possible to envisage a rapprochement – or even a marriage – between art and life. Fink further adds that the later Edmund Husserl, the thinker of the return to the “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*), “seeks to return to the formless ground from which formations emerge ... he seeks to grasp it as an originary upsurge.”¹⁷⁰ It must be clearly understood that only the accomplishment of this return, carried out in full awareness of what has been gained through the reduction, can “free us from the sole concern of making use of the world, of mastering it, and teach us instead to answer for the meaning of the world.”¹⁷¹ Is it not precisely here, in this radical disinterestedness, that the distinctive condition of all genuine art is founded?

II. Correlation, or “the Return to the Things Themselves”

Art, we have suggested, is the confrontation of a being with a material. What material, then, presents itself to the human being once reduction-as-purification has been accomplished? We now find ourselves in the presence of the immanent, transcendental life of pure consciousness, a life in and through which the world and things, Husserl emphasises, give themselves of their own accord, in their proper density and thickness. It is important to note that the purity attained through this form of ascetic practice that is reduction is in no way equivalent to a state of inner emptiness. The “pure art” to which Husserl refers in his *Letter to Hofmannsthal*¹⁷² – an art in which all “posits of existence” have been neutralised, an art unfolding in disinterestedness towards worldly affairs and concerns (moral, political, economic, or practical) – is not an empty art. The manner in which transcendental consciousness relates itself to the world and to things has nothing whatsoever to do with any form of subjectivism or subjective idealism. To designate the new relation to self and world established by this immanent life, Husserlian phenomenology speaks of a “return to the things themselves”. To call for such a return is by no means to advocate, against an overbearing rationalism, the virtues of empiricism.

What this programmatic watchword ultimately suggests is that we should abandon a distorted relation to ourselves, to the world, and to things. It is not a matter of retreating into the merely sensible matter of things in the form of an impossible return to pure immediate sensation. Nevertheless, it does indicate the necessity of finding the path towards a genuine encounter with that which is not simply consciousness closed in upon itself. Thus, the radical and revolutionary

¹⁶⁷ E. Housset, *Husserl ou l'énigme du monde*, Éditions du Seuil, 2000, p. 155.

¹⁶⁸ Depraz, *La crise...*, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁶⁹ *Proximité et distance*, op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁷⁰ Idem, p. 184.

¹⁷¹ Housset, *Husserl ou l'énigme du monde*, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁷² Trad. E. Escoubas, *La part de l'œil*, n° 7, 1991.

transformation of the natural attitude, far from annihilating the world and things, allows us instead to see them in their truth and in their being as world and as things.

But once the reduction has been carried out, what are we to understand by “truth”, “world”, and “thing”? Truth no longer signifies objectivity and no longer implies the correspondence or fidelity of what now appears to consciousness to some external referent or model. We shall see that the idea of “adequation” present in Husserlian phenomenology involves a different issue – an experiential one – than the mere reproduction of an external reality. As for “things” and the “world”, their meaning and their being depend upon this “appearing” which, as we have seen, becomes the new and genuine object towards which all attention must be directed. Our consciousness, Husserl reveals, is always moving towards things, and it is through this transcendental movement, which characterises its very nature, that they offer themselves to it. This movement bears the name of “intentionality”¹⁷³ and designates the characteristic of consciousness as a being-directed-towards. According to a now-famous formulation, the German philosopher defines it by the fact that “all consciousness is always consciousness of something”; in other words, to every intending act (or noesis) directed towards a particular reality there corresponds an intended object (or noema), which is none other than the appearing to consciousness, at the very moment it is intended and through the very movement that intends it, of that reality. This immediate association, the alliance we have been seeking, takes the technical name of transcendental “a priori correlation”: the correlation that places the operations of pure consciousness and things in relation to one another. Consciousness therefore never functions in a void but is always correlated with what it intends and which, through this intending, appears. Intention is thus accompanied by an intuition of the intended thing, an intuition which Husserl determines as that which comes to fulfil the intention¹⁷⁴. What thus appears – this appearance at the heart of appearing itself, that is to say, the content of intuition – is precisely “the thing itself”.

To understand fully what is taking place here, and why Husserl can speak of an “originary giving intuition”¹⁷⁵, it must be borne in mind that what intention causes to appear, and which receives the name of “phenomenon”, is not a purely arbitrary and subjective datum. Rather, it refers to a reality transcendent to consciousness, a reality which nevertheless gives itself to consciousness, through appearing, in the form of a thing or a world. For consciousness, causing something to appear is therefore not a feat of conjuring or magic, but the immanent process through which the very meaning of things and of the world is constituted (as we shall see in Part Four), including the meaning of their transcendence. Consciousness’s movement towards things thus becomes not only an opening through which they may be received, but also the operation by which they manifest themselves – appear – as what they are. As for the world, it too is apprehended as a phenomenon; more precisely, it presents itself as the horizon of all horizons of things, an “infinite horizon of possible experience”¹⁷⁶, and imposes itself as the “unity of meaning” within every intention.

Let us insist upon this appearing, for it is the key to art. It should be made clear that access to this “a priori correlation” is possible only through the exercise and maintenance of the reductive gesture, under the now reflexive and disinterested gaze of consciousness – that is to say, when consciousness grasps its own transcendental life and observes itself observing. Here, “a priori” designates an originary experience through which the meaning of the being of things is apprehended. The thing

¹⁷³ Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes : Introduction à la phénoménologie*, Vrin, 1986, § 14.

¹⁷⁴ Voir *Recherches logiques*, Presses universitaires de France, 2002, Tome III, Recherche VI, Section 1, § 45.

¹⁷⁵ Husserl, *Idées I*, op. cit., pp. 65-66.

¹⁷⁶ Husserl, *Philosophie première II – Théorie de la réduction phénoménologique*, PUF, 1972, p. 206.

rests entirely within its appearing. Its being, Husserl maintains, is equivalent to its appearing. Whether it be my own body, another person, a landscape, a feeling, a memory, an automobile, or the architecture of a city, the thing manifests itself to consciousness in the fullness of its phenomenality, together with its horizon, its qualities, its concrete inscription in time and space, its shadows and its light. It demands that we accord the utmost importance to its appearing, so that the contours of its existence and the manner in which it unfolds in and through itself may be discovered and expressed. The more I concentrate upon it, the richer its presence becomes in quality and nuance; the more it is illuminated and revealed.

If, for Husserl, aesthetics and phenomenology are closely related, it is because neither concerns itself with facts or with the existence of objective things, as in the natural attitude, but rather with their manifestation to and through consciousness. The world, Husserl explains, “becomes for the artist a phenomenon; its existence is indifferent to him... He does not seek, like the philosopher, to discover the ‘meaning’ of the phenomenon of the world and grasp it conceptually, but rather to appropriate the phenomenon of the world intuitively, in order to gather from it an abundance of forms and materials for creative aesthetic configurations.”¹⁷⁷ The art we have in mind – an art no longer of representation but of presence – must therefore consist in a meticulous, sustained, and continually renewed attention to things and to the manner in which they appear. “The artist,” notes Michel Haar, “makes us return from forms to their formation, from what has appeared to the very process of appearing.”¹⁷⁸ From the phenomenological perspective, art thus presents itself as “the rediscovery of a world in the state of its birth”.¹⁷⁹ Perhaps this is what Paul Klee sought to express through his celebrated statement: “Art does not reproduce the visible; it makes visible.”¹⁸⁰

Within this phenomenological method, *intuition* and *evidence* constitute the experiential foundation upon which both knowledge and art may be grounded¹⁸¹. Once again, it is important not to conceive intuition as an arbitrary act of subjective consciousness. Precisely because it is not such an act, but possesses its own autonomy, intuition imposes measure and limit upon our experience of the thing. The thing itself imposes its norm; it serves as the guiding thread of its own donation, as phenomenology puts it. Within the *a priori correlation*, what is given is neither a copy nor a conception of the thing, but the entirety of the thing itself, with all its aspects as a thing. Originary donation, Husserl assures us, is accompanied by an evidence that owes nothing to the subjectivity of the subject. “In evidence, in the broadest sense of the term, we have the experience of a being and of its manner of being; thus, in it, the gaze of our mind reaches the thing itself.”¹⁸² Evidence – which may require several intention-intuition sequences before it is fulfilled and becomes the ultimate sign of a perfect fulfilment of intuition – is established by Husserl as the final and self-sufficient criterion of the successful donation of things. Within this “theatre of appearances” that is the life of transcendental consciousness, it therefore amounts to the same thing to speak of the “thing itself”, the “concrete thing”, the thing “in the flesh”, “presence in person”, or the thing “in the original”.

III. Transfiguration, or the passage from things to “hyper-things”

¹⁷⁷ *Lettre à Hofmannsthal*, op. cit..

¹⁷⁸ Haar, M., *L'œuvre d'art. Essai sur l'ontologie des œuvres*, Hatier, 1997, p. 74.

¹⁷⁹ Idem.

¹⁸⁰ *Théorie de l'art moderne* (1920).

¹⁸¹ Husserl regards intuition as a ‘source of knowledge’ (Ideas I, p. 78). This discovery constitutes the ‘Principle of Principles’ (Idées I, §24, p. 78).

¹⁸² Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes*, op. cit., p. 10.

If there is an aesthetic truth of the thing that is given in intuitive evidence, we must also discern within it the eidetic truth (that which makes a thing what it is) that it bears, for it is through the unified combination of these two truths that the thing and the world can present themselves in their total and integral unity and truth. “The very principles of being [the essences] are given in intuition, but through sensible intuition, and it is this that grounds the unity of the world.”¹⁸³ The thing that discloses itself through its sensible aspects is always already inhabited and illuminated by a complex of essences, even though we are usually unaware of their presence. Things – and therefore the world they compose through their interrelations – fully and completely disclose their truth only through the unveiling of the intimate and irreducible unity within them of sensibility and ideality.¹⁸⁴ Consequently, just as there exists access to things themselves according to their sensible aspect, we also have at our disposal another specific method of reduction, which Husserl called “eidetic”, providing us with the means of revealing essences.

Eidetic reduction thus reveals essences that are already there, already at work at the heart of every intention and intuition. These are *a priori*, absolute, unconditioned, and indubitable structures and principles. Ideality, another name for this realm of essences, is neither a being-in-itself devoid of any relation to subjectivity and things, nor a being-for-itself dependent solely upon my present subjectivity and its finitude; rather, it is imposed by the thing itself. The intuition of essence therefore always presupposes the givenness of a thing, which serves as the limiting framework for that intuition. The thing also serves as an example through which the existence of an essence may be illustrated – as, for instance, the black cat I perceive exemplifies animality. But how is conscious and voluntary access to essences achieved? Through ideation, or the process of idealisation. The aim is to detach from things, in contrast to the accidental character of facts, those ideal features that are necessary. The method proposed by Husserl is known as “eidetic variation” or “free variation”.¹⁸⁵ It consists in subjecting reality, particular things (a round object), to imaginative variations (all possible round objects throughout space and time) and extracting from the superimposition of these variants the invariant, which may be called universal (roundness), the identical element present throughout diversity. Like the thing itself, the essence is given “in person” within what Husserl calls the “intuition of essence”.

What we wish first to emphasise is that this new reduction, consciously undertaken, in no way impoverishes our experience of things and the world. On the contrary, it enriches it – provided, of course, that these essences are not regarded merely in themselves and for themselves, which would constitute yet another source of fascination, but are immediately reintegrated into things and become inseparable from them, henceforth manifesting themselves as if in filigree. As Raymond Abellio forcefully explains, although such a reduction initially produces a derealisation of the “natural object” or the “fortuitous event”, “it derealises them in the same way that a work of art, refusing merely to copy nature, exalts it in the very act. The continual growth of the powers of abstraction and structuring goes hand in hand with a sensory and even bodily enrichment, an exultation and deepening of all the powers of the body.”¹⁸⁶ In this way, we discover within ourselves “unsuspected visual resources”.¹⁸⁷ We shall designate this new stage on the path of art by the term

¹⁸³ Housset, *Husserl ou l'énigme du monde*, op. cit., p. 116.

¹⁸⁴ ‘It is in the very nature of the matter that, in the final analysis, everything that is categorical rests upon a sensory intuition’, Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 220–221 (183).

¹⁸⁵ *Expérience et jugement. Recherches en vue d'une généalogie de la logique*, PUF, 1971, pp. 412-434 + *Psychologie Phénoménologique* (1925-1928), Vrin, 2001. pp. 71-84.

¹⁸⁶ S. A., p. 32. For details of Abellio's projects, please refer to the end of the text.

¹⁸⁷ Natalie Depraz, « Crise et création », *Rencontres Raymond Abellio 2005* (<https://rencontres-abellio.net/Archive/2005>), p. 6.

chosen by Abellio to describe the transformation undergone by things and the world: transfiguration¹⁸⁸. It marks the decisive stage in what Abellio calls the interiorisation of the world.

The significance of grasping essences within sensible intuition – or, in Abellio’s terms, of their “integration” into things following their reduction – is therefore to render our experience of the world, and our communication with it, more meaningful, more ordered, more transparent, more luminous, richer, more nuanced, more intricately interconnected, and ultimately more alive because more deeply explored. To proceed in this way is to attain a higher degree of truth, both sensible and intelligible, concerning the world and things, by discovering within them – that is to say, by bringing to appearance – the inherent presence, immersed within the sensible, of meaning and universality. Without this meaning and universality there would be no order, no relation, no intelligibility, no unity, and therefore no world – only chaos. The world thus manifests itself as an organised and rational unity grounded in this universal aesthetic-eidetic *a priori* that prefigures every act of consciousness. Essence reveals itself as “pure meaning, which must be intuited if one is to grasp the rationality of the world”¹⁸⁹, its own *logos*.

This alliance of the sensible and the intelligible offers a way beyond the opposition between idealism and materialism. The eidetic reduction thus undertaken presents itself as a form of transcendental empiricism or, to borrow a phrase from Emmanuel Levinas, as an “idealism of the sensible”. Essences are and remain within things; it is therefore not a matter of induction or deduction, nor even of abstraction in the sense of “drawing out from”. The apprehension of the universal (the colour yellow) occurs within the sensible world given through intuition (the colour of this sunflower). Essence is fused with the thing itself, within which it grounds both its universal identity and its participation in the world.

Abellio regarded transfiguration, which he considered “abrupt”, as “the highest enigma”. Indeed, because of what it brings about within us – an irreversible consequence that radically and completely transforms our relation to things and to the world – transfiguration cannot fail to provoke wonder and questioning. By comparing its effects to that spiritual manifestation which Christian tradition calls the “glorified body”¹⁹⁰, Abellio further accentuates the mystery surrounding its nature. There is, moreover, an undeniable difficulty in speaking about and describing it, for it designates the lived experience of a limit-state of consciousness whose singularity, subtlety, and intensity cannot be adequately conveyed by any particular verbal expression. When Abellio occasionally speaks of illumination, he does so not from a mystical and ecstatic perspective but from a gnostic and *enstatic* one. Through and within this illumination, things become radiant and are transformed, in turn, into “supports of knowledge”. A circular – and indeed spherical – movement thus emerges between knowledge and transfiguration, each being at once the source and the product of the other, and vice versa.

The following passage is one in which Abellio succeeds in synthesising the process of transfiguration.

But this perception of perception radically alters the original state. The lived state, initially naïve, loses its spontaneity [...] Among the elements of my new perception there figure not only those of the house as such, but also those of perception itself as a lived flow [...] Yet the concomitant vision

¹⁸⁸ “I thus find myself reducing the problem of the ‘return to things themselves’ to that of the transfiguration of the thing within the living present of that very same Ego.” Abellio, M. N. G., p. 85.

¹⁸⁹ Housset, *Husserl ou l’énigme du monde*, op. cit., p. 115.

¹⁹⁰ To understand this connection and, above all, how it enables Abellio to shed light on the process and significance of the Transfiguration, see his analysis of Raphael’s painting aptly titled *The Transfiguration* (‘Gnosis and Transfiguration’, the final lecture transcribed in *Question* no. 72, *La structure absolue*, 1987, pp. 39–40).

I have, in this state, of the house that was my original motive, far from being lost, distanced, or obscured by the interposition of 'my' secondary perception before 'its' primary perception, is paradoxically intensified: clearer, more present, and more charged with objective reality than before. [...]

Here lies the whole problem of consciousness's presence to itself: the 'reflective' distance between consciousness and its object is abolished. There is no longer reflection but adhesion. In fact, a secondary spontaneity replaces the former primary spontaneity. A spontaneous reflex gives way to a power that is no less spontaneous. We are confronted here with a fact that cannot be justified by purely speculative analysis: namely, the transfiguration of the thing as a fact of consciousness, its transformation [...] into a 'super-thing' (*surchose*), and the passage from the state of science to the state of knowledge.¹⁹¹

The two key points of this passage are, on the one hand, the abolition of every separation – and therefore of every dualism – between subject and object, and, on the other hand, the emergence of a power. We have already dealt with the first point. As regards the second, we are confronted with a crucial issue: the constitution of a genuine personal power as a condition for the establishment of an art grounded not only in eidetic-sensible vision but, above all, in its embodied enactment and testing. In reality, it must be stressed that there is not merely one power but several, all related to the acquisition and exercise of freedom, all ultimately reducible to the constitutive power – a power that is neither magical nor political and in no sense worldly. We have already encountered, in the practice of eidetic variation, the positive power of imagination operating between the sensible and the intelligible. The free play of this faculty, unconcerned with any “positing of existence” on the part of things, grants us access to the realm of pure possibilities. Its privileged domain is, of course, art, and particularly fiction, in which it can give free rein to the voluntary variation of images in order to reach these pure possibilities. This is why Edmund Husserl accords a certain privilege to art and poetry. We must also acknowledge the power of identifying essences – or, as Zen would say, of designation – which likewise enables us to escape the confines of the here and now, as well as contingency. Another important aspect of this power lies in the opportunity it affords consciousness. By opening to it the realm of ideal or pure possibilities, it enables a passage from the finite world of facts and things to the infinite world of the possible, both actual and potential – for example, all yellow objects currently in existence, but also all those that have existed in the past or may exist in the future. This phenomenon, which allows consciousness – and thereby our experience itself – to gain a firmer grasp upon the world and no longer to be “taken by surprise” by it, to use Abellio's expression, corresponds to an intensification of experience. These powers facilitate the exercise of freedom of spirit by establishing a distance, even a detachment, from factual reality. If artistic creation may benefit from the illumination and aesthetic richness brought by such powers, individual and collective human existence can only be ennobled by their use when they are united within the constitutive power that confers meaning upon the world.

Another distinctive feature of transfiguration as identified by Raymond Abellio deserves emphasis, for it enables us both to understand the existence of the many conceptions and practices of art and to distinguish those that concern us here. In his analysis¹⁹², Abellio identifies two types of essence: *lower essences*, formed by particular and universal properties (for example, those of a particular spatial form – round, square, parallelepipedal, and so forth), and *higher essences*, constituted by the most universal idealities (for example, the essence of space itself). It is from their “short-circuit”, he argues, that transfiguration springs forth. This means that, within the unified and illuminated

¹⁹¹ Abellio S. A., pp. 62-63.

¹⁹² S. A., chap. 2, § 6.

vision of the world, the higher essences are inseparable from the lower essences, the latter serving as “supports” of knowledge for the former. It is at this stage that the “derealisation” of the thing takes place. The significance of this distinction lies in its indication of the two extremes of the broad spectrum of possible art. At one end, that of reduction pushed to its limit and of pure extension, we find the disconnected and multivalent multiplicity of disruptive elements that provoke fascination. At the other end, that of ultimate integration and pure intensity, there appears the constituted unity of edifying meaning, a source of communion not only with others and with the world but also, as Abellio adds, with the Self, understood as the presence of Universal Intelligence.

The reduction–integration pair proposed by Abellio constitutes the major operative polarity in the establishment of the kind of art we are seeking. From this perspective, either we ascend upwards, towards ever more integrating and ever better incarnated meaning, or we descend downwards towards innumerable and dispersed signs, formalism, or possession. Three major tendencies within modern and contemporary art may be distinguished from this conception. At the lower pole, we find the exclusive overvaluation, mobilisation, proliferation, and sedimentation of lower components taken in isolation – words, images, notes, sensations, planes, lines, points, moments, material components, and so forth – together with the chthonic, matricial, nocturnal, irrational, and centrifugal forces associated with them. At the upper pole stand all those pictorial, literary, cinematic, and musical compositions that undertake a work of crystallising the layers of reality, revealing the unity of meaning, and universalising relation: the domain of analogies, proportions, genesis, structures, mediations, correspondences, and dialectics. Here too are manifested the solar, autonomising, diurnal, anagogical, and centripetal powers. At the precise midpoint between these poles lie all artistic forms belonging to *mimesis*, realism, and naturalism. Between these two extremes – in that interval where art still finds its place and its *raison d’être* through the expression of a style – unfolds the entire spectrum of possible mixed works¹⁹³, whether they are marked predominantly by a descending dialectic or by an ascending one.

IV. Constitution, or the Work of Meaning Performed by Transcendental Consciousness

“The world of which we speak, and of which we shall ever be able to speak, which we know and shall ever be able to know, is in fact nothing other than precisely that world which we constitute within the immanence of our conscious life, both individual and communal, through the multiple systems of cognitive formations that are unified within it... that world which, as knowing subjects, we never cease to possess and towards which we never cease to strive as the goal of knowledge; and, in the final analysis, this world is nothing other than our idea, a pure and simple idea.” - Edmund Husserl, *First Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 354 (277)

Let us now examine in greater detail what this constitutive power represents, a power which we have suggested gathers within its exercise all the transcendental powers liberated through reduction-as-purification. We have seen that, in order to perceive the world more fully in all its richness, depth, diversity, and truth – and therefore to express it more adequately, particularly through profound, revealing, and radiant works – it is necessary to distance oneself from it and detach oneself from all that has become worldly. This applies equally to us, insofar as we are initially regarded as objects in the world, as external beings subjected to objectification. Reduction and the reflexive return of consciousness upon itself have revealed the existence of the transcendental ego

¹⁹³ ‘One might even define art as the result of the fusion of intensity and scope, or rather of their more or less irreducible combination.’ Abellio, ‘L’esthétique de la fin des temps’, in A. N. G., p. 56

as the “ground” of all validation. They have also taught us that, although the thing and even the world, as phenomena, are what appears, this appearing of things and of the world is itself the product of an activity of transcendental consciousness. Consequently, the constitutive power – which in phenomenology is the power of conferring meaning upon the things and world that present themselves – depends likewise upon this transcendental subject. The explication of the world as meaning therefore refers back to a self-explication of the ego. The evolution of the world’s meaning is in fact related to the subject’s own inner development. This implies that the unity and clarity of the world depend upon the practical resolution of the problem of continuity and unity within intentional life itself. It is the necessity of such a return to the constituting activity of consciousness that Raymond Abellio indicates in the following passage:

We shall achieve nothing with regard to a profound grasp of the artistic phenomenon so long as we do not undertake a simultaneous reconstruction of all means of expression and knowledge, considered not only in their particular relativity but in the relativity of all communication to the poles of consciousness bearing experiences, intention, and intensity, from which that communication seeks to emanate or through which it seeks to pass. And indeed aesthetics will remain futile so long as it has not measured this intensity and unveiled this intention; that is, until it has reached, beyond techniques, consciousnesses themselves.¹⁹⁴

The genesis of the world and the genesis of the self are therefore parallel. This teaching also invites us to recognise that, if the world requires the transcendental ego in order to be a world and to possess meaning, the ego in turn requires the world in order to fulfil itself as a giver of meaning. The relation to oneself thus passes through the world. In constituting the world, the concrete subject constitutes itself. The encounter between self and world is therefore necessary, and their alliance here takes on the character of a work to be accomplished, the true horizon and meaning of the art we are seeking. Thanks to the phenomenological awakening, we know that we must move from the stage of naïve and dualistic confrontation to that of translucent and unifying communion. With constitution – a key notion never systematically expounded by Edmund Husserl – the ego once again experiences itself as inscribed within and absorbed by the world. Yet this is now a world of meaning, a spiritual world. In his later works¹⁹⁵, Husserl designates this new world, the object of a new gaze purified of all natural naïveté, by the transcendental concept of the *lifeworld* (*Lebenswelt*), that is, the world of common human experience. This lifeworld is at once the pre-given ground and the horizon of all praxis, both actual and possible. The constitutive power with which we are entrusted, as the power of conferring meaning upon this shared lifeworld, is a responsibility that we must assume. This responsibility must be constant and can never be completed, for the idea of a fully constituted world – that is, a fully meaningful world – is an infinite idea implying a teleology.

Furthermore, because this life-world – from which we come and to which we ceaselessly return – is both ground and horizon, our constitutive power must be inscribed within an evolving circular movement of reflection unfolding between, on the one hand, a return to the origin of all experience – a return that must be understood as an illuminating recollection of the foundation of all life and all meaning – and, on the other hand, a centrifugal movement towards an end situated in infinity, a movement responding to (and called upon to answer for) the insistent appeal, the vocation, addressed to us human beings by the life-world itself. There is nothing arbitrary in this bestowal of meaning by the transcendental subject; rather, it is a personal response governed by what Abellio, from a metaphysical and gnostic perspective, calls the world’s “global structuring intentionality”.

¹⁹⁴ A. N. G., p. 52.

¹⁹⁵ Particularly in *Krisis*.

To grasp fully what is at stake here, one must simultaneously accept the two meanings – objective and subjective – contained within the genitive expression “consciousness of the world”. Things in reality form a totality, an ordered system of things, and therefore a meaningful world, one that signifies and conveys meaning. It is this world of relations that constitution must take into account, step by step, using as its guiding thread the things that give themselves. When Fink defines this “bestowal of meaning” (*Sinngebung*) as a “creation”¹⁹⁶, he does not understand it as creation *ex nihilo*, but rather as self-generative creation; that is to say, as implementing an intensifying circularity, an evolving and integrative reflection between constituting consciousness and the constituted world, or between intended meaning and constituted meaning. We might now say: between transfiguring consciousness and the transfigured world.

That there is nothing arbitrary or contingent in this constitution of meaning inaugurated by reduction, purification, and conversion – and that such meaning is not relative to any particular empirical self – is further confirmed by the fact that this triple transformation leads simultaneously to a depersonalisation and a universalisation of both world and subject. “The thought of which it speaks [phenomenological analysis] is nobody’s thought,” Husserl assures us. “We put out of play the transcendent positing of the ego [the empirical ego], and hold fast to the absolute, to consciousness in the pure sense.”¹⁹⁷ This does not mean, however, that the conferral of meaning is disembodied. Rather, what is truly mine is defined not by the empirical self and its worldly interests, but by the activity of my own transcendental subjective life awakened to the universal problem of meaning. The transcendental subject is in reality free from every personal attachment to the world, free – as we have seen – with respect to facts. Abellio even declares that such a subject no longer takes sides in anything while continuing to participate in everything. It has attained a state governed by unconditionality, impartiality, and disinterestedness, attitudes that must be firmly distinguished from indifference. Abellio further adds that such a subject has become amoral (not immoral) and asocial (not antisocial).

To understand more fully the intertwining of consciousness and world, let us examine this constitutive power more closely. For Paul Ricœur, “constitution must be the essential positivity of consciousness”¹⁹⁸; that is, both that through which consciousness continually affirms itself as giver of meaning (being-as-meaning) and the very principle through which the world appears as phenomenon (meaning-of-being). Constitution rests upon the *a priori* correlation between habitus and the surrounding world, or lifeworld. According to Ricœur, “reality is relative to consciousness, in the sense that it announces itself there as a unity of meaning within a diversity of convergent profiles.”¹⁹⁹ The problem then becomes one of understanding how the unity – and therefore the continuity – of consciousness and of its correlate, the world, is possible. The explanation lies in the synthesising power of constitution, the true principle of all genesis. It is a structuring and unifying power of the ego, which Husserl calls the “universal constitutive synthesis”, because it succeeds in constituting a unified world from the diversity of modes of consciousness and the infinite multiplicity of “profiles”²⁰⁰ through which things are given to us. The world is therefore the product

¹⁹⁶ “...in the depths of his life, the creation of the world takes place.” *Proximité et distance*, op. cit., p. 34.

¹⁹⁷ *Chose et espace. Leçons de 1907*, PUF, 1989, §13, p. 64(41).

¹⁹⁸ « Introduction à *Ideen I* de Husserl », op. cit., p. XVIII.

¹⁹⁹ *Idem*, pp. XVI-XVII.

²⁰⁰ To fully understand what is at stake here, let us take an example. The moment I perceive a tree, the tree-object is constituted. It cannot be reduced to the sensations it triggers in me at that moment. These sensations merely provide me with a ‘sketch’ of what this object is, a sketch that is relative to my position in relation to it. In every perspective on it, in every new sketch, it is the entire tree-object (‘identical X’ = ‘unifying centre’) that is targeted as an intentional

of a continuous and indefinite synthesis, both passive and active. The various acts and lived experiences of consciousness – perception, imagination, memory, and so forth – are articulated with one another through the present activity of meaning-giving, which stands out against the background of the world's already pre-given, already pre-constituted unity of meaning. Present meaning is therefore grounded in already constituted meaning (and retention), while simultaneously opening through anticipation (or protention) towards a potential future constitution, thus generating an intentional unity of meaning.

To speak of synthesis and genesis is therefore to return to the problem of time as a key dimension in the constitution of self and world. Fundamentally, if there is a world possessing a history, it is because its constitution belongs to a subject who likewise has a history: the history of its own constitution, which is equivalent to the history of its constitutive power. Temporality is no longer here an objective form, as in Isaac Newton or even Immanuel Kant. Rather, it is the mode of being of the subject in its presence to itself and to the world. It is subjectivity itself in its mode of givenness and of meaning-giving. It is the universal and immanent form of every genesis of the “I”, referring concretely to personal acts of intentional life that crystallise into habitus. It is also the bond linking past, present, and future. Our “I” is no longer simply subjected to the passage of time, because time has become for us both the material and the means of intervention and transformation. Duration, for example, becomes an *a priori* possibility of reactivating a past evidence for the sake of present or future action. To see, to know, and to build the meaning of the world all refer to a temporalisation of conscious life in its constitutive relation to the world. The meaning of the world evolves as the ego evolves. To assume the richness and meaning of the world is therefore to adopt a comprehensive mode of conduct that integrates, directs, and elevates habitus; to live an operative relation to time, to the instant, to the living present, even to eternity itself; to implement what Abellio calls a “synthetic style”²⁰¹; to choose an appropriate manner of being and art of living that takes account of all these dispositions of the pure ego. All these choices through which we constitute ourselves, while simultaneously constituting a world, must therefore become a living art – an art that may ultimately be accompanied by creating, now understood in the sense of creating works. Such an art will consequently be an art of temporality. It becomes evident, therefore, that constitutive power is inseparable from the constitution of a *power-to-be*.

There is indeed an auto-constitution of the ego. In reality, it is threefold and corresponds to a threefold temporalisation: as transcendental ego, the identical pole of lived experiences, a pure absolute self-presence beyond time; as ego underlying habitus, the self-presence of noetic ipseity evolving through the constitution of immanent temporality and through the subject's decisions in its work of constitution; as empirical ego, resulting from a self-objectification subject to worldly time. The constituting ego thus truly individualises itself as a knowing being in the process of becoming, beginning from its stream of lived experience. This individualisation is originary in relation to the secondary individualisation of the world. There therefore exists a “sphere of ownness”²⁰² belonging to the ego, the sphere in which meaning becomes incarnate in a living body. This sphere affirms itself not only through its conferral of meaning but also through the integration of that meaning – in other words, through the interiorisation of the world as “immanent transcendence”. Indeed, Abellio tells us, “transcendental vision is personal, specific, and incommunicable. It belongs to the action of gnosis, that is, to the process of personalisation and

unit, and is therefore constituted as identical by means of syntheses of identification. This amounts to saying that this constituted tree-object transcends my lived experience.

²⁰¹ Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes*, op. cit., § 37, pp. 123-124 et 109-110.

²⁰² Idem, § 44.

specification of states.”²⁰³ This constitution of an intensity of consciousness, understood as the “conscious interiorisation of all separate or external knowledge transformed into gnosis, or ineffable knowledge”²⁰⁴, is crucial for establishing art as a manner of being. This amounts to saying that transfiguration is a product of gnosis, but equally that gnosis is a product of transfiguration.

V. Communion, or the Resolution of Vision and Action in a Pure Art

“The problem of consciousness is to transform perpetually the factors of fascination into factors of transfiguration (or communion), but this task is endless, for the multiplication of signs is indefinite and the organisation of those signs is indefinitely infinite.”

— *Dialogue avec Raymond Abellio*, p. 153

If there exists a possible art of being-in-the-world – one that is also an art of world-making (of meaning and community) – arising from transcendental reduction, purification, and conversion, then it depends not merely upon our awakened and receptive relation to the world, nor even upon our conferring meaning upon it, but upon our capacity to embody and live that meaning. In doing so, we ourselves become world-making, both individually and with others; that is, we exercise a power of communion with the shared lifeworld, a power that is none other than a capacity-to-be in adequation with a meaningful world. The challenge consists in passing from the conferral of meaning to a genuine personal power-to-be, through the aesthetic and ethical assumption of responsibility for the transcendental correlation between consciousness and world. Put differently, our concern here is with the artist himself – the one who must be simultaneously the author, the agent, and the point of application of art. Whether we conceive it as the personal signature of a work or as the signature of a life, style is always that which reveals both the concrete commitment of a being and the degree of advancement attained in the practice of art. Within the perspective that concerns us here – that of a “pure art”, to borrow Husserl’s expression, an art emancipated from representation – the question of style becomes that of constructing and expressing a personal mode of being capable of fulfilling art’s ultimate end: communion with the world, the transfiguration of the subject, and, ultimately, the formation of an intersubjective community. The issue is therefore not one of appearance or display but of inner state; far less one of action than of presence. A quality of smile or silence, even of stillness itself, can here be more eloquent than discourse, and conduct takes precedence over attitude.

What we seek is the apotheosis of the dialectic of incarnation and assumption within an art of operative knowledge: access to the impersonal Self. In Pauline and Abellian terms, we aspire to an art of the inner man.²⁰⁵ In relation to this goal, one must acknowledge – indeed, Abellio perhaps does so excessively – that artistic style, the style embodied in a work, appears as the “final iridescence of the essence of matter” and therefore as the “last obstacle between the artist and God... Art does not prevent one from seeing God, but from attaining Him. Or rather, art allows one to believe that one sees God. Yet the issue is not to see God; it is to be Him.”²⁰⁶ The same holds true of style understood as a general “way of doing”, for here too, because of embodiment, we must reckon with our body, its particularities, limitations, and resistances. Yet the body to which we

²⁰³ S. A., p. 67.

²⁰⁴ Idem, pp. 62-63.

²⁰⁵ “The transfiguration of the world and the edification of the inner man are one and the same act, perpetually repeated and intensified: such is the function of art.” Abellio, “Gnose et Transfiguration”, op. cit., p. 38

²⁰⁶ A. C., p. 83.

refer – the transcendental flesh, distinct from the objectified and reified body of the natural attitude and of science, the flesh that is ours and that we experience as a unity of physical, psychic, and intellectual life – is in no way secondary or arbitrary. As the domain in which constituted meaning and gnosis become incarnate, and as the basis from which we project ourselves towards the world and things, it is, on the contrary, central and primordial. Whereas the reduced gaze, Abellio notes, separates and distinguishes, the body integrates and unifies.

The real problem is that although communion with the world possesses a certain recurrence on the level of vision, producing apodictic evidences, the situation is different on the level of action. There, evidence is measured in terms of the degree of adequation between intention – that which is aimed at or willed – and what is actually realised through action. In this second case, where the subject's intention confronts what Abellio calls “the intention of the world”, confirmations, validations, and verifications are infinite. Outside simple, common, and repetitive activities – in domains such as reflection, art, or even sexuality,²⁰⁷ which require self-reflection, acquired knowledge, individuation, and development – the transition from the domain of vision, even embodied vision, to that of action charged with fulfilling it²⁰⁸ or satisfying its intention, in other words the active realisation of the project carried by vision, is never completely accomplished. A gap remains. There is always a residue. This interval of inadequation between vision and action, between willing and being able, is, according to Abellio, “the motor of the perpetual renewal of genesis.”²⁰⁹ In order to confront and illuminate this issue, we shall now present the distinction and dialectic established by Raymond Abellio between vision, action, and art – or between seeing, doing, and the manner of doing – or again between knowing, doing, and know-how.²¹⁰

If there is always a manner of doing within action, and if, conversely, there is always an element of action within art (which explains the persistence of inadequation), Abellio nevertheless distinguishes them by proposing that action belongs to the sphere of repetitive activity, whereas art – understood here as a generic term designating a way of being rather than the domain of the arts properly speaking – belongs to the sphere of non-repetitive activity. However, in order to demonstrate the connection and continuity that exist between them, he presents art as the sphere in which action is intensified. Art thus occupies the summit of the triptych of vision–action–art. It is its culmination. An important clarification is required. Although nothing stands above art, art does not simply conclude a linear development inaugurated by vision. In reality, Abellio argues, art in turn nourishes the gnosis already constituted that led to it. Through an intensifying closure of the circle between the extremes, it relaunches vision itself, now endowed with a new knowledge that must be embodied and that will give rise to a new project.

This embodiment of vision, knowledge, and the essences of the world is what Abellio, as we have seen, calls *knowledge* or *gnosis*, a “lived vision”. To distinguish it both from being-in-itself – which designates the pre-reflective world, the world of matrices, of “diffuse knowledge”, reflexes, and fusion – and from being-for-itself, the proper mode of consciousness through which scientific knowledge becomes possible, Abellio identifies gnosis, or infused knowledge, as being *cause-of-itself*, that is, as the power of self-construction and communion with the totality of being. The

²⁰⁷ Abellio considers sex, art and the contemplation of death to be the three ‘essential driving forces’ or ‘ultimate questions’ of the inner self.

²⁰⁸ As it is said, ‘to carry out a task’.

²⁰⁹ S. A., p. 127.

²¹⁰ “In reality, the author of ‘La structure absolue’ explores each of his actions in terms of their transformative power, which is strikingly evident in this unique fusion of seeing and doing – a fusion that precisely defines the demiurge’s creative act.” N. Depraz, “Crise et création”, op. cit., p. 9.

process of embodiment begins with constituted knowledge (vision), arising from the power to designate things, essences, and “syntactic or logical forms”²¹¹. We are here at the stage of what Abellio calls *substantivisation*. From this point, two paths of embodiment – or *substantialisation* – become available. The first proceeds from the flesh, now rendered knowledgeable, towards the world through the construction of tools, whether material or symbolic, which are placed “at the service of the body” and extend it in order to secure a firmer grasp upon the world. The second proceeds through the progressive interiorisation of the world: I come to understand more fully its “supports”, its meaning, its “pedagogy”. Through the constitution of gnosis and the immanent presence of self to itself, scientific knowledge becomes embodied, the flesh becomes illuminated, and gnosis short-circuits things (transforming them into *hyper-things*). Ultimately, at its highest point, it renders tools and intermediaries unnecessary. All transformations of the flesh are inscribed within what Abellio calls its *germ*, that is, its indefinite potential for experiences of the world. Being cause-of-itself thus corresponds to germination, which tradition, he notes, regards as “the supreme art, also called the Great Work”.²¹²

In their strict distinction, then, we have, on the one hand, action, supported by our already acquired knowledge – which must constantly be renewed because the gap between willing and being able is irreducible, because the world’s “surprises” are inexhaustible, and because our local connections with it are infinite – and, on the other hand, pure art, founded upon gnosis, whose genesis is itself endless because the reserve of meaning to be constituted and embodied is inexhaustible. The former multiplies tools within “spatial time”, operating through sedimentation and, through engagement in the world, often sacrifices itself to utility and efficiency. The latter unifies meaning within “lived time”, operating through crystallisation and, whether through detached conduct and/or the creation of works, devotes itself to truth and beauty. Whereas action realises itself within the visible, pure art, when it remains at the stage of purely gnostic vision without works, abides within the invisible immanence of personal consciousness and flesh. In both cases, however, the finite confronts the infinite and is thereby relativised. The same was already true of vision.

We may invoke here another triptych that synthesises this process of embodiment: from nouns (vision and knowledge) to flesh (knowledge-as-gnosis, art), by way of verbs (action). This spherical genetic process – a continual circular return to the origin, to the ground, mobilising reduction and integration while generating vertically, in opposite directions, both tools and meaning – unceasingly amplifies and intensifies my “sphere of proper belonging”, advancing me endlessly in my knowledge of the world. Being cause-of-itself thus perpetually and hyperbolically surpasses itself (“positivity”) towards an ultimate “position”: that occupied by Unitotal Being, whose vision is granted in its entirety to the gnostic, yet with whom no real and integral communion will be accomplished before the end of time. This is what Abellio calls the *paradox of gnosis*. My desire for communion with the world is absolute, but my action, the power of my flesh over the world, and the art I practise in order to realise this desire remain limited and relativised because of the infinity of possible relations that the world requires me to discover and integrate – an infinity that Abellio explains through the existence of a “universal interdependence”. Pure art and the gnosis with which it is correlated both depend upon the conscious recognition of this universal interdependence. If the vision of this interdependence – and therefore of the infinite – is “authentic”, because it is one, total, and apodictic, the action undertaken in order to live it is “inauthentic”, because it is multiple, local,

²¹¹ Abellio, S. A., p. 196.

²¹² S. A., p. 133.

repetitive, and inadequate. It is art, in turn – unique, non-repetitive, global, and productive of adequation – that recovers authenticity.

Pure art must therefore be understood as a contradictory experience of the infinite, for it sets in motion, on the basis of its vision, a *becoming of* (in the intensifying sense of the genitive) the Absolute, which for us remains an endlessly renewed becoming-Absolute. It is also an art of constituting the relations between all things, bringing them forth from universal interdependence through its knowledge of structures and dynamics, stases and ecstasies, levels and passages.

In every present moment, therefore, the fate of the encounter between a will-to-be and a power-to-be is at stake; between the vision of communion between my flesh and the world and the concrete, personal realisation of that communion. Between the two stretches the entire field of action. In truth, Abellio declares, every present moment gathers together vision, action, and art. Every present moment may potentially be crowned by a communion with the world of which pure art is the guarantee. In such a case, we pass from an initial and spontaneous experience to vision (essences and knowledge); then, through a first inversion, from vision to another experience (action); and finally, through an inversion of the inversion, from this integrated and crystallised experience to a new vision (art), which is also a new spontaneity, more knowing than the first.²¹³ Here we rediscover the contiguity of the extremes. In turn, “the artistic must also become natural. Art must be a form of immediate and universal communication, a new nature.”²¹⁴ A new gaze and a new world have come into being for us; our action has become more assured. We have crossed the double transcendence from being-in-itself to being-for-itself, and from being-for-itself to being-cause-of-itself. We have effected the synthesis of being-in-itself and being-for-itself. We have thereby integrated the possible infinity of similar situations. We have ultimately amplified our “proper sphere” and attained a higher level of intensity. As Raymond Abellio emphasises, “Man encloses himself within a succession of ever more integrating totalities. He is a universe of universes; he continually universalises universes.”²¹⁵

When, conscious of the paradox mentioned above and of the underlying presence of universal interdependence, we succeed in living this continual amplification and intensification in full awareness, we attain a state of paradoxical communion with the world in which time opens onto eternity, speech onto the ineffable, action onto stillness, creation onto non-doing, ethics onto aesthetics, aesthetics onto ethics, beauty onto truth, and truth onto beauty. Lived transfiguration becomes the permanent event “through which the succession, the patient progression of time, hitherto misunderstood, suddenly comes to a halt within us, while being itself is at once melted and founded by the flame; an event that possesses a history only in order to lead us out of history.”²¹⁶ It is this event which, through the second incarnation, derealising and transforming things into *hyper-things*, enables us to interiorise presence itself (in the form of meaning), and not merely what is present.

Having disclosed to us, from within and through the lifeworld, the light, order, and meaning concealed within it, and having led us “from the being of the phenomenon to the phenomenon of being”,²¹⁷ that is, to the ineffable vision of totality, the phenomenological-artistic way gradually detaches us from all commerce with things and worldly concerns. It also allows us progressively to

²¹³ To understand this structure of the evolution from action to art, see the example cited by Abellio (a fall in the mountains) in S. A., § X, pp. 143–153.

²¹⁴ P. G., p. 106.

²¹⁵ S. A., p. 151.

²¹⁶ A. N. G., p. 60.

²¹⁷ S. A., pp. 185–191.

dispense with mediation, whether material or symbolic tools. This is the inner man: the one who, crucified upon the “contradiction between the intensity of time and the expanse of space”²¹⁸, inhabits the gap opened between vision and action, willing and being able, and who, through pure art, is inhabited by this light, order, and meaning. He is reborn into the world – that is, into a continually renewed state of knowledge of the world – insofar as he becomes the world at the same time as the world becomes him, throughout an indefinite duration rising upon the eternal present. Pure art rediscovers life while life itself is elevated through art. Conscious that “art, in itself, is unfinishable”²¹⁹, the inner man nevertheless rises to “the lived vision of the eternal present and to the permanent establishment of relations, the interiorisation, and ultimately the effacement of every ‘event’ as such through ‘second memory’.”²²⁰

This aesthetics of communion, which is equally an ethics, tends, according to Raymond Abellio, towards the “formless perception” and the art-without-art of Zen Buddhism.²²¹ What, then, becomes of the work of art itself within such a conception? It is, Abellio confides, that “which arises in the in-between, at the centre of the cross.” It “hollows out transcendence”²²² and, for this very reason, always remains unfinished. Moreover, because it is doubly relative – firstly as an external and visible form dependent upon the inadequate domain of action, and secondly because of the invisible gnosis that sustains it, which is itself a vision and an aiming towards the Absolute – “every human work is always unsatisfactory.”²²³ The inner man understands this relativity and insufficiency of the work when measured against art’s ultimate end as communion. The work thus occupies a paradoxical position. It is “like those means whose end ignores them, yet which one is nevertheless obliged to use”²²⁴; but it is also the case that the final, unique, and unifying work must ultimately be conceived as both the absence of a work and the work of its own absence. Therein lies its mystery. Meanwhile, if one nevertheless accepts, beneath the horizon of pure art, an art of forms, it may affirm itself as the art of expressing – through finite works composed of words, signs, images, figures, gestures, and sounds that “detach themselves”²²⁵ from gnosis – the origin of things and of the world. Such an art allows these things, in their truth, richness, complexity, and original self-evidence, to come forth and reveal themselves. It presents, in the form of paintings, performances, music, sculpture, installations, or films, their very emergence. Born from a rupture with the self-evidence of the natural attitude, arising from wonder, astonishment, and contemplative recollection before the appearing being of the world and of things, before the fact that there is something rather than nothing, it seeks to awaken the same states of soul in those who encounter its works. It may also take another path, as it does in Abellio’s metaphysical novel²²⁶: on the one hand, evoking the drama of the inner man – that is, the actions and events that lead to his emergence and detachment – and, on the other, showing the possibilities for the constitution of a transcendental intersubjective community, a true gnostic fraternity of pure art.

Éric Coulon,

April 2026.

²¹⁸ Abellio, D. M. I., p. 32.

²¹⁹ D. R. A., p. 37.

²²⁰ Idem, p. 153.

²²¹ Abellio, C. H., p. 152.

²²² D. M. I., p. 32.

²²³ M. N. G., p. 289.

²²⁴ D. M. I., p. 40.

²²⁵ Abellio, S. A., p. 194.

²²⁶ C.H., p. 155.

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Roots Drinking the Skies

Henrique Manuel Pereira

Letter to a friend

Dear friend,

I write from a house, in *Trás-os-Montes*, which was once my family's home. Here fire, love and life were kindled; here, my grandmother Cândida cried for her children behind the letters that arrived from "ultramar". I lived in this house until the first hairs of my beard sprouted. Clouds passed over it with the patience of the years, until one day winter crouched there and it almost died on us. I try to raise it again, to bring it back to life.

I keep imprecise memories, but clean as rain and linen. In the morning, the music was made of birds and falling water; at night, of the bleating of the sheep on the way back to *Curriça* (fold) and of the distant chirp of some owl. The bell and the Hail Marys marked the rhythm of the days. Now, I do not hear silence, but memory, that meta-landscape made of other sounds and vibrations, an invisible line that connects the present to the past.

I see myself as a branch that continues with deep roots. I know that this house will outlive me. Through the window I see the same trees that, for years, seem to have been accompanying me. I like trees. I fix my gaze on the bare trunks and branches. They persist standing, as if waiting for better days or a new spring. In their verticality, the trees connect the lowest to the highest. Stretched between the sky and the earth, they resist winds and rains, hail and snow, untimely felling attempts. Through the roots, they suck the earth, through the leaves, they drink the sun and the colour of the days. It is now, in winter, the season of goodbye and long retreats, which, naked and stripped bare, show their most intimate structure. Their branches are "roots drinking from the heavens". From that time come the most substantial learnings of myself and of the world.

I look at the bookshelf. What will happen to my books? The one, with the thin spine, on the third shelf, does anyone know the reason why I bought it, the subtleties of that copy? I don't need to open it to repeat a certain passage by heart. This one: "For the character of a human being to reveal truly exceptional qualities, one must be lucky enough to see it in action for many years. If this action is devoid of selfishness, if the idea that guides it is of an unexampled generosity, if it is undoubted that it does not want any reward and, moreover, still leaves visible marks on the world, then we are, without a doubt, facing an unforgettable character."

I think of her, and I think of you, perhaps of the same character without calculation. Friendship is a rare thing. It escapes the arbitrariness of pacts, it has no exact declination, it is not of the order of the will or even of the decision. It ignores ages, it is beyond physical presence, words or spaced silences. Perhaps the category of miracle explains it.

Kilometres lie between us. Yesterday was a yogurt I gave you – and you couldn't finish it. Your hands and the effort to keep your eyes open won't leave my mind. I feel an anticipated, almost tangible "saudade". In you I see that it is possible, that something blossoms behind us. We have all said it in other words and ways: your life is a clear word, a pact of mercy, forgiveness and trust. At your side there are no chased or banished. And so many bear witness to this – I would even say everyone who knows you. I like your voice without incisive authority, your boyish and enraptured poet's speech: "There is beauty in all things! Even on the grains of sands of the ground of this beaten earth!". I like your writing: what is peripheral, tiny, inglorious or invisible to the eye, your words reveal it with disconcerting simplicity. And it is as if the world recreated itself.

I turn my eyes to the old paintings in this house, and to the reproductions that, over the years, I have been adding to them. What painting is that in which each brushstroke is charged with light, sound and colour? Symbolist, impressionist or both? Spiritual manifesto of modernity and religion without dogma? In any case, the same transfiguration of Nature as a temple, the same displacement of the sacred from cathedrals and churches to Nature, as an altar of faith – “Nature is the last church, in which our spirit, tormented and sceptical, still kneels to pray”.

Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, Jean-François Millet, Constant Troyon, realist painters of the nineteenth century, are like evangelists of the modern soul and sensibility. And notice the so daring as beautiful equivalence between art and spirituality: *Millet's Angelus* is placed on an equal footing with the *Flos Sanctorum*, the book of the lives of the saints.

I look at the *Angelus* as a revelation, or as if I were entering the painting and, a little apart from the peasant couple, in communion with them, kneeling and praying, with Junqueiro by my side; or even as if it evoked my childhood – the many sunsets and the touch of the Trinities, Uncle Lele standing still, with his head uncovered, hat in his hands – and all together (the nominees and a few others: Rilke, Novalis, Thoreau, Caeiro, Sophia, Torga), in the still-luminous sacredness of the *Trás-os-Montes* landscape, we prayed “with all the voices of Creation”.

Where did your memories go? Some, as many as I was able to keep, remained in me.

He will continue to hide behind the fruit, and we will continue to look for him among the trees...

When I have forgotten everything, what will I still remember? Will I finally be able to tell you the name?

What is left for us, to be thankful? To give thanks for the house, the fire, grandmother Cândida and her preserved letters; to thank the trees that wait for me at the window; to thank you for the books and passages that I know by heart; to thank you, friend, for your voice without authority and the beauty you discover in the grains of sand on the ground; to thank for the paintings and the sunsets, for Uncle Lele with his head uncovered.

Is giving thanks the most enlightened way of thinking? Do you think with me? One of these days we will talk.

Henrique Manuel Pereira

