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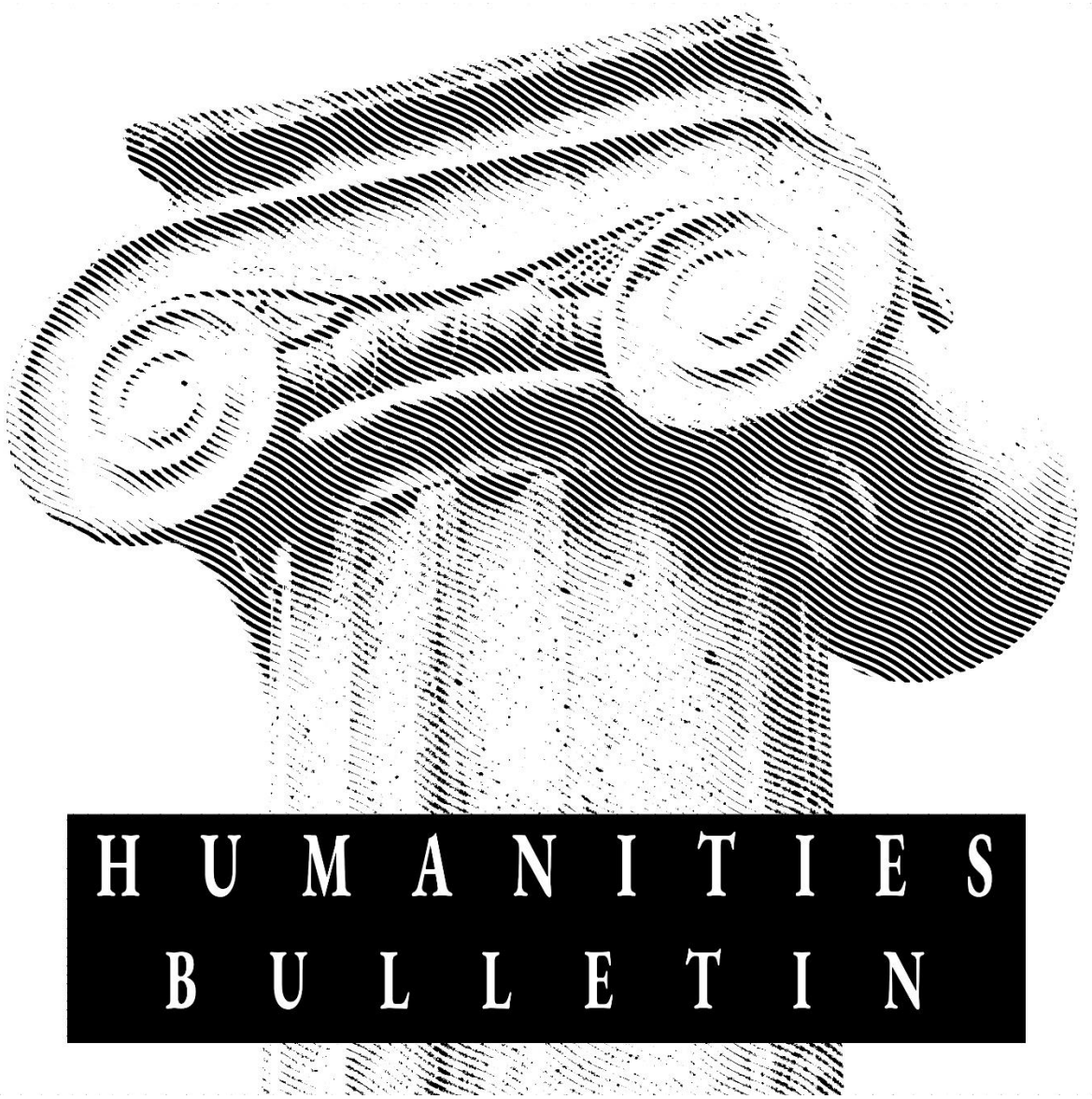

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Unintentional Intentionality

Iulia Nistor
Department of Philosophy
University of Regensburg
D-93040 Regensburg, Germany
Email: iulia_nistor@gmx.de

Abstract:

Intention is a necessary condition for John Searle's concept of derived intentionality; it is what bestows the intentionality of mental states on physical phenomena. This may be true for illocutionary acts but not for all instances of intentionality in the physical realm. I discuss cases of unintentional intentionality, starting with the example of the wave-poem by Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels (1982) and continuing with cases that implement images rather than text, that is, pareidolia. Furthermore, I criticise the dependency of the intentionality of physical phenomena on the intentionality of mind, suggested by the adjective 'derived'.

Keywords: intentionality, derived intentionality, meaning intention, pareidolia

Intentionality is a property attributed to mental states, namely the property to be directed towards or 'about' things. Some philosophers attribute a related property to certain physical phenomena, referred to as derived or derivative intentionality. The intentionality of the physical phenomenon is hereby understood as derived from the (intrinsic) intentionality of the mind. John Searle introduced the notion of derived intentionality, and he posits that the intention with which the act is performed bestows intentionality on physical phenomena (Searle, 1983). What a speaker means is explained by the intention with which the utterance is made, particularly by what Searle calls 'meaning intention'.[1] Although he focused on speech acts, he attributed derived intentionality to a wider range of phenomena, including writing and pictures (Searle, 1980). The idea that a sentence is the expression of a thought and that to express or represent something, we need to have the intention to do so seems intuitive. For Searle, intention is a necessary condition for derived intentionality. But is this true for all instances of intentionality in the physical realm? I will discuss cases of unintentional intentionality, starting with Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels' wave-poem example (1982) and continuing with cases that implement images rather than text, that is, pareidolia. Furthermore, I will criticise the dependency of the intentionality of physical phenomena on the intentionality of mind, suggested by the adjective 'derived'.

To discuss unintentional intentionality, we begin with Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels' wave poem: walking along the beach, we come across the stanza of a poem written in the sand. We can read and understand the writing, and we may assume that someone has written it there.

Eventually, a wave washes over it and astonishingly leaves another stanza behind, which seems to continue the poem. Knapp and Michaels concluded that while in the first case, we assume that the sentences have meaning, i.e. semantic content, because we suppose the existence of an author (and his intention); in the second case, we do not attribute meaning to the signs in the sand. As there is no author, but the marks appear accidentally, for them, the second stanza is not a linguistic phenomenon. They proceed to consider sentences produced by a computer, arguing that meaning in this case depends on whether we can attribute intentions to computers and not on the possibility of 'intentionless language' (Knapp & Michaels, 1982). Searle's position is referenced in their account, introduced with the sentence, 'The claim that all meanings are intentional is not, of course, an unfamiliar one in contemporary philosophy of language' (ibid., 727). In response, Searle offers a further example: Suppose a cat wanders over the keys of a computer keyboard and out comes the perfect English sentence 'The chair is made of wood'. He argues that nothing prevents us from taking this instance as an English sentence and attributing meaning to it since

> Languages are human institutions and thus are intentionalistic through and through. But it is a mistake to confuse the intentionality of the system with the requirement that every element of the system be the product of an actual human intention. (Searle 1994, 680)

Searle claimed that Knapp and Michaels misunderstood his point. In his view, a sentence is the standing possibility of an intentional speech act. Conversely, Knapp and Michaels believe that without the instantiation of the author's intention, nothing is a sentence. I further suggest that Knapp and Michaels seemingly confused intentionality with intention. In the passages mentioned earlier, they debate the possibility of an 'intentionless language' and the claim that 'all meanings are intentional'. In neither case is it clear if they mean 'intentional' in the technical sense. Furthermore, there is no instance in the text in which intentionality is explicitly addressed in a technical sense, such as through paraphrase. It seems that for them, the 'intentionality of language' means the 'intendedness of a sentence or speech act'. This is not implausible, given that Knapp and Michaels background is literary theory, in which the author's intention is widely discussed.[2] Even in philosophy, it is uncommon to attribute the term intentionality to writing and utterances. Rather, one would speak of reference or representation, whereas intentionality is typically attributed to states of mind. Searle applied the concept of intentionality to physical phenomena, such as writings, utterances, and pictures, referring to it as derived intentionality. For him, 'linguistic meaning is a form of derived intentionality' (Searle 1983, 175). For now, I will use 'meaning' or something 'being meaningful' based on Searle's sense as something 'having derived intentionality', but I will differentiate this later.

Instances of unintentional intentionality, such as the wave-poem or the cat-on-the-keyboard example, are unproblematic for Searle. According to him, we understand a correct sentence in a language familiar to us,

> weaned from all production or origin, putative or otherwise. [...] because a meaningful sentence is just

> a standing possibility of the corresponding (intentional) speech act. To understand it, it is necessary to know that anyone who said it and meant it would be performing that speech act determined by the rules of the language that gives the sentence its meaning in the first place. (Searle 1977, 202)

The rules of language and the standing possibility of an author's intention ensure intentionality in such cases. This suggests that not every instance of language–that is, every written sentence or speech act–has to be made with the intention of an author, but it is the standing intention that readers presuppose that makes the ascription of meaning possible. The reader does not necessarily need access to the particular intention with which the act is performed, nor does there need to be a particular intention involved in the first place. This allows for examples such as the wave poem or the cat-on-the-keyboard. In these cases, there is no intention of the author (the cat)[3], or there is no author in the first place (waves washing over the sand), but in both cases, such accidental agglomerations of signs can appear meaningful if they form a (more or less) correct sentence in a language we are familiar with. It seems that the conditions for intentionality differ according to the author's perspective and that of the reader or listener. From the author's perspective, the necessary steps to get from the possession of an intentional state to the performance of an illocutionary act, according to Searle, are (a1) the expression of that intentional state according to the rules of the language used, and (a2) the performance of the illocutionary act with the intention of some author. From the perspective of the reader, the understanding of a sentence is constituted by (r1) the reader being firm in the rules of the language used and (r2) the reader presupposing the standing possibility of the speech act being performed with the intention of some author.

Clearly, languages are human 'institutions', systems that function according to a set of rules, which are essentially based on intentionality. This implies that in order to impose intentionality on a physical item/event, one must (a1) (per)form an item/event that fulfils the rules of language, and the intentionality of such an item/event can be understood if (r1) the audience is firm in the rules of (that) language. However, it is unclear why the intentionality of physical phenomena must necessarily be linked to an author's intention, even if we understand this as the standing possibility of such an intention. According to Searle, (a2) is necessary because there is a difference between saying something and meaning it and saying something without meaning it.

> [People] make noises, or marks on paper; they draw pictures, or wave their arms about etc. Now my problem is: what must be added to these noises, marks, etc., in order that they should be statements, orders, etc.? What, so to speak, must be added to the physics to get the semantics? (Searle 1986, 209)

However, the thing 'to be added' does not seem to be a question of how something gathers semantic content but rather of how something becomes a speech act. There is a difference between uttering a sentence and meaning it: for example, singing a song in a foreign language. We can sing a sentence meaning it and without meaning (or understanding) it. Searle is interested in this difference. He asks how noises become a statement, an order, etc. Therefore, the 'meaning intention'

seems to refer to what we mean to do by making these noises. However, although a sung sentence may not be meant, it still has meaning. If, for example, our friend Katrin is singing along to a song on the radio: *'a cadeeeeiiira e feita de madeeiiiira'*, she might not mean to say that 'the chair is out of wood'. She may not even know the meaning of the words she is singing. And we might not understand them either because we do not speak Portuguese or because of her pronunciation. However, this is a correct Portuguese sentence and a Portuguese speaker would be able to understand it. Therefore, the difference in this case is what Katrin means to do, that is, singing along to a song or making a statement, not what the sentence means. Catherine Talmage argued that Searle failed to distinguish clearly between 'meaning' in the sense of the semantic meaning of a sentence and 'meaning' in the sense of a speaker meaning to do something by uttering that sentence (Talmage, 1996). Something can be said without meaning to, which nevertheless has meaning. In Katrin's case, we could still doubt whether what she meant to do was only to sing along to the song or if she (also) meant to make a statement. Let us suppose that Katrin pronounces the sentence 'The chair is made of wood' while being thoroughly asleep. She articulates a correct English sentence, and we can understand it. We would not hold her responsible for what she said because we do not consider a person in that situation an agent. However, what she utters forms a correct sentence nonetheless, and nothing prevents us from understanding it. She does not mean what she says, that is, her utterance is not a speech act, but the uttered sounds can be considered an instance of intentionality because they form a correct sentence, and thus seem to be about something. Thus, (a2) might be true for illocutionary acts but not for all instances of intentionality.

Let us look at (r2). Is it necessary from the perspective of the reader, listener, or observer to presuppose the (standing) intention of an author to understand a physical phenomenon as an instance of intentionality? In most cases, there is a reason to presuppose an author, and in these cases, readers and audiences assume the intention of such an author and often wonder about the particular intention she had. When we read a sentence from a book, an advertisement on a billboard, or graffiti on a wall, we usually assume an author and her intention.[4] Even when we read a poem in the sand, as described by Knapp and Michaels, we initially assume an author's intention. However, after a wave washes over it and leaves behind another poem, we are certain of witnessing an accidental agglomeration of signs in the sand. Still, these signs make sense to us, and nothing prevents us from understanding them. It seems necessary that the accidental agglomeration of signs forms a correct sentence in a language we are familiar with. However, is it necessary for their understanding to presuppose (r2) the standing possibility of an author's intention? What could this 'standing intention' actually be? There are many cases where the author is not present, and we do not witness her performance. For example, Searle (1977) mentions the sentence of a dead author, 'On the twentieth of September 1793, I set out on a journey from London to Oxford'. In this case, the standing intention could be related to the production of the sentence and the context in which it is read. When we read a sentence in a book, we assume that there was an author who intended to make such a statement, because it is a printed sentence in a book, so someone must have decided to print

it; before that, someone must have submitted it for publication, and before that, someone must have written or typed it. When we read the sentence scratched in the seat in front of us while sitting on a train, we assume the author and her intention because someone must have meant to scratch it there. However, in the case of the wave poem, we just saw the wave wash over the first stanza and leave behind a second stanza, so we would not assume that it was written there by someone. We are astonished by this coincidence and bemused that the random signs seem to make sense. It is precisely the absence of an author (and her intention) that elicits such bemusement. What could a standing intention be in this case? Maybe that the sentence could be used by someone in a speech act; that is, the possibility to appropriate the signs for an author's intention. However, in this case, (r2) is not necessary to understand the signs, rather because someone understands the signs they might appropriate them. In a more general sense, the standing intention might be inherent to the conventions of language; it could be the presupposition that, at some point, someone attributed a certain meaning to a certain sign and that this was done intentionally. This presupposition may be implicit in our use of language. In this sense, (r2) would be true for strongly conventional signs, like most words we use in language.

(r2) may be true for texts and other manifestations of language. However, if we now consider images, we find that this is changing the setup significantly. Let us assume that our wave does not leave behind a poem but a clearly delineated portrait of a particular person, say Madonna. We do not follow the lines of the drawing as we would follow the words that form a sentence, but the image is more instantly recognisable to us. At least at the level of 'face value'. Also images can be highly coded when used in a manner that implies complex contexts and conventions. We even sometimes speak of having to 'read' an image or of a 'language of images'. In this case, I do not discuss such coded uses of images but the basic recognition of an object or portrait. We said that (r2) might be true for strongly conventional signs because the intention of an author can be understood as implicit in the arbitrary conventions of language. Regarding images, this setup is changing; images are not an arbitrary system agreed upon by convention. In the case of images, we would not assume that at some point, someone (intentionally) attributed a certain meaning to a certain sign, as we might assume in the case of language.[5] Images are partly recognised through their likeness to the things depicted, whereas the words we use to signify things usually do not bear likeness to the things signified.[6] Symbols, signs, and pictograms may form exceptions and must be discussed separately. The crucial difference for my argument is the arbitrariness of linguistic meaning. This helped maintain (r2) that the reader presupposes the standing possibility of the speech act being performed with the intention of some author. Also images have conventions of use and may be highly coded. However, in the case of the wave portrait, we recognise Madonna because the signs in the sand look like her. We do not presuppose that at some point, someone intentionally attributed the meaning 'Madonna' to that particular sign. However, (r2) applies only to arbitrary signs.

The phenomenon of seeing images in accidental stimuli is also referred to as pareidolia, such as recognizing shapes in clouds, seeing a man (alternatively, a rabbit) in the moon, or the face of the

Virgin Mary on a piece of toast. Scientific research considers pareidolia a sensory illusion because one is attending to an actual stimulus such that a familiar pattern is perceived. The same could be said about representations, only we usually assume that someone made them with some purpose. The tendency to recognise faces in accidental stimuli is particularly high. Recent neuroscientific research has shown that our sensory system works similarly if confronted with (what they call) an illusionary face or a real one. For example, we track the gaze of illusionary faces in the same manner we track the eyes of a person in front of us (Takahashi & Watanabe, 2015). Several studies have investigated pareidolia using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), and the results indicate, among other things, that the interpretation of accidental stimuli depends on processes similar to those elicited by real objects. This is related to the finding that such recognition occurs at a relatively early stage of perception and is not a late cognitive reinterpretation of sense data (Voss et al., 2012). Some researchers have suggested that our sensitivity to face recognition and its location in early sensory processes may also explain why the mere perception of a face can produce the same reactions we have when we look at a real person (Kaufmann et al., 2018). The fact that image recognition is not a late cognitive reinterpretation of sense data but can occur at an early stage of perception supports our theoretical observations that (r2) the presupposition of a standing intention is not necessary for intentionality.

One could argue that the viewer's intention is necessary for intentionality, that the viewer wants to see a face, as in games of seeing-in, where one tries to find shapes in the clouds passing by. We sometimes play such games and what we want to see (or read) certainly influences the meaning we attribute to that image or sign. However, this does not imply that the viewer's intention is necessary for intentionality. This is because it cannot explain the case in which recognising a face on a piece of toast comes as a surprise. We might dismiss the thought as absurd; we might laugh about it and not take it further seriously. And we can only experience this reaction because we recognise something in the first place. There is something to the toast that looks like something else–that is, pointing beyond itself. Therefore, the toast can be considered to have intentional properties. It is important to distinguish between intentionality and meaning at this point. As mentioned earlier, Searle claims that linguistic meaning is a form of derived intentionality. However, this should not imply that intentionality and meaning are identical. Rather, they stand in an asymmetrical relationship: if there is meaning, there must be intentionality, but not vice versa. We can identify intentional properties in/on physical phenomena, such as an agglomeration of marks that form a correct sentence or bear a likeness to the features of a person. However, even though we can say that these marks have an intentional property, they only have meaning if a viewer reads them as meaningful or if an author intends to express a meaning through them. In this sense intentionality is not identical to meaning; rather the intentional properties of physical phenomena can be described as potentially meaningful.

Discussing cases of unintentional intentionality and considering not only text but also images, we can see that (a2) may be true for illocutionary acts but not for all instances of intentionality. As

the phenomenal range of intentionality for Searle includes, next to utterances and writings, also pictures, it follows that intention is not a necessary condition for intentionality.

When confronted with instances of intentionality in the physical realm, two aspects appear relevant: (1) the correspondence of content in different forms; and (2) the idea of consequence. The first seems unproblematic, whereas the second is debatable. The first aspect (1) describes the fact that we encounter instances of intentionality in mental states and artefacts that are directed towards, that are 'about' the same thing. The second aspect (2) is the case if (1) is given and one of these instances is the consequence of the other. In many cases an author expresses a mental state in a text, performance, or image, and thus imposes intentionality on a physical phenomenon. These are examples of illocutionary acts. In these cases the instance of intentionality in the physical realm is a consequence of the intentionality of a mental state and the author's intention. There are also mistakes and unsuccessful attempts, but these cases do not lack intention; rather the intention confirms the failure. Here, (2) is given, but (1) is not. In cases of unintentional intentionality, the opposite is true: (2) is not given, but (1) is.

Searle developed the concept of derived intentionality to ground his speech-act theory. This becomes apparent in the adjective 'derived'. This adjective indicates the relationship between the intentionality of the mind and the intentionality of physical phenomena: the intentionality of the physical phenomenon is understood as derived from the (intrinsic) intentionality of the mind. The intention with which an act is performed imposes intentionality on physical phenomena. Since it could be shown that intention is not a necessary condition for all cases of intentionality, the dependency of the intentionality of physical items and events on the intentionality of the mind has to be questioned. Such a dependency may exist for meaning but not for intentionality. When confronted with physical instances of intentionality, we cannot infer that they are a consequence of a corresponding mental state. We can only be certain that there are instances of intentionality in mental states and physical phenomena; however we cannot infer that they are necessarily consequences of each other.

Conclusion

Searle's claim that intention is a necessary condition for intentionality has been refuted. In cases of unintentional intentionality, we are confronted with accidental agglomerations of signs or marks; however, we are still able to understand the text or recognise an image. Considering examples of images and not only text, we can see that intention (be it a particular or standing intention) is not a necessary condition for the intentionality of physical phenomena. I further criticised the dependency of the intentionality of physical phenomena on the intentionality of mind, suggested by the adjective 'derived'. We can attribute intentional properties to both mental states and physical phenomena, but to determine a causality between them is not always conclusive. Differentiating intentionality and meaning, and understanding the intentionality of physical phenomena as independent of the intentionality of the mind is, among other things, relevant for discussing AI-generated images and texts.

Endnotes:

1. Searle's point of departure is Paul Grice's claim that language is dependent on mind, in the sense that for speakers to mean something is to have a certain set of intentions directed at an actual or possible audience (Grice 1969). Searle disagrees with the idea that this intention has to imply the production of effects in the audience, because he realised that 'meaning exists independently of the intention to communicate that meaning' (Searle 1986, 211). For Searle to mean something by an utterance is to intend its production as the performance of a speech act, what he calls the 'meaning intention'.
2. However, even with respect to the author's intention we have to differentiate the discourses. Whether the author's intention should be a norm for the meaning of a work, or the author's intention is necessary for any kind of meaning to exist, is a different question. I could insist on the importance of the author's intention (and the context of production, etc.) for the purpose of interpretation by art history or art criticism, parallel to the argument that intention is not a necessary condition for intentionality in the philosophy of mind.
3. Of course, the cat might have several intentions for walking over the keyboard, but (probably) not the intention to write the sentence 'The chair is made of wood'.
4. Actually, this assumption is becoming less and less common, given the increasing presence of AI-generated images and texts.
5. The notion that the conventions of language originate in an intentional act of denomination by some author(s) is merely a hypothetical assumption that a reader may have, and does not pertain to the actual formation of the conventions of language.
6. Likeness is not something that can define images (for a critique of likeness theories of images see for example Oliver Scholz, 2004), but it does form an important difference to the arbitrariness of linguistic signs.

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Logically Simple Objects and a Relational View of Reality in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, Russell and Carnap

Richard McDonough
Arium School of Arts and Sciences
51 Cuppage Road
#06-23, Singapore 229469
Email: rmm249@cornell.edu; wittgensteins_poker2007@yahoo.com

Abstract:

Many philosophers have puzzled over the nature of the logically simple objects, the "substance" of the world, in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (*TLP*). Such questions are misplaced because *TLP* is committed to the view that talk of such metaphysically problematical entities is part of the "ladder" that must be "thrown away" after one has climbed it. Further, *TLP's demotion* of *its* logically simple objects to mere logical subjects requires an *increased emphasis* on the relations between these alleged objects. *TLP's* account of its logically simple objects is an application of Russell's *relational* view of mathematical objects from his *Principles of Mathematics* applied to "reality". Carnap develops an analogous relational or "structural" view of reality in *The Logical Structure of the World*. Despite important differences between them, these three philosophers can profitably be seen as replacing the traditional emphasis on substances with a *relational model of reality*.

Keywords: Tractatus-logico-philosophicus, logical simples, relationalism, Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap

> We can describe the world completely by means of fully generalized propositions, i.e., without first correlating any name with any particular object.
>
> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* (5.526)

What are the logically simple objects (hereafter LSO's) posited by the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (*TLP*) and *Notebooks 1914-16* (*NB*) (Black 1961, 49; Tejedor 2015; Proops 2022, § 4).[1] Could a watch or visual patch be an LSO? (NB, 62-66) Do LSO's have an essential character? Could a property or a relation be an LSO? Can we become *acquainted* with LSO's or are these merely theoretical requirements of logic? In fact, these questions are misplaced. *TLP* is committed to the view that talk about LSO's and about their fully analyzed names is eliminable in a logically adequate language. This may seem surprising because LSO's are said to be the "substance" in the world (2.021, 2.027). However, *TLP's* talk of such metaphysical entities is part of the "ladder" that must be "thrown away" after one has used it to "see the world right" (6.54). Questions about the nature of LSO's and their unanalyzable names evaporate once one understands *TLP* correctly. However, the *elimination* of LSO's means that

the most significant contribution to the sense of *TLP's* fully analyzed elementary propositions rests on the *relations* in which LSO's are represented. (2.0231) The paper also argues that *TLP's* account of LSO's is an application of Russell's *relational* view of mathematical objects formulated in *Principles of Mathematics* (*POM*) applied to the real world and explains an illuminating analogy between *TLP's* relational view of reality and Carnap's view in *The Logical Structure of the World* (*LSW*).

I.) Simple Objects, Substance and Possible Worlds

> Logic ... is prior to the question 'How?', not prior to the question 'What?'
>
> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* (5.552-5.5521)

According to *TLP* the logic of the world, i.e., the limits and structure of logical space, is determined by the ground-level set of LSO's. Since it is natural to assume that, for *TLP*, the actual world is composed of an *enormous* number of LSO's that, in turn, may or may not be configured in an enormous number of ways, it is useful, for heuristic purposes, to present a simplified model of the connection between the LSO's and the limits of logical space. If Norman Malcolm is composed of 27 trillion LSO's involving 9 trillion different possible relations this would generate an unmanageable enormous number of different possible worlds. Consider, therefore, a fictional world in which there are far fewer LSO 's and possible relations and, therefore, a far smaller set of possible facts and possible worlds. Since "there are no privileged numbers" (*TLP* 5.453), one cannot rule out that there could be only a tiny number of LSO's, perhaps even just two objects and one possible relation. One can, therefore, describe the list of possible worlds there would be if there were only two LSO's, a and b, and one possible relation, R, in which they can participate. Assume further that this relation R is symmetrical but not reflexive. That is, if a can be R to b then b can be R to a, but neither a nor b can be in relation R to themselves. Assume also the principles of classical logic: There are no contradictory states of affairs, e.g., no possible world in which a is both R to b and not R to b. This yields only 4 possible worlds (PW's),

PW1: a is R to b; b is R to a
PW2: a is R to b; b is not R to a
PW3: a is not R to b; b is R to a
PW4: a is not R to b; b is not R to a

Fig. 1.

Although *TLP's* LSO's are not familiar objects like Bob and Mary, it is useful to sketch an everyday language interpretation of the model in Fig 1. Suppose that "a" = "Bob", "b" = "Mary", and "R" = "loves". Thus, in PW1 Bob loves Mary and Mary loves Bob. In PW2, Bob loves Mary and Mary does not love Bob. In PW3 Bob does not love Mary but Mary loves Bob. In PW4 Bob does not love Mary and Mary does not love Bob.

Assuming also that one represents the proposition that a is R to b by the propositional symbol "aRb" and, employing the usual truth functional connectives, *TLP's* descriptions of these four possible worlds (DPW's) is given in Fig. 2,

DPW1: "aRb & bRa"
DPW2: "aRb & ~bRa"
DPW3: "~aRb and bRa"
DPW4: "~aRb & ~bRa"

Fig. 2.

Since, as *TLP* (5.526) states, one can symbolize such propositions in completely general form using quantificational logic without correlating any name with any object, one can completely represent the possibilities in Fig. 2 in the fully general propositions in Fig. 3,

DPW1: (∃x)(∃y) (x ≠ y & xRy & yRx)
DPW2: (∃x)(∃y) (x ≠ y & xRy & ~yRx)
DPW3: (∃x)(∃y) (x ≠ y & ~xRy & yRx)
DPW4: (∃x)(∃y) (x ≠ y & ~xRy & ~yRx)

Fig. 3.

Following 5.526, in Fig. 3 one says everything said in Fig. 2, thereby representing the four possible states of reality, without correlating any name with any object. One might, however, argue that these four descriptions in Fig. 3 leave out the most important features of these PW's. For, although DPW1-DPW4 do capture the abstract *formal structure* of these four possible descriptions and the corresponding four PW's described in Fig's 1 and 2, these completely generalized descriptions in Fig. 3 *leave out Bob and Mary*. For, when, in everyday language, one is told that Bob loves Mary one is not merely told that there are two distinct objects where the one loves the other one. One is told that a specific individual, Bob, loves another specific individual, Mary. Those two concrete individuals, Bob and Mary, are the actual subject matter in the world that determines the sense or content of these propositions. By translating the four propositions in Fig. 2 into the fully generalized forms in Fig. 3 it appears that one loses the most important linguistic devices, the names that represent the subject matter in the world and, with that, the most important content of the propositions in Fig. 2, the two real subject matters of the propositions, Bob and Mary.

It is highly significant that though this seems true for everyday language, it does *not* hold for *TLP's* completely logically analyzed language. *TLP's* model of the role of LSO's and their possible configurations in the world is virtually the *opposite* of the role names and their references have in everyday language. In order to see this, one must look more closely at the peculiar nature *TLP*'s LSO's.

II.) A Geometrical Model of *Tractatus* Logical Space

> If two [simple] objects have the same logical form, the only distinction between them apart from their external properties is that they are different.
>
> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* (2.0233)

One cannot imagine anyone claiming of ordinary everyday objects like Bob and Mary that the only distinction between them apart from their external properties is that they are different. Perhaps Bob is distinguished from Mary in that one of Bob's "external properties" is that he always wears blue and one of Mary's "external properties" is that she always wears red, but it is not *only* by means of "external properties" that Bob and Mary are distinguished. For, at least on the everyday understanding, objects like Bob and Mary have all sorts of *internal* (intrinsic) properties that distinguish them, e.g., Bob is male and Mary is female.

One might argue that the everyday distinction between external and internal properties is vague, e.g., that Bob could transition to female, suggesting that gender is also an external property. However, we *do* make the distinction between external and internal properties in ordinary language and Bob's O-negative and Mary's A-positive blood would be almost impossible to change without causing their demise. That is, in *ordinary language* we assume that if an object can have external properties, it must be a determinate object in its own right with its own internal nature in order to be the *substrate* for its external properties. It appears, therefore, that in ordinary language the notion of an object's internal properties is conceptually prior to that of its external properties. Russell says something like this about numbers at *POM* (§ 242): "If [numbers] are to be anything at all they must be intrinsically something." In any case, the present paper argues that this does *not* hold for *TLP* objects and, on that basis, develops a crucial contrast between the ordinary conception of an object and *TLP's* novel concept of LSO's.

Since ordinary objects do not resemble the LSO's described at *TLP* (2.0233), one wonders if there is any actual system of items that satisfies that description and, in fact, there is (Goddard and Judge 1983). Consider the ordinary concept of the Euclidean plane as an ordered system of points in which each point bears a determinate relation to each of the other points in the plane. These Euclidian points are, however, very unusual objects. For each point in that plane, taken by its self, is completely indistinguishable from every other point in that plane. Employing the Cartesian coordinate system, the point (2, 4) at 2 on the x-axis and 4 on the y-axis is, in itself, completely indistinguishable from the point (4, 9) located at 4 on the x-axis and 9 on the y-axis. One *can* distinguish them but only by putting some *external* marks at these points. Since one cannot distinguish these two pure geometrical points by any of their intrinsic properties, *because they have no intrinsic properties*, one can only distinguish them by, so to speak, putting something, i.e., a mark, at those points on the graph.

This geometrical analogy may help explain why *TLP* (2.023) states that "In a manner of speaking objects are colorless". For the points in the Euclidean plane, considered in themselves, are *literally* colorless (and soundless, weightless, etc.) which is why, in order to distinguish them we must

use some external mark, an ink mark or a mathematical notation like "(2, 4)". This is connected with *TLP* (3.221), one of *TLP's* mysterious mystical, remarks,

> Objects can only be *named*. Signs are their representatives. I can only speak *about* them. I cannot *put them into words*. Propositions only say *how* things are, not *what* they are [all emphasis, LW's].

TLP's fully analyzed propositions cannot express the individual nature of the LSO's they describe, if LSO's even have any inner nature or "whatness." Since *TLP's* LSO's resemble the points in the pure Euclidean plane that are, in themselves, internally indistinguishable from each other, it committed to hold that one cannot meaningfully talk about their nature (*TLP*, 6.5). Thus, *TLP's* fully analyzed elementary propositions can only describe the *relations* between these internally indistinguishable LSO's, i.e., *how* they are configured.

TLP may describe its LSO's as substances but on this geometrical model they do not resemble objects or substances traditionally conceived. Just as it makes no sense to talk about replacing one point in pure geometrical space, e.g., the point "(2, 4)" in a Cartesian coordinate system, with the point "(4, 9)" in that space, it makes no sense to talk about replacing one *TLP* LSO at some point in logical space with another from a different position in logical space. Just as a point in pure Euclidean space is individuated solely by its place in *that relational system*, *TLP*'s LSO's are also individuated only by their position in the system of *relations* that constitutes logical space. Since a *TLP* LSO O_1 is individuated by its position in that relational system, any object occupying that position in logical space just *is* O_1, not a different object that had somehow been substituted for it. This is concealed if one thinks of *TLP's* LSO's as if they are substantial entities like Bob and Mary with their own intrinsic identities that might be moved around from here to there.

One might profitably compare *TLP's* LSO's to the "it" in the everyday statement, "It's raining". For that sentence to be true" there need be no actual object in the world, the reference of "it", that does the raining. To say "It's raining" is, roughly, only to say that there is a complex set of relations in the world that constitute rain and that could, in principle, be described by a physicist. Just as the *syntax* of ordinary English demands a subject for the predicate, an "it" to do the raining, even though no such substantial "it" need exist in the real world, *TLP* holds that logic demands a subject for its fully analyzed relations, but this demand is *purely formal*: "The substance of the world *can* only determine a form" (2.0231).

Since *TLP's* LSO's resemble the internally indistinguishable points in Euclidian plane, and since the only way simple objects enter into the meaning of propositions about the world is as formal placeholders for the relations, *TLP's* fully analyzed propositions need only distinguish LSO's *formally*, e.g., if the facts about the world, as described in DPW2 from Fig 1 in § I are that a is R to b and that b is not R to a, one can describe this possible world completely, leaving out *nothing*, by the fully generalized proposition DPW2 from Fig. 3,

$$(\exists x)(\exists y)\,(x \neq y \;\&\; xRy \;\&\; \sim yRx)$$

If the objects over which "x" and "y" range are like Bob and Mary then something *is* left out by this proposition, namely, Bob's and Mary's intrinsic natures. Since, however, *TLP's* simple objects have no intrinsic natures, *nothing* is left out by DPW2. It is true that the objects ranged over by "x" and "y" in DPW2 are as different as the two distinct geometrical points (2, 4) and (4, -1), but since these points are not distinguished by their internal properties they can only be distinguished formally, but that is accomplished by DPW2 in Fig. 3.

Since *TLP's* simple objects appear to be formal requirements of logic, one might think that both they and logical space are *transcendentally ideal*. However, although *TLP* (6.13) does say that "logic is transcendental," it nowhere suggests that simple objects are *created* by the mind. Rather, since *TLP's* LSO's "only determine a form", the names for these "objects" are completely replaceable by purely formal logical apparatus that, according to *TLP's* "fundamental idea" (4.0312), do not stand for anything. Thus, even if God miraculously understands the language that, up to that point, following *TLP's* "solipsism" (5.62), I alone had understood, it would still true that the substance of the world "only determines a form". Therefore, God would only understand *the same empty form that I do*! One should, therefore, say that *TLP's* simple objects and logical space are formal "presuppositions" (6.124) of logic much as the system of different but internally indistinguishable geometrical points are a presupposition of Euclidian geometry. There is nothing in the least bit subjective or idealistic about that. Wittgenstein does talk about "my world" but "never speaks of 'my logic'" (Black 307). Given that this geometrical model lies at the foundation of *TLP's* view of the substance of the world, *TLP* is the most thorough-going attempt up to that time to defend a version of the pure geometrical model of the world initiated by Plato (Cf. Popper 1965, 88).

III.) The Relational Character of Reality

> The substance of the world can only determine a form, not any material properties. For it is only by means of propositions that material properties are represented [*dargestellt*], only by the configuration of objects that they are produced [*gebildet*].
>
> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* (2.0231)

Whereas § II discusses the fact that *TLP's* LSO's and logical space resemble, respectively, pure geometrical points and pure Euclidean space, *TLP* also sketches an account of the "production [*bilden*]" of the material world. That is, *TLP* does *not*, on the geometrical interpretation, hold that its simple objects are indistinguishable but only that, like the empty points in the Euclidean plane, they are not distinguishable by virtue of their "internal properties" but only by their contingent configurations.

Consider again the simple world sketched in § I in which there are only two simple objects, a and b, and one possible relation R, yielding four possible worlds. Recall from Fig. 2 that in the first of these possible worlds PW1, a is R to b and b is R to a. In the second, PW2, a is R to b and b is not R to a. In the third, PW3, a is not R to b and b is R to a. In the fourth, PW4, a is not R to b and b is

not R to a. Suppose further, for heuristic purposes, that when in PW2 a is R to b and b is not R to a, the world has the material property of a blue glow and that when in PW3 a is not R to b and b is R to a, the world has the material property of a red glow. On these assumptions there is a sense in which a and b, even though internally indistinguishable, can be distinguished. For a is distinguished by virtue of the fact that its being is R to b when b is not R to a "produces" the material property of a blue glow. What does it *mean* to say that a is R to b while b is not R to a? "Can't you see the blue glow?"

TLP (2.0233) does not, therefore, hold that LSO's, as completely indistinguishable in themselves as two empty points in geometrical space, cannot be distinguished. It holds that different LSO's can only be distinguished by virtue of their contingent configurations. On *TLP*'s model of reality the "material properties" of the world, the blue glows, are "produced", not by the "substances" of the world (that "only determine a form)," but by their configurations. This is a model of the reality on which the LSO's function only as formal subjects for the all-important relations. For the existence of these relations produce the "material properties". Thus, for *TLP*, the everyday proposition, e.g., that the world exhibits a blue glow, must be analyzable into a conjunction of elementary propositions about the contingent relations between the LSO's that are, in themselves, completely indistinguishable.

This also suggests an interesting interpretation of *TLP's* (2.0251) puzzling remark that "Space, time and color (being colored [*Färbikeit*]) are forms of objects." Note that space here *cannot* mean the logical space discussed in the previous section. *TLP* is here referring to the "material properties", in a broad sense, of physical space, time and color in the actual world. Since "form is the possibility of structure" (2.033), to say that space is the form of the LSO's is to say that the spatiality of the actual world is "produced" by a certain combination of the LSO's. Similarly, physical time is "produced" by a different combination of the LSO's. Finally, the color in the world is produced by combining LSO's yet in another way.

It is a corollary of this that the world of LSO's, substances, considered in itself, is devoid of time, space or color. *TLP* does not envisage a set of simple substances in physical space and time prior to entering into any actual configurations. The physical phenomena of space, time and color are each "material properties" that are "produced" by the configurations of LSO's. This should not be surprising. The logical point of view is the point of view on the logical possibilities, that is, on logical space as such. But that is to view the word "*sub specie aeterni*" (6.45), i.e., prior (logically not temporally) to any definite configuration in LSO's that make up the "material properties" of the world.

IV.) An Analogy with Carnap's Logical Positivism

> The actual basic concepts of the constructional system ... to which all other concepts are to be reduced are not the basic objects but the basic relations [because the] system of relations is primary relative to its members.
>
> Carnap, *The Logical Structure of the World* (§ 7)

Although Carnap took *TLP's* logical system as the template for his views in *LSW* there are

important differences between the two. Perhaps the most important is that Carnap (1935, § I.7) sees *TLP* as "inconsistent" because it says that "whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent; and then, instead ... he writes a whole philosophical book." Carnap aims in *LSW* to produce a logical-philosophical system modeled on *TLP* but purged of *TLP's* residual metaphysics. Whereas *TLP* writes in a metaphysical mode and is only little interested in epistemology (Garver 1989, 101-2), *LSW* approaches many of *TLP's* problems from an epistemological mode in order to provide a logical-linguistic framework for *empirical science* (*LSW* §'s 103, 178). *LSW* (§ 67) replaces *TLP's* LSO's by "the basic elements" of knowledge that "we call *elementary experiences*" [C's emphasis]". For this reason, *LSW* (§'s 58, 66) takes an "auto-psychological" or "methodological solipsism" perspective because it holds that each person's elementary experiences are directly available to themselves but not to anyone else (*LSW*, § 58, 66). This presents Carnap with the difficult problem of showing how an objective empirical science of physics can be grounded in individual subjective experiences (*LSW*, § 59-60, 66-69)!

LSW aims to provide "the step-by-step derivation" or "construction" of all concepts "from certain fundamental concepts" needed for a logical-epistemic system capable of completely describing everything that can be said about the world (*LSW*, § 1). *LSW*, like *TLP*, mentions basic un-analyzable objects but since *LSW* (§ 7) takes an epistemological perspective its most basic "un-analyzable objects" are not *TLP*-style LSO's but "'my experiences' (more precisely entities which can be called *terms of relations* [emphasis added]". These basic objects, each person's private experiences, play a very limited role in *LSW's* system: "[T]he basic relations take precedence over the basic elements ... [because] construction theory considers the individual objects as secondary, relative to the network in which they stand (*LSW* § 61). *LSW* (§ 162) does mention "substances" but, following *TLP's* description of the basic substances as "formal," these are "the unlimited number of possible *forms* [emphasis added] of ordering the elements on the basis of their basic relations". It is not the basic objects but the "network" of relations that is fundamental to *LSW's* system.

Since *LSW's* substances are demoted to "forms" for "ordering" the relations between experiences, "The basic objects from which all others are constructed are the basic relations [C's emphasis]" (§ 105, Part C. See also § 75). *LSW* (§ 69) continues: "The statements about un-analyzable units ... can only be pure relation descriptions." *LSW's* simple un-analyzable units dissolve into "pure relation descriptions" (pure formal subjects for the all-important relations). Since *LSW's* demotes its basic objects to formal subjects for the relations, it aims "to characterize all objects through merely *structural* properties ... and to transform all scientific statements into purely structural statements" (*LSW* § 6). *LSW* purports to provide an account of the logical structure of the world not in the limited sense that it provides a framework for describing the structuring of objects needed for a complete description of the empirical world but in the *much stronger* sense that "All statements ... in the constructional system *are ... about nothing but the basic relations* [emphasis added]" (*LSW* § 153)!

LSW (§ 177) even states that "Construction theory agrees with *transcendental idealism* [C's emphasis] ... that all objects of cognition are constructed (in idealistic language: 'are created in

thought')." This holds even for *LSW's* (§ 7) most "basic elements" ..., that is, "my experiences which initially have neither names nor properties ... and can be called terms of relations only after certain [mental] constructions have been carried out". All of these "constructed objects," including even elementary experiences, "are objects of conceptual knowledge only *qua* logical forms that are generated in a certain way (*LSW,* § 177). *LSW* agrees with *TLP's* view that the elementary objects are mere formal subjects for the all-important relations, but it arrives there at a very different route. Whereas *LSW (*§'s 82-83, 100), in Kantian language concerning the "construction" or "synthesis" of experience (Cf. Strawson 1966, 93-97), even sees elementary experiences as mental constructions, *TLP* ties *its* simple objects to the truth-functional tautologies that "show [*zeigt*]" the logical form of reality. One cannot get more objective and mind-independent than *TLP's* view.

Although Stenius (1996, Chap. XI) see a Kantian dimension in *TLP*, it must be remembered that whereas Kant builds his system on synthetic *a priori* knowledge, and, therefore, needs a mind to synthesize the basic experiences into knowledge, *TLP's* (6.1-6.111, 6.12) system is built upon the "analytic" propositions, the tautologies, and there is, therefore, no obvious need for a mind to "synthesize" the logical structure of the world. Since "the nature of the natural and inevitable ... propositions of logic ... speaks for itself" (6.124), *TLP* needs no mind to speak for them. Whereas *LSW*, like Kant, aims to build a system of knowledge, *TLP* presents a "treatise on logical philosophy" (*Tractatus logico-philosophicus*), not a treatise on mental synthesis. It is Carnap's *LSW*, not Wittgenstein's *TLP*, that has this Kantian dimension.

Despite that major difference over the nature of the basic objects, *LSW*'s view is analogous to *TLP's* view (2.0231) that it is only by the configuration of the LSO's that the material properties in the world are produced. Just as *LSW* attempts to describe the logical *structure* of the world, not the objects or substances in those structures, so *TLP* attempts to describe the "logical form" (2.18) of reality, not the LSO's themselves. This is the real significance of Carnap's title *The Logical Structure of the World*. The basic objects in Carnap's world, elementary experiences, are mere "terms of relations," empty subjects for the relations that provide the content for his *purely structural* description of the world.[2]

There is, therefore, a sense in which for both *TLP* and *LSW* the elementary or simple un-analyzable objects drop out of the sense or content of the proposition in favor of the all-important relations (or structure). However, it would be too strong to say that *TLP* is committed to the view that *TLP's* simple objects in the world do not exist, just as it would be too strong to say that *LSW* is committed to the view its elementary experiences do not exist. It would, for *TLP*, be safer to say that the need to posit simple objects is a formal requirement of logic and leave it at that because nothing more can be said about them (3.221). Similarly, even though *LSW's* elementary un-analyzable objects appear to dissolve into mere forms created by the human mind, it would also be too strong to say that they do not exist. *LSW* embraces realism in the sense that it embraces the truth of scientific propositions, but *LSW* (§ 52) neither affirms nor denies the metaphysical reality of its elementary objects.

Carnap (*LSW* §'s 12, 16) credits the discovery of the importance of the structural or relational view of the world to Russell's work in the philosophy of mathematics. Russell's seminal insight is that since the mutual relations of points in the Euclidean plane are of the same type as those of the complex numbers, plane geometry, as a branch of pure mathematics, is not concerned with the question what kinds of entities these points really are. For Russell (*POM*, § 27), the "true subject matter" of mathematics is relational types. Russell explains the emphasis that mathematics lays upon relations: "To the mathematician, it is wholly irrelevant what his entities are, so long as they have relations of a specified type. ... [A]n instant is a very different thing from a point; but to the mathematician as such there is no relevant distinction between the instants of time and the points on a line." (*POM*. § 387) As a consequence, Russell says that pure mathematics can "dispense altogether with indefinibles ... because here every concept is defined in terms of general logical concepts," prefiguring *TLP's* view that the names for simple objects can be eliminated and replaced by purely general logical apparatus.[3] Although Russell's notions of a mathematical relational systems was anticipated by Dedekind (Reck 2020, § 5) and later developed by Cassirer (Friedman 2022, § 3), Russell's *POM* is the seminal work in the logic of relations.

TLP's innovation is to apply Russell's relational model from his philosophy of mathematics more generally to the whole account of "reality". It is one thing to say that the objects of pure mathematics "become variables", quite another to say that the basic "substances" in the real world "become variables," mere "forms" in a pure relational view of reality. But that is precisely what *TLP* does, with the proviso that this "relational" view holds only at the *fully analysed* level. *TLP* does not hold that Norman Malcolm "becomes a variable." Malcolm is a material object and, therefore, a complex structure the complete true description of which at the fully analysed level would require a level of logical analysis that is literally *beyond human abilities* (4.002). *TLP's* relational view does not apply directly to the sentences of everyday language.

V.) Reply to the Objection that *Tractatus* Logical Space is not Uniform

> What any picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it—correctly or incorrectly—in any way at all is logical form, the form of reality
>
> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* (2.18)

One might argue that *TLP*'s (2.171) implication that different kinds of pictures can have different "forms", that "A spatial picture can depict anything spatial, a colored one anything colored, etc.," suggests that *TLP* sees logical space as divided into different regions with different kinds of simple objects with different kinds of logical form, color form, sound form, etc. In this case the claim of the present paper that there is an analogy between *TLP's* notion of logical space and internally indistinguishable points in Euclidian space is wrong.

This objection is misguided. Note that 2.15-2.171 is concerned with "pictorial form." The

notion of logical form is not introduced until later at 2.18 where *TLP* clarifies that despite the fact that different pictures can have different kinds of *pictorial form*, color form, spatial form, etc., *all* pictures must, in the final analysis, possess "logical form, i.e., the form of reality." Thus, *TLP* is in 2.15-2.18 making the distinction between mere pictorial form, which might, for example, be mentioned in a lecture to art students, and logical form, which latter belongs is a philosophical concept generally unfamiliar to most non-philosophers but which must be possessed by *all* pictures if they are to represent reality at the fully analyzed level. The art student is only concerned at the everyday level with the pictorial form of the picture, e.g., they must choose the right colors to represent a rainbow. Their drawing of a rainbow must *also* possess logical form but that is irrelevant to their everyday concerns and generally unknown to them. Thus, 2.171 has *nothing* to do with *TLP's philosophical* point at 2.18 that at the *fully analyzed level* propositions must possess logical form if they are to represent reality either "correctly or incorrectly". There is no suggestion that *TLP's* logical space divides into different regions with different kinds of logical forms.

Further, Wittgenstein only began to consider the possibility of such different regions of logical space many years later, after he returned to philosophy from a long absence, in his 1929 "Some Remarks on Logical Form" and his 1930 *Philosophical Remarks* with realization that *TLP's* notion of logical space was inadequate. Whereas *TLP* (4.211, 5.124) holds that all the elementary propositions must be logically independent of each other, Wittgenstein now begins to take seriously the idea that there are some *systems* of elementary propositions in which propositions are incompatible with each other, e.g., "a is red" and "a is blue" are logically incompatible even though neither is the truth-functional negation of the other. Thus, Wittgenstein begins to considers replacing *TLP's* (2.1512) view that a proposition "is laid against reality like a measure" with the new idea that it is "systems of propositions", e.g., the *system* of color propositions or the system of sound propositions, etc., within which there are *internal elementary non-truth-functional incompatibilities*, that is laid against reality. This, however, is a significant modification that initiates the unraveling of *TLP's* logical system. The fact that Wittgenstein only begins to consider this subversive idea in these later works shows that it had *not* been present in *TLP*.

Conclusion

TLP's view that the world can be *completely* described by fully generalized propositions in which no name is correlated with any object means that *TLP's* notion of LSO's and the simple "names" for them in elementary propositions are part of the "ladder" that must be thrown away after one has climbed it. Just as it does not matter to Russell what mathematical objects "really" are, if anything, it does not matter to *TLP* what its "simple objects" really are, if anything. Since *TLP's* simple objects are only the formal subjects of propositions, its elementary propositions can only say how those "colorless" formal subjects are related, nothing more. *TLP*'s internally indistinguishable LSO's *can* be distinguished by employing *fully generalized* propositions used to describe how these formal subjects are contingently configured. Carnap's *LSW* is a further development, with some illuminating

differences, of *TLP's* notion of logical space as a relational (or structural) system. The misplaced focus on *TLP's* notion of LSO's distracts from the fact that *TLP's formal notion of LSO's as like* the intrinsically indistinguishable points in geometrical space thereby makes a novel departure from the substance metaphysics that has dominated Western philosophy since Aristotle to a new model on which "reality" consists entirely in systems of relations.

Endnotes:

1. References to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (*TLP*) are to proposition number, to his *Notebooks* (*NB*) *1914-16* by page number, to his *Philosophical Remarks* (*PR*) by section and paragraph number.
2. Carnap does distinguish between relation-descriptions and structure-descriptions, the latter forming a "higher level of formalization and dematerialization" (*LSW* §'s 11-12, 153), but this goes beyond the primary focus here on *TLP's* LSO's.
3. Russell elsewhere in *POM* seems, inconsistently, to deny that numbers can be defined purely relationally (Pakaluk 1992, 303).

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The Menstrual Cycles: Philosophical and Ethical Insights in a Powerful Tool

Laÿna Droz
Graduate School of Frontier Sciences, Tokyo University
5 Chome- 1 -5 Kashiwanoha, Kashiwa, Chiba 277-0882, Japan
Email: layna.droz@edu.k.u-tokyo.ac.jp

Abstract:

The dismissal of menstrual cycles from the philosophical discussions about how we get knowledge of the world rests on the assumption of a stable and unchanging self, which supposedly conflicts with the inherent dynamicity of changing cycles. Yet, instead of being an epistemological obstacle, this dynamicity can be a tool to better grasp our continuous state of change. It affects the perception of the world and the development of ethical relations with others. Passing through stages in which one feels particularly vulnerable is a reminder of human vulnerability to environmental and social changes. The awareness of this vulnerability can ground decision-making leading to precautionary actions. Plus, readiness to change and flexibility are crucial elements of ethics in a world in which we constantly need to adapt ourselves. The experience of menstruation sheds light on a conception of the self as an ever-changing, vulnerable and adaptive agent.

Keywords: menstrual cycle, menstruation, self, vulnerability, relations, impermanence, adaptation, ethics, embodied self

Introduction

Menstruations are still remarkably concealed, even in recent philosophical discussions recognizing embodiment as a concrete element of experience[1]. As a result, the impact of the menstrual cycles on the experience of the world is strikingly underexplored. This paper explores how the experience of the menstrual cycle influences the experience and the epistemological understanding of the world and others, as well as ethical relationships with the world and others. It seeks to gather insights on the menstrual cycles from diverse sources, including philosophy, cultural studies and sciences; then, it aims to draw philosophical insights from the menstrual cycles. This paper shows how the menstrual cycles reflect a state of dynamic stability of the self and can constitute epistemological and ethical tools. This in turn has implication on the social taboos and restrictions surrounding menstruations. The focus of this paper is on the menstrual cycles specifically, and other related phenomenon such as menopause and hormonal cycles beyond the menstrual cycles are mentioned briefly but would benefit from further research.

The subjective experience of the menstrual cycle can hardly be separated from the socio-cultural

treatments of the phenomenon. Indeed, the cultural imaginaries crucially inform the individual and how she perceives, makes sense of, and reacts to events in the world, including her own bodily changes throughout the menstrual cycle. For this reason, I start by briefly sketching the wide-spread taboo surrounding menstruations. From there, I shortly explore the rich symbolism associated with menstrual cycles. The taboo and symbolical baggage of menstruations are not harmless dreams, but they translate into various restrictions limiting the woman's activities. I discuss four general ways in which current societies still use the menstrual cycles to justify the political invalidation of women's voices, the relative incapacity of women sanctioned in laws (such as menstruation leave), the social stigma forcing women to hide, and finally, medical research aiming at controlling the mysterious menstrual cycle. My aim is not to offer a critic of the social taming surrounding the menstrual cycles, but I must mention it insofar as it contributes to framing the subjective experience of the woman.

Drawing from studies in medicine, cognitive sciences and psychology, I take a step back from taboo, myths and prejudices to check what we actually know regarding the influence of the menstrual cycles on women's experiences. Then, I discuss the phenomenology of the menstrual cycle, and how this changing relation to the world influences the very experience of oneself and the world. Finally, I draw some ethical implications from this epistemological and phenomenological discussion. Notably, these implications go beyond the particular case of the menstrual cycle to encompass non-menstruating human beings and shed lights on a conception of the human self as adaptable and changing.

Taboo and magic

Menstruation is still a taboo in most of the contemporary world. Despite affecting half of the world population for an average total of about 20 litres of blood flow throughout almost seven continuous years[2] in a woman's lifetime, references and discussions about menstruation are conspicuous by their absence. When they are, most mentions of menstruation are externally descriptive and normative – men should not touch, women should hide.

In literature, songs and pop culture, the few references to menstruation use euphemisms. For example, the word "red" associated with a young woman is recurrent in Western fairy tales (Delaney et al. 1988, 161-165). Many religious texts (especially in Abrahamic religions) use the word "flowers". Popular songs beat about the bush and use expressions such as "not that time". Most of the times, mentions of menstruations associate it with fertility and sexuality. The young woman starts to menstruate and becomes fertile, changing her relations to others, especially to men, and to the society in general.

Among European literary novels, there are very few accounts from the phenomenological experience of the menstruating woman, and the existent ones focus on the "first time", associated with surprise, terror, secrecy and pain. Mostly written by men writers (such as Zola and Goncourt), they also present menstruation as a signal that the woman is ready for sexual and reproductive activities. The phenomenon almost appears like a one-time event to signal the world that the women is becoming fertile. There are also few poems and songs celebrating the cyclicity of menstruating

women, and of the female life (pre-menstruation, during menstruation, menopausal and post-menstruation)[3].

Symbolically, the only blood shed by no war, violence, illness or injury became a sign of the mysterious powers of giving life. But the mystery surrounding its cause wrapped it with beliefs of magical powers, both positive (such as giving life) and terrifying, linked with dark magic and witchcraft. With mysterious powers comes danger, and the menstruating woman becomes subject of various restriction. To one extreme of the cultural spectrum of diverse restrictions, the menstruating woman is excluded from the ordinary life. For example, in Western regions of Nepal, menstruating women are forbidden from entering houses and engaging in any form of social or familial life and must instead stay secluded in menstrual hut (*Chaupadi),* sometimes putting the lives of the women at risk (Thapa, Bhattarai, Aro, 2019).[4] Less extreme is the strict interdiction for menstruating women to enter sacred areas. In some cases, because all women are tainted by their menstruations even when they do not bleed, they are excluded all the time from sacred areas (e.g. Okinoshima Island in Japan).

Historically, most descriptions and explanations of menstruations by – male – philosophers in Europe are blatant by their lack of basic knowledge of the phenomenon. For example, Aristotle believed that "active" men were providing the form, and "passive" women offered the material from which men were shaping the child, that is, menstrual blood (2.4.185). Consequently, for him, it appeared clearly that women were inferior to men. This explanatory theory continued to be used as a relevant source, with for example Aquinas' sexual theology[5]. Besides, Aristotle wrote that the gaze of a menstruating woman had the power to redden the mirror in which she looks.

In contrast, menstruations are mentioned several times in the "Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon", a classic of traditional Chinese medicine written around 475 B.C. They are presented as the product of a growth in energy of the connective meridian, and the reason why the girl can become pregnant. Similarly, when this energy weakens with old age, the women reach menopause. Healthy menstruation (as well as healthy "sex energy" in men) is preserved by the balance between Yin and Yang. Menstrual blood is thus an important indicator for health, as, for example, "when Yin is in deficiency and Yang is in excess, it will cause excessive menstrual flow"[6].

Later, Freud associated menstruation with the fear of castration (1976). He describes men as seeing menstruation with a mixture of disgust, fear, sexual arousal, attraction and fascination with the inaccessible mystery of giving life. All of which somehow translates into justifications for the isolation of women, as we will see in more details later. Some authors also link male circumcision and ritual bleedings as rituals of passage to imitate menstruation (Delaney, Lupton, Toth 1976).

Mary Douglas pointed out the ambiguity of menstrual blood as "pollution" (1966). While menstrual blood – and by extension, femininity – is seen as a tainted signal of inferiority of the woman, it is simultaneously giving women mysterious secretive powers. As Buckley and Gottlied summarize: "The common fact of menstruation among all women challenges the social order of a male-dominated society and defines and bounds a female subgroup within the society, thereby creating a new separate and dangerous order." (1988, 28-29) Douglas' pollution theory raised numerous

objections and debates around patriarchy and the "shadow societies" of women alienated from "real society" by male domination (Wolf 1972). Notably, Françoise Héritier places the observation of the "injustice and mystery" of the fact that to reproduce himself, a man needs a woman's body at the source of the appropriation and control of women's bodies by men, leading to the hierarchical gendered social structure that can be observed all over the world (2007, 20; 1991).

The main point is that, despite sometimes being endowed with mysterious powers, menstruation is often seen as a shameful pollution and a debilitating hindrance (Dahlqvist, 2018). This symbolic understanding of the menstrual cycle unsurprisingly unfolds itself in dialectical relation with an idea of clean and stable masculinity as the standard and norm of humanity. The assumption of a stable and unchanging self gifted with reason seems to conflict with the continuously changing female cycles. Then, menstruations themselves may appear obviously undesirable and lead to assertions such as: "No woman would menstruate if she did not have to" (Greer 1971, 42). In contrast, the subjective experiences and the social regulations of menstruation give an image more complex than plain rejection. Moreover, menstrual activists and artists who strongly challenge these assumptions are increasing their visibility (Bobel 2010; Weiss-Wolf 2017).

Social taming

Menstruation is normatively used to justify isolation, exclusion and discrimination against women simultaneously to "protect" women who suffer from menstrual pains, weaknesses, and instability, and to "protect" men from the mystical dangerous powers of menstruating women. Societies tend to go to great lengths to capture and regulate the menstrual taboo. When menstruation is associated with pollution and shame, it comes as no surprise that women are expected to hide their menstruations and the various symptoms that come along the menstrual cycles.

What must be hidden is not only the drops of menstrual blood, the whole of the symptoms of the menstrual cycle. Symptoms of the menstrual cycles are often source of shame, precisely because they lie beyond the control of the woman. It sometimes gives rise to an idea of the woman as concretely not self-contained and not self-controlled. This supposed lack of self-control then justifies the fact that the society itself must control the woman. Carol Delaney describes this line of argumentation as prevalent in the Turkish village society where she conducted her anthropological fieldwork. She shows how the religious promise of an afterlife leads to a devaluation of the present life and its various embodied contingencies – such as menstruations – in aid of the religious, pure and masculine preparation of the soul for the afterlife. She writes: "The entire system could be interpreted as an elaborate denial of the awesome power of women to bring forth life and a response to and a prophylactic against the mess, fluidity, and change that are its inherent characteristics" (1988 92). Without going this far, generally, the menstrual cycle as a whole carries strong social stigmas that pushes or forces women to hide it, or to seclude and to cover themselves because they are irremediably tainted by it. From the risky Nepalese menstrual huts to humiliating jokes in schoolyards around the world, girls and women learn that their menstrual cycles have no place within the public eyes.

The menstrual cycles are instrumentalized to justify not only the social control of women, but also their invalidation from politics. During the 19th century, changes in mood across the menstrual cycles were supposedly proving the unsteadiness of the female mind itself (Buckley et al. 1988, 43), making them inapt and unreliable for any serious tasks. On the contrary, nowadays, the anger and irritation of women is often downplayed as the results of temporary bodily dysfunctions. Because of that, claims and protests of women are not to be taken seriously. E. Rome argues that labelling the premenstrual syndrome as illness and menstruations as incapacity (including incapacity of judgement) is a way to "ignore and invalidate women's rebelliousness" (1986, 146). According to her, these support attempts to normalize what is the "true" self of the women as when she is "loving and docile" (1986, 148), especially in contrast with the premenstrual syndrome (PMS). Further, this view of menstruation as incapacitating does not only affect women and discredits their protests and political claims, but it is also used to excuse and explain men's behaviours. Emily Martin notes: "If a man's failure at work can be laid at the doorstep of a woman's PMS, so too can a man's violence", as woman's rebelliousness and impertinence provoke an irresistible spark that naturally pushes men to feel uneasy, worry (and thus work less efficiently), and even exert violence (1988, 174).

Many authors described a tendency to treat the "rebelliousness" of menstruation (and menopause) as an individual – mainly physical – problem instead of considering the claims raised by the women (Fox-Genovese 1982, 272-273; Dalton 1979, 80). This tendency supports an image of a supposedly stable and rational self (often taken to be a characteristic of masculinity) as the standard and legitimate authority in relation to which the changing and uncontrolled female bodies must be forcingly grasped. As a result of this social explanatory story of menstruation, women tend to interiorize the idea of their inferiority and lack of control at least during some phases of their menstrual cycles, often during the menses (e.g. Ussher and Perz, 2011). A.J. Dan describes this process of internalization. From the biological substrate and physiological changes emerges first a subjective reality that is shared with other women and builds the social reality of menstruation as a shared experience (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This shared experience is then confronted with the dominant social reality, which happens to be "largely defined by males" (1986, 5). Consequently, the individual tends to internalize the received ideas and to structure their subjective experience of the menstrual cycles around them.

Crucially, women are not passive in this process of interacting with and interiorizing the social reality constructed around the menstrual cycles (Fahs, 2016). There are many anthropological accounts of women who accept the "dangerously powerful conception of themselves as menstruators but utilize the fears associated with menstruation to achieve their own ends" (Lawrence 1988). Women tend to circumvent the male monopoly of official decision-making to play in an arena of informal power relations. Moreover, some movements made more accessible through social media and the internet encourage a (re)valorisation of the experience of the menstrual cycle[7]. In particular, women are encouraged to dedicate their premenstrual and menstrual periods to creative time. More will be said about the phenomenological experience of menstrual cycles later.

Concretely, menstruation (and menopausal disturbances) is not only commonly used to discredit, invalidate and ignore women's complains and anger, but it is also sometimes used to justify pay gap between men and women and specific legal treatments of women. The debates around menstrual leave illustrate the dilemma of legal approaches to the menstrual cycle. In Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, women who experience difficulties to work because of menstruations are legally allowed to take a leave.[8] In South Korea, women are even ensured additional pay if they do not take the menstrual leave. But menstrual leave also raises backlash, as it is also used – by other stakeholders – to justify pay gap and discrimination in work, all of which is related to the idea that women are less efficient at work that men (Dan 1986). Menstruation supposedly causes lowered work efficiency and increases vulnerability. Yet, several authors showed that incapacity is not a necessary companion of menstruation (Harlow 1986, 42), and others that men also have cyclic changes in mood and work efficiency, so that "a social cycle exists for both sexes and conceptualizing debilitating effects only due to the menstrual cycle may indeed reflect a cultural bias against women" (Englander-Golden 1986, 94).

In criminal law, for example in the United States, the premenstrual syndrome has been presented as an affirmative defence to a criminal charge "if the defendant can show that (i) she was suffering from premenstrual syndrome at the time the crime was committed; and (ii) because of her condition, either that the criminal act was an involuntary act or that at the time of the criminal act she did not possess the mental state required by law for the commission of a crime" (Lewis 1990). Debates are still raging around the idea, especially in the English speaking world (Solomon 1995; Oleck 1953). These legal approaches to the menstrual cycles contribute to reinforce the image of menstruations as potentially dangerously uncontrollable and debilitating.

Nowadays, medicine plays a central role in the social attempts to control menstruations. The attitudes towards menstruations and amenorrhea (the absence of menstruation) vary greatly and are often intertwined with fears of illness, infecundity and pregnancy (Van de Walle and Renne 2001). They led to the proliferation of "menstrual regulators", pills and diverse forms of medicine aiming at controlling menstruation and restoring it in case of amenorrhea. It might seem paradoxical that while menstruations are depicted as a painful burden, losing them is considered unhealthy and "menstrual regulators" are used to "restore" the blood flow. Interestingly, female contraceptive pills continue to mimic menstruations, while some claim that "many women would now welcome a form of contraception that mimicked the natural effect of breast-feeding and produced amenorrhea" (Anderson et al. 1983, 31). Yet, this is less surprising when we learn that "women learn to attribute negative events in their lives to particular times of their cycles whether or not they actually correspond to cyclical changes in any measurable way" (Rome 1986; referring to Golub and Harrington 1981). In other words, the social construct of the menstrual cycle and of "how women are supposed to feel" during the menstrual cycle importantly shapes women's subjective experiences of the cycle itself. Moreover, there are discrepancies between the physical realities and needs of women related to the menstrual cycle and what is normatively advised – or imposed – by the medical community. Consequently, dissatisfaction and distrust with the healthcare systems (and doctors)

who appear not to take seriously women's claims and display "traditional authoritarianism" pushes women to turn to "alternative healers" (Brown and Zimmer 1986, 182).

We went through various social constructions attempting to understand and manage the menstrual cycle, be it the social stigma pushing women to hide their menstrual cycles, the political invalidation of their claims due to their supposed emotional instability, or the attempts by law to normatively regulate the menstrual cycles. Now, what do sciences tell us about it?

What sciences tell us

First and foremost, the experience and symptoms related to the menstrual cycle vary greatly among women, so the generalities and average that are discussed here are not to be taken with a normative value regarding what is considered a "normal" menstrual cycle, and more importantly, a "normal" experience of the menstrual cycle. This being said, some regularities are observable throughout the menstrual cycle.

In average, the menstrual cycle lasts 28 days and includes the follicular phase (from the first day of the menses to ovulation around the 14th day) and the subsequent luteal phase. The follicular phase is characterized by lower body temperature and lower levels of progesterone. Ovulation is signalled by a peak in bodily temperature and is accompanied with a hormonal increase of oestrogen levels, followed by higher progesterone levels during the luteal phase. Studies have found an increase in report of feeling jealousy (Krug et al. 1996) during the pre-ovulatory phase, and an increase in sexual appetite and mood improvement in the ovulatory and post-ovulatory phases (Henderson and Whissell 1997). The menstrual cycle has also been shown to be a major contributor to cyclic variation in women's mood, regardless of the cultural background (Pierson et al. 2019), and larger in amplitude than other cycles (daily, seasonal, etc.). Women tend to feel statistically significantly sadder in the pre-menstrual and menstrual phases, and significantly happier in the follicular phase. Interestingly, age might increase the amplitude of the mood variations (Pierson et al. 2019).

The most famous effect of the menstrual cycle is the premenstrual syndrome (PMS) that begins during the luteal phase (often only a few days before the menses), and disappears within a few days of menstruation. Premenstrual syndrome affects almost half of reproductive-age females (despite great variation in this estimate across studies) (Johnson 1987), and includes depression, irritability, anxiety and stress (Luine 2014). Between 10-20% of menstruating women (again, there is a great variation of this number across studies) suffer from premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) that can disable the sufferers from engaging normally in their personal interactions and daily activities (Ryua and Kim 2015). On top of the symptoms of PMS, it includes pain, headache, generalized aches, hypersomnia and insomnia, changes in appetite (Sundström Poromaa and Gingnell 2014), and also emotional symptoms such as intense emotional lability, feelings of "loss of control", difficulty in concentrating, and fatigue (Ramos-Loyo and Sanz-Martin 2017). Besides, it has also been shown that suicidal attempts (Baca-Garcia et al, 2000) and psychiatric admissions (Reilly et al. 2019) are more frequent during the menstrual and premenstrual phases.

Notably, the menstrual cycles seem to have no clear effect on the perception of pain in healthy women, but studies have shown "differential activation patterns across the menstrual cycle in regions involved with cognitive and motor function, even in the absence of a behavioural pain response, suggesting that cognitive pain and bodily awareness systems are sensitive to menstrual cycle phase" (Iacovides et al. 2015).[9] Similarly, cognitive performance (such as navigation performance and verbal fluency) does not appear to be affected by the menstrual cycles. Instead, "menstrual cycle dependent-changes in cognition are likely more subtle and possibly not so much reflected in performance per se, but in how that performance is achieved, i.e. in cognitive strategies" (Pletzer et al. 2019; Scheuringer et al. 2017). Recent findings in neurosciences show that "menstrual cycle changes in brain activation occur irrespective of cognitive strategy" (Pletzer et al. 2019). Some authors suggest that "these shifts allow for more flexibility in thinking" (Gorvett 2018; Hausmann et. al. 2002; Hausmann et al. 2017).

The most important effects of the menstrual cycles are on emotional experience and recognition. The luteal phases is associated with impaired emotion recognition accuracy (Derntl et al. 2008) (e.g. longer reaction times to all emotional stimuli) and enhanced emotional memory (Poromaa and Gingnell 2014), possibly due to high progesterone levels and increased amygdala reactivity (Ertman et al. 2011). Events occurring during the luteal phase are more likely to result in spontaneous intrusive recollections (Soni et al. 2013) and increased traumatic flashback memories (Bryant et al. 2011). In addition, reactivity to fear seems to be enhanced during the luteal phase (Bayer et al. 2014). Moreover, studies found that women show a significantly larger response to happy male facial expressions during the follicular phase, which is significantly reduced in the luteal phase (Yamazaki and Tamura 2017; Hofmann et al. 2006). Interestingly, these changes in emotional reactions to facial expressions do not translate in differences in self-reported levels of empathy (Derntl 2013).

Unsurprisingly, oral contraceptives (or sex hormones) significantly affect the effects of the menstrual cycles on women, in particular by reducing emotional recognition accuracy and decreasing responsiveness during facial emotion processing tasks. Conversely, pregnancy and postpartum also alter emotion recognition, which could indicate a "hypervigilant state in new and future mothers" (Osório et al. 2018). Nevertheless, "there is no consistent evidence for negative effects of most hormonal contraceptives in the general population", even if there is individual variation (Robakis 2019).

Phenomenology of the menstrual cycle

The experience of the menstrual cycle is primarily internal, clearly anchored within the body. Every woman has a different experience of the menstrual cycle, and this very experience also changes throughout her lifetime. Nevertheless, from the previously mentioned studies a standard image of the experience of the menstrual cycle for most menstruating women can be painted. Through more or less the time-span of a lunar month, the menstruating woman experiences different stages. During menstruations and during the premenstrual time, she might feel pain, sometimes so strongly that it

might leave her curled up on the floor, incapable from engaging in her usual daily activities. She might also feel numb, sadder, and less ready to interact with others. When the bleeding starts, she needs to take actions to hide it, with a piece of cloth, pads, tampons, cups, etc. Even when she does not experience pain, she might still feel uncomfortable, tired and less energetic, and refrain from engaging in some activities. Notably, women are likely to feel more vulnerable, exposed to danger (Skultans 1988, 143) and introspective during the premenstrual and menstrual periods.

After the menstruations, women often regain energy, assertiveness, self-confidence and self-reliance. Women can learn to observe their leucorrhoea to understand at which exact stage of their cycles they are. Without any visual observations, some women can feel when they approach ovulation and when they ovulate. Some also experience pain in the lower abdomen that switches from one side to the other from month to month during ovulation. After ovulation, women enter in the often gloomy luteal phase that ends with premenstrual symptoms and finally the menses. This description reflects the standard changes through the menstrual cycle, but again, some women experience different kinds of changes at different points of the cycle.

Crucially, through a menstrual cycle, a woman experiences different stages. She goes through moments or days during which she feels particularly vulnerable, and others in which she feels stronger and more proactive. In other words, she experiences regular changes in herself. They affect what she feels up to do (and sometimes what she can do), and how she sees herself, others, and the world. So, these changes do not affect only her body and her experience of her body, but they also taint her interactions with others and her experience of the world. For example, pain and numbness give the experience a blurred and languid taint, while at other points during the cycle, the experience might be sharper and brighter.

Moreover, the ways the woman interacts with others might slightly vary as a result of, for example, impairment in how she recognizes emotions in others and herself. She might feel more easily irritated from what others do during some phases, or more prompt to feel jealousy. Through time, she might learn to feel these differences, to identify that they are related to her menstrual cycle, and to adapt her activities accordingly (not necessarily by balancing her moods, but also by interacting differently or dedicating her time to different tasks). On top of these differences in relation to the self, to others and to the world, as we discussed before, the menstruating women is also subject to numerous social restrictions according to the socio-cultural context, and that might be amplified by feelings of shame, fear, and emotional symptoms linked to the cycle itself.

The subjective internal and embodied experience of the menstrual cycle is also influenced by the shared experiences (Ussher, Perz and May, 2014). One could suppose that the experience of the menstrual cycle is primarily influenced by the mother-daughter relation and exchange of knowledge. Yet, the influence of peers seem to be a stronger factor in shaping the shared reality of the menstrual cycle, probably because "Menstrual attitudes, beliefs and symptoms experiences may change throughout a woman's life, reflecting her recurring experiences of the menstrual cycle and, perhaps, other significant life events and experiences (e.g., child-birth, motherhood)" (Stolzman 1986, 111).

In particular, the adolescent experience of the beginning of the menstrual cycles is likely to be strongly influenced by the shared reality with other adolescents and the social taboos and cultural messages surrounding it, whereas the older menstruating women are likely to have balanced these external social inputs with their own experience to create a more nuanced perception of their own experience. Long-term experience of the menstrual cycle, child-birth and pregnancy are not the only factors influencing the menstrual symptoms themselves, and the perception of these. Oral contraceptive also affect the amount and degree of cycle-related symptoms; actually, in many cases, they are used precisely to this end, more than for their contraceptive effects.

Menstruation has a critical influence on self-image (Young, 2005). The first menstruation marks the entrance in womanhood, while menopause either projects women in an uncertain and relatively undefined social position, or, makes them gain the new more free and higher social status, in between male and female status, as it is particularly common in Africa (e.g. Vincent, 2003). Women have different attitudes towards menopause, which might reflect their variety of attitude towards menstruations themselves. For example, through her anthropological field in South Wales, Vieda Skultans describes two opposite attitudes towards menopause. She notes that "the way women described their conjugal relationships emerged (...) as directly related to the way they described their experience of menstruation" (1988, 145). Namely, women who were classified as "happy" (successful motherhood, regular relationship with the partner), desired menstrual blood loss, "*de*emphasized their experience of menopausal symptoms" (155), and rejected the transition to a "postmenopausal role and that role's culturally defeminized basis". Conversely, women deemed "unhappy" appear to welcome the "opportunity to conform to a new postmenopausal role". Depending on the adequacy of the women's self-perception with the cultural role of womanhood, menopause was then perceived as either a long-awaited liberation from an unsatisfying position ("deemphasized through relative indifference to menstruation") or in an uncertain and worrying "state of suspension" after losing their "rightful place" symbolized by fertility and menstruation (159-160). In both cases, the end of the menstrual cycle marks important and often progressive changes in the self-image, as menopauses does not happen overnight, and many women experience a period of irregular menses, hot flashes, and struggle with adaptation. Skultans quotes interviewees who describe menopause as a vivid self-image havoc: "women turn into men "inside"" (154), or "there was another person, "a me" inside her, one that had nothing to do with being a wife and mother" (158).

The disruption that often accompanies menopause indicates the importance given to the menstrual cycles in the woman's conception of her self, be it as a regrettable hindrance or a central feature of her femininity. It also sheds light on the ambiguity of the self-perception of the menstrual cycle. The experience of the menstrual cycle is changing over time, intertwined with the experience of other life-events (such as adolescence, motherhood, menopause), and associated with different social roles and cultural images. Moreover, as we have seen, the experience of the menstrual cycle itself also impacts the experience of the self and the experience of the world. Then, the various internal, embodied, cultural and social transformations associated with the life-time changes linked

to the menstrual cycles are likely to impact the woman's conception of the self, relations to others, and even worldview.

Nevertheless, the evasiveness of these changing factors raise difficulties to establish what is to be considered "normal". There are large differences in the experience of the menstrual cycle (both intra- and inter-women) that span across a wide spectrum. Yet, if there is one element that appears clearly, it is precisely this state of constant changes. There is no fixed, frozen and solidified reality or normality. It leads to a conception of the self as dynamic, possibly changing over lifetime, but also mobile through the menstrual cycle. Plus, as worldviews are tainted by the conception of the self, themselves become changeable. Then, the best course of action in a given situation is not anymore defined exclusively according to external circumstances, but internal factors of the agent also play a crucial role. Internal capabilities (and even, to a minor extend, values) are coloured by the phenomenological stage the agent is in at the moment.

In sum, we have seen that studies from medicine, psychology and cognitive sciences show that the woman goes through different stages throughout the menstrual cycle. These changes affect not only the self (internally), but also interactions with others (externally), and also what the agent is socially encouraged or discouraged (notably through shame) to do. That supports a conception of the self as the nexus of continuous changes. The self is then concretely flexible, going through cyclic stages of vulnerability. By realizing how changing and vulnerable she sometimes becomes, the agent might also be mindful on how others are equally changing and vulnerable. It might encourage her to take a precautionary posture regarding her own limitations and capacities, and the needs and vulnerabilities of other people. By extension, this precautionary approach tied to her own cyclic vulnerability may influence her worldview and apply to decisions involving not only herself, but also others and non-human beings.

Importantly, this concrete state of continuous changes does *not* entail a complete lack of control and restrain. The fact that the agent is subject to cyclic and life-long internal changes does not imply that she is fundamentally unpredictable, irrational and unreliable. On the contrary, the awareness of this flowing state of changes allows the agent to distance herself from it. To understand this unescapable fluidity of life enables the agent not to be submitted to it, but to prepare herself and be more ready to welcome these changes in a precautionary and peaceful way. In short, the self does not appear as an unbridled unsteady and untamed force, but as a dynamic stability that is ready to deal with ineluctable changes in the world and in herself.

Ethics and epistemological power

The dynamic stability of our viewpoint on the world and ourselves has epistemological and ethical implications. Notably, while the focus of this article is on the menstrual cycle, these epistemological and ethical implications are not confined to the female phenomenological agent. Non-menstruating women and other human beings – crucially, men – also go through different hormonal and emotional stages that involve moments of vulnerability (e.g. testosterone levels appear to be

following circadian or seasonal cycles (Kimura and Hampson 1994, 59)). For example, Ameisen elegantly links the dynamicity of the menstrual cycle to the continuous birth and death of cells in the human body. He adds that the fragility of the cells "plays an essential role in our plasticity, allowing our bodies to recompose and adapt to constantly changing environments at each instant" (Ameisen 2007, 205, my translation). So if the menstrual cycles bring our attention to the dynamic stability of the standpoint of the self, this dynamicity is not limited to menstruating women. Let us see first how this dynamic stability impacts the ways we acquire knowledge of the world and ourselves, and consequently how does that shape ethics.

The awareness of the menstrual cycles has epistemological benefits. The menstrual cycle makes the agent regularly go through different stages that taint her world and herself, stages that she can identifies easily as related to her embodied standpoint and to bodily traceable and visible symptoms. This fact enables her to see the world and herself through different angles. Consequently, it increases her knowledge of how the world looks like from different perspectives, comparatively as if she was constantly stuck in one static standpoint supposedly "neutral". Indeed, one can safely suppose that observation of the same object from different angles and through different emotional lenses is likely to increase the understanding of the given object. Moreover, it pushes her to pay attention to changes in herself that affect her perspective on the world and what appear to be her possibilities and her needs. By extension, it also encourages her to pay attention to changes in other people. No state of affairs appears fixed and definitive. The same person can have different needs and powers at different moments.

This stance frontally opposes the idea of essentialization of the self or of some features of the self. Essentialization transforms transitory features into fixed and central elements of what it is to be a certain person or a certain type of person. For example, associating the transitory vulnerability that a woman may experience in the premenstrual and menstrual phases to womanhood itself leads to *define* women as fragile and vulnerable "by nature". Essentialization is the process that is behind the rationalization of the "protective" social control of women because they are "by essence" unconstrained and fragile (as we discussed before). On the contrary, the experience of menstrual cycles that links clearly emotional viewpoints with regular and visible bodily changes provides a strong warning against any tentative to fix and essentialize some impermanent traits to what a person "truly" is.

When it comes to understanding other human beings, the flexibility of this dynamic epistemological standpoint is fundamental. Regardless of gender and sex, human beings go through different stages through their life. Artificially essentializing some features and hypothesizing a stable and unchanging self is likely to produce more harm than good when confronted with unescapable changes (such as typically like illness, injury, old age, depression, etc.). On the opposite, recognizing the inherent possibility (if not reality) of changes in others and oneself amounts to recognize the possibility of improvements and the possibility of errors.

This brings us to the ethical implications of recognizing the stable dynamicity of the menstrual cycle. In particular, the awareness of the normality of passing through impermanent stages of

vulnerability, and of the changing nature of the self supports a tolerant attitude to weaknesses and errors from oneself and from others. The awareness of our own vulnerability enables us to connect with other individuals as vulnerable agents. It can improve communication between individuals by revoking shame linked to temporary weaknesses and clarify each other's particular needs. Understand the other's needs is a prerequisite for answering them. Conversely, understanding the other's vulnerability is a necessary condition to minimize harm.

Moreover, menstrual cycles underline the adaptability of agents to changes in themselves and in the world. This readiness to change and to adapt oneself is critical for ethical decision-making and behaviours in a changing world. Nowadays, environmental and social changes confront us to the necessity of changing our habitual behaviours in order to avoid inflicting (more) harm on others. In such a pressing context, to have the capacity to adapt oneself is essential, that is, to recognize simultaneously one's vulnerability and one's ability to change. Furthermore, the current environmental and societal issues we are facing are also presenting us with the crude reality that our seemingly insignificant everyday life actions have harmful consequences on others' lives. We must think in terms of what "place" we take in the world, and what do we leave to others. In thinking about these questions, the dynamic stability of the menstrual cycle presents us with rich inputs regarding our own needs and vulnerabilities, the ones of others, and our own powerful agency characterized by a sharp awareness of these.

The recognition of the fact that we are not all-powerful, constantly rational and stable human beings pushes us to take precautions when intervening in the world and in each other's lives. Even if another individual (or another being or system) momentarily appears to be unshakable and firmly strong, she might not be so in different circumstances, or in another day. Then, actions and measures regarding this individual must take into consideration the natural possibility of weaknesses in the seemingly powerful other.

Conversely, the inherent adaptive capacity for change implies that we cannot reject responsibility to change behaviours and practices with an excuse based on essentialization of the practice as part of who we are. If who we are *is* changing, then we can be expected to *become* better. In other words, as we *can* change, then we *must* thrive to improve ourselves and minimize the harm that we might be involved in doing. The common phrase "...but we have always done so" is not a valid excuse for rejecting responsibility to change one's behaviour, if this behaviour has harmful consequences. For example, appeal to tradition to justify the isolation of young girls in menstrual huts regardless of their own safety cannot be acceptable insofar as the advocates of such a tradition are able to change themselves and to reconsider what they value and desire to protect.

Finally, in our interconnected world where buying a mango in Japan likely supports an exploitative production system in the Philippines, not doing harm reveals to be highly complex and responsibility might become overwhelming. In this context, going through stages in which the menstrual cycles reminds us of our own embodied vulnerability can highlights our own personal limits and needs. It teaches us to find a balance between what we can do and what we need.

All in all, the menstrual cycle appears to be a powerful tool to understand and navigate within a changing world of intertwined relationships with other vulnerable beings. Far from being an obstacle in the way to "objective and neutral" knowledge, it informs us from different perspectives and breaks the dangerous illusion of a stable and purely neutral reality. When we consider the current world of rapid social and environmental changes, the capacity to adapt ourselves to these changes appears as a necessary ethical virtue. And the dynamic stability of the menstrual cycles can train us in this direction by showing us a variety of alternative ways and options, and by constantly reminding us of our plasticity and adaptability.

This new light on the menstrual cycle as an epistemological and ethical tool has also implications on the social taboos and restrictions presented previously. Far from being a source of shame, this approach normalizes the menstrual cycle as part of the changing nature of human life. Instead of being seen as incapacitating, it appears as a tool to understand the world and ourselves better, and also to monitor better one's own mental and physical health by allowing oneself to be momentarily vulnerable. For example, the anger and "rebelliousness" triggered by some specific issues especially during the premenstrual and menstrual cycles might be used as a signal pointing at underlying recurrent problems that are otherwise left invisible.

This perspective also has implication on research, as it urges for the need not to presume the menstrual cycle as neither a necessity, nor an incapacitating handicap. It also indicates the possibility to reconsider the use of "menstrual regulators" as not exclusively positively "normalizing" menstruations and moods (even while admitting some regrettable side-effects), but also as potentially depriving the agents from other perspectives on herself and the world. In a word, it widens the often overly narrow perspective on the menstrual cycle.

More generally, this analysis of the phenomenology of the menstrual cycles informs a vision of the human self. Indeed, most of the considerations described here relatively to vulnerability, changes, emotions, etc. are not limited to menstruating women. If the menstrual cycles has the benefit of clearly linking some emotional patterns to bodily changes, allowing women to follow these changes quite easily, men and non-menstruating human beings in general also go through different stages through life, and through different cyclic patterns, be it mood swings affected by weekly schedules, seasonal changes, or daily cycles. When we take a step back, most of the points discussed here around the particular case of the menstrual cycle apply to human beings in general. We are all vulnerable and changing beings who need to be aware of our own individual limitations and needs, and who simultaneously need to adapt ourselves to the changes in the world while recognizing vulnerability in other beings.

Conclusion: A powerful tool

Despite being one of the most common phenomenon regularly shaping the lives of half of the world population, the menstrual cycles are still kept away from discussions about how we relate to ourselves, and to others and the world. Once we look at the various cultural taboos and magic beliefs

associated with menstruations, this ignorance of the menstrual cycles does not come as a surprise anymore. Across different cultures around the world, menstruations have been widely used to justify a high variety of social restrictions imposed on the menstruating woman. On top of social stigmas, the menstrual cycles have also been a key in discrediting women's political claims by painting an image of the woman as unconstrained and lacking of self-control. In contrast, recent studies in medicine and psychology shed lights on the high variety of subjective experiences and symptoms associated with the menstrual cycle, and the regularity of some average patterns such as a tendency to feel gloomier and sadder during the luteal phase, and significantly better emotional recognition accuracy during the follicular phase.

Instead of seeing the dynamicity of the menstrual cycles as an epistemological obstacle and a handicap, I propose to see it as a tool to better grasp the continuous state of change we are in. The dynamic stability of the female cycle affects the individual perception of herself and of the world, and the development of ethical relationships with others. It allows the agent to explore the world and her relations with others from different angles while being aware of the bodily anchored source of these changes. Moreover, passing through stages in which one feels especially vulnerable is a reminder of human vulnerability to environmental and social changes. The acute awareness of this vulnerability can help keeping in mind the precautionary principle when making decisions. The dynamicity of the female cycles also highlights the continuous state of changes we are in, and supports a conception of the self as ever-changing. Readiness to change and flexibility are crucial elements of ethics in a rapidly changing world in which we constantly need to quickly adapt ourselves to new ideas and lifestyles. Through the repetitive experience of menstrual cycles, menstruating women can cultivate *in the flesh* an awareness of our vulnerability associated with readiness to change, which can guide us to develop adaptive and ethical worldviews and ways of life. In short, the in-depth study of the menstrual cycle, gathering insights form psychology, anthropology, medicine and biology allows us to conclude that the dynamic stability of the menstrual cycles provides an excellent basis to develop adaptive and ethical worldviews and ways of life. It remains to be seen more in details how non-menstruating beings are also prone to cyclical bodily variation that impact their perceptions of self, others and the world.

Endnotes:

1. For example, it is completely absent from discussions on embodied selfhood (e.g. Durt et al., 2017).
2. As a woman has about 13 periods of 5 days and 50ml in average, for about 35 years of her life (Shaw et. al. 1972).
3. The most famous example in English-speaking literature might be the poem by Emily Dickinson, "The name – of it – is – 'Autumn'".
4. https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Water/ContributionsStigma/others/field_bulletin_-_issue1_april_2011_-_chaupadi_in_far-west.pdf.
5. Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium,* book 4, 2 (766b 33): "As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten for the active power in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness according to the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from

defect in the active power or from some material indisposition, or even from external influence, such as that of a south wind, which is moist". And Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae I and II.*

6. Huang Di Nei Jing, Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon, Chapter 7, translation by Henry C. Lu (301, Vol. 1).
7. For example, "'We're having a menstrual liberation': how periods got woke" by Abigail Radnor in The Guardian, 11th November 2017. And websites such as periodpositive.wordpress.com.
8. In Japan, see Article 68 of the Labour Standards Law states: "When a woman for whom work during menstrual periods would be specially difficult has requested leave, the employer shall not employ such woman on days of the menstrual period". In Taiwan, see the Act of Gender Equality in Employment. In South Korea, see Article 71 of the Labour Standards Law.
9. Notably, the following older article disagrees and states: "The menstrual cycle effect on human pain perception is too large to ignore." (Riley et al. 1999, 1).

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Paul Draper, Cornel West and a Pragmatic Critique of Natural Theology

Joshua Anderson
Department of History and Philosophy,
Virginia State University
1 Hayden Drive, Box 9070, Petersburg, VA 23806, USA
Email: janderson@vsu.edu
ORCID: 0000-0002-3621-9771

Abstract:

Paul Draper has expressed concerns regarding the current state of the philosophy of religion. Based on insights from Cornel West, in this article I will be giving a pragmatic response to Draper's article "Partisanship and Inquiry in Philosophy of Religion". More accurately, this article will be presenting what Draper calls "philosophy of theism" as a pragmatic tool for overcoming partisanship in the philosophy of religion. Ultimately, philosophy of theism is commendable insofar as it can overcome partisanship better than the alternative.

Keywords: Paul Draper, Natural Theology, Philosophy of Theism, Cornel West

1. Introduction

Both Paul Draper and Cornel West have lamented the current state of the philosophy of religion. Though Draper and West have different reasons for drawing their conclusion, I find it interesting that two philosophers with such differing backgrounds come to a similar conclusion, and that both are so passionate about coming to a reasonable resolution to the problem. Based on insights from West, in this article I will be giving a pragmatic response to Draper's article "Partisanship and Inquiry in Philosophy of Religion". More accurately, this article will be presenting what Draper refers to as "philosophy of theism" as a pragmatic philosophy.[1] From the pragmatic perspective, the philosopher of theism is guided by the principle of overcoming partisanship in the philosophy of religion. The philosopher of theism makes certain assumptions about *how* one ought to investigate the existence of God. Those assumptions are not right or wrong, but either conducive or not conducive to overcoming partisanship. Ultimately, philosophy of theism is commendable only in so far as it can overcome partisanship better than the alternative—viz. natural theology.

I believe that a pragmatic understanding of philosophy of theism is warranted for two reasons. First, the criticisms that Draper raises against natural theology are just the kind that a pragmatist would raise. Second, the reasons that Draper gives in support of philosophy of theism are just the kind a pragmatist, like West, might give.

I will first examine Draper's criticism of natural theology and explain why I think they are pragmatic criticisms. I will then explain in more detail why I believe that philosophy of theism is best understood as a pragmatic tool as opposed to a philosophy that seeks to give an *objectively true* understanding of the existence and nature of God.

2. Draper and West on natural theology

Draper claims that there are four issues that make the position of the natural theologian problematic. Together, these four points give rise to much of the partisanship that occurs in the philosophy of religion. First, the natural theologian performs a special function in his/her religious community. Second, religious authority greatly influences the position of the natural theologian. Third, the natural theologian does not engage in genuine inquiry about God's existence. Fourth, natural theology is relatively safe because the natural theologian is unlikely to change his/her religious beliefs.

These four points that Draper raises are all related. Draper maintains that natural theology is a branch of apologetics. As an apologist, the natural theologian is responsible for "defending the beliefs of the community against outside challenges, [...and] convincing other's that the community's beliefs are true" (Draper 2006, 9). Because the natural theologian is an apologist he/she must be careful not to offend the religious authorities who establish the dogmas of the community. In fact, the religious authorities and the dogmas of the community set limits on how the natural theologian can even conceive of divinity thus inhibiting genuine inquiry into God's existence. Finally, because the natural theologian's philosophical investigation is limited by religious authority and by the community of which he/she is a member, the natural theologian is not in danger of being forced to give up some cherished beliefs.

Cornel West comes to a similar conclusion. West would claim that the natural theologian is guilty of succumbing to religious realism.

> [R]eligious realism is an intellectual strategy adopted by those who accept the authority of particular ecclesiastical (or personal) interpretations. The purpose here is to convince one's self and others that these interpretations are true *regardless of their role and function in one's life*. [... However, t]he truth-claims of religious communities are inseparable from the aims and purposes of those communities (West 1993, 269).

What Draper has implied, and West has made explicit, is that the claims of the natural theologian, as a member of a religious community, are constrained by, and relative to, the beliefs, values and goals of the community to which the natural theologian belongs. Further, not only are the natural theologian's claims constrained by, and relative to, the beliefs, values and goals of the community, but often times the natural theologian acts as though—or more likely truly believes—the claims are not so constrained.

By failing to realize the constrained and relative nature of his/her claims, the natural

theologian naturally falls victim to the partisanship that Draper maintains negatively impacts the philosophy of religion. The partisanship occurs because the beliefs, values and goals of the community put blinders on the natural theologian preventing him/her from free and open inquiry. The beliefs, values and goals then become self-justifying and self-supporting. For a religious realist, the beliefs, values and goals of the community are already held to be true because they are held by the community. Therefore, to question those beliefs becomes impossible. Further, unless two separate communities share a certain number or kind of beliefs, values or goals, there is not the possibility of meaningful dialogue between the two communities, because there is no common ground from which dialogue could begin.

Ultimately, Draper is concerned with the overall state of the philosophy of religion. Draper states: "I cannot [...] ignore some flashing neon signs that not all is well in my discipline [philosophy of religion]" (Draper 2006, 1). Draper argues that part, and perhaps most, of the problem is the degree of partisanship. Further, Draper believes that the partisanship is due in large part to the prevalence of natural theology in the philosophy of religion. I have suggested above that the partisanship is an outcome of the nature of natural theology. More specifically, because the natural theologian serves a particular role in the community any claims or arguments that the natural theologian presents are constrained by, and relative to, the beliefs, values and goals of the community to which the natural theologian belongs. Due to the limiting nature of the community's influence the natural theologian cannot be anything but partisan.

I am suggesting that Draper's criticisms are pragmatic because what Draper is drawing attention to is that the metaphysical speculations of the natural theologian are all relative to the natural theologian's role in a particular religious community. As such, the metaphysics and ontologies of the natural theologian are good or bad only in so far as they promote the beliefs, values and goals of the community. However, when looked at from the perspective of reducing partisanship in the philosophy of religion, the metaphysics of the natural theologian are to be rejected because, as was suggested above, the natural theologian cannot be anything but partisan. So, while it might be the case that one could reject natural theology because it gives an inaccurate conception of divinity, what is more important is that Draper has shown that natural theology is to be rejected because natural theology fails to overcome partisanship.

3. Philosophy of theism as pragmatic tool

I turn now to explain why philosophy of theism is best understood as a pragmatic tool used to solve the problem of partisanship in the philosophy of religion. There are two reasons I believe philosophy of theism should be understood pragmatically. First, the strengths that Draper gives in favor of philosophy of theism are best explained relative to the goal of reducing partisanship in the philosophy of religion. Second, if philosophy of theism is not understood pragmatically then the philosopher of theism might run into some of the problems that arise for the natural theologian.

The activity of the philosopher of theism is primarily focused on the question of whether or

not God exists. Draper suggests that the way the philosopher of theism engages this question is by trying to give equal time to arguments both for and against God's existence. Further, because the philosopher of theism is uninfluenced, or at least less influenced, by religious communities and religious authority there are arguments available to the philosopher of theism that do not even occur to the partisan natural theologian. Finally, the philosopher of theism is engaging in a risky activity. By directly questioning God's existence and engaging in relatively free and open inquiry regarding God's existence the philosopher of theism might have to give up cherished beliefs about the nature and status of God.

Draper sees the above—directly questioning God's existence, engaging in free, open and balanced inquiry, not being influenced by religious authority, and facing the existential risk of giving up cherished beliefs—as four points that commend philosophy of theism. It seems to me that the four points only commend philosophy of theism for a pragmatic reason. The four points are valuable when viewed from the perspective of reducing partisanship in the philosophy of religion. In and of themselves, I do not see what would make the four points superior to their alternative. However, I will admit that there could be other pragmatic reasons, besides dealing with partisanship that would give one good reason to accept the four points and thus justify accepting philosophy of theism.

As with the criticisms Draper raised against the natural theologian, the four points in favor of philosophy of theism are all interrelated. I will focus on the fact that the philosopher of theism engages in free, open and balanced inquiry regarding God's existence—for brevity I will refer to this as simply free inquiry. I will focus on free inquiry because it seems to me that it is the central feature of the activity of the philosopher of theism, the other three points either result from, or enable, free inquiry.

Free inquiry, as Draper conceives it, involves spending equal time constructing good arguments both for and against Gods existence. Further, when

> confronted with an argument for or against God's existence [free inquiry requires spending] roughly equal amounts of time trying to construct serious objections to that argument and trying to strengthen the argument either by revising it or by defending it against objections (Draper 2006, 10).

Draper contends that free inquiry is what it takes to objectively seek the truth about God's existence. However, I am presenting philosophy of theism pragmatically, as such, free inquiry is valuable not because it is "objective" but because it allows the philosopher of theism to avoid falling into the traps of partisanship.

Free inquiry, in itself, does not guarantee that the conclusions one comes to are *true* from an ultimate perspective, this is so for two reasons. First, there is no stopping point to free inquiry. Therefore, one can never arrive at the *true* answer because there are always more arguments that could be made or refuted. Second, if one were to assume that there is a correct and true answer regarding the existence of God, one would have to give good reason why unbalanced inquiry cannot come to truth, beyond just saying that it is not free inquiry. Thus, it is simpler to give a pragmatic justification for accepting free inquiry.

Therefore, philosophy of theism is valuable, good, right or true because it engages in free inquiry. Free inquiry is valuable, good, right or true because it helps avoid partisanship in the philosophy of religion in a way that the natural theologian cannot because the natural theologian does not engage in free inquiry. Free inquiry avoids partisanship because it removes the blinders established by religious authority and religious communities; therefore no belief is immune from questioning. Further, if a group of individuals are all engaged in free inquiry, then there is already common ground between them, thus allowing dialogue to occur in a way that it is not possible for a group of natural theologians who all come from religious communities with irreconcilable beliefs, values and goals.

Finally, understood pragmatically, philosophy of theism through free inquiry can come to intersubjective agreement regarding the existence of God. This intersubjective agreement might not appeal to some; however it does have something to commend it. Primarily, it helps avoid, or at least deal with, the partisanship that seems to be undermining the discipline of the philosophy of religion.

I will now briefly discuss some problems that arise for philosophy of theism, if not understood pragmatically. The first problem is that it removes at least some rational reasons for accepting the metaphysics of the philosopher of theism. The second problem is that the philosopher of theism may run into the same type of problems that arise for the natural theologian. Cornel West maintains "that background prejudices, presuppositions, and prejudgments are requisite for any metaphysical or ontological reflections" (West 1993, 267). If West is correct, then any metaphysics—and questioning whether or not God exists is clearly a metaphysical position—is "always relative to specific traditions, theories, and particular sets of social practices" (West 1993, 267).

An individual can accept the metaphysics of the natural theologian because the beliefs, values and goals of the religious community, to which the natural theologian belongs, appeal to that individual. They could be appealing because it helps the individual make sense of his/her life, or to cope with existential crises, or a variety of other reasons. It can thus be rational to accept a particular metaphysics, not because the metaphysics by itself provides good reason to accept it, but rather because one could have good reason to accept the traditions, theories and social practices that undergird the metaphysics. With philosophy of theism, it is unclear what traditions, theories and social practices ground the metaphysical speculations. Therefore, it removes potential good reasons for the rational acceptance of philosophy of theism's metaphysics.

Not acknowledging the traditions, theories, and particular social practices that shape the metaphysics of the philosopher of theism leads to a further problem. As was shown above with the natural theologian, the beliefs, values and goals of the community can unwittingly blind the natural theologian's metaphysics resulting in partisanship. Likewise, the philosopher of theism could be blinded by certain unacknowledged values and presuppositions and partisanship would remain. Draper gives an excellent example of failing to recognize unacknowledged values and presuppositions when he discusses John Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness (Draper 2006, 16-17).

The philosopher of theism might be able to avoid the above two criticisms but only by falling prey to what Cornel West (1993) calls an Archimedean objectivism (263). Archimedean objectivism

maintains that Reality serves as an ultimate court of appeal, and philosophy of theism is appealing to this ultimate court to adjudicate. The problem with this position is that, as Kuhn, Quine and others have shown, "reality-claims are theory-laden, that is, our truth-claims are mediated by our theories" (West 1993, 269). Therefore, there are no ultimate courts of appeal, and "[e]very penultimate court of appeal is linked to a particular description, version, or theory of the self, world, and God" (West 1993, 263). Therefore, one returns to the first two objections raised against interpreting philosophy of theism non-pragmatically.

4. Responding to some possible concerns

Before concluding, I will look at a couple of objections that could be raised against a pragmatic approach to the philosophy of religion. The first objection is that philosophy of theism—understood pragmatically—is merely some type of idealism. The second objection is that philosophy of theism would be reduced to some sort of vulgar relativism.

Philosophy of theism, understood pragmatically, does reject Reality as a final court of appeal to adjudicate between conflicting interpretations of reality. However, "to reject Reality as the standard by which we accept theories of reality is not the same as rejecting the existence of Reality per se" (West 1993, 269). The philosopher of theism can still hold that sense-independent objects do in fact exist, however one's understanding of those objects are always mediated by one's theories.

Philosophy of theism is also not some sort of vulgar relativism that denies the existence of any rational standards. In fact, philosophy of theism depends on some type of rational standards, that is part of what makes free inquiry work. However, being pragmatic, the philosopher of theism acknowledges that those standards are relative to a common goal. In the case of philosophy of theism, that goal is to reduce or remove partisanship in the philosophy of religion. Certainly, by removing an objective concept of Reality as the arbiter between differing positions, intersubjective agreement becomes the standard. Yet, "[t]his does not mean that Reality is simply what people can agree on. Rather, it means that common aims and purposes are required if there are to be rational standards which help determine acceptable and unacceptable theories and interpretations" (West 1993, 269).

5. Conclusion

I have presented philosophy of theism as a pragmatic tool designed to adequately deal with the problem of partisanship in the philosophy of religion. The philosopher of theism, aided by free inquiry, directly engages the question of whether or not God exists. Free inquiry requires that the philosopher of theism remains self-critical and ever mindful of the external beliefs, values, and goals that might be shaping his/her metaphysical speculations. If done well, the philosopher of theism can engage with other self-critical interlocutors to come to an intersubjective and philosophically rigorous concept of divinity.

I have shown that natural theology cannot be anything but partisan. Therefore, if partisanship will ultimately be detrimental to the continued flourishing of the philosophy of religion, then natural

theology should be rejected as a dominant voice in the philosophy of religion. I will, however, add that this does not mean that natural theology should be rejected itself, just that its limitations within the philosophy of religion should be acknowledged. Natural theology will remain important within the religious communities in which the natural theologian resides.

"There is no doubt that metaphysical and ontological reflections should continue" (West 1993, 267). A pragmatic understanding of philosophy of theism allows this metaphysical and ontological reflection to continue in the philosophy of religion. But, unlike the alternative, natural theology, philosophy of theism can overcome partisanship. Insofar as philosophy of theism remains guided by the principle of free inquiry, with the goal of alleviating partisanship in the philosophy of religion, philosophy of theism is to be commended.

Endnotes:

1. Here, and throughout the article, I am using "pragmatic" somewhat more broadly than the more technical understanding of the pragmatist tradition of Peirce, Dewey, and West himself.

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Eros and Demos:
Reading John Dewey in the Arab World

Rachid Boutayeb
Doha Institute For Graduate Studies
Al Tarfa Street, Zone 70
Al Daayan-Wadi Al Banaat Doha, Qatar
Email: rachid.boutayeb@dohainstitute.edu.qa;
rachid.boutayebb@gmail.com

Abstract:

The following pages represent an endeavor to explain why Dewey's understanding of democracy, education, and religion implies great relevance for understanding the present Arab-Islamic crisis. The historicism of Abdallah Laroui, the social theory of Hisham Sharabi, and the political anthropology of Abdellah Hammoudi emphasize that the persistence of political authoritarianism in the Arab world reflects a malaise in the culture or society and above all a crisis of education — an education that remains patriarchal or neo-patriarchal, emphasizing the communal and undermining the individual. The thinkers mentioned above explain that a reform of *Demos* cannot come about without a reform of *Culture*. This is another reason John Dewey's meditations on democracy and education, or democracy as a way of life, are of great importance for today's Arab societies. Basically, this paper deals with the relevance of Dewey's work and shows why we cannot achieve a *democratic transition* without a *cultural transition*, which includes an education strategy regarding democracy.

Keywords: Dewey, Education, Democracy, Experience, Inheritance, Religious, Religion, Arab World

Introduction

This paper defends the relevance of Dewey with respect to the study of modern Arab culture. Given the questions raised in this context, all of which are expressions of a divorce between the dominant culture and democracy or democratic culture, Dewey's political philosophy does not offer ready answers but a methodology for critically formulating these questions. What makes Dewey's philosophy relevant is first its conception of democracy. He believed that democracy should not be limited to any particular culture, nation, or race.[1] The second element that encouraged me to deal with Dewey's political philosophy was his understanding of democracy as a way of life linked to the individual rather than to an elite. The third element is the centrality of education in his philosophy for the democratic process. And the fourth is his immanent understanding of religion.

In my analysis, I would like to examine the Arab crisis, which is characterized on the political

level by a persistence of authoritarianism and on the social and cultural level by a perseverance of patriarchalism, through the works of Abdallah Laroui, Hisham Sharabi, and Abdallah Hamoudi. Through their contributions, I will focus on the three dimensions of this crisis namely, historical, social, and political – all of which remain closely linked, directly or indirectly, to the issue of democracy. I believe that the Arab crisis stems from a lack of cultural or educational development. Additionally, I will turn to Dewey's conception of democracy, education, and religion because it contains fundamental and inspiring elements for my reflections on understanding the current Arab crisis. This paper has implications with regard to the political science approach with respect to the Arab crisis, which advocates for a democratic transition without addressing the need for cultural change.

My approach is an intercultural one that is aware of the fact that Western philosophy, in the language of Chakrabarty, is *indispensable* but, at the same time, *inadequate*. (Chakrabarty 2000, 16) It is inadequate or insufficient because it is also a philosophy that emerged in a particular historical context – in the case of Dewey, that of America from the first decades of the 20th century and in dialogue with the questions of its time. About Dewey, I will focus on the *indispensable* of his political philosophy for the Arab context without claiming that this philosophy provides us with a ready-made recipe. Instead, it helps us to determine our questions, ask them differently than in the prevalent ideological discourse, and be more creative, experimental, and pragmatic. In summary, I aim to read Dewey's philosophy from the Arab context of the present and to illuminate its critical potential or actuality for this context.

1. Culture vs. Democracy: Interpreting the Arab Malaise

I start from the following premise: A political or democratic transition presupposes a cultural transition. In Arab communities, we are introduced to power before we are introduced to our freedom or individuality. A striking example of this is the prevalent view of the body in this society, which I have selected as the starting point of my discourse, and for good reason. The body, as a symbol of individual autonomy (Le Breton 2013), is frequently forgotten in modernization projects and is commonly sacrificed. But how do Arabs think about their bodies today? What are their attitudes toward sexual freedom? What about the position of women in society? What role does religion play? What does political power look like? In a book closer to an ethnological study, Shereen El Feki will examine the reality of the body and sexual life in contemporary Arab society. The writer was not interested in discussing various theories about sex, but rather, over the years, she traveled to several Arab countries, from the Arabian Gulf, through Egypt and Tunisia to Morocco, following what was called the Arab Spring, and she met specialists, theorists, clerics, representatives of civil society organizations, doctors, and psychologists, etc. She is not exaggerating in writing at the beginning of her book, "If you really want to know a people, start by looking inside their bedrooms." (El Feki 2013) El Feki reiterates what we all know and live by, namely that the Arabs know from an early age that they must stay out of three areas: politics, religion, and sex. The author explores the

contrast between Arab and Western societies, highlighting that it is not solely based on democratic values but also attitudes towards women and sexuality. According to the author, the differences between Islam and the West have more to do with *Eros* than *Demos*. She examines Sayyed Qutb's trip to the United States and observes that the central figure in contemporary Islamism only saw *"sexual disintegration"* and *"family disintegration"* in American civilization.[2] Qutb's advocacy of an "Islam" that restricts women's freedom and controls their actions reflects the authoritarian regimes' approach to maintaining power by strictly regulating children's sexual lives, as Wilhelm Reich observed. In his words, "It creates the individual who is forever afraid of life and of authority and thus creates again and again the possibility that masses of people can be governed by a handful of powerful individuals." (Reich 1974, 72)

El Feki does not exaggerate in highlighting with Wilhelm Reich that any project of freedom can only succeed if it sexually transforms the human being, stressing that the patriarchal interpretation of religion, the crisis of the education system, and the combination of all this with a flaccid political system – despite the "Arab Spring" – are hindering the achievement of radical change. In terms of women, their status and role in society, and thus in terms of the body and sexual freedom, the young generation who took to the streets to drive Mubarak and others from power, as she writes at the end of her book, were eventually forced to return to their homes; in other words, they returned to the clutches of the patriarchal society that produced the Egyptian dictator, and it will inevitably create another. The following analyses confirm El-Feki's observations, and they also confirm, as we will see in the second and third parts of this paper, the relevance of Dewey's understanding of democracy and religion for the contemporary Arab world.

1.1. Cultural Backwardness

Abdallah Laroui believes that the problem of the Arab world lies in its historical backwardness; a delay "concerning the liberal era as it was prepared in the second half of the 18th century and as it flourished in the 19th century." (Laroui 2021, 8) In his opinion, "Arab culture, in its classical expression, and the most influential part of its contemporary modern expression, is opposed almost point by point to liberal culture." (Laroui 2021, 8) Laroui addresses many issues, including the relationship with the past in contemporary Arab culture, the rejection of historical thinking, the subordination of knowledge to religion, the denial of secularism, and the rejection of modernity and its legal and political achievements. Laroui is right to ask, "Isn't the secret of an underdeveloped society, in the final analysis, the unconscious will of the elite to save its absolute at the expense of living individuals, rather than keeping the living if the absolute were to dissolve?" (Laroui 2021, 105)

But what are the consequences of continuing the past in the present? Laroui's response is clear, "A-historical thinking leads to only one result: not seeing the real, and if we translate that into political terms, we say that it reinforces dependence at every level." And dependence "does not just mean loss of freedom", but also "the persistence and deepening of historical backwardness." (Laroui

2021, 176) Laroui sums up the Arab malaise in what he calls *"dualism"*, which, in his view, represents a *"fact"* and a *"policy"*. He even speaks of an *"educational policy"* of constantly *"deepening dualism"* for political reasons. This education aims to maintain the political system and its elite in place. (Laroui 2021, 188-189)

1.2. Education to Unfreedom

Abdellah Hammoudi explains, how the *Master and Disciple* diagram or scheme, as a mystic form of education and initiation, extended beyond Sufi structures and remains the modus operandi of power relations and political institutions in the context of Arab authoritarianism, like in Morocco or Egypt. (Hammoudi 1997) The main question of his anthropological work is the following: "How can we account for the prevalence of authoritarian political systems in our societies from the Atlantic to the Gulf?" (Hammoudi 1997, 1) The various works of political scientists who have tried to explain the persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab world in political terms have failed. The developments after the so-called *Arab Spring* are striking evidence that reducing authoritarianism to its political dimension explains its symptoms rather than its causes, causes that are more of a religious-cultural nature, as Hammoudi pointed out decades before. For this reason, too, the critique of dominant politics should *nolens volens* be a critique of the dominant culture or the dominant cultural model and value system that constitutes, serves, and legitimizes this politics. It is about "a sort of grammar which governs daily interaction and ensures the reproduction of existing authority and power relations in a human climate fraught with strong undercurrents of ambivalence." (Hammoudi 1997, 5) In this closed system, political participation is only possible as obedience. Any form of opposition is eradicated and dehumanized. At the heart of this system is the sultan or monarch, who alone decides the fate of the community. He is the symbol of their unity and the guarantor of their integration. As Claude Lefort explains, the power in the pre-modern monarchy *"was embodied in the king."* (Lefort 1986, 27) In other words, power could not be separated from the king's body, as he is its sole and legitimate owner. As Hammoudi notes, quoting Abdellah Laroui, the system is legitimized by "the classical theory of the caliphate... [...] this theory can justify any situation, to the extent that even an impious and immoral sultan cannot possibly be deposed." (Hammoudi 1997, 67)

The *Master and Disciple* schema is anchored and reproduced through education at all levels of society. It is a religious-political education that condemns individuality, emphasizes the collective, and perpetuates subjugation and ruling authority in the name of religion.

1.3. The delayed Society

Hisham Sharabi presents a compelling explanation of the reality of contemporary Arab societies and their structures through his concept of neopatriarchy. This concept combines *modernity* and *patriarchy*, resulting in a society that is controlled by groups such as sectarian groups, tribes, ethnicities, or religious movements. Sharabi writes,

> The persistence of clan or sectarian allegiance in neopatriarchal society reveals how extensively modern patriarchy has been tied to primordial forms. Neither the city nor the society or state have succeeded in evolving social forms providing for genuine, alternative structures. Kinship and religious affiliation remain the ultimate ground of loyalty and allegiance, stronger than abstract ideology. (Sharabi 1988, 28-29)

And adds further:

> Despite all ideological appearances, the individual's basic affiliation in "modernized," neopatriarchal society is to the family, the clan, the ethnic or religious group. For the common person in this society the concept of society or fatherland is an abstraction which has meaning only when reduced to the primordial significations of kinship and religion. In social practice the authority of father, tribal head, and religious leader (rather than considerations of nation or class) determines the direction and object of individual allegiance. (Sharabi 1988, 45)

And even when this society knows modernity, it does not live it except as *dependency*. It does not live tradition except as *traditionalism*, as Abdelkebir Khatibi expresses. (Khatibi 1983, 29) Modernity is instrumentalized only to rehabilitate the old structures. (Sharabi 1988, 4) This modernization project in the Arab world postponed democracy until state-building was complete, resulting in a monster state that works against individuals and society. Sharabi argues that neopatriarchal societies cannot be considered truly modern or traditional. They distort and misrepresent pre-modern communities, while only superficially reflecting the values and institutions of modern society. Sharabi sees neopatriarchy as a totality that controls economics, politics, society, and culture. (Sharabi 1988, 5) The central figure around which the whole of society revolves, this delayed society, as I prefer to call it because it did not separate its flesh from the flesh of the community or did not discover the individual, is the figure of the patriarch. It is a figure that establishes vertical relationships, as Sharabi calls them, between power and authority and within various social institutions and associations, from school, family, and political parties. In language that reminds us of Laroui's critique of *dualism*, Sharabi talks about "*neopatriarchy's schizophrenic duality*", quoting Nagib Mahfouz, who, better than any modern Arab writer, has portrayed the contradictions of the modern Arab city and Arab man. (Sharabi 1988, 8) Arab man, like Arab society, remains torn between two "*regimes of truth*", as Sharabi notes. This has disastrous consequences for the new generations, who today live trapped in a *social Nnihilism*[3] that is expressed in various social pathologies, such as illegal and legal migration, religious extremism, political abstinence, sectarianism, etc.

From all these previous analyses, it is clear that the problem of today's Arab societies manifests itself in a crisis of education because it is about *disciplining* rather than *educating* or an education that does not strive to connect the generations to the future, as Kant wants, but to an imaginary memory or identity. It robs people of both their individuality and their future.

2. John Dewey: Democracy as a way of life

Given the previous discussions, the current Arab-Islamic crisis is to be understood as an educational one. The societies of the *Master and Disciple scheme* know *discipline* and not *education*. The individual remains a pale copy of the collective. That is why the paths to renewal, to social association, and to democracy are blocked. The triad of *democracy*, *education,* and *religion* that concerned me in this text can be better understood starting from Dewey's political philosophy – I mean the relevance of his emancipated and pragmatic political philosophy to the Arab-Islamic context, where people in the 21st century still mourn and long for their deceased dictators, and where the dominant thinking is unable to overcome its pure eyes and understand that the long-awaited democracy without the creation of a new man or an education for democracy, one that creates society from new, will not be able to protect itself from the authoritarian forces. Here are five points from Dewey's political philosophy that shed light on the educational crisis in the Arab world today:

2.1. Education for the present

Democracy is not on the edge but at the center of the educational project – against state paternalism and religious guardianship, Dewey argues, and entirely in the spirit of Kant of the Enlightenment text, for a democratic education that fosters individual development. Democratic education aspires to replace the traditional, undemocratic education system and its dogmatic modus operandi. This education prioritizes something besides the past and rejects the concept of inheritance. It is essential that the past does not dictate our lives, and we should have a democratic relationship with it. This means keeping the rights of future generations in mind and valuing experience over blind allegiance or closed belonging that the fundamentalists of all colors propagate. It does not mean that Dewey is defending a nihilism of the past, as 19th-century anarchism did. In Dewey's words, "As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society." (Dewey 2008, 23-24) He further explains his attitude towards the past as follows:

> A knowledge of the past and its heritage is of great significance when it enters into the present, but not otherwise. And the mistake of making the records and remains of the past the main material of education is that it cuts the vital connection of present and past and tends to make the past a rival of the present and the present a more or less futile imitation of the past. Under such circumstances, culture becomes an ornament and solace; a refuge and asylum. [...] The past is a great resource for the imagination; it adds a new dimension to life, but on condition that it be seen as the past of the present, and not as another and disconnected world. (Dewey 2008, 70)

2.2. Emphasis of the Individual

In Dewey's view, democracy is not just a superstructure or a form of organization of political power but extends to society, the individual, and the public sphere. The institutions and laws that

characterize a democratic state are of little value if they do not help to realize democracy at the level of individuals and in a democratic manner. The democratic state is an extension of individuals and their freedoms. It is to Dewey what moral law is to Kant: I choose it of my own free will. Dewey writes,

> Democracy as a personal, an individual, way of life involves nothing fundamentally new. But when applied it puts a new practical meaning in old ideas. Put into effect it signifies that powerful present enemies of democracy can be successfully met only by the creation of personal attitudes in individual human beings; that we must get over our tendency to think that its defense can be found in any external means whatever, whether military or civil, if they are separated from individual attitudes so deep-seated as to constitute personal character. (Dewey 1976, 226)[4]

In contrast to the *separatist state*, as I call the contemporary Arab state, that prioritizes *modernization* over *modernity* or individual rights and freedoms and separates itself from society and its destiny. The democratic state, as defined by Dewey, is closely intertwined with culture and the individual. Instead, it is in a free, critical, open, and continuous dialogue with the culture that expresses the individual and his aspirations, which Axel Honneth, for example, will consider as he links Dewey's position with Durkheim's. (Honneth 2011, 504) For Dewey, as Honneth emphasizes it, "[D]emocracy is for him primarily the superior form of government, because it makes use of the intelligence of all subjects concerned in the reflexive management of social problems." (Honneth 2011, 505) This is not an elitist undertaking. In other words:

> Democracy is the faith that the process of experience is more important than any special result attained, so that special results achieved are of ultimate value only as they are used to enrich and order the process. Since the process of experience is capable of being educative, faith in democracy is all one with faith in experience and education. (Dewey 1976, 229)

Or as Ruth Anna Putnam emphasizes it, "What makes society, in Dewey's eyes, the ideal type of organism is precisely that, when democratically organized, it makes ethical individualism possible." (Putnam 2017, 445)

2.3. The Incompleteness of the State

No less important is Dewey's conception of the incompleteness of the state. The democratic state is not complete, nor does it seek to be so. Instead, unlike the totalitarian, theocratic, and neoliberal state, it does not accept completion because it contradicts democracy as an expression of a constantly transforming culture. "By its very nature, a State is ever something to be scrutinized, investigated, searched for. Almost as soon as its form is stabilized, it needs to be re-made." (Dewey 1946, 31-32)

This is another reason Dewey's understanding of democracy is not a blank cheque for capitalism. He would certainly reject the idea of an *end of history*, as the neoliberal frenzy propagates

it. His harsh criticism of the marketization of the press of his time is proof that he is not far removed from Horkheimer's and Adornos's critique of the culture industry, (Honneth 2011, 507-509) but without their pessimism – a pessimism that in the end leads to a closed form of critique and also to political apathy or hopelessness.

2.4. Democracy as Cooperation.

Cooperation is central to Dewey's understanding of democracy. According to Honneth: "Dewey, in contrast to republicanism and to democratic proceduralism, takes his orientation not from the model of communicative consultation but from the model of social cooperation." (Honneth 1998, 765)

This implies a rejection of negative freedom, which cuts individuals off from the destiny of society or ethical life. This is a reason why Honneth sees Dewey as close to the young Marx and far from Tocqueville. (Honneth 1998, 767) Already in one of his first texts on democracy, namely *The Ethics of Democracy*, Dewey defends the idea of an "internal connection between cooperation, freedom, and democracy." (Honneth 1998, 767) Democracy is not an arithmetic game or a numerical majority, and individuals are not isolated islands. But this cooperation is not an unworldly one. It presupposes a genuine division of labor. (Honneth 1998, 776)

2.5. Democracy as a Way of Protest

Dewey's concept of democracy as a way of life is of great importance in the age of neoliberal globalization. Today's critical theory has explained that since the 1970s, we have been dealing with a process of divorce between democracy and capitalism or with "the process of the de-democratization of capitalism through the de-economization of democracy." (Streeck 2017, 28) This is also why people in the democracies feel abandoned by politics. It is further why we are experiencing harsh criticism of representative democracy from both left and right populism. This critique of democracy in the West is instrumentalized by the anti-democratic forces in the Islamic world to legitimize the dominant political and social order. Democracy in its neoliberal age has decoupled from democratic citizenship. It has degraded into a representative rather than an emancipatory experience, as Dewey understands it. In other words, it has distanced itself from the social destiny of society. Equal participation in social life, the adaptation of institutions to new developments, and the habit of experimentalism are all part and parcel of a living democracy. (Hytten 2016, 986-987) Therefore, it is not wrong to see the new social movements fighting for a just globalization and protesting against social degradation in many parts of the world as a form of this experimentalism. (Hytten 2016, 991) They certainly align with Dewey's understanding of democracy as a social cooperation and an emancipatory project for the individual and the collective. We should not forget that Dewey saw in *"passivity, complacency, and hopelessness"* a danger to democracy. (Hytten 2016, 994) The opponents of neoliberal globalization teach us, in the sense of Dewey, that history is open, that democracy is an unfinished project, and that another world is still possible.

3. Dewey's Legacy and the Islam of Today

In his book *A Common Faith,* Dewey defends the religious against organized religion. He understands organized religion as a throwback to a premodern value system that focuses on a supernatural God and not on human beings. (Dewey 1934, 2) The belief in a supernatural is, for Dewey, an enemy to true faith. (Ryan 1995, 163) On the other hand, the *religious* expresses a specific experience anchored in life and society. To say *religious* and not *religion* is to accept that religion plays a role in social existence, not from the outside and not as a metaphysical or institutionalized authority or pre-established value system, but from the inside of society. Dewey is not distant from Kant's religion of reason. Still, he is more decisive than Kant in his rejection of a supernatural deity and entirely in agreement with Hegel's rejection of institutionalized Christianity. Dewey remained an Enlightener in his critique of religion. We must not forget that institutionalized religion chiefly emptied the religion of its ethical message. Religion, in its supernatural variation, separates morality from the realm of nature, i.e., experience, by tracing values and ideals back to the supernatural. For Dewey, our task is to liberate the religious from the metaphysical or to understand the religious in and out of the social and its interactions. We can understand this better by looking at historical Islam. We will soon see that Islam did not know the concept of *man* and that of *history*. (Hanafi 1992, 17) It is a faith that revolves around *God* and not around *man*.

It is no exaggeration to claim that "traditional religion's belief in a supernatural world blocks the road to moral progress and human betterment in this world." (Baurain 2011, 84) Nevertheless, I am of the opinion that the problem with religion lies not in its conception of a supernatural God but in our idea or image of that God. Nevertheless, Dewey's critique of official religion involves an act of democratization because it starts from the idea that the individual can know the truth of faith, independent of the power of official theology and its hierarchies. To say it in concrete language — the problem of religion lies in fundamentalism and its intolerance of ambiguity.[5] In the Islamic world, it is a fundamentalism that seeks to transform religion into a political project and to dominate society and the individual in the name of a past ideal that it knows only by *heredity*, an ideological one, and not by *experience*. And it is not a rhetorical exaggeration if Abdelwahab Meddeb writes, "We must understand that the emergence of this thin and poor Islam acts first and foremost against Islam itself as a civilization and a culture." (Meddeb 2002, 51) And he does not exaggerate too when he calls the theocentrism of Maududi, the father of modern Islamism, totalitarian and nihilist because it sacrifices man to a closed religiosity. As Nasr Abou Zeid has rightly analyzed, "The important thing for this discourse is to extend its hegemony through the consecration of the principle of sovereignty, which brings everything back to God and abolishes man's free will." (Abou Zeid 1999, 144-145)

Olivier Roy, for his part, tries to decipher the phenomenon of *poor Islam,* its etiology, and its message. He finds an explanation for it in *deterritorialization*, i.e., in globalization and *deculturation*. Both phenomena concern the other:

> Deterritorialization is not only associated with the movement of people (which only affects a small percentage of the global population), but also with the circulation of ideas, cultural objects, information and modes of consumption generally in a non-territorial space. But in order to circulate, the religious object must appear universal, disconnected from a specific culture that has to be understood in order for the message to be grasped. Religion therefore circulates outside knowledge. Salvation does not require people to know, but to believe. (Roy 2013, 6)

According to Roy, we are witnessing a *deculturation* of religion in the context of globalization. We must add, however, that the case of Islam, which reflects a backward society, is more delicate because – in Laroui's language – it has not experienced "*the liberal moment*". The dialogue with modernity and its epistemological, political, and legal achievements is still pending with Islam, and not with Western Christianity. In the Arab world today, we live in Islam without its culture. We also experience it without ethics because today's Islam condemns individuality as heresy. In the name of an imaginary purity that has nothing to do with the rich history of Islam, we have sacrificed this religion and its cultural heritage to fundamentalism. As Abou Zeid defends, Islam's cultural heritage is "not unique but multiple and in constant motion, changing according to the nature of the forces that produce it. Heritage cannot be traced back to a single datum but to several trends and currents expressing different positions, ideologies and visions." (Abou Zeid 1999, 20-21) For this reason, I advocate a democratic approach to this cultural and religious heritage, free from any form of ideological appropriation. A fruitful encounter with this heritage is only possible within a democratic education system.

In this light, what characterizes the *religious* as conceived by him in his book *A Common Faith?* In Bradley Baurain's words:

> The religious is characterized by a rejection of creeds, doctrines, rituals, and other elements of organized religion. Instead, an authentically religious attitude or orientation is existential and humanist. Moral faith rests not upon a divine Supreme being or divinely revealed truths, but upon the dynamic potential of inquiry to discover knowledge and pursue ideals, that is, to act on experiential knowledge in order to improve life. (Baurain 2011, 75)

To paraphrase, Dewey offers a critique of religion that aims to free it from its traditional rituals and dogmas. It is important to note that Dewey's approach is not atheistic, as I mentioned earlier, because atheism could amount to replacing one set of "institutionalized belief system" (such as religion) with another "institutionalized belief system" (such as secular dogma).[6] Instead, Dewey advocates a religion rooted in spirituality and personal experience, which involves establishing meaningful connections with other humans and society at large. His goal is to encourage individuals to live a religious life that is in tune with the modern world and its scientific advancements. As Baurain explains it, "From Dewey's perspective, the authentically religious holds the potential to unify the natural, scientific, moral, and social dimensions of experience." (Baurain 2011, 80)

Habermas' position is not different when he asks religion to express its convictions in the secular language of modernity. (Habermas 2001, 21) In an earlier work, Dewey notes that "[r]eligion has lost itself in cults, dogmas and myths." (Dewey 2007, 330) It is unable to address modern society and modern man. To use Helmuth Plessner's language, it realizes itself more as *social radicalism* or as a communal temptation. (Plessner 1999, 103-104) In the sense of Dewey, religion must be democratized, which means allowing itself to be liberated from a premodern authority and ideal. The only authority that recognizes religion in a democracy is that of experience. (Baurain 2011, 81)

Concluding Remarks

Given all of the above, we can say with Dewey that the relationship between education and democracy is organic and that its function is to build a democratic individual and a democratic society. As he emphasizes, "The devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. [...] Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education." (Dewey 2008, 80) The individual creates society to the same extent that society makes the individual. Hence, Dewey's praise of Hegel's contribution and his assertion that historical or social institutions contribute to the formation of the mind strongly means that the education project is a social project and should be so, not as Rousseau thought. But Dewey, at the same time, criticizes Hegel's idealism for linking the work of institutions to the spirit of the world, but especially his ideal conception of these institutions and the absolute goal he sets for it, will bring it to swallow up "concrete individualities, though magnifying The Individual in the abstract." (Dewey 2008, 57) Just as Dewey refuses to tie education to an absolute goal that liberates institutions and hinders the individual's freedom, he refuses to limit it to rigid ideals that prohibit movement or change, as with Plato's philosophy of education. Plato believes that change inevitably leads to chaos. Dewey also criticizes the Platonic idea that education only follows the establishment of the ideal state because this implies that the state is not the natural outcome of the inner movement of society. (Dewey 2008, 83) The same platonic idea is repeated in different languages by the proponents of the democratic transition in the Arab World since, in their social and cultural blindness, they link the spread of democratic culture with the emergence of a democratic state.

Last but not least, let us not forget that education is never truly completed; it will be present throughout the democratic life of the citizen. For this reason, any discourse on democratic transition risks not only not understanding the indispensability of education for democracy but also the meaning of democracy itself, which cannot be reduced to a political institution or a government. My defense of considering the culture of society in all thinking about democracy, or the necessity of liberating society to liberate politics, or the necessity of building a political and social culture that will support the democratic transition does not mean at all that I adopt a culturalist position that speaks of the consistent and absolute essence of Arab-Islamic culture and its hostility to democracy. Arab-Islamic culture cannot develop towards democracy under unjust political and economic

conditions. The democratization from above that Arab political scientists defend today is nothing more than an echo of the putschist mentality that has dominated nationalist circles in the Arab world for decades. They have remained faithful children of the prevailing political culture.

Regarding the question of religion, it is essential to emphasize their social and historical nature. Islam changed radically when it moved from the Arabian Peninsula to the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages, and it will change when it moves from a context of tyranny to a democratic context. This entails welcoming cultural change. However, when I say that cultural change is necessary, it does not mean that I fall into the essentialism of Huntington or Fukuyama and their fellow culturalists because the cultural shift I call for does not condemn Islam but the political power that abuses it against democracy and individual freedoms.

Even if Abdelwahab El-Affendi presents several pieces of empirical evidence that confirm that democratic culture is not a condition for democratic transition, (El-Affendi 2010, 16) what such analysis overlooks, the results that cannot be generalized to all regions of the world, and what El-Affendi misses is that the goal of the democratic transition is not a democratic transition in itself. It does not lie in the liberation of the state but in the liberation of man, and what that means is building free social relations, not only horizontally between the ruler and the ruled. As George Tarabichi writes in language reminiscent of John Dewey, democracy cannot

> be a system of government without being a system of society. It is not permissible for the relations between the rulers and the ruled to proceed without the relations between the ruled themselves. Although it is by definition a system of the state, it is in essence a system of civil society. (Tarabichi 2006, 17)

Hisham Sharabi is right when he sees the patriarchal structures of Arab societies as allies of authoritarianism. We cannot live our freedom and experience our democracy in a patriarchal Islam, but only in an Islam that has gone through the Kantian cold-water cure of modernity. In other words, the claim that today's Islam or its culture is not hostile to modernity is the product of a mindset alienated from the reality of Arab society. Such an approach springs from a false conception of democracy, devalues education, and ultimately reproduces the *separatist state* it rightly criticizes.[7]

Endnotes:

1. Dewey writes: "Intolerance, abuse, calling of names because of differences of opinion about religion or politics or business, as well as because of differences of race, color, wealth or degree of culture are treason to the democratic way of life." John Dewey, "Creative Democracy: The Task before Us," In *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925–1953, vol. 14, Essays*, edited by J. A. Boydston, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976, pp. 227-228.
2. It must be pointed out that Sayyed Qutb, who received an American scholarship to study education in America, is the same one who attacks pragmatism and its conception of education, but often in ignorance of its meaning, not only for the American context but also for the Arab-Islamic context.

See: Nadia Duvall, *Islamist Occidentalism. Sayyid Qutb and the Western Other,* Berlin: GerlachPress, 2019, p. 76.

3. By this concept, I mean the various forms of bovarism or escape from reality among the young generation, which are an expression of a structural crisis in Arab societies and an expression of the failure of the modernization project.
4. As explained by Mathieu Gagnon, a Canadian specialist in Dewey's Philosophy: "In a way, the State is not conceived of as an authoritarian monologue imposing itself on culture but as being in dialogue with it. as a response to the problems that emerge from it. Which also means acting on it to reconstruct it.", See his doctoral thesis: *Savoir ce que l'on fait. L'héritage hégélien de la bildung dans la philosophie de la culture de John Dewey*, Laval University 2022, p. 353 (Manuscript).
5. According to sociologist Donald Levine, Protestantism promotes purification, austerity, and anti-pluralism by rejecting religious differences and other sects. Levine believes this Puritan ideology is responsible for America's unique desire to control nature to an extreme extent, ultimately leading to an aversion towards ambiguity in American culture. Donald N. Levine, *The Flight from Ambiguity. Essays in social and cultural Theory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 37.
6. Gordon Mitchell explains Dewey's position as follows: "Both militant atheism and supernaturalism are, in his opinion, preoccupied with humankind in isolation from their fellows and from nature". Gordon Mitchell, "The Sacred in the Everyday: John Dewey on Religion in Public education," In *Pragmatism, Education, and Children. International Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Michael Taylor, Helmut Schreier, Paulo Ghiraldelli, Jr., Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008, p. 114.
7. Abdelwahab El-Affandi presents a convincing picture of the "*Separatist State*", as I call it, in the Arab context. He underlines that the state of national independence inherited the colonial state and must be understood as an extension of it. It is a state alienated from society and its fundamental issues. Instead, the matter is related to an Institution at war with society, "seeing in every move within civil society as a threat, every independent economic development a mortal danger." Abdelwahab El-Affendi, "Political culture and the crisis of democracy in the Arab World." *Democracy in the Arab World. Explaining the Deficit*. Edited by Ibrahim Elbadawi and Samir Makdisi, Abingdon: Routledge, 2010, p. 30.

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Fragmentation and Interruption in Foucault's Concept of the Subject, Power, and Madness

Justina Šumilova
Lithuanian Culture Research Institute
Saltoniškių g. 58, LT-08105, Vilnius, Lithuania
Email: justinasumilova@protonmail.com

Abstract:

The aim of this article is to investigate fragmentation and interruption in Foucault's concept of the subject, power and madness. The research explores the concept of fragmentation in modernity, particularly in relation to subjectivity, power, and madness. It discusses how the shift towards individualism and the erosion of traditional values have led to a sense of disconnection and fragmentation in society. The research states that fragmentation produces multiplicity of meanings and fragments the concept of the subject in which we have a new kind of fragmented subjectivity that is defined by multiplicity. While fragmentation of the subject can lead to madness, it gives an important linear narrative. The research also delves into the role of power in shaping subjectivity and the ways in which language and discourse contribute to fragmentation. Furthermore, it examines the connection between madness and language, as well as the exploration of madness in literature.

Keywords: fragmentation, interruption, subject, madness, power

Introduction

Modernity have resulted in the creation of new human environments, industrialization and new technologies, the acceleration of life's tempo, the expansion of state powers, and the emergence of mass social movements. Alongside the vast physical changes, the world has undergone in Modernity, the way we perceive and comprehend reality has also been altered and a new way of understanding subject and subjectivity evolved.

The older conception of the self as embedded in a holistic but differentiated natural-social-theological order slowly gave way to a "disembedded" selfhood understood to be ontologically prior to and independent of its surroundings (Gordon 2006, 660). Since the mid of 20th century, authenticity and expressive individualism became a common phenomenon in Western societies encouraging people to find their own way and discover their own fulfillment (Taylor 2007, 299).

At the same time, this shift of individualization has also led to a sense of fragmentation and disconnection. Fragmentation is experienced in the form of consumer culture that is trying to embrace authenticity and individuality as well as in the construction of a modern city.

French philosopher Michel Foucault theorized subject as a social construction that is shaped by

language, discourse, and power play in constructing our identities, and how our identities influence the world around us. Subject as a social construct in Foucault's theory that expresses some fragmentary features that are important to explore.

The goal of this work is to discuss the role of fragmentation in Foucault's definitions of subject, power and madness. This work will mainly focus on Foucault's concept of subject and subjectivity, power and madness relating them to Blanchot's concepts of interruption and fragmentary, showing negative and positive aspects of fragmentation. The work argues that fragmentation is an important part of modern subjectivity by using Foucault's concepts.

Fragmentation and interruption in the modern world

Modernity has created fragmentation in various ways. Rapid social change increased economic inequality, racial and ethnic tensions impacted political and religious polarization. These fragmentations affect social, political and economic realms of human life, but in this work the main emphasis lies on changes that impacted fragmentation of the subject.

Modernity has created fragmentation of the subject through the erosion of traditional values, beliefs and the rise of individualism. Fragmentation refers to the way in which religious beliefs and practices have become increasingly dispersed and broken down into smaller, more specific parts impacting the way subject understands one's inner-self and the environment outside the subject.

Religion had a unifying moral role in society, but since the mid of 20th century, it lost this role and became a personal matter. New moral, ethical and spiritual systems replaced traditional religious beliefs and had to give meaning and purpose to people to reach their authenticity and individualism. However, this process can lead to multiple different beliefs coexisting at the same time, and thus inducing confusion and fragmentation.

In the past, identities were often tied to a certain living place that had local community and religion that provided a sense of belonging and identity. But in a modern city, such connections are often more fluid. Cities don't contain silence and openness. Instead, they are full of sounds and movement, and this constant instability can be understood as interruption.

For Blanchot, interruption is a disruption of the continuity of thought, speech, or action which he explains by example of language. Language is not an object or a process, but rather an event. Through our interaction with language, we enter into a relationship of proximity in which nothing is revealed but we cannot avoid engaging with it. Language can interrupt the linear flow of thought when talking or language can be used to construct narratives or stories, but the narrative can be disrupted by those who speak it differently or have experiences that do not fit with the narrative. Blanchot sees discourse as invasive because it "breaks in" from the outside like language; when you speak, somebody interrupts starting you to question certain ideas, beliefs or concepts (Blanchot 1993, 76).

Blanchot's concept of interruption also resembles the modern culture and consumerist society. Consumerist society advertises authenticity and individuality to people by using techniques of language and creating multiple ads to "find yourself." Both the city and the society are full of

interruptions showing up in the form of noise, whether it is the physical sound or commercials and ads.

Multiple meanings in modernity can become a source of confusion and anxiety, as it can create a feeling of disorientation and lead to an inability to assert one's viewpoint or make decisions. The modern world, starting from 1960s, started to focus more on individuality, self-expression, personal desires and exploring oneself.

Discourse interrupts and forces to rethink your own subjectivity. History of being is not a linear narrative, as the principle of identity can interrupt and disrupt any attempt to construct a narrative. Therefore, the passage implies that history is made up of fragmented moments, with the potential for something to disrupt the flow of narrative at any given moment (Bruns 1996, 133).

The modern culture became more fragmented and suggested different ways to find one's true self, but people can feel overwhelmed by multiplicity of meanings. Fragmentation is experienced in the form of consumer culture. The way modern society exists now is the issue that leads us to fragmentation; society lost its unifying ontological segment and now is too dismantled into fragments.

Another issue of the modern society is the production of fake needs. The modern society creates fake needs that are used as tools of repression, inducing alienation with oneself and loss of personal dimension which emerges a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behavior in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe (Marcuse 2002, 13-14).

Fragmentation in Foucault's subject. Power and fragmentation

In Foucault, subject has no intrinsic reality or structure because it can be shaped and remodeled by various power structures. Foucault stated that human subject is placed in relation of production and of signification as well as in complex power relations (Foucault 1982, 778). The fragmentation of external sources of meaning, such as religion and culture, induces a more individualized sense of identity. A person must actively create their own unique identity by creating their own values and beliefs, rather than relying on external sources.

Foucault pointed out that objectification happens due to "dividing practices". These practices divide the subject from oneself and from others and thus individual becomes objectified (Foucault 1982, 778). In pre-modern times power was related to the church and aristocrats and thus had a personal character attached to it. In modern times, power lost the personal feature. Human population as a whole started to distinguish norms from abnormalities. New disciplines like psychology, sociology and criminology appeared and established new scientific insights to objectify humans and put them into categories.

Foucault argued that science is one of the most powerful forces in producing and maintaining subjectivity (Foucault 1982, 777). Through classification of groups, individuals, and objects, science creates and reinforces social hierarchies, power structures, and ideologies that shape our subjectivity. Subjectification also occurs through the political, economic and cultural forces of our societies. These forces create and maintain the discourses, practices, and technologies that limit and define subjectivity.

Foucault argued that the process of division is used to create and maintain subjectivity and is carried out through the categorization of individuals and objects into distinct groups, often based on physical characteristics or attributes. By dividing people into categories, subjectification takes place through the construction of stereotypes and power dynamics that shape and define our identities.

Fragmentation is experienced in categorizing certain aspects of life into separate roles that are not united and function as narrative interruptions. We are taught to perceive childhood, old age, work, leisure, the public and private sphere, and the individual's corporate life as distinct and separate forms of life, instead of viewing them in terms of a single unified life journey. All these mentioned aspects are now investigated by specific fields in science which can start to be perceived by the individuals as the most important specific feature of their lives. This leads to a focus on each individual aspect, rather than the overall unity of the individual's experience (Willian 2000, 205).

Subjectification occurs by creating, maintaining and reinforcing power dynamics and distinctions between groups of people. More examples could be the split between healthy and sick people; sane and insane; criminals and citizens. These splits started to justify what makes us sane or insane, criminal or law-abiding, sick or well. At the same time, this objectification spark subjectification in certain ways because by having this knowledge about humans, we become subjects to those investigated acts. Foucault reveals a paradoxical situation: the modern human becomes constituted and constituting at the same time, the one who writes history and historicizes and lives in history.

Human is able to reflect on personal experience, but at the same time, objectify oneself. A human enters an ambigous state when one is one‘s own interruption. Blanchot describes interruption as an ontological power that is able to disrupt other's being: "between man and man there is an interval that would be neither of being nor of non-being, an interval borne by the Difference of speech – a difference preceding everything that is different and everything unique" (Blanchot 1993, 298).

Objectification of human beings creates certain norms and standards by which humans should be measured; a norm or a standard is possible only into reference to a group or a certain population.

> This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to (Foucault 1982, 781).

Fragmentation is a tool for power to control how subject is shaped. Power chooses certain aspects of subjectivity that are highlighted in the society, while others are neglected or considered to be unacceptable, like the discourse of sexuality. This way, subjects are encouraged to develop only certain, power approved features of identity, while the unapproved ones remain hidden and repressed. Power can act as a negative component in some discourses rejecting certain ways of subjectivity and creating gaps that act as power by not allowing to integrate certain aspects into one's identity:

> It [power] never establishes any connection between power and sex that is not negative: rejection, exclusion, refusal, blockage, concealment, or mask. Where sex and pleasure are concerned, power can "do" nothing but say no to them; what it produces, if anything, is absences and gaps; it overlooks elements, introduces discontinuities, separates what is joined, and marks off boundaries. Its effects take the general form of limit and lack (Foucault 1978, 83).

These gaps and absences can become unintegrated parts of the subjects that are neglected due to power's impact on subject formation. Power also revolved around controlling discourses and language about certain topics. Some discourses were silenced or considered taboo, these discourses are not fully formed and appeared in the form of undeveloped fragmentary gaps. The nature of fragment is that it cannot have a center and it cannot be referred to an origin (Blanchot 1993, 152). Censorship mechanism can use silence as a tool to fragment certain narratives to prevent their formation into a discourse and sustain the power.

> It may well be true that adults and children themselves were deprived of a certain way of speaking about sex, a mode that was disallowed as being too direct, crude, or coarse. But this was only the counterpart of other discourses, and perhaps the condition necessary in order for them to function, discourses that were interlocking, hierarchized, and all highly articulated around a cluster of power relations (Foucault 1978, 30).

As Foucault points out, sex discourse was reduced to "silence" because sex discourse is the insidious presence that speaks in a voice so muted and often disguised that one risks remaining deaf to it (Foucault 1978, 35). Discontinuity of discourse can manifest in silence within a conversation that allows for a true exchange of ideas between two people (Blanchot 1993, 77). However, in other cases, silence can form a narrative when silence is a pause. Despite silence complicating the dialogue, silence's interruption is beneficial for formation of words and ideas (Blanchot 1993, 77). Foucault's analyzed sex discourse shows that language is a tool of interruption because it can control the spread or silencing of certain narratives, or it can be used to highlight certain narratives to confuse and distract people.

Modern world idea of authenticity is another example of fragmentation and power control. The modern era has been saturated by dream that your true self remains available to reach if you can find a certain social group or personal style to belong to. According to this model, the individual is self-contained and complete, and society presses in on it from the outside, frustrating its dreams and restricting its ability to express itself (Mansfield 2000, 54). Such model presents a "finished" subject identity that is possible to discover and putting the responsibility for your own process of subjectification.

It creates the fake feeling of control over who you are, but one can choose only certain established and societal power-approved categories to become the individual that is defined and categorized. Effects of power constitute individual and the individual is an effect of power and at the same time an element of its articulation (Mansfield 2000, 54). Power creates the subject and controls via subject – subject is like a medium for power to show itself. Subject is interrupted by power-induced mechanism of control in which subject forms oneself in the way power allows one to be formed. This

form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks one by one's own individuality, attaches one to one own identity, imposes a law of truth on one which one must recognize and which others have to recognize in that person.

Technique of power is a way of turning a person into a specific, desired subject. Not all people are able to separate themselves form techniques of power because they believe that this power is their idea or volition. This is a subtle and tacit power of subjectification that makes a person behave in certain ways that becomes normal and unchangable.

Madness, language and fragmentation in Foucault

In The Order of Things, Foucault argues that language gives us the ability to recognize, categorize, and understand reality by imposing meaning and structure on our thoughts and experiences. Language is key to understanding how and why humans form relationships between concepts, words, and material items, and how this shapes our experience of the world.

Language occupied a fundamental situation in relation to knowledge because only by the medium of language things can be known – not because it was a part of the world, ontologically interwoven with it, but because it was the first sketch of an order in representations of the world, because it was the initial, inevitable way of representing representations (Foucault 2002, 322). Language may not look like the things it describes, but this doesn't mean that it is isolated from the world. In a different form, it is still a place of discovery and plays an essential role in establishing the truth.

Within language, there can be more than one "language". There can be the language of identity, which tries to make the other similar to itself, and the language of temporality or of sensibility, which makes what was once the same become "other" than its original self. Language does not unite us, as if it were a bond or a whole that contained us both, language separates us because it is itself uncontainable within any totality and language becomes the interruption of every union (Bruns 1996, 137).

Fragmentation causes fissures in structures of language. Foucault argues that modern world has multiple discourses that don't lead to anything finite and organized. Tension between self and subjectivity inside oneself is discovered, and one's tension manifests in one's relationships with others; this inner tension leads to fragmentation and dissociation ending in madness (Reich 1999, 148).

Languages plays a big role in understanding subjectivity because people are considered to be objects of knowledge and individual subjects at the same time. Human is able to reflect on one's own experience, but at the same time, objectify oneself. The schizophrenic moves from feeling empowered and self-determining to powerless and ineffectual, much like man in the modern age who shifts between being a product of the past and impacting the future, but in an increasingly unpredictable and tumultuous way. Foucault also pointed out that the speech of the madman has always been rejected, denied and suppressed – they either fell into a void – rejected the moment they were proffered – or else men deciphered in them a naive or cunning reason, rationality more rational than that of a rational man (Foucault 1988, 217).

This specific and neglected language of the madman is an important component of madness because language of madness helps to organize its own form. A mad person contains fragments that isolate the man from oneself and reality in such a way that fragments form unreal unity of a hallucination, it's derangement of the imagination (Foucault 1988, 93). These fragments exist in person's mind, and one uses language to rationalize and guide one's reason according to those fragments that are based on person's experience. A certain fragment becomes the dominant aspect of someone's identity, but it functions like a repetition of thought that does not lead to any kind of unity, it functions like an interruption. Fragment is not self-sufficient and not capable to talk about it, fragment cannot be combined with other fragments to form a complete thought making fragment a repetition of thought (Blanchot 1993, 153).

Fragments of madness are like "silence pauses" – this fragment functions like silence in discourse and does not permit the exchange because it cannot be integrated, it can only function as unreason that guides one's understanding of the world (Blanchot 1993, 75). Here, fragment functions in a similar way as it does in Blanchot when explaining fragmented speech. Fragment in speech is not self-sufficient and not capable to talk about it, fragment cannot be combined with other fragments to form a complete thought (Blanchot 1993, 152).

Madness didn't necessarily mean an absence of reason, but rather a less rational method of thinking and responding. Subjectivity is related to madness in a way that madness was the individual's experience of their own mental behavior that created a subjective understanding of the world signified by using language. Signification is related to power because power signifies certain traits or characteristics in a human being. Human contains various signifieds that one uses to describe oneself, while power is implemented in the form of language. Foucault argued that by labeling certain behaviors and individuals as "mad", these power structures seek to repress and control them, thus fragmenting them from the larger social order.

Language and madness. Subject overload

> The art of language was a way of 'making a sign' – of simultaneously signifying something and arranging signs around that thing; an art of naming, therefore, and then, by means of a reduplication both demonstrative and decorative, of capturing that name, of enclosing and concealing it, of designating it in turn by other names that were the deferred presence of the first name, its secondary sign, its figuration, its rhetorical panoply (Foucault 2002, 48).

The previous chapters investigated the relationship between fragmentation, power and subject, and this chapter focuses on the way language fragments subject and leads to a new type of madness of subjectivity, focusing on the issue of multiple meanings in signification. In today's world, people can experience madness in a non-traditional way. There are many powers and ways to construct one's subjectivity, people can become overloaded with multiple meanings, deny or suppress certain aspects of identity and thus experience fragmentation and interruption of consistent subjectivity.

In the modern age, we experience multiple meanings in discourses and language and in the

world around us. There is no one correct or right path, there are thousands of those paths which lead of floating and endless signifieds revealing inefficiency of language and discourse which leads to overloaded signifier. The disunity of language can cause the crisis of disintegration of the subject.

"Signifier overload" is a process when signifier has too many signifieds and too many meanings, especially in social context. Signifier overload is related to subject fragmentation in our world. The modern way of living encourages disconnection with one's subjectivity because certain aspects of human's life are categorized by acceptance or denial by powers forming the subject.

Ideology needs subjectivity as a technique to produce and sustain people who support the ideology. Institutions reproduce the logic of the capitalist system values and indoctrinating them on people to create subjects who become instruments and bearers of this ideology (Mansfield 2000, 53). This is a method of control – divided and thus controlled – and it creates fragmentation because people do not see unity, they seek to be individual and unique, and this seeking actually becomes fragmentation in the form of division and separation. Subject is disorganized by too many possible ways of signification, requiring an interruption in forming an identity because multiple meanings induce the feelings of being lost and confused, unable to reach unity.

Another case is when fragmentation impacts multiplicity of split identities. A proper noun does not effectively describe the fragmentary constitution of the subject – this happens when one signifier is not enough to express the plurality of signifieds, because signifier assumes different signifieds that depend on social, cultural, economic context in different situations. The multiple identities accumulate and are not attenuated, thus becoming senseless meanings trapped in the mind that can lead to madness (Foucault 1998, 90-91). Subject experience disembodiment from societal and historical being, loose one's touch with society, culture and history and carry multiple senseless meanings that are not interconnected. Signifier overload can lead to madness manifesting in subject disembodiment from societal and historical being and subject can become senseless meanings.

There is linguistic instability in which signification is relative and infinite – words assume different meanings when said by different people in different social contexts (Reich 1999, 151). The social constitution and formation of the subject is important and related to disintegration of narratives. Individual's identity crisis is provoked by realization of the individualization procedures society employs to objectify the subject by objectifying the speaking subject, dividing practices when the subject is divided inside oneself or from others and subject's self-formation (Reich 1999, 152). Division of practices is something that creates dissociation and exclusion of subject's identity forming units.

Subject then is not able to identify oneself because one is either dissociated from certain meanings and signifieds or the subject is overloaded with too many signifieds to relate to. Different social roles can be given separate linguistic identities that are divided, therefore these divided linguistical alters can accompany one in social settings.

In the modern times, due to setting of life, one's character's self-development can be self-annihilation because human experiences multiplications of oneself which could be called "a new form of madness" that manifests in multiple fragments and loss meaning and unity. It is the experience of

the desubjectification, but it is worth to note that is does not happen in all cases. Desubjectification can have a positive aspect and function as construction of oneself.

Madness in literature: exploring other ways of subjectivity?

Foucault investigation of madness showed that human nature is fractured and revealed the power of dividing practices that saw madness as a threat to "imagined" stability. Foucault's goal was to uncover the madness in history of western civilization. Foucault also understood madness as a part of our nature that is repressed and rejected from the concept of humanity. Foucault connects the concept of madness with literature and that madness can be a language for the work of art because:

> Through madness, a work that seems to drown in the world, to reveal there its non-sense, and to transfigure itself with the features of pathology alone, actually engages within itself the world's time, masters it, and leads it; by the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself... in the time of that work swamped in madness, the world is made aware of its guilt (Foucault 1988, 288).

Madness allows to create a space of literature in which certain ideas of the work of art can be presented to the audience. The madness in a work of art forces to create a pause, a blank space without resolution, leaving the world with a question it cannot answer. Interruption introduces waiting – this waiting may not necessary be understood as silence or a blank, but its most important effect is the change in the form or the structure of language (Blanchot 1993, 77).

Interruption is necessary to component of writing because this intermittence and discontinuity in the text allows to better grasp and understand the text. This moment of profanation disrupts the flow of time, allowing the work to seize control of it and to make its own non-sense meaning within the context of its pathology. Fragmented writing is a way to become "one's own disorder", to close up upon one's own self in a contented isolation. There is no pure self in the process of fragmentary writing.

Foucault's notion of madness in the work of art could be related to Blanchot's understanding of fragmentary writing. It is worth to point out that both Foucault and Blanchot focused on breaking the limits in their works, and Maurice Blanchot saw in Foucault's work his own experiment with a form of writing that explored limits and defined a new literary space (Dosse 1997, 155). Foucault, following the path of Maurice Blanchot, in his works emphasized the forgotten and repressed, giving the voice to the ones that history forgot, as well as going beyond limits and expressing new discourses.

Just like Foucault's idea of madness and literature, Blanchot in his writings invited his audience to engage with his work on their own terms, allowing them to make their own interpretations. By focusing on smaller, disconnected ideas, he hoped to create a mosaic of perspectives that could come together to form a more complete understanding of reality. For example, in work "The Writing of the Disaster" Blanchot demonstrates fragmentary writing that

tries to break totalizing structures of language and tries to accomplish articulation of silence (Wallace 2016, 293-294). Fragmentation in writing is a way to restructurize the written text and rebel against the oppression of certain powers and this helps to unwork writing practices aimed at the silence anterior to language – a silence that constitutes interior communication (Wallace 2016, 293).

Madness is the absolute break with the work of art; it forms the constitutive moment of abolition, which dissolves in time the truth of the work of art; it draws the exterior edge, the line of dissolution, the contour against the void (Foucault 1988, 287). Madness is the definitive point of divergence between art and reality, the moment that separates truth from untruth and erases the boundaries between the two. It creates a void, a line of demarcation that suggests an end to the work, while at the same time opening up a realm of possibilities beyond. Madness, just like fragmentary text, allows to express plurality of existence of various ways how to view or understand the text.

Blanchot, via analyzing Sade's writings, points out that madness can be a form on writing. Madness expresses itself in the movement of writing and it can give an escape from conventions of the everyday helping to free oneself and reach greater understanding. Madness is associated with both joy and suffering; it is a place of solitude and alienation, but also of clarity and understanding (Blanchot 1993, 220). The positive aspect of madness is that it can give voice to unspoken narratives.

Madness can be a necessary component of one's subjective deconstruction and reconstruction – madness can lead to a new form of subjectivity being born and expressed in the form of text, shifting from subjectivity to non-subjectivity and vice versa. Blanchot developed a concept called the Neuter that defines something that does not fall into the standard categories of being, it is "nothingness coming into being". It is impossible to give a sign to neutrality, so we find ourselves faced with the questions of knowledge that are presented to us when the unknown appears as neutrality, that is, when we see the experience of neutrality embedded in every relationship with the unknown (Blanchot 1993, 299). Madness can be described as a mode of the Neuter, it is incomprehensible to the human reason, but it can give a start to new type of subjectivity and experimentation of subjectivity.

Conclusions

Fragmentation in the modern world is experienced via loss of unity and multiplicity of meanings. Interruptions are discontinuities of thought that produce fragmentation of the subject because society is divided into certain segments of which some are highlighted and advertised, while others are rejected and controlled. Power divides and rejects certain forms of subjectivity which contributes to fragmentation of identity. Gaps and discontinuities are the tools of fragmentation for power to control the formation of the subject.

In the modern world, science leads to investigation of human nature and categorization of human experience. Scientific narratives contribute to fragmentation because they create roles that are not united and dispersed, focusing on individuality, rather than a unity of subject experience.

For Foucault, language has a crucial role in subject formation and manifestation of madness. Fragmentation and dissociation from one's own subject can lead to madness. Fragmentary form of

madness can become the most important linear narrative to human that starts to constitute one's whole identity neglecting other identity features.

There are multiple interpretations of discourse and language, and this extends beyond the literal meaning. Our language is overloaded with signifiers, without clear signification, which in turn can lead to a crisis of the disintegration of individual identity. This process can be defined as signifier overload which manifests in having too many signifieds and too many meanings. Signifier overload also occurs when one identity is not enough to define the subject. Multiple identity crisis can lead to disintegration of the subject and madness.

Foucault's combination of madness and literature resonates with Blanchot's concept of fragmentary writing by which Blanchot wanted to express the multiplicity of meanings in a text. Madness in literature is a positive concept, allowing to express the unexpressed in news ways as well as contributing to positive subject formation by creating a space for experimentation and allowing "nothingness to come into being" to form new form of subjectivity.

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Was There Religion Before Modernity? A Dialogue with Brent Nongbri

João Almeida Loureiro
Department of Philosophy, University of Lisbon
Alameda da Universidade, 1600-214 Lisbon, Portugal
Email: jloureiro2@edu.ulisboa.pt

Abstract:

This article aims to analyze the legitimacy of a thesis that has been gaining traction in recent decades within Religious Studies - namely, that the term religion can only be applied accurately to Protestant Christianity, and that all previous phenomena must be described using different terminology. To this end, we will take Brent Nongbri as our main interlocutor. What Nongbri advocates is simple: the term "religion" stands for the private adherence to a given set of theses; pre-modern peoples did not have any concept with such or similar meaning, therefore, they did not have religion, but something different. We will postulate, on the one hand, that Nongbri's thesis is tremendously fragile, and, on the other, that we are perfectly justified in continuing to talk about religion when referring to pre-modern peoples and cultures.

Keywords: Religion; Ancient; Modernity; Nongbri; Christianity

In recent decades, within *Religious Studies* and adjacent fields, a certain school of social constructionism has emerged, which has as its program the rejection of the notion of religion as a universal category that could be used to describe the individual or collective experiences of pre-modern people. Following in the wake of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who proposed the abolition of the term "religion" in his best-known work, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962), the best-known figures in this current trend are today Talal Assad, Daniel Boyarin and Brent Nongbri. It is precisely Nongbri who resurrects the controversy when he publishes *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (2015). His thesis is simple: "religion" is a concept that belongs exclusively to modernity, and no ancient language has a term that is equivalent to what modern populations understand when they say "religion". "Religion" is, for Nongbri, an irremediably modern concept, engendered by Europeans, which refers to the model of Protestant Christianity in which "religion" would be understood as private adherence to a set of theses of a soteriological nature, and, therefore, the domain of the religious would be clearly demarcated from the secular. This is, in fact, for the author, the crux of the question: "what is modern about the ideas of 'religions' and 'being religious' is the isolation and naming of some things as 'religious' and others as 'not religious'" (Nongbri 2015, 4).

For the Greeks, *eusébeia* meant both the attitude that a subject should desirably adopt before

the gods - and *asébeia* the wrong attitude, this being one of the accusations that fell on Socrates and ultimately lead to his condemnation - as well as referring to social imperatives of other types, such as filial duties and those relating to state institutions (therefore, the common translation as *piety*, carrying all the baggage of the Latin *pietas*, can be tremendously misleading). In turn, the word that is most commonly translated as "religion" (and translated into Latin as *religio*), *thrēskeía*, also has a myriad of meanings. For Herodotus, it refers to rites and rituals – such as ablution and others -, for Philo of Alexandria, the term refers to actions that occur inside temples, such as sacrifices, for the author of the letter to the Colossians it seems to stand for the cult and worship, and for Josephus the *thrēskeía* of the Jews is the activity they carry out in their temples, normally sacrifices. In this sense, for Josephus, *ioudaïsmós* is the activity of Judaizing, of doing what Jews do, such as "sacrificing, going to temples, obeying kings, paying taxes, eating certain foods (not just kashruth), wearing certain hats, speaking Judean, everything one does as a Judean, with no distinctions made between what we in our culture would call 'religion', 'law', 'manners', 'customs', or 'politics'" (Boyarin 2019, 63). In fact, *ioudaïsmós*, as it appears in the Fourth Book of Maccabees (4:26), is related to *hellênismos* (belonging to the Hellenic community; referring to a subject who acts like a Hellene), and designates, more than a collective entity, an activity, a way of life. But *nómos* also refers to something similar: if it is true that *nómos* can have the meaning of "law", it is, nevertheless, a law that expresses the way of life of a people, and not, like a mere *thesmós*, a legal norm enacted by a legislator (Ostwald 1969, 55). In this sense, *nómos* is an expression of *politeuma*, which not only consists of "laws", but involves a set of notions of justice, *communitas*, *pietas*, harmony. Greek thought is holistic. For this reason, Josephus still equates the Jew's way of being (*ioudaïsmós*) as a *nómos* (making it equivalent to the Hebrew *Torah* and the Aramaic *'orayta*) (Boyarin 2016, 158).

In the same way, the Latin *religio*, instead of referring to institutions or to the adherence to a given set of theses, seems rather to describe a set of emotions, such as anxiety, fear, embarrassment, inhibition, and above all scrupulosity, in such a way that that we could say that *homo religiosus* was synonymous with *homo scrupulosus*. Thus, Livy reports, in his *Ab Urbe condita*: "Quod quamquam Varro aegre est passus, Flamini tamen recens casus Claudique consulis primo Punico bello memorata navalis clades religionem animo incussit" (22.42.8-9). The sight of past defeats instills Varro's *animus* with *religio* – with anxiety, hesitation. Or even Seneca, when he says, in his *Epistulae*: "Si quis specus saxis penitus exesis montem suspensionit, non manu factus, sed naturalibus causis in tantam laxitatem excavatus, animum tuum quadam religionis suspicione percutiet" (41.3), which Richard M. Gummere translates as follows, "Or if a cave, made by the deep crumbling of the rocks, holds up a mountain on its arch, a place not built with hands but hollowed out into such spaciousness by natural causes, your soul will be deeply moved by a certain intimation of the existence of God" (Seneca 1917). In truth, the intimation does not refer necessarily to the existence of God; Seneca intends only to evoke the sense of fear that accompanies the new and the abnormal, and that requires one to be cautious – from this fact many authors have derived the idea that the primordial cause of this fear is the feeling generated by the *tremendum* aspect of divinity, in the sense that Rudolf Otto offers to the numinous (Sabbatucci 1951).

In this sense, *superstitio* also does not constitute the opposite of *religio*, but refers to the idea of religion taken to the extreme, an exaggeration of *religio*. As Cicero uses the term: "(...) non enim philosophi solum verum etiam grandes nostri superstitionem a religione separaverunt nam qui totos dies precabantur et immolabant, ut sibi sui liberi superstites essent, superstitiosi sunt appellati, quod nomen patuit postea latius" (*De Natura Deorum*, 2.71-72). Those who spent their days praying for the health of their children, neglecting their other duties, were called *superstitiosi*. Thus, the anxiety of religion derived from a calamity, from an approaching war, or from a fatal illness, could, if the person had no healthy psychological mechanisms to deal with it, slip into *superstitio*[1]. This distinction remained until the medieval period. Then, in ecclesiastical circles, the adjective *religiosus* began to be used to describe clerics belonging to monastic orders (and *saecularis* to refer to elements of the Church that were not affiliated with them). In fact, it was only in the 19th century, more precisely in 1851, that a fundamentalist atheist, George Holyoake, used the word "secular" as a synonym for freethinker, unbeliever, nonbeliever (Keddie 2003, 15).

Likewise, the Arabic term that is normally translated as religion – *dīn* – has a great semantic range. This is what Muhamamd Sarwar does, for example, in his translation of the third verse of the fifth Quranic surah: "On this day I have perfected your religion [*dinakum*], completed My favors to you, and have chosen Islam as your religion [*dinaa*]". Maria Dakake (who participated in the first collective translation of the Quran, organized by Hossein Nasr), Abdul Haleem, Muhammad Pickthall, and virtually all modern translations, opt for the same translation (*religion*). First, it would also be worth pointing out the fact that it is not at all clear that the word Islam itself, as it appears in the Quran, even designates a collective entity, a current, or a homogeneous movement – a thesis defended by Fred Donner (Donner 2012). Patrice C. Brodeur believes that "religion" and "dīn" became equivalent during the 20th century through the facilitation of the encounter between English and Arabic cultures and the need to find a common term for translating the Quranic text (Brodeur 2001, 395). Brent Nongbri, relying on the first English translation of the Qur'an, which appeared around 1649 and was made by Alexander Ross, who did not translate from the Arabic, but from a French translation by André de Ryer – a strange foundation for a philological argument! – suggests translating "dīn" by "law", strangely stating that such translations (loy and law) "capture something that more recent translations miss" (Nongbri 2015, 40-41). What seems to escape Nongbri is the fact that "law" is a much more problematic translation of "dīn". In fact, there are several words in Arabic that could be translated into English as "law" – and *dīn* is not one of them. If *dīn* is to be understood as "law", what about *qānūn*, *fiqh*, and *sharīʿah*? Wael Hallaq demonstrates, in a more serious and less biased way, the problems that arise from wanting to universalize European concepts – such as that of legal penalties – for universes where such a thing simply does not exist, nor has it ever existed (Hallaq 2009).

The cases are not, however, comparable. The juridical system stands for a coherent set of state legal norms, which are ordered through a hierarchy, and which are imposed coactively. The political principles that govern a State are codified. In short, a legal system has a more or less well-defined

material reality, unlike religion, which has a greater semantic range. In fact, the thesis that Nongbri advocates in his book is one of total arbitrariness, which, in addition, as Robert Segal– who delivers a set of very harsh criticisms directed at Nongbri – as observed, reveals a general lack of knowledge of the bulk of studies on religion that have been carried out over the last few centuries (Segal 2016, 425). Nongbri claims to follow the famous Wittgensteinian precept that the meaning of a word is its use in a given language (Wittgenstein 1968, 43), and, thus, that "religion" always means something like Protestant Christianity, which would have as its fulcrum, as we have already said, the private act of adherence to a set of theses of a soteriological nature, clearly demarcating a secular – public – domain, where religion has no place. Now, on the one hand, as James Broucek was careful to point out, Nongbri's conception of Protestantism is caricatural:

> The material suggestive of a different view, in which belief plays no especially central role in Protestant communities, is massive. We can point to Presbyterian and Congregationalist concerns with the proper order of church government in seventeenth-century Britain, the emphasis on glossolalia as "proof" of the work of the Holy Spirit in one's life, or the ways Scots imposed discipline with respect to the taking of communion. Institutions, practices, and disciplines matter for Protestant communities as much as they matter for other religious communities—despite some Protestant rhetoric to the contrary (Broucek 2015, 104).

On the other hand, the alleged anachronism of the privacy of the religious domain is demonstrably false – of which the omnipresent initiatory schools in classical antiquity are direct testimony. The Pythagorean community, through the acousmatics, very clearly had a religious praxis, worshiping Apollo and believing in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, and was primarily known as such (Kahn 1909). *Mutatis mutandis*, Roman Mithraism, which coexisted with the widespread cult of the emperor, was a secret school of initiation into religious mysteries, whose adherents, according to Plutarch, practiced ritual sacrifices (*Vita Pompei*, 24.5). Also in the East, within the Shiite tradition, mainly of Ismaili orientation, we find the practice of *taqiyyah* (literally *prudence*, *caution*), which consists of the possibility for the believer to hide his faith if the historical-geographical situation in which he finds himself does not allow him to practice his religion publicly and peacefully. In short, as Ann Williams Duncan, who wrote a specific bibliography on the subject, points out, "private or secret religious activities have existed in all types of religious traditions" (Duncan 2006, 469).

Furthermore, the idea that religion, since modernity, has been understood as belonging to the domain of private experience does not work – Nongbri seems to be unaware of, or deliberately ignores, the multiple authors and different schools of thought that, in recent centuries, have seen religion as an irremovable part of a social logic. Rousseau, for example, conceived of a religion of the citizen (*religion du cytoyen*), which he identified with divine civil law and which had as objective the fostering of social cohesion, whose fulcrum is similar to Marciano's legal precept recorded in the Digest: "sacrae autem res sunt hae, quae publice consecratae sunt, non private: si quis ergo privatim sibi constituerit sacrum "sacrum constituerit", sacrum non est, sed profanum. Semel autem aede

sacra facta etiam diuto aedificio locus sacer manet" (1.8.6 – 3). In 1893, Durkheim – the father of sociology of religion – argued that religion, at its core, is social: "tout ce qui est social est religieux; les deux mots sont synonymes" (Durkheim 1893, 183). Later, in 1912, in his famous study on *Les Formes Élémentaires de la Vie Religieuse*, he categorically reaffirms that: "la religion est une chose éminemment sociale. Les représentations religieuses sont des représentations collectives qui expriment des réalités collectives; les rites sont des manières d'actir qui ne prennent naissance qu'au sein des groupes assemblés et qui sont destinés à arousing, à entretenir ou à refaire certain états mentaux de ces groupes" (Durkheim 2013, 13). Therefore, Durkheim considers that there is no religion without the Church – understood as the union of members of a community who share certain representations of the sacred, which translate into identical practices. This is what, for the French sociologist, allows religion to be distinguished from magic: the former's purpose is to unite men among themselves, to foster bonds, it is eminently social, while the magician, to practice his magic, does not need unite with their counterparts; even when associations of magicians are formed – which is already something exceptional and unusual – these are not indispensable to the practice of magic, which is a fundamentally private practice. Following Durkheim's steps, Henri Bergson's concept of static religion stands exactly for a kind of social religiosity, in which one cannot dissociate the individual from the collective practice and experience (Bergson 1937). In the same way, Carl Jung, another name never mentioned by Nongbri, affirms the superiority of Catholicism over Protestantism precisely because the Protestant conception of religion is based on individual experience, and not on collective activity (Jung 1992, 31-6). In more contemporary times, Bruce Lincoln offers a definition of religion that in no way refers to the intimacy of private consciousness: "religion, I submit, is that discourse whose defining characteristic is its desire to speak of things eternal and transcendent with an authority equally transcendent and eternal" (Lincoln 2013, 165).

However, beyond all this, the distinction between the sacred and the profane, which Nongbri believes emerged with Protestantism and modernity, is, as Mircea Eliade demonstrated, abundantly present since the beginning of humanity, and is what more specifically characterizes the *homo religiosus*. The religious person's space is not a homogeneous and aseptic space, composed of mutually exchangeable specific units, but it is a living space, a space of ruptures (Eliade 1987). When God orders Moses to take off his sandals because he is on sacred land (Exodus 3: 5), he immediately outlines an ontological-existential distinction between a profane space and a sacred space, endowed with supreme reality. When it is not the divine that bursts into a certain place, it is the person himself who performs the consecration, whether by erecting a cosmic column that functions as an *axis mundi* (as in the case of the Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw), a sanctuary (like the temple in Jerusalem), a sacred hut (like the Sioux people), etc.

Let us also add that this alleged separation between secular and sacred, between the domain of religion and that of politics, science, etc., which Nongbri sees as a characteristic of modernity, often does not occur. The politics of the most influential country in the world, the USA – whose population, it should be noted, is mostly Protestant, as are the overwhelming majority of its

presidents throughout its history – is explicitly Christian. From the outset, the constitutions of American states such as North Carolina, following the Declaration of Independence ratified in 1776, affirm the existence of God and, therefore, a set of God-given rights. When, in 2001, George W. Bush declared a "war on terror", he referred to the need for the offensive against Iraq and Afghanistan as a crusade. Later, in 2004, he reaffirms – in opposition to the Other par excellence, the Islamic East – the Christian nature of freedom and democracy, and his proselytizing mission: "Freedom is the Almighty's gift to every man and woman in this world. And as the greatest power on the face of the earth we have an obligation to help the spread of freedom". The narrative of the existence of a secular liberal democracy, of a neutral State that is no longer susceptible to religious influences, and that is the only path to world peace and cohesion, not only fails to account for these and other aspects, but is also a complete fiction.

On the other hand, we also find several examples of confusion between religion and science, that is, of circumstances in which people or religious communities believe that their religion – for example, through their scriptures – has a set of scientific truths and that the Science is not divorced from religion. Let us invoke, again, a paradigmatic case of Protestantism - creationism. Understood as the position that "supports a literal interpretation of the Judeo-Christian Bible, an earth that is no more than 10,000 years old and created ex nihilo in six days by a monotheistic God, with no new kinds arising since the period of creation, and with a single flood of staggering force shaping layers of rocks and trapping the fossilized organisms within them" (Antoling and Herbers 2001, 2379), it is a thesis that comes into clear conflict with the scientific theory of evolution, insofar as it postulates that there is something like an biological evolution understood as "change in the properties of groups of organisms over the course of generations" (Futuyma 2009, 2). In early 2000, the People for the American Way estimated that a third of Americans wanted creationism as part of the school curriculum (half of them wanting it along the theory of evolution, and the other half wanting to disregard completely the theory of evolution). The countless ideological clashes in American public schools, even today are well documented (Branck and Scott 2009). Contrary to what Nongbri postulates, we moderns often do not clearly demarcate religion from politics, economics, or science. Nothing radically different here compared to the pre-modern mind.

However, the core of Nongbri's criticism is based on the thesis that the absence of a word implies the absence of a phenomenon. "The question could be put like this: does the absence of a word or a phrase equivalent to "religion" in a given language mean that the speakers of the language also lack the concept of religion" (Nongbri 2015, 22)? Invoking Wittgenstein, Nongbri defends the omnipotence of language to describe reality: "the presumption of the existence of concepts somewhere "out there" that somehow escape language is distant to me, not so much on philosophical grounds as on practical grounds. Such an assumption is, it seems to me, a conversation ender" (*idem*). The premise that surreptitiously hovers over his postulate is, first and foremost, that the apprehension of reality occurs only through concepts – or, even, that reality itself is made up of concepts. This is what seems to be implicit when Nongbri rejects that an Ancient Greek has no religion just because he has

no concept of religion (understood, as always, and in an absurdly unjustified way, as equivalent to the Protestant Christian model). The truth of this thesis is not at all clear – on the contrary, arguments could easily be made to show its falsity. The suggestion that the subject himself does not have a certain concept because he does not have a given word is not unreasonable, but we fail to see the relevance of this point to the subject. Robert Segal asks: "Did Adam have to confer with the animals before naming them? Should Malinowski have asked the Trobrianders about their Oedipus complex before concluding that the central complex in their lives was not Oedipal? Should Jung have been banned from identifying the archetypes in the dreams, myths, and behavior of others because others did not speak Jungian? Is the diagnosis by a doctor irrelevant because the patient is unfamiliar with the aid? Must atoms approve the naming of themselves in order for the term to be appropriate?" (Segal 2016, 427). In fact, the word "solidarity" does not arise from classical or medieval Latin, nor within Christianity, but appears for the first time in the philosophical lexicon by the hand of the socialist Pierre Leroux. Being an originally legal term, it meant the relationship in which each debtor is responsible for the entirety (*in solidum*) of a certain amount, considering the co-debtors equally responsible. Will anyone have the audacity to subscribe to the statement that, prior to the 19th century, there were no acts of solidarity or solidary persons? Did Alzheimer's disease only emerge when it was named after the psychiatrist Alois Alzheimer? This is, ultimately, the absurd nature of Nongbri's thesis.

If, to use the language of Anthropology, Nongbri's proposal consists of arguing that, from the perspective of an "emic" approach (that is, an approach that intends to describe events from the point of view of those who live and experience them), the use of the term "religion" is illegitimate, we will have to ask him to demonstrate the veracity of the thesis that says that the comprehension of a given phenomenon as such requires the existence of a linguistic concept – which he fails to do. Everything indicates that pre-modern people had a very clear conception of religion, generally understood as the effective presence of the invisible, experienced as sacred, and that, not infrequently, there was a well-defined demarcation between a sacred domain and a profane one. Like Nongbri, we believe it extremely important to try to understand religious events in all their breadth, which necessarily involves discerning the specificities of each culture and adopting a multidisciplinary stance when approaching the study of the role of religion in history. However, as we have argued here, we do not think that the simple elimination of the term "religion" is a fruitful measure, much less necessary, when wanting to study this complex phenomenon that has permeated all peoples throughout history.

Endnotes:

1. On the other hand, Cicero seems to believe in a link between the fears associated with *religio* and the observation of obligations before divinities, specially when he states that "religio est quae superioris cuiusdam naturae, quam divinam vocant, curam caerimoniamque affert", that is, that *religio* is what leads men to the veneration of divinity (*De Inventione*, 2.53.161). However, he also uses *religio* to refer to the *cultu deorum* itself (*De Natura Deorum*, 2.3). Cicero played an important role in adopting new meanings associated with religion. A philological study of this event falls outside our purpose.

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From Nationalization to Personalization: Towards an Historical Epistemology of the Concept of Culture in American Anthropology

Alexandru Casian
University of Paris 8
2 Rue de la Liberté, 93200 Saint-Denis, France
Email: alex1992universty@gmail.com

Abstract:

In the present days, culture has become a highly personal experience moving from its initial collective locus. As a consequence, the concept has undergone a process of unseen pluralization and expansion of meanings and interpretations. Herder is conventionally held responsible for coining the plural term 'cultures' by linking it with the eighteenth-century idea of nation. This conception evolved into a broader approach to look at cultural phenomena as national manifestations. Despite common assumptions, Herder did not ignore the role of the individual locus. Historical epistemology shows how, in the United States, a derivation of the Herderian notions took the pluralization of culture to the next level. By putting emphasis on the psychological and individual elements, the founders of American anthropology, Boas and his followers, revolutionized the conceptual frameworks in human and social sciences. It is possible to argue that personalization of culture is a secondary effect of Herder's ideas. The Herderian-Boasian vision of culture mirrors the dichotomy between nationalization and personalization that activates strong conceptual mutations and reflects the dilemmas of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: culture, Herder, Boas, personalization, anthropology, historical epistemology

Introduction

In the twenty-first century the term 'culture' has become a big catchword. Almost every discourse and institution incorporated it as an integral part to their existence and overall activity (Bhatt 2020). The concept of culture reflects the historical and epistemological context within which it is located. Often used as synonymous for 'society', culture has expanded its conceptual powers. Interchangeable expressions such as 'Western culture' and 'Western society' have inundated our vocabularies. Moreover, culture has gradually replaced words such as 'practice' and even 'style'. The expressions 'strategic culture' or 'business culture' do not seem so peculiar anymore (Bartosch 2022). Both subjective and abstract, culture has become an irresistible word (Steigerwald 2004). In this article I investigate how the concept of culture that was produced within a historical and epistemological context of the twentieth-century United States has deep Herderian roots. I put a special emphasis on Herder's *Ideen Zur Philosophie Der Geschichte Der Menschheit* because Boas

made an explicit reference to this work as the foundational stone in the construction of the concept of culture. In fact, it is the only text in Herder's scholarly and literary oeuvre referenced by Boas.

The shapers of the American anthropology, the Boasians, were directly influenced by Herder (LaPolla 2020), who was the first to theorize the plurality of cultures, and to give us a formal concept that we use even today (Flett and Wrogemann 2020). In addition, Herder introduced the first definition of nation (Kulyk 2020). He has been conventionally held responsible for linking the notions of culture and nation. However, my argument is that Herder went further than the so-called nationalization of culture. By giving a great power to each human being in the construction of culture, Herder started a process of the personalization of culture that became much more visible thanks to the efforts of Boas and his students. We will end up finding elements that gradually begin to make sense in the analysis of the socio-political, historical and epistemological contexts.

Literature Review

Numerous academic disciplines and domains of knowledge have produced complex definitions of the term 'culture'. Over the centuries, the definitions have undergone a process of continuous redefinition and refining under the plurality and variability of contexts (ShawHong 2020). Research on this term has shown that the academic literature has not achieved consensus or a shared understanding. In 1952, the Boasian researchers, Kroeber and Kluckhohn had already detected and examined hundreds of definitions (Ciaudo 2021).

The academic literature on the concept of culture has experienced multiple shifts. The popularization of emotionalized and psychologized discourses has compelled researchers in diverse fields, from anthropology and sociology to medicine and economy, to take part in the emotional turn in science and humanities (Lerner and Rivkin-Fish 2021). This turn carries many obstacles and contradictions. According to De Vos (2011), even the mainstream psy-sciences have failed to achieve a comprehensive self-understanding. The structural failures that exist in the academia form a major paradox in the contemporary processes of psychologization.

Poetics of culture are often associated with anecdotes of ethnology. Excessive abstractions and discourses of otherness emerge from the lack of a deep historical view (Kroeber 1992). The dominance of the Herderian concept of culture did not secure its stability. The ideas that Herder introduced were subsequently developed and suffered significant mutations in the nineteenth and twentieth-century anthropology. In some cases, there were significant misunderstandings (Taylor 2011). Accusations of nationalism remain a constant element in the academic debate on Herder's work. In the article 'Hands off Herder: The New Right's Appropriation of an Eighteenth-Century Cultural Theorist', Speltz (2018) notes that Herder did not advocate nationalism. As a matter of fact, the interplay between the nation and the individual forms an important basis on which Herder constructed his theories.

Methodology: Historical Epistemology

I propose to clarify the mystery behind the concept of culture by restoring its historical and

epistemological context. In the twentieth century, this concept supplied the means for the astonishing rise of the human and social sciences. As each context produces a different meaning, a unitary concept of culture seems an impossible goal. Studying conceptual mutations assumes difficult and complex proportions (ShawHong 2020).

Concepts belong to the historical and epistemological context in which they emerged and evolved. Historical epistemology offers the space to bridge the dichotomous distinction between society and science. For historical epistemologists, knowledge has a dyadic character that forms a complex combination between science and common sense (Weir 2008). This dichotomy has obtained a renewed importance with the historical evolution of scientific research. According to Kasavin (2020), historical epistemology produces a special philosophical discourse and aims to construct historical knowledge adapted to the contemporary reality and the intersection of science and society. The flourishing of the Herderian concept of culture in the American anthropology does not have serendipitous, spontaneous qualities. In the rise of the culture and personality school, one can find valuable evidence, affinities and precedents for the actual content of anthropological frameworks.

Drawing on the works of Herder and the Boasians, the concept of culture will be analyzed and framed. This article is basically built around a comparison of two historical and epistemological realities that present a set of intertwined continuities. The critical potential of historical epistemology allows the study of complex phenomena such as self-reflection and psychologization of sciences. The epistemology of self-reflection unlocks the understanding of the phenomena of psychologization (De Vos 2011). Each researcher and scientist brings a unique vision of the studied subject, adding new paths for reflection and discussions. The gradual psychologization of scientific and intellectual paradigms during the twentieth century underpins the transformation of the interplay between science and society.

Results and Analysis

Boas' heavy Herderian heritage (Koerner 2000) cannot pass unnoticed. One has to gather the appropriate information, and situate it within the proper historical and epistemological context. Herder renewed and fortified the Herodotean concept of ethnic specificity, and gave scholars the plural concept of cultures, as an alternative to the classical concept in its singular form (Taylor 2011).

Herder's cultural nationalism is relatively well known. However, it is essential to position his ideas in their scientific, historical and epistemological context, to consider what it can teach us about the value of concept of culture. Scientists and researchers can no longer rely on simplistic interpretations of Herder's approaches.

What seems important to highlight is that latent in the Herderian concept was the premise of the autonomy of culture (Taylor 2011). One could state that Herder largely anticipated what would much later, in the twentieth century, be called 'cultural anthropology' (Voelz 2021). Inspired by Herder's works, Boas reshaped the entire character of American anthropology. He linked individual actions, thoughts and views with collective dimensions, contextual and environmental factors (Benton 2020). The emphasis on individual variables carries important implications in regard to

anthropological conceptions of culture, as it will be further explored in the following chapters of this study.

Boas and American Anthropology

The Boasians gave us the modern conception of culture (Kroeber 1992). This evolution needs to be traced with an overview of its broad historical and epistemological context. The twentieth century represents a turning point for conceptual frameworks.

Franz Boas and his students laid the basis for the full elaboration and widespread adoption of cultural relativism by redirecting American anthropology away from evolutionary approaches and the nineteenth-century racial theory (Brown 2008). Focused on the link between language and culture, and leaving race out of discussions, anthropologists, such as Boas and Sapir, began to give an increasing importance to cultural relativity (Everett 2013).

The Boasians conceptualized cultural difference horizontally based on the idea that people cannot be inferior or superior to one another. By experiencing distinct realities, people tend to form different notions for the good or the beautiful. Boas and his students critiqued earlier interpretations of culture of the twentieth century. Boas (re)initiated the trend of speaking of 'cultures' in the plural form. He fiercely denied the existence of a universal system valid for all human beings in which 'culture', in the singular, was the prerogative of the elite occupying the highest positions in evolutionary hierarchies (Bargués and Schmidt 2021).

Classical cultural relativism has a characteristically American flavor. One cannot forget that the concept of culture acquired an unseen power in North America which was far greater than elsewhere. In addition, the American legacy of multiculturalism and the efforts to assimilate unseen numbers of immigrants into a hybrid eclectic society, cultural relativism, and emerging issues such as intercultural tolerance, gained a strong political resonance that frequently lacked in most parts of the world, including Europe, until relatively late in the twentieth century (Brown 2008).

Herderian Heritage: Nationalization versus Personalization

Just like Herder, Boas' work features a combination between atomism and holism (Verdon 2007). According to Boas (1904), in *Ideen zur Geschichte der Menschheit,* Herder created the first solid notion of culture. In Herder's revolutionary analytical structures, culture did not represent a universal progress of humankind. Conceptualized in plural rather than singular, it inspired the Romantics to (re)discover folk culture, to collect and study the numerous elements of national folklores. The genetic make-up that forms plurality and the uniqueness of human cultures attracted the attention of scientists and philosophers (Voelz 2021).

According to Taylor (1991), Herder's *Ideen* represents a milestone in the notion of originality of each human being. "Mankind, both taken as a whole and in its particular individuals, societies, and nations, is a permanent natural system" (Herder 1800, 451). The Herderian tradition positions individuals and nations as equivalent components in a complicated network of 'living forces' (Herder

1800, 451). Without dismissing the value of each individual, Herder insisted on searching the essence of beauty and truth in history and cultural experience. The study of individuality creates an important instrument in his theoretical arsenal.

Despite a heavy accent on collective aspects, Herder conceived culture as an embodied experience (Solanki 2022). Personalization of culture is a secondary effect of Herder's ideas which became the basis for the most influential American anthropological school. The Boasians gave a renewed meaning to the Herderian legacy. "In contrast to English anthropology and the chief American variety it superseded, the Boasian school had a taproot leading back to Germany, its ultimate origin to be found in traditions of which Johann Herder was the most important articulator" (Kroeber 1992, 12). The dichotomy between individual and nation represents a pillar of the Herderian arguments which will be analyzed in the next subchapters.

Nation and *Volksgeist*

"Time, place, and national character alone, in short, the general cooperation of active powers in the most determinate individuality, govern all the events that happen among mankind, as well as all the occurrences in nature" (Herder 1800, 348). Following the Herderian postulates, Boas recognized the role of the 'genius of a people' in culture formation, art, and meanings (Verdon 2007). Herder conceptualized *Volk* as a profoundly humanist idea (Speltz 2018). His idea of *Volksgeist* reflected a complex interplay between culture and invisible psychic processes. Boas inherited this legacy by studying the psychology of the visible habits and traditions, and the invisible *Volksgeist* (Verdon 2007).

Psychological thinking intersects the Herderian conceptualizations of art. Herder compared the process of cultural production with a human being. "The production of an art, as of a human being, was an instant of pleasure, an union between idea and character, between body and spirit" (Herder 1800, 240). With Herder, cultures acquire a body and a spirit that accentuate their plurality.

One of the most important pillars of the twentieth-century American anthropology, cultural relativism, has many similarities with German idea of nation. Despite common assumptions, Herder's deeply relativist stance toward nation made him and his followers able to observe and study cultural differences in an inclusive and non-chauvinist manner. In the hands of Herder, national identity became a tool for fusing social and aesthetic ideas. He did not aim to use national identity as a political tool (Quinn 2014).

The Boasians elaborated the cultural relativist axioms by considering the unique quality of culture to create a total social world that can reproduce itself through enculturation. In this process, the members of one generation transmit their psychological and emotional dispositions, embodied behaviors and values to the members of the next generation (Brown 2008). The intergenerational links make the idea of *Volksgeist* historically more relevant and useful.

Individual and *Selbstheit*

Despite being famous for his reflections of *Volksgeist*, for Herder, the notion of *Selbstheit*

played an essential role (Holzhey 2006). Selfhood became a central priority. According to Theobald and Wood (2009), the emergence of the modern state, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, became tightly bounded to the demands of securing the free pursuit of not only prosperity but also of happiness. The political and economical changes produced a powerful effect on the notion of *Selbstheit*. "Herder, further refined the liberal view of identity formation along individualist lines by popularizing the idea of selfhood as something singularly unique. For Herder, there is only one me and, further, only one original way to be me" (Theobald and Wood 2009, 12). This infinite variation separates human beings from animals. "No beast has the form, clothing, habitation, arts, unfettered mode of life, unrestrained proprieties, and fluctuating opinions, which distinguish almost every individual of mankind" (Herder 1800, 67).

In the twentieth century, the Herderian legacy found a new shelter. Going beyond formal appearances, Boas produced a complex psychological anthropology (Verdon 2007). Discussions on psychological elements and cultural relativism gradually acquired a distinctly North American character. By crystallizing the relativistic thinking in American anthropology, the Boasians produced strong ties with the European social theory of the eighteenth century. Herder's cultural relativism produced a powerful effect that has continued for centuries. Adolf Bastian refined many elements of the Herderian tradition and transmitted them to his student, Franz Boas. North America was especially receptive to Herder's ideas but this transfer took much more time in the other parts of the world. British anthropology, for example, maintained a closer contact with academic philosophy than its North American counterpart. British anthropologists aimed to clarify the transcultural status of rationality, and to identify different modes of thought, an idea originated in the works of Malinowski, Lévy-Bruhl, and Evans-Pritchard (Brown 2008). German-American transnational transfers induced changes at multiple levels and scales. Herder argued for uniqueness of not only of each culture/nation but also of each individual:

> Western nations, particularly the United States, have so completely adopted this view that it is widely believed to be a self-evident truth rather than a cultural predisposition. Further, we believe that individuals are to find this "one way to be me" only by looking within themselves, not in the world around them. Conformity to social institutions began to be seen as a threat to one's originality and an impediment to the authentic realization of one's true self. Thus, in the development of contemporary thought, the importance of the community's role in shaping identity suffered a further blow. After Herder, modern selfhood was defined almost exclusively by the exercise of rational choice in the pursuit of one's "unique" identity. (Theobald and Wood 2009, 12)

The Boasians took the innovative Herderian arguments on human senses and impressions as a starting point. "It is truly refreshing to find Herder, in the age of neatly pigeon-holed faculties, boldly asserting these to be but more or less convenient abstractions; to Herder the human 'mind' is an indivisible entity" (Sapir 1907, 12). The great resonance of Herder's notions should not astonish us. Besides fortifying the idea of nation, he touched the very core of philosophical inquiry by

rethinking human subjectivity. According to Holzhey (2006), discussions on subjectivity can be traced back to Plato. However, it was arguably only with Herder that the formation of subjectivity through a complex set of imaginary relations as felt existence starts to acquire a clear and solid conceptualization. This specific mode of subject constitution critically informs the existence within the symbolical order that transcends empirical one.

Psychologization of American Culture

Franz Boas had a special interest for psychology that was inherited by his students. Margaret Mead promoted the adoption of critical and reflexive perspectives. While Ruth Benedict's work evolved around the idea of human values across cultures, Paul Radin argued for the existence of a universal cognitive template (Brown 2008). The Boasians catalyzed the process of psychologization of culture. But how can one define this process? For example, by psychologization, Parker (2010) means "the reduction of social processes to the level of the individual subject and the induction of that subject into an understanding of themselves in which psychological explanations take precedence" (Parker 2010, 26). The individual subject became the nucleus of the Boasian anthropology, and psychology became an indispensable tool to achieve its aims.

"The contrasted goods which different cultures pursue, the different intentions which are at the basis of their institutions, are essential to the understanding both of different social orders and of individual psychology" (Benedict 1934, 165). As we can observe, Benedict (1934) explicitly uses the term 'cultures' in its plural form. The clear emphasis on individual psychology introduces a new set of variables. In contrast to its plural form, the unitary conception of culture operated in a monolinear style to achieve a theoretical betterment. Singular conceptions promote a superficial perception of human differences based on simple variables, such as the color of the skin and technological abilities. In Herder's plural conception, human beings were compared to different animal species. The Herderian view assumed that while one may perceive multiple animal species inhabiting the same environment, each species had, in fact, its own environment framed internally by abilities, inherited instincts, and habits. In other words, each culture had its own unique ungraspable *Umwelt* (Taylor 2011). By looking from exterior to interior, Herder transformed culture into a highly embodied and individualized element. Following a similar logic, Boas became increasingly interested in studying the power of each organism's surroundings. By defining these surroundings as a cumulative product of the history of the people, the influence of the regions and the interactions with other people during the migratory processes, Boas postulated a relativist model of culture and cautioned against absolute interpretations. In his view, an anthropologist must always look at an individual in relation to its surroundings. Moreover, Boas argued that the thoughts and world views of individuals may vary according to their surroundings (Benton 2020).

The Herderian legacy seems to have an enigmatic, obscure character. Authors tend to not acknowledge its power and influence. The conflict between Herder and Kant may be at the origin of this tendency. Kant classified Herder's theories as a mere romantic psychologization rather than

an empirical statement of human nature (Gilman 2014). However, Herder developed complex arguments and hypotheses. By extending the concept of *Umwelt* from animal species to human cultures, Herder argued that each culture creates its unique psychological and behavioral patterns. Exterior stimuli shape human beings and human cultures. For Herder, at birth, human beings lack sufficient instincts to behave. Only through the process of enculturation and interaction with the surrounding world, an individual becomes complete. Each culture creates its own unique cultural *Umwelt*, which acts in relation to the values of each individual (Taylor 2011). This complex interplay between cultural and individual variables was captured by the Boasians to bridge a link between psychology and anthropology:

> Both psychology and anthropology could well begin to lay as much stress upon the similarities in all human beings as they have, quite properly, upon the differences. The anthropologist, looking at psychology, must express some fear lest "human nature" go the way "mind" has gone. (Kluckhohn 1948, 442)

We need to frame the concept of culture within the broader historical and epistemological context of the twentieth century. Parker (2010) associates psychologization with the birth of capitalism and the exchange of labor time for money which has encouraged competitive individualism as a technique for maximizing profit. Transcending the economical realm, psychologized anthropology provided new models and alternative analytical approaches that stressed the mediating role and expressive value of each individual (Spindler 1978). Psychological thinking came to dominate institutions of cultural production. With psychological and therapeutic logic infiltrating social live, new meanings and values emerge (Lerner and Rivkin-Fish 2021).

Culture and Personality School

The term 'culture' gained massive and worldwide popularity only from the beginning of the twentieth century (Ciaudo 2021). The Boasians instrumentalized this concept and set American anthropology on a path of psychologization. By creating the culture and personality school, Boas and his students became the emblems of a new anthropological thinking. They reinterpreted the Herderian concept of culture(s) and stressed its subjective dimension. In her revolutionary book *Patterns of Culture*, Ruth Benedict set down the foundational principles of the culture and personality school by describing human cultures as a very fluid yet cohesive patterns of thought and behavior (Robbins 2018).

> The significance of cultural behaviour is not exhausted when we have clearly understood that it is local and man-made and hugely variable. It tends also to be integrated. A culture, like an individual, is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and action. Within each culture there come into being characteristic purposes not necessarily shared by other types of society. In obedience to these purposes, each people further and further consolidates its experience, and in proportion to the urgency of these drives the heterogeneous items of behaviour take more and more congruous shape. Taken up by a well-

> integrated culture, the most ill-assorted acts become characteristic of its peculiar goals, often by the most unlikely metamorphoses. The form that these acts take we can understand only by understanding first the emotional and intellectual mainsprings of that society. (Benedict 1934, 33)

Just like Herder, in the search for distinctive characters and traits, Benedict compared whole cultures with individuals. During the 1920s, American anthropologists turned to psychological theories to study and explain cultural phenomena. The culture and personality school emerged in a historical context dominated by unique social and epistemological conditions of comparative intercultural inquiry (Srivastava 2013). The Herderian postulates found a new life in the culture and personality school. "Herder's emphasis on the social genesis of the personality into an account based on the psychologizing of culture" (Jones 2020, 895) became instrumental in the Boasian anthropology. Edward Sapir refined many ideas that formed of the framework of culture and personality (Spindler 1978). In his personalistic approach, personality became more than a simple cultural microorganism (Preston 1966). Boas and his students elevated the study of the personality and the individual to a goal in itself. They fiercely defended the personalization of culture without dismissing the role of collective dimensions and the importance of social anthropology:

> In that case "social anthropology" would resemble culture-and-personality, or personality-in-culture, which started out somewhat self-consciously as the revolutionary adding of a new dimension to the view of culture, but which seems now essentially to be contributing to the portrayal of culture a greater depth of personalization than was formerly thought necessary, possible, or meet. (Kroeber 1959, 402)

Both psychology and anthropology borrow concepts from each other. Closely examining human beings, the two fields share a similar ideological reservoir, despite using different research strategies. The period 1930-1960 witnessed growing intersections between cultural anthropology and social psychology that activated the mechanisms for the creation of the culture and personality school. Captivated by psychological processes of learning and socialization, American cultural anthropologists greatly encouraged these intersections. Individual behavior and culture gradually became two increasingly convergent dimensions (Srivastava 2013).

Personalization as a Theoretical Tool

The fusion between the notions of culture and personality induced a multilayered set of effects. Taking the Herderian approach as model, the Boasians exponentially amplified the plural nature of the concept of culture. "The pluralization move was made by Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict" (Dâmaso and Murray 2021, 160). This pluralization operated through a complex process of personalization. Benedict's personalization of cultures (Guddemi 2005) has had a powerful effect. Thanks to her efforts, cultural theory underwent major modifications, transformations, and reformulations. Benedict argued that the complex multidimensional variables of culture carry valuable meanings, and insights that can be discovered in the patterned regularities of individuals within a determined society

(Brooks 1964). She did not conceptualize the individual and the cultural realities as two conflicting forces. On the contrary, Benedict combined the two notions in order to undertake her analyses:

> The problem of the individual is not clarified by stressing the antagonism between culture and the individual, but by stressing their mutual reinforcement. This rapport is so close that it is not possible to discuss patterns of culture without considering specifically their relation to individual psychology. (Benedict 1934, 183)

Another of Boas's students, Margaret Mead, greatly stimulated the use of cultural notions in the study of individualities. By replacing heredity with cultural conditioning, in her theoretical models, Mead advocated that temperaments and individualities have pronounced cultural characteristics. As a matter of fact, she was the first anthropologist to closely look at specific human development processes through a multicultural lens (Benton 2020). Overall, the Boasian anthropology justified itself as an intensely personal, highly detailed study of small cultural groups. The Boasians celebrated the difference and cultural diversity by gathering and analyzing enormous amounts of ethnological materials and comparing archaeological and linguistic data (Kroeber 1992). In their hands, personalization became a methodological instrument and requirement. It secured a solid basis for interdisciplinary discussions and dialogues. Greatly dependent on the process of psychologization of culture, the personalization technique facilitated conceptual innovation and the introduction of new theoretical approaches.

Individualistic Concept of Culture and Personalistic Approach

The Boasians created a concept of culture whose value lies in its interdisciplinarity. According to Steigerwald (2004), since Sapir, the concept of culture has been interpreted as a bimodal formation, aesthetics and anthropology. Today this concept continues to reflect two traditions. Its rise to intellectual dominance in the recent years may be explained by this solid mix. From the aesthetic tradition, the concept of culture received the inherently subjective and highly personal quality of taste. On the other hand, from the anthropological tradition, it got a strong predisposition towards indefinable abstraction. The two features - subjectivity and abstraction - explain the universal power of the concept of culture today.

Culture is more than aesthetics and anthropology. The development of the twentieth-century aesthetics, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, and politics connected conceptual frameworks and models. In their writing, the Boasians, such as Ruth Benedict, demonstrate an impressive level of interdisciplinary effort that puts the concept of culture into its larger context:

> To understand the behaviour of the individual it is not merely necessary to relate his personal life-history to his endowments, and to measure these against an arbitrarily selected normality. It is necessary also to relate his congenial responses to the behaviour that is singled out in the institutions of his culture. (Benedict 1934, 183)

As we can see, Benedict uses culture as a tool to understand the individual behavior. The Boasians reshaped this concept to fit it into a coherent personalistic approach. One's culture has become a matter of subjective imagination. Its abstract quality has made culture more useful and open to all sorts of views, interpretations, purposes, and influences (Steigerwald 2004).

The Boasians did not ignore the importance of history. For example, Boas argued that an organism's actions represented a direct or indirect implication of its whole distinctive history up to that specific point in time (Benton 2020). In this context, history becomes a useful instrument. The study of the concept of culture remains incomplete without considering its history. The conceptual dilemmas and paradoxes stem from the intellectual history of culture. At its origin, the aesthetic tradition elaborated on a body of thought determined by aesthetic judgment. One should be aware that aesthetic judgment is, put simply, taste which remains an inherently subjective question. It does not reflect one reality. Culture has become a mirror for an infinite number of realities. Reducing culture to taste produces powerful effects that lead to a high degree of subjectivity. At the same time, the science of culture, anthropology, tends to define its main concept as a way of life, which despite all the academic and scientific efforts, remains highly broad and abstract. The academic community has recognized these fallacies. Meanwhile, the concept of culture has spilled into common usage, and its fallacies have become even more pronounced (Steigerwald, 2004). The Sapirian concept of culture combines subjective and abstract features in order to create highly individualistic plural meanings. Conceptual precision and argumentative rigor elevated the importance of the Sapirian concept of culture:

> The true locus of culture is in the interactions of specific individuals and, on the subjective side, in the world of meanings which each one of these individuals may unconsciously abstract for himself from his participation in these interactions. Every individual is, then, in a very real sense, a representative of at least one sub-culture which may be abstracted from the generalized culture of the group of which he is a member. Frequently, if not typically, he is a representative of more than one sub-culture, and the degree to which the socialized behavior of any given individual can be identified with or abstracted from the typical or generalized culture of a single group varies enormously from person to person. (Sapir 1932, 236)

Stressing the role of psychology, Sapir finds the locus of culture in the individual. While other researchers were suggesting discarding the concept of culture, he saw its enormous potential as an inclusive frame of reference and gave it a central position in social thought. With Sapir, the concept of culture acquired an unseen level of power and influence (Preston 1966). His distinction between authentic and false cultures criticized industrial scientific-driven cultures for lacking spirituality and harmony (Pupavac 2012). In the chase for authenticity, Sapir turned to psychology and the study of thoughts and feelings. Sapir's individualistic concept of culture provided an anthropological approach that challenged cultural determinism (Stern 2022).

Subjectivization and Personalization of Culture

Culture and personality studies emerged in a historical and epistemological environment dominated by a general interest for psychology and psychoanalysis (Frie 2014). The Boasians gave a new breath to the concept of culture through the process of personalization. Culture became constantly reinterpreted, highly mediated and individualized (Spindler 1978). The personalistic approach redefined culture into a product derived from the mutual interactions between all the personalities of a determined group. In this new formula, culture becomes the personalized construct made through conscious or unconscious selections of experiences that each individual perceives as significant (Preston 1966).

To understand social processes, scientists and researchers use psychologized individual experiences as a theoretical template (Parker 2010). Pyschologization and personalization represent two complementary processes. From a cultural perspective, personalization involves knowledge and identity dynamics. Hollins (1995) provides a comprehensive definition of the personalization process:

> Personalizing culture refers to the act of developing knowledge of one's own culture that allows for the type of deep introspection that reveals its centrality in one's own life. This includes acquiring an understanding of the longitudinal influence of early socialization, making explicit one's own personal and group identity, identifying personally help perceptions of the world that are culturally framed, and describing participation in culturally sanctioned practices and values. (Hollins 1995, 71)

Each individual establishes a unique connection with cultural phenomena. The personalization process needs to be acknowledged and explored. Stressing the personal dimension of culture puts anthropology in a new light. Boas and his students adopted an explicit interdisciplinary position. As a consequence, the Boasian cultural relativism has spread very rapidly beyond the boundaries of anthropology (Brown 2008).

Nowadays we can witness an increasing psychologization of individual subjectivity (Parker 2010). The individual has become the central component in the discussions on authenticity and culture. The Herderian legacy resulted in multiple subtle shifts that affected this process. "Herder paved the way for the Romantic fascination with the idea of cultural authenticity to be found in the simple lifestyles of ordinary people" (Voelz 2021, 71). The simple individual was transformed into a cultural agent with significant power and autonomy. In fact, "Herder was the first to speak of authenticity as one's own measure of selfhood" (Hutflötz 2020, 54). He was fascinated by the great diversity of cultural manifestations and individual constructions. "The human species is such a copious scheme of energies and capacities, that, as every thing in nature rests on the most determinate individuality" (Herder 1800, 451).

Despite few direct references, the Boasians celebrated the Herderian leagacy. For example, in 'Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions', Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) insisted on Herder's crucial importance for the creation of solid definitions of culture. The link is subtle, yet powerful. Boas and his students used Herder's individualistic concept of culture to reformulate American anthropological discourses.

Conclusion

The Herderian concept of culture emerged in the eighteenth century but it did not lose its resonance today. We examined the historical and epistemological context of the emergence of this concept, and its remarkable achievement in terms of scientific power.

As a signifier, culture carries the dichotomy between nature and nurture. What really matters in this question is the human being. The value of each individual remains at the centre of this dichotomy. Assuming the roles of the agent, participant, recipient and even catalyst, the human being actively creates and transforms cultural processes (Bhatt 2020). We can no longer legitimately use the terminology of culture without reference to their historical and epistemological context. As formulated by Herder, culture is a fluid multilayered matter. Each individual has an active role in cultural dynamics. The personalizing approach, proposed by the Boasians, pushes the anthropologists much closer to the subjects they are studying. The combination between the personalizing approach, sophisticated knowledge of psychic structure and meaningful participation allows a deeper understanding of personal relationships and personal meanings that create the cultural *milieu* (Preston 1966). As a matter of fact, culture manifests itself temporality and spatiality not only through collective but also individual norms, cognitive structures, beliefs, values and ways of life (Bhatt 2020).

Studying the phenomena of psychologization improves the understanding the modern subjectivity as such (De Vos 2011). In the plural and personalized conception, culture acquired a renewed power. "Cultures, like personalities, are in part unique" (Schein 1991, 311). The individuals experience the great multiplicity of cultures they interact with through a wide range of personally significant perceptions. Putting the individual in the centre of the question facilitates the study of cultures (Preston 1966). The personalization process has given us many possibilities. In its contemporary usage, the concept of culture has become an omnipresent device. It mirrors not only the variety of subjective interpretations but also the complexity of structures of power in era of globalization. Both abstract and highly subjective, the conceptual networks of culture carry the paradoxical burden of the present times (Steigerwald 2004). Despite a less extensive national focus, the Herderian legacy shines as brightly as ever through the contemporary processes of subjectivization and personalization. It continues to motivate the pluralization of the concept of culture and the openness towards infinite human diversity.

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Antigone and the Sublime: Acts of Impossible Affirmation

Lindsay Parkhowell
University of Potsdam
Department of English and American Studies
Am Neuen Palais, 10, 14469, Potsdam, Germany
Email: parkhowell@uni-potsdam.de

Abstract:

In this article, I interpret Antigone through the philosophical category of the sublime, which enables her to transcend the order of nature and her empirical self. Through a close textual analysis of the Greek word *amechanos* (impossible), I argue that Antigone manages to affirm a place for herself within the incoherent kinship legacy left her father Oedipus by resolutely honouring her brother as an end-in-himself. At the same time, this burial also affirms her nature as a "mother bird" opposed to the normative gender roles available within Kreon's *polis.* Understanding Antigone as a sublime figure also helps to explain two otherwise inscrutable references in the text: the first when Antigone compares herself to Niobe, and the second when the chorus describe her as the only person to enter Hades "alive". My argument that Antigone becomes a sublime Idea concludes with an analysis of her through the rhetorical figure of *hypotyposis,* or as an indeterminate analogy that exists concurrently between the realms of aesthetics (sublimity) and ethics (autonomy).

Keywords: Antigone, the sublime, the impossible, aesthetics, gender relations, German Idealism, ethics

Introduction

Antigone is an exceptional figure, but where does her power come from? Drawing upon Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment philosophers, I will interpret Antigone through the category of the sublime, which offers Antigone the power of the transcending the order of nature and her empirical self. Following this, I will analyse how her project of honouring her brother as an end-in-himself is fraught by impossible relations, because it is a position that can never be generalized within a rule or law. Antigone's *eros* for *amechanos,* or love for the impossible, exposes her problematic place within the kinship structure, while also providing the grounds for a twofold affirmation based on her famed autonomy: affirming the value of "irreplaceable singularity" represented by the burial of her brother, and affirming her nature in opposition to the norms of the political regime represented by Kreon.

Despite the fact that she is consigned by Kreon to a "nowhere place" (Green 1991, 204),[1] she continues to speak, to affirm her nature and to make visible her position and person. The fact that

Antigone acts at the limits of the intelligible confers upon her a status beyond generation and decay, which is acknowledged by the Chorus when they say that she will, alone among people, descend alive into Hades. Antigone's sublime sacrifice is to become an Idea that can live on in mythical memory after she is dead, which is why she compares herself to Niobe before she dies, that "Phrygian stranger" who could still weep through the rock that she was transformed into.

Finally, I will discuss how Antigone's subjecthood precedes the temporal order within which all 'fully' human narratives are produced. The chorus recognise this when they refer to her as a *daimonian teras,* a "spiritual prodigy or portent – a holy monster" (McNeill 2011, 37). They link her inhumanity to her spirituality, her ability to presage things to come by exposing her place within the symbolic order that governs intersubjective relations; at the same time, she comes to represent both moral autonomy and sublime transcendence, a paradoxical representation which, drawing upon Jean-Francois Lyotard's *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (1994), I argue should be viewed through the rhetorical lens of *hypotyposis* or analogy. In this way, Antigone is not an aesthetic figure that results in goodness, but rather an aesthetic symbol for an unrepresentible (impossible) good.

Antigone and the Sublime

In Kantian aesthetics a sublime experience is one in which an idea is unable to be represented by our faculties of sensible intuition. The imagination cannot play host to the immensity of the idea, and this inadequacy results in the sublime, an experience which is both pleasurable and painful to us, because it simultaneously involves both the defeat of our imaginative capacity of representation and the exaltation of our reason. Kant distinguishes between two kinds of sublime experience: In the mathematical sublime, the elevation of reason as a supersensible faculty is achieved in response to the imagination's inability to conceive of infinite magnitudes, while in the dynamical sublime, we achieve dominion through reason over natural events that make us feel physically powerless.

Both categories can be applied to the figure of Antigone. In the mathematical sublime Kant writes "that is sublime in comparison with which everything else is small" (Kant 2000, 134). The very idea of autonomy, which Antigone embodies, speaks of the independence of self-law from any other influence, and therefore also the precedence of this self-law over all others. Whether or not human beings are able to be autonomous and generate law by themselves is certainly an imperative by which all others can be considered small, because it sets itself up as the power that can command all others. Therefore, Antigone also evinces the dynamical sublime, because her idea of autonomy establishes dominion, i.e. power over other powers. The chorus recognise that Antigone's actions are incomparable to anyone else's when they refer to her as someone "alone among mankind**"**, as singular, when she is going to her death (Grene 1991, 882).

At the same time, the contemplation of the sublime in nature introduces the idea of an end or teleology to our capacity to reason. As Kant writes, "as we never meet with such an end outside ourselves, we naturally look for it in ourselves, and, in fact, in that which constitutes the ultimate end of our existence – the moral side of our being" (Kant 2000, 181). It is through the sublime that

we apprehend the Idea of reason, which is to say the unconditioned or absolute, the first in the chain of causality, in a form that is almost "intuitable" (Lyotard 1994, 187). As I will argue in my conclusion, *Antigone* dramatizes this relationship of thought to moral action, while at the same time producing an impossible gap between them: for although the sublime gives Antigone the power to transcend empirical conditions, it also remains unrepresentable as an Idea that cannot be reduced to any particular situation or person.

While Kant writes that in the face of nature's sublime power "the humanity in our person remains undemeaned even though the human being must submit to that dominion" (Kant 2000, 145), later Counter-Enlightenment thinkers argued instead that the self-transcendence of the sublime no longer exalts the dignity of human reason, but rather splits the subject by elevating her beyond an empirical and natural existence. Adorno writes:

> The sublime was supposedly the grandeur of human beings who are spiritual and dominate nature.... Even in Kant's formulation it was tinged with the nothingness of man; in this nothingness, the fragility of the empirical individual, the eternity of his universal destiny – his spirit – was to unfold. (Adorno 1997, 198)

Adorno views the split instigated by the sublime as creating a field in which the fragility of the empirical individual is sublimated into the eternity of her spirit. His claim that "the legacy of the sublime is unassuaged negativity" describes a situation in which a sublime self-representation cannot exist positively because we are never truly emancipated from our predicament within nature (1997, 198). While the liberation offered by the sublime is to sublimate a power that seek to dominate us, this liberation remains dependent upon the object that inaugurated it for its force. Therefore, a person who achieves a sublime self-representation would not only be undermined by their inability to ever give this Idea a sensible representation (according to the Kantian logic), but also by the way it separates them from their natural being.

This helps to explain why Antigone describes her husband as the "Lord of Death" (Grene 1991, 877), as dying for a principle takes upon the human body the immensity of an idea that the body cannot truly sustain or live out. Further, is it not paradoxical to even say that a person *could* even achieve sublime representation, because they would then be seeking to give expression to the unrepresentible? In fact, once committed to, such an endeavour would be fraught within impossible relations. I will now turn to close reading of the play, focusing upon how the concepts of the impossible, autonomy, and nature support my reading of Antigone's sublimity, before returning to the philosophical category of the sublime, and its shadow, the elemental, in my conclusion.

Impossible Relations: Limits and Ends

In my analysis of the theme of impossible relations in *Antigone,* I want to focus on the way Sophocles establishes the contours along which the possible and the impossible are delimited through

his early characterisation of Ismene and Antigone. Then I will focus on why the end that Antigone pursues, the burial of her brother to emphasise the principle of his irreplaceable singularity, represents an "impossible" (ἀμήχανος) end, one that can never be generalised because it must remain particular. Finally, I will compare this principle with the idea of instrumental ends espoused by Kreon.

In the opening scene of the play, Ismene presents a reasonable case for respecting the limits of possible action. These limits are, for her, socially demarcated, outlining her role as one citizen unable to oppose the majority of other citizens and as subordinate to sovereign law, and naturally demarcated, highlighting how it is not in her nature as woman and subject to transgress male law, or act in a manly manner. While she acknowledges that to obey Kreon is to offend the memory of her dead family, she will "beg those beneath the earth to give me their forgiveness" (Grene 1991, 74-75).

Antigone, by stark contrast, is from the outset resolute on burying her brother no matter what the cost. She refers to Ismene's arguments as an "excuse" and states that she obeys a law higher than any that can be set on Earth, for "the time in which I must please those that are dead is longer than I must please those of this world" (Grene 1991, 93; 86-87). Her emphasis that Polyneices' burial must be made visible to others is central to my later arguments about Antigone's affirmation. When Ismene suggests that Antigone should bury him in secret and promises to herself keep silent, Antigone emphatically responds that she "will hate you (Ismene) still worse for silence" (Grene 1991, 100). Antigone's commitment to "pleasing those I should please most", leads Ismene to answer in the conditional: *"If* you can do it. But you are in love with the impossible (ἀμήχανος)" (Grene 1991, 184; 104-5).

This is the first emergence of the Greek word 'impossible' (ἀμήχανος) in the text, and I want to note that it emerges in the context of a conversation about what sort of natures can contest or must submit to power, conceived of in both state (sovereign) and natural (manly) senses. The *LSJ* includes "extraordinary" or "enormous" in the sense of infinitely great or inconceivable in its list of definitions; the reader should note here the parallels to the incomparably great magnitude of the sublime. As in English the prefix ἀ attaches to denote 'not' or 'without' to the word μήχανον, which means device or machine, often specifically a military device such as a battering ram. We draw the sense that something ἀμήχανος cannot be routinised or generalised, it is unable to be 'mechanised'. This is a very different understanding to the one we would have if the word had been δύναμις, power.

Antigone responds to Ismene's conditional with a denial. In words that seem eerily prescient of the end that her actions will bring her to, she says: "when I can no more, then I will stop" (Grene 1991, 106). Here we can see the first demarcator of the possible for Antigone; the limits of the possible are bounded by her own capacity or momentum for action, to the limits of her strength, rather than an external boundary (as the external boundary of state force constrains Ismene.)

Kreon's first speech marks a counterpoint to Antigone's fiercely individualistic stance. His hubris is to seek to control divine law, to extend his political power into death: "he that is loyal in death, in life alike, shall have my honour" (Grene 1991, 188).[2] The importance of the complementary worldviews of Kreon and Ismene is that their position on what is possible or deserving of honour, and of what cannot be transgressed, is based upon a foundation combining divine sanction (it invokes the

gods), political power (it is unlawful) and temporal control (a narrative defining the present in relation to past and future). Understanding this allows us to understand that Antigone's opposition is to the normative, social and temporal orders that govern Thebes, and that her sublimity gives her the power to transcend these orders.

But what is the nature of Antigone's "impossible" end or goal?[3] the most detailed and passionate explanation occurs in her final speech, which is given in Grene's translation as:

> If my husband were dead, I might have had another,
> and child from another man, if I lost the first.
> But when father and mother both were hidden in death
> no brother's life would bloom for me again.
> That is the law under which I gave you precedence,
> my dearest brother, and that is why Creon thinks me
> wrong, even a criminal... (1991, 966-975)

Antigone holds the action of honouring her brother with precedence over her own survival because it exhibits the principle of "irreplaceable singularity": he cannot be replaced (he is unique *to her*) and nobody else is like him (he is singular). She wants to honour him as he is in-himself, irrespective of whatever he did during life; furthermore, as McNeill notes, Antigone privileges this principle of honouring her family over its immediate living representative in Ismene. He further observes that once the burial rites are performed, Antigone considers her duty discharged and does not fetishize or in any way concern herself with Polyneices' body: "The paradoxical situation in which Antigone finds herself is that in seeking to honour her dead brother as or for himself her deed must take as essential the material remains that her deed seeks to render inessential. By honouring him in burial, Antigone seeks to distinguish her brother as he is in himself from his material remains" (McNeill 2011, 13).

Honouring Polyneices as he is in himself represents an impossible (ἀμήχανος) end in another sense as well, because the radically individualised idea of a person in-themselves is something that cannot be routinized, or generalised. This principle cannot be brought into the "machinery" of social interaction. Through his interpretation of the linguistic reasonances within *Antigone,* McNeill shows how Sophocles intends for the relation between instrumental ends and ends-in-themselves to be characteristic of the juxtaposition of Kreon and Antigone. The *auto-* compound assigned to Antigone is *autonomy,* or self-law, the capacity to be a self-legislating moral agent; whereas the *auto-*compound assigned to Kreon by Tiresias in his warning to him is αὐθαδία (authadeia), "prideful stubbonness" (McNeill 2011, 31-32). Therefore, within Kreon's conception of moral behaviour, not forgetting that he has exemplified himself as the standard-bearer of public morality, Antigone's commitment to honouring the incomparable worth of her brother is set apart from the legitimised moral action within Thebes. It is literally incomprehensible to Kreon, who views moral action as circumscribed by instrumental ends.[4]

Antigone's Autonomy and her Place within Kinship

When Antigone stakes her life on the irreplaceability of Polyneices she is also emphatically coming to stand for this principle herself. She will not accept Ismene's paradigm of self-interest subordinated to force, or Kreon's paradigm where familial and personal interests are subordinated to the state in life and in death, but radically emphasises her status as a deliberate being with both the ability, and the right, to choose what she thinks is right. This is true even as the focus of her deliberation, her commitment to its absolute fulfilment regardless of the cost, fixates her upon death and ultimately results in her status as a living being descending into death.

But what is her precise interest in the principle of "irreplaceable singularity"? One could argue that the denial of a proper burial for Polyneices has occasioned the rupture between death and life that leads to the necessity for Antigone to defend and exalt this principle. However, while this may be true, it is also clearly true that Antigone has a deeply personal interest in honouring Polyneices himself and not anybody else, as she speaks longingly of lying with her brother in death. It is my belief that, through her overwhelming commitment to honour her brother as an end-in-himself, Antigone asserts a place for herself within the symbolic order that governs inter-subjective relations, precisely because of her family legacy that has denied her a coherent place within kinship. The fact that she buries Polyneices twice, mirroring the dual burial of her father Oedipus, shows how Antigone uses the present to perform her duty to both family members, a burial that "reflects and institutes the equivocation of brother and father" (Butler 2000*,* 61).

As Butler writes in *Antigone's Claim*, the particular fate that desire suffers in language is to be unable to signify only the single object of stated desire, but also to contain references to all other significations that may be called up by this word or belong to the field that it negates in order to attain meaning. Therefore, when Antigone

> claims that she acts according to a law that gives her most precious brother precedence, and she appears to mean "Polyneices" by that description, she means more than she intends, for that brother could be Oedipus and it could be Eteocles, and there is nothing in the nomenclature of kinship that can successfully restrict its scope of referentiality to the single person, Polyneices. The chorus at one point seeks to remind her that she has more than one brother, but she continues to insist on the *singularity and non-reproducibility* of this term of kinship. (Butler 2000, 77, my italics)

Within the larger social and cultural context, Antigone is condemned to never have a clearly-defined and intelligible position within the kinship structure; as the product of incest she will always inhabit more than one kin position, and therefore be denied the stability and coherence that a clear-delimited role within the kinship structure confers. This is her inheritance from her father, and it means that she can never be recognised as 'fully' living, because she can never operate within the inter-subjective field without being an uncertain subject, at best, and a source of horror, at worst, for other subjects. Therefore, for Antigone, the self-reflexivity of an irreplaceable and singular subjecthood would mean to inhabit, for *the first time in her life,* a position that is not equivocal, but fixed and sure.

Antigone's unconditional commitment to acting morally in regards to her brother's burial is given its impetus by the accumulated weight of the past upon her, her existence as a social being exposed to the uncertain fate of 'dying within life', a person denied coherence at the very limits of the culturally intelligible. If we say that Oedipus's journey is one of self-knowledge, of discovering his place within the symbolic order by seeking to precede that order (through taking the place of his own father and marrying his own mother), then Antigone's journey is one of moral determination, of epitomising the agency available to people born into a situation that is outside of their control, but which they can nevertheless call up their human agency to respond to. In their final exchange the chorus says to Antigone:

> Yes, you go to that place where the dead are hidden,
> but you go with distinction and praise.
> [...] it was your own choice and alone among mankind
> you will descend, alive,
> to that world of death. (Grene 1991, 878-885)

Here Grene has translated αὐτόνομος, which means "one's own law" or "self-law" with connotations of independence, as "your own choice", presumably for reasons of verse compatibility. But to be autonomous means more than a choice, it means to be capable of agency based on a self-given law that is or can be independent of other influences. Antigone has come to embody autonomy, and we can imagine that this represents a victory for her, because it has assured *her own place* within the symbolic order that governs inter-subjective relations, as a person able to determine herself based upon her self-law and not only as the product of an incestuous legacy fated to live out a social death.

Anti-Nature and Antigone's Affirmation

Although she asserts her place, Antigone also knows that she has been consigned to "nowhere" within the social and normative orders as they are constructed under Kreon: She describes herself as having "neither a home among the living or the dead" and then repeats the point (Grene 1991, 905-907). Thus, from a social perspective *Antigone* dramatizes not only the conflict between private conscience and public law that the play is famous for,[5] but also the struggle for some types of people and some forms of social relations to be publically recognised as 'liveable'. In this section, I want to show that Antigone herself clearly is aware that that it is not in her nature to possess a socially-sanctioned, conventional role within the normative order, and that part of her affirmation is to affirm her own nature *even though* she cannot achieve a sanctioned place. Towards the end of her life she compares the hypothetical trajectory her life might have taken implicitly with the nature that is her own:[6]

> *Had I been* a mother of,
> of children, and my husband been dead and rotten,

I would not have taken this weary task upon me
against the will of the city.... (my italics, 961-4)

[Kreon] now takes me
by the hand and leads me away,
unbedded, without bridal, without share
in marriage and in nurturing of children. (Grene 1991, 972-6)

If Antigone could have been a wife and mother, and fit herself into the paradigm of harmonious intercourse between the state, the gods, and the domestic extolled by Kreon in his first speech, then the necessity of becoming a radically individual moral agent, an agent obeying "a greater, indeterminate time" (McNeill 2011, 14) than that of earth where the undying laws of the gods reside, would never have had to emerge. But the drama of *Antigone* and the resoluteness of its title character shows, I think, that we are not meant to take Antigone's hypothetical comparison as wishful or regretful thinking. It is a lament for what she never could have been, which borrows from the normative language of society but renders as inescapably distant the goals of this society through her use of the conditional.

Antigone's name gives a clue to her nature. Her name is a compound of *anti-,* meaning against, alike or compared to, and *gonē,* meaning birth or offspring. So while her name reflects the role of resistance that she has in the play, just as Polyneices's (poly= many, nieces= strife) name reflects the great strife that he brings to Thebes, this interpretation should not merely focus upon Antigone as a figure resisting Kreon, because she explodes the patriarchal rule that he personifies, as is shown at the end of the play when Kreon is completely alone, repentant, and powerless. While Antigone cannot provide any alternative political order to supplant Kreon's, she *can* embody an alternative principle radical enough to completely destabilise this order.

Antigone's elevation of an absolute end above all other obligations refuses the subordination of familial ties to the state extolled by Kreon in his first speech. As McNeill notes, the description of Antigone as a "mother bird whose nest is robbed of her hatchlings" provides a clue to her nature which drives this end, which is "by her deed not to bring forth some indeterminate offspring, but to bring forth her brother as he is in himself" (McNeill 2011, 422-428). McNeill continues that Antigone "contrasts the indeterminate 'whatever brother' (ἀδελφὸς ὅστίς) that could naturally spring forth from a living mother with the individual brother she addresses as 'you'. It is this brother that she has delivered forth in his individuality", a reading that is markedly different from Alenka Zupančič's reading of the role of the incest taboo in the play (See McNeill 2011, 423; Zupančič 2023, 70-73).

Antigone cannot claim a 'position' for herself within the social order, because there are none available. As Butler writes, she is the "one with no place who nevertheless seeks to claim one within speech, the unintelligible as it emerges within the intelligible, a position within kinship that is no position" (Butler 2000, 78). But she can make as visible as possible her claim to selfhood, which is based upon her nature of paradoxically bringing into "life" her brother as an end-in-himself, a duplicity

of life and death which is mirrored in the dual burials in the play and based upon a sublimity of negation and transcendence. While Antigone cannot socially affirm a place *for* herself, she can and does affirm *herself,* as the eventual recognition of Haimon, Ismene, and the Chorus shows.

Discovering Antigone's Self-chosen Lineage: the Elemental and the Sublime

We have seen how Antigone was born into problematic kinship relations. It was her lot to struggle with Oedipus's legacy, a situation that wounds her as "the most painful" when it is mentioned (Grene 1991, 913). However, we have also seen how in her opposition to the very facts of her social existence, she has come to be autonomous and an exemplar for the principle of honouring life as an end-in-itself, a principle which is not subordinate to the norms of her society. Before she dies, even though Antigone considers herself completely alone with no friends on earth, she does appeal to the myth of Niobe as what is "most like" to herself, and it is through this comparison, and its relation to the sublime and the elemental, that I want to end my explanation of her subjective formation.

> "But indeed I have heard of the saddest of deaths –
> of the Phrygian stranger, daughter of Tantalus,
> whom the rocky growth subdued, like clinging ivy.
> The rains never leave her, the snow never fails,
> as she wastes away. That is how men tell the story.
> From streaming eyes her tears wet the crags;
> *most like to her* the god brings me to rest." (885-891, my italics*)*

Incidentally, Sophocles also wrote a play about Niobe, of which only papyrus fragments survive. The parallels between Antigone and Niobe are many. Niobe is seen as the epitome of the bereaved mother who weeps through the stone because all of her children are dead. But before this she was a symbol for giving birth to beautiful children, as she had fourteen children, and it was her hubris in mocking Leto (who had only two children, Artemis and Apollo) that led to all of her children being killed. Although Antigone does not exhibit the same hubris as Niobe, she does suffer like a mother with dead children, as the counter-birth she honoured Polyneices with shows; further, just like Niobe, she also lives on after her bodily death, although in her case she is not petrified forever into rock. It is the sublimity of her idea that lives on in mythical memory, and to see how a sublime idea has this 'eternal' or 'undying' status I want to investigate the relationship of the sublime to elemental nature.

Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory* that for Kant "the unleashing of the elemental was one with the emancipation of the subject and thus with the self-consciousness of spirit" (Adorno 1997, 196). By this I take him to mean that as spirit becomes conscious of itself through its sublimity, the subject is emancipated through her use of reason. Simultaneously the elemental, which is what is left of nature after it has been negated, is also present as a force which has been stripped of its intentionality to favour

the subject's rationality. Adorno's understanding of the elemental is clarified further when he writes of modern art that it is "spiritualised not by the ideas it affirms but through the elemental – the intentionless – that is able to receive the spirit in itself" (Adorno 1997, 196).

The metonymic similarity that Adorno proposes between the elemental as intentionless clarifies the role of nature in relation to the sublime. Because nature must remain *unerklärlich* (inexplicable; see Lyotard 1991, 183) within the Kantian framework, the sublime transcendence must reduce the natural to an intentionless force by determining the power of human reason as having dominion over the power of nature. Because to be *unerklärlich* is also to be seen as sacred, the sublime also transfers to the subject a holiness that could only be fulfilled if the human being were infinite and divine. The subject must be, according to sublime logic, as inexplicable to herself as the natural realm was *before* the emancipation of the subject as reasoning being.

It is for this reason, I believe, that Antigone compares herself to Niobe, because the raw consuming power of elemental nature provides an intentionless ground so that a transcendent, sublime idea can represent the triumph of spirit over the empirical world; and as that idea will live on, so that Antigone can go down into Hades 'alive', so too will the elemental, not petrified into rock as with Niobe, but nevertheless present in its anthropomorphic and necessarily pre-social state in her walled-in grave.

I believe the simultaneous existence of these contradictory qualities is why the chorus receive Antigone as a *daimonion teras,* a holy monster or spiritual portent (McNeill 2011, 37). She is a figure who can presage the way that things will come to be, by exposing her place with the symbolic order that governs inter-subjective relations, but that others receive this knowledge as monstrous, as recognisably inhuman. Can Antigone, whose subjectivity delves into a pre-social elemental nature, and who speaks from the limits of the culturally intelligible, tell us something about the constitution of the human, and the pre-political, pre-social inhumanity that has been sacrificed in order to bring the political and social spheres into being? The chorus seem to think so, for in a play concerned with political destabilisation, oppression and death, they sing an ode to the great achievements of human beings. By doing so in such a 'debased' context, they raise the spectre of whether the greatest achievements of humanity are predicated upon or arise from "inhumanity".

The Unworldliness of Sublime Action

Now that we understand how Antigone stakes her life to insatiate the absolute worth of her brother, to bring him into being as an end-in-himself, the spectre of aesthetics as ethics is raised. Given that aesthetics is an autonomous realm of experience, separate from the realm of practical reason, how can an aesthetic experience (or, in Antigone's case, a sublime self-representation) ever come to instantiate a moral principle, which must be a determinate concept? The interest involved in aesthetics is precisely pleasure without end, or better, without the idea of end, as it involves the pleasure we take in the endless play of forms proper to the faculty of imagination. And yet any moral principle must set up an end that it views as good and worthy of universally applying as law. Properly speaking, once

aesthetic pleasure would become finalised under a determinate concept of the good then it would then cease to be aesthetic and become practical and moral; and yet both are present in Antigone.

In my concluding remarks I want to show how we can receive these paradoxical but parallel realms that are both present in the figure of Antigone, and then I want to return to analogy as the open-ended and necessarily indeterminate means by which to do so. I will analyse the sequence of how aesthetics ignites into morality that the Kantian system provides, and then discuss how *Antigone* dramatizes this sequence.

It is through aesthetics that we realise the moral law, because the particular character of aesthetic judgements as reflective judgements enables us to be aware of this singularly human capacity for reflection. As Kant writes, "intellectual ... good, estimated aesthetically, instead of being represented as beautiful, must rather be represented as sublime" (in Lyotard 1994, 181). He also differentiates the finality given by nature with the finality given by reason: "it (the sublime) gives on the whole no indication of anything final in nature itself, but only in the possible *employment* of our intuitions of it in inducing a feeling in our own selves of a finality quite independent of nature" (Lyotard 1994, 181).

In his work *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* Jean-Francois Lyotard provides a reading of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in the analytic of the sublime. He is interested not only in the relationship of the third critique (aesthetics and teleology) to the second (practical reason), but also in the general economy of the faculties and how the imagination relates to reason. Lyotard writes that the reflective judgement of aesthetics provides a "gesture" (182) towards what the finality of the human being could be. This gesture is then taken up by the faculty of reason, which subordinates the imagination and understanding to its project of achieving human finality under the auspices of practical reason which can actualise this finality. But why, we should ask, does practical reason hold primacy over the other faculties, and what happens to the sublime experience once this transfer to ethics and action is effected?

The end of thought as practical reason is twofold. First, thought gives practice "a necessary access ... to the supersensible i.e., freedom (the absolute of causality)" (Lyotard 1994, 176). The absolute, the unrepresentable Idea that the sublime evokes, must be absolute causality, because this would be the first in the chain of determinations that would result in any other Idea. Therefore what is unrepresentible in the sublime is the Idea of reason as such, because it can take no sensible form, and this Idea is also practice as such, because it is the absolute of causality i.e. the beginning or absolute of all subsequent events. From the human perspective this is called freedom. And second, the transcendental dictate of reason, however it seeks to subordinate the empirical world, must also "make itself heard by a thought immersed in the world of empirical interests, conditions, and charms" (Lyotard 1994, 177)" i.e. be made practical.

To summarize the sequence, in the sublime we experience the impetus to actualisation as such, to being practical as such, because it raises the Idea of absolute causality, which then propels reason back into the practical realm with the need for this idea to actualise itself, to connect transcendental

reason and the empirical world. The realisation of this idea can never remain sublime and aesthetic, but must 'cross over' the realms separated by the latter two *Critiques* and become moral and practical.

The sublime provides an instantiation of the ultimate ground of rationality, which is practical morality, while itself never being practically instantiated. A sign illuminated by a flame that then extinguishes itself. Even though aesthetics cannot *act,* never be actualised, could the sublime be characterised as an *un*worldly action, in the sense that it evinces a transcendental principle that cannot appear in the empirical world but that is nevertheless analogous to practical action, and ignites, in fact, the impetus for practical action? Here the theme of the impossible in Antigone's sublimity returns. Her sublimity is to stand for the idea itself, the principle of moral action as such, which can only ever be imperfectly realised by finite beings; in bringing this idea to life, she is seen to be communing with the dead, with an *un*world that is still of *this* world in the sense that she is still a living, breathing being holding discourse with other living, breathing beings. Even her suicide can be seen as the perverse side of her sublimity, as she determines her own end instead of being condemned to half-life and half-death in the tomb.

Within the economy of the faculties, the imagination is sacrificed in order to provide greater and greater expansion of reason's sense of its own capacity. But this means that nature, which for Kant is always *unerklärlich,* and therefore in some sense sacred, is also sacrificed to reason. The sacredness of nature is sacrificed for the absolute Idea. Is the Idea then expected to assume a mantel of holiness? Here the description of Antigone as a *daimonion teras,* a holy monster, also returns, this time in the sense of both her 'holiness' and her 'monstrosity' as present in the paradox of a finite being attempting to live out an infinite Idea. As Lyotard writes, there is a "destruction or consumption of the given, the *Stoff* of free natural form, in order to obtain in return the countergift of the unpresented" (Lyotard 1994, 188). *Antigone* also dramatizes this move because it shows the loss commensurate to this transfer, and suggests that the superiority of the turn to practical reason and moral action in its ideal form come at the cost of the finite empirical being.

Conclusion: Antigone as Analogy

There is a necessarily open ended and indeterminate conclusion to Antigone, because we can receive her both as the sublime aesthetic figure, and as the attempt at embodiment of an absolute moral principle. She exemplifies the paradoxical parallel between these two separate realms. Kant recognises the parallel nature of his 'autonomous' realms of practical reason and aesthetics, but warns against seeking to bridge the two: "in the case of two dissimilar things we may admittedly form some conception of one of them by an *analogy* which it bears to the other, and to do so even on the point on which they are dissimilar; but from that in which they are dissimilar we cannot draw any *inference* from one to the other on the strength of the analogy" (Kant 2000, 328-329)." As Lyotard puts it, "one can in short say that "*as* the beautiful, *so* the good", but not "*if* the beautiful, *then* the good" (Lyotard 1994, 165).

The character of Antigone has already provided the model for analogous thinking appropriate to our interpretation of her, as a dual figure representing both the moral and aesthetic realms, and the impossibility of bridging the two. In a previous section I discussed how she claims a lineage for herself via an analogy with Niobe, and how this lineage opposes itself to the normative order because it opposes Antigone's nature with the natural as it is normatively constructed. But the ability to draw 'like' and 'unlike' comparisons from a subjective perspective is also the ability to present a mobile and non-finalised view on the formation of subjective identity. This view is the one we should take with Antigone. We should leave as necessarily indeterminate the two figures, the agent of moral action and the sublime actress, in order to consider them both unreduced. This is a way of honouring the sacrifice her figure enacts and not subjugating the impossible aim of her journey through a reductive, partisan account.

It is also a way of not committing a kind of heresy in the Kantian eyes, which would be to go against the critical project that has separated as autonomous the three realms (pure, practical, aesthetic/teleological). There are "two heteronomous subjects, the one that is constantly born to itself without being interested in doing so, without wanting it, in the pure pleasure of the beautiful, and the one that is always held to act in the interest of the realisation of the law" (Lyotard 1994, 164). Instead of as a bridge between the two, we can best view Antigone through *hypotyposis,* which is "the operation that consists in putting in view something that (analogically) corresponds to an invisible object" (Lyotard 1994, 164). In this way, she is not the beautiful that results in goodness; she is a beautiful symbol for an unrepresentible (impossible) good.

Endnotes:

1. All quotes from *Antigone* are taken from Grene's translation, and the line number, not the page number, is given to facilitate comparison with other versions.
2. This viewpoint has been strongly put forward in Anne Carson's rewriting of the play, *Antigonick.* See, for example, Carson's rather blunt characterization of Kreon's "verbs for today / Adjudicate / Legislate / Scandalize / Capitalize" (Carson 1995, 16).
3. In her recent book *Let them Rot: Antigone's Parallax,* Alenka Zupančič provides her own reading of impossibility in *Antigone* based upon prohibition of the incest taboo, as well as he "particular hole in the structure of kinship" which is revealed by Antigone's emphasis on Polyneices' irreplaceable singularity. See, in particular, Chapter 3: Let Them Rot, pages 52-59.
4. McNeill is perspicacious on this point through his analysis of Kantian morality and Antigone. He writes, "Essential to Kreon's instrumentalism is his inability to see human motivation in any terms but wages, price and profit. Antigone in contrast is or seeks to be motivated by respect for the dignity – the incomparable worth – of her brother as an irreplaceable individual, as an end in himself" (McNeill 2011, 13).
5. For an in-depth discussion of the contrasting positions of familial obligation (Antigone) and loyalty to the state (Kreon), see Knox 1983, 84-90.
6. McNeill's discussion of Antigone's nature has influenced me here, for example Antigone's "claim is that if she were "born" or "by nature" (ἔφυν) a mother of children, or if she had a husband rotting away for her, she would not have borne the labour of *this very task* (τόνδ) against the might of the citizenry.... Her nature is very different from the nature of a wife and mother of children as she understands the latter" (McNeill 2011, 23).

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Note: Quotes from the play *Antigone* are taken from the Grene translation unless otherwise stated, and numbers cited in-text refer to line and not page number.

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"The Underpainting and the Overpainting": Layers of Power and Powerlessness in Maggie O'Farrell's *The Marriage Portrait*

Maria Antonietta Struzziero
Independent Scholar
Piazza Pompei, 14
00183 Rome, Italy
Email: mstruz@hotmail.it

Abstract:

Maggie O'Farrell's *The Marriage Portrait* (2022) revisits late-Renaissance Italian courtly life, with its intrigues of dynastic politics, to explore the short life and mysterious death of Lucrezia de' Medici, third daughter of Cosimo, Duke of Florence. Lucrezia, aged sixteen in the novel, is married off to the older Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, a pawn in her father's hands to fulfill his wish for a political alliance between the two families. O'Farrell enters the young woman's life inspired, as she acknowledges in the Author's note, by Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842), a dramatic monologue that, in turn, draws inspiration from a portrait of Lucrezia. Both Browning and O'Farrell endorse the rumour that the girl was murdered by her husband, though the official records suggest that she probably died of 'putrid fever'.

O'Farrell's historical narrative, the article argues, is both an act of appropriation of a true story and a creative re-reading of it, that intertextually engages with a different source, Browning's poem. Through the figure of Lucrezia, O'Farrell aims to explore the life of women who are obscured by men, entrapped and circumscribed by a patriarchal society that suffocates their aspirations and expectations, and ruthlessly stifles any attempt at autonomous choices.

Keywords: Renaissance Italy, patriarchy, fragmentation of the self, subtext, feminist critique, gender relations, power dynamics.

Introduction

> My God, had women written histories
> Like cloistered scholars in oratories
> They'd have set down more of men's wickedness
> Than all the sons of Adam could redress
> (Wife of Bath, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*)

Maggie O'Farrell's *The Marriage Portrait* (2022) revisits late-Renaissance Italian courtly life, with its opulence and intrigues of dynastic politics, to limn the short life and mysterious death of a young woman, Lucrezia de' Medici, third daughter and fifth child of Cosimo, Duke of Florence, and his brilliant Spanish wife, Eleonora of Toledo.

In *The Marriage Portrait,* O'Farrell juxtaposes the scant factual records of Lucrezia's short life with portraiture, minute descriptions of places and atmospheric evocations of psychic landscapes, and reimagines her story against the background of Renaissance Italy. The article argues that the writer works the little threads of historical detail into the narrative tapestry, to delve deeper into other layers, "other narratives, hiding in the shadows behind the one that we think we know" (Kleiber 2023), the "secret places in the text [that] are the internal mark of its inexhaustibility" (Ricoeur 1983, 75). It is a textual 'secrecy' that the narrative itself engenders, signalling the hermeneutic potential that an untold story opens up both for the writer and the reader.

She explores the subtext of Lucrezia's life, epitomized by the symbolic title of the last chapter, "the underpainting and the overpainting" (O'Farrell 2022, 413)[1] and, by filling the empty spaces in her obscure life, she restores her agency. In fact, a favourite theme of O'Farrell is to bring to light the tangled stories of women plunged into extreme psychological states by warping relationships. They are compelling characters whose lives were overshadowed by men and enacted in the background, silenced or confined by paternalistic societies, and bypassed by grand historical narratives, as happened to Anne Hathaway to whom she gave back a story and a voice in her previous novel *Hamnet* (2020).

This aspect of the text will be discussed guided by Pierre Macherey's argument that "the speech of the book comes from a certain silence, [...] a *certain absence*", the text's "unconscious", what it tacitly implies, and that "the work is founded on the multiplicity of its meanings" (1978, 85, 78, italics in the original).

A young woman, a poem and a portrait

The real Lucrezia was married off to the twenty-four-year-old Alfonso II d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, at the age of thirteen, in 1558. She was the replacement bride for her elder sister Maria who had been promised to Alfonso, a marriage contract signed by her father, Cosimo I de' Medici, to seal the peace between his Spanish ally, King Philip II of Spain, and his longtime rival Duke Ercole II d'Este, Alfonso's father, but Maria had unexpectedly died of malaria in 1557 before the wedding could take place.

Renaissance marriages of the aristocratic classes "were about wealth, lineage, and political cachet, not romantic love" (Mandel 2000, 720), and daughters were significant in Cosimo's dynastic plans to further his ducal ambitions, as "political alliances through marriage could be a means of cementing Medici power" (Langdon 2006, 98). So the Medici-d'Este alliance had to be honoured to heal the breach between the two ducal families and maintain the delicate and outwardly civilized balance of power between the two courts: one, the d'Este, could claim antecedents stretching back to Charlemagne; the other, the Medici, not many generations back mere merchants, were only recently ennobled and striving for hegemony in Italy.

Allegedly Lucrezia, "hardly past childhood, was infatuated, but Alfonso by all accounts was not attracted to her" (Langdon 2006, 140), though he accepted her as replacement for her elder sister. Using his military campaigns as an excuse to delay his child-bride's move to Ferrara, Alfonso

left Florence three days after the wedding and went to France to fight for Henry II, while Lucrezia remained at the Medici palace almost sequestered indoor by her austere mother for the following two years, strongly resenting her long and harsh period of 'incarceration'. During his absence, Alfonso, "apparently, could not be moved to write to his young wife", though one of his retainers at the Florentine court reported to him that his wife was always sad, scarcely smiled, and "pined for letters from him" (Langdon 2006, 143-144).

On his father's death in 1559, Alfonso returned to Ferrara where he was sworn in as the 5th Duke. Towards the end of January 1560, he sent his uncle Francesco d'Este to fetch Lucrezia. Accompanied by her brother Francesco, she set out for her husband's court and made her magnificent official entrance into Ferrara on the 17th of February.

Less than a year later, on the 21st April 1561, after two months of illness, she died of 'putrid fever' according to the official records, a political blow for both families who entered a period of deep mourning. Immediately suspicions were voiced and rumours began to circulate that she had been poisoned by her husband through motives of jealousy, but actually symptoms of decline from consumption were already apparent before she left Florence for Ferrara. Besides, inter-court documents dispel such gossips recording that Alfonso and his family proved sincerely caring during Lucrezia's final months of treatments. "Her marriage of less than three years – wholly marred by her pathetic, lingering death in exile in Ferrara, under sympathetic Este care but mostly isolated from her family – informs the brief historic traces there are of her" (Langton 2006, 141).

At the beginning of O'Farrell's novel, Lucrezia is sixteen, "not quite a year into her marriage" (1) to Alfonso, her destiny bound up in political expediency. This barter, a young woman's future for social prestige, fuels O'Farrell's tale of expectations and betrayal. In the Author's note, O'Farrell declares that she conflated "both the marriage and the departure, so that Lucrezia [...] is married and leaves for Ferrara in one single event at the age of fifteen". Besides, she renames Alfonso's two sisters "to avoid confusion with other characters in the book" (434), and brings forward the grim episode of Alfonso sentencing his sister's lover to death that, in reality, happened after Lucrezia's death, in 1575, not 1561.

O'Farrell enters the young woman's life inspired, as she acknowledges both in the Author's note and in many interviews, first by a poem and then by a painting, and brings that young woman back to life. The poem is Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842), a dramatic monologue, whose protagonist is widely believed to be based on Alfonso II d'Este, and that in turn draws inspiration from a portrait of Lucrezia, most likely the one housed at the Palatine Gallery, in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence, very close to Casa Guidi, Robert Browning's Florence residence. In his dramatic monologue, Browning endorses the hypothesis that the girl was murdered by her husband, a sinister situation that forms the kernel of the novel.

By choosing to make the Duke himself address a silent listener, who turns out to be the envoy of the family of his potential future wife, Browning offers a subtle psychological examination of the Duke's mindset, and conveys his possessive, jealous nature and his overbearing hubris. He does it

through a process that starts from a neutral beginning: "That's my last Duchess painted on the wall, / Looking as if she were alive" (ll. 1-2). Then, through a succession of delicately engineered stages, the poet forms the complex portrait of a marriage, inside which a young wife's simple-minded happiness is set against her husband's sophisticated awareness of his sense of destiny, lineage and prestige of class, attributes that mark him as a typical Renaissance grandee: "She thanked men – good! but thanked / Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked / My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name/ With anybody's gift" (ll. 31-34). Historical sources confirm these personality traits and describe Alfonso as "immoderately arrogant and conceited", someone who "prided himself beyond measure upon his bravery, intelligence, and ancient descent. With all that he was vengeful and ever ready to pursue a feud" (von Chledowski 1919, 311).

Gradually, the reader becomes aware of the Duke's egotism and callousness, his flashes of resentment and criticism of his wife and what, in his view, are her failures in decorum. His enigmatic portrait comes to full life in the brilliant last lines of the poem, reaching a chilling climax in the unexpected final revelation, "Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt, / Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without / Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands; / Then all smiles stopped together" (ll. 43-46), thus silencing her. The end of the poem foregrounds the Duke's lack of human affection, his obsession with power and the resolute cynical determination to assert it, in order to control even his wife, one more object to possess and display in his private art collection.

In a very insightful analysis of Browning's poem, Louis Friedland discusses the specific nature of Alfonso's jealousy in these terms: "The Duke's jealousy [...] may be more properly termed an arch-egotist's overweening desire for possessiveness, – an egotist who [...] exacts the last measure of obedience to his will for exclusive ownership" (1936, 674-75).

His immoderate desire for possession could only be quenched by reducing her life to the rigid dimension of a painting. When her life is extinguished, she is no longer full of life, yet still a potential source of jealousy, to be preserved, hidden behind a curtain and shown only at his own will. So, he blandly recollects his wife, a young girl sacrificed to his tyranny because she refused to be 'owned', in the same way as he owns the painting of his "Last Duchess" or the bronze statue of "Neptune/ [...] Taming a sea-horse" (ll. 54-55), both art objects essential instruments for the display of power. The statue, the image of a powerful, brutal god taking control over a sea-horse, a creature evoking vitality and freedom, symbolically also sums up the unbalanced marriage relationship between the Duke and his young wife.

Indeed, Alfonso was a well-known patron both of fine arts – painting, architecture, sculpture – of music and literature, in this latter sphere a patron of Torquato Tasso, who wrote his *Aminta* (1573) for him, and who also appears in O'Farrell's text. Browning's "Last Duchess" will become "my first Duchess" (337) in O'Farrell's, a slip of the tongue of Alfredo that speaks volumes about his personality. Browning's poem is a subterranean presence in the novel, its influence surfacing at a few points, in some allusions that signal difference rather than similarity between the two texts. In O'Farrell's version of the story, "Browning is still present, but her treatment half-obscures it, bringing what was underneath to the surface" (Bucknell 2022).

In talking about the genesis of her novel, O'Farrell reveals that, as for Browning, the other source of inspiration was the portrait of Lucrezia de' Medici, commissioned by her family probably in early 1560, just before her departure for Ferrara, and attributed to the workshop of the Medici court portrait painter Agnolo di Cosimo, known as Bronzino.

In the same interview, O'Farrell adds that, after re-reading Browning's poem, she downloaded Lucrezia's portrait on her phone and,

> As soon as I saw her, it was a kind of lightning bolt. I knew as soon as I looked into her eyes that I was going to write a novel about her and that I was looking at the subject of my next book (Kleiber 2023).

What she found intriguing was that in the portrait Lucrezia is not smiling, and she looks really troubled, worried, anxious, "as if she has something she wants to say" (Kleiber 2023). Because, although the girl is 'imprisoned' in the framed portrait, there is a sense of her interiority emanating from her image that the writer wants to explore, as "no human creature can be completely silenced by a text or by an image" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 16).

Intrigued and inspired by the portrait of the mysterious young girl and her grave expression, a small pale face engulfed by a dark background, and puzzled by her mysterious early death, O'Farrell weaves for Lucrezia what Paul Ricoeur calls "the as yet untold story", a story that demands to be narrated because,

> in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative (1983, 75).

In O'Farrell's novel, Alfonso commissions the marriage portrait – which, however, is fictional – to Sebastiano Filippi, called Il Bastianino, a real court portraitist. The presence of this painter gives the Duchess the chance to meet two of his apprentices, one of which will play a crucial role in the dramatic turn her life will take.

O'Farrell unravels Lucrezia's story sweeping back and forth, interweaving two narrative threads and timelines, and alternating the novel's focus. One narrative charts Lucrezia's life trajectory, starting from her conception, her childhood and early adolescence in Florence, then her brief married life, up to the moment when Alfonso takes her to his country hunting lodge, when the two threads converge. The other follows Lucrezia's present state during her final hours at the lodge when she realizes that her husband is planning to kill her.

O'Farrell flouts the linear ordering of temporal sequence as she does not recognize in chronology a propulsive narrative force and privileges thematic rather than temporal connections; so there are constant time shifts, a temporal dislocation that mirrors both the protagonist's psychological fragmentation and *how* our mind works, while, at the same time, creating mystery and suspense. The writer uses, most of the time, the present tense to bring the past back to life, manipulating time and

point of view – to keep the reader vacillating between sympathy and skepticism – and a close third person narrator internally focalized from Lucrezia's point of view. O'Farrell's construction of narrative point of view is a powerful means to bring readers imperceptibly to share the values of the text, hollowing out a linguistic space that they are invited to occupy and from which to challenge the dominant values and gender assumptions of the world she is portraying, with an open, critical mind.

"A wild and lonely place"

The brief first chapter sets in motion the present narrative strand and offers the epistemological key to enter the text. The novel opens in 1561, at a remote "fortress" (2) in Bondeno, west of Ferrara, where Alfonso has taken Lucrezia. It is a rural retreat, the fitting place for her potential demise, being "a high-walled edifice of dark stone" (1) that looks more like a prison or a tomb, surrounded by dense forest, an inescapable place that epitomizes Lucrezia's condition inside her marriage. She is seated at a long dining table, facing her husband; unexpectedly, at the end of the first paragraph, "with a peculiar clarity" (1), observing his face in the flickering light of a candle, she has the foreboding that her husband "intends to kill her" (1), a sudden realization that is like "a dark-feathered bird of prey [that] has alighted on the arm of her chair" (2).

So, not only O'Farrell endorses the rumour that the girl was murdered by her husband, but, unlike Browning, the revelation of Lucrezia's death comes at the very beginning and the entire narrative is framed by the impending murder. The reader's concern, then, is not with what happens but *how* and *why* it comes to happen. Besides, whereas Browning's poem is centred on Alfonso's resentment, his egotism and disapproval of his wife's behaviour, O'Farrell is interested in capturing Lucrezia's subjectivity and psychology, by tracing her existential trajectory: first, as a solitary, but profoundly imaginative, young girl who knows little of the world beyond her family's palace walls and can do nothing to resist the dynastic pressures on her as a woman. Then, her growing sense of imprisonment and obligations as a young bride. In both cases, she is expected to show obedience, the main requirement of the ideal woman at the time, first to her parents, then to her husband.

In that initial moment of terror, Lucrezia becomes an observer of her own plight and has a disembodied view of herself "hovering by the vaulted ceiling, looking down at herself and him" (2), observing what appears to be a sort of prelude to her death, almost as if she is watching a play in a theatre. This sense of doubleness, a split between her mind and her body, when she sees herself from outside, a watchful remove from action, and the feeling of being distanced from not only her surroundings but from herself, is a motif that returns in several crucial scenes, when fear and emotional distress threaten her psychic integrity. Lucrezia's sudden revelation about her demise plunges the reader immediately into her panicked mind: on the one hand, it creates a tense and threatening atmosphere that rises as the two narrative threads draw closer. On the other hand, it interrogates the gap between what Lucrezia knows and what, in her feverish and fervid imagination, she assumes is happening, sowing the seeds of doubt in the reader that maybe she is simply a spirited young girl drawing conclusions too quickly.

The ominous certainty of her impending death surfaces five times in the first four pages and recurs with regularity throughout the text. O'Farrell underscores Lucrezia's rising panic through formal devices: she combines the use of the present continuous with a succession of questions in a paragraph, and the hammering repetition of words or phrases, all devices that contribute to give readers the impression that they are inhabiting the girl's mind and following her accelerated thinking process. Besides, the writer intersperses the section with elements that contribute to ground Lucrezia's fear in reality and not in her imagination: Alfonso is not "in his customary place" at table; he "straighten[s] a knife" (1) in his hands, "resting his fingers on the bare skin of her wrist" (2), almost to signify his possession of her. Besides, he entertains her with a tale about hunting and the description of his fingers covered in blood when releasing the arrows to hit the target.

In her frightened mind, Lucrezia connects these details to Alfonso's abrupt decision, what appeared to be a capricious whim, to set on a sudden journey on a cold, wet winter day, to reach a "wild and lonely place" (1). She also suspects that her husband has carefully schemed to leave her trusted maid behind in Ferrara, separating her from others, to be sure that he would be alone with her, and begins to wonder *how* he will kill her. Lastly, she recalls the words her sister-in-law had whispered to her: "You will be blamed" (2), a subtle hint at the urgency for her to conceive an heir to secure Alfonso's delicate political position and the safety of his region. On the one hand, to Lucrezia this seems reason enough for her husband to wish to get rid of her – as she has failed to have a child as yet; on the other hand, it underscores how a woman's function inside the marriage is tied to her reproductive nature, basically to be a fruitful womb. This necessity is epitomized by her mother Eleonora, named "La Fecundissima" (9), and her personal Latin motto, "'CUM PUDORE LAETA FOECUNDITAS' ('Joyful fertility with modesty')", because, "for a state's survival and hegemony, succession was *the* paramount concern" (Langdon 2006 86, 99 italics in the original).

The dynamics of the interaction in this very brief section brings to light, and problematizes, the traditional stereotypical dichotomy that sees the male's 'transcendence' of nature symbolized by his ability to hunt and kill, and the female's identification with nature in her role as a life-giver which perpetuates the species. As Simone de Beauvoir commented, in a patriarchal world, superiority or authority "has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills" (1953, 58), an ideology that has constructed woman as man's Other.

Lucrezia's fears of death seem to be confirmed the next morning when she begins to feel sick and vomits. Once again, she recollects her sister-in-law's repeated warning about Alfredo: "You have no idea what he is capable of" (362), advising her to be "very, very careful", going on to insinuate that, as Alfredo "has never [...] got a woman with child" (363), it is *he* who is responsible for the lack of an heir, but that *she* will be blamed for it. Actually, the Duke died childless and, from all indications, even before he married Lucrezia, he "had good reasons to dread the oncoming of physical impotence" (Friedland 1936, 669), for causes that were not set forth by the authorities but hinted at in unmistakable terms.

O'Farrell chooses a female narrative gaze and consciousness to offer readers both a first glimpse

of the unbalanced psychological power relationship inside the marriage and of Alfonso, whose charming façade masks a Machiavellian dark side, viewed at court "like Janus, with two faces, two personalities. And he can switch between them" (258), as frequently happens in the course of the narrative, at times quite abruptly and unexpectedly. There are many instances of Alfonso's dark side surfacing in the novel, with unpredictable explosions of anger, sometimes directed at Lucrezia who is forced into psychological submission and in puzzled awe of such moments, that can happen even for the most banal of reasons, as when she opens a window fascinated by the dramatic scenery of an impending storm outside. Alfonso orders her to shut the window and when she hesitates, he reaches her, seizes her wrists and pulls her away, "his hand closed about her upper arm like a manacle" (275), considering her behaviour reckless. When she tries to justify herself, he warns her: "Do not [...] be foolish enough to interrupt me when I am speaking. Now or ever" (277), and makes it clear that he expects her to obey his orders without delay or hesitation. Though Lucrezia feels flames of anger smoulder within her, she realizes that she is powerless in facing the "vengeful, irascible monster in human form" that her husband has turned into, and tears fill her eyes. When he sees this, he calms down and, she ponders, "the beast is banished: Alfonso is back" (279).

However, the most shocking proof for Lucrezia of her husband's degree of cruelty is his decision to put to death his sister Elisabetta's lover when he discovers their secret relationship, even compelling Elisabetta to watch, as "he commanded the guards to hold her fast, so that she could not get away" (357). This revelation leaves Lucrezia speechless and under the impression of being no longer in "a tower room but in a box, shuttered off from the world" (357), totally defenseless. This personality trait of Alfonso is confirmed also by historians who maintain that the Duke was "master of life and death over all in Ferrara, and disposed at times to exercise his power with ruthless cruelty" (Friedland 1936, 674).

O'Farrell consciously intends the novel's first section to serve as a paradigm for the larger plot, as it foregrounds and juxtaposes images of suffocating imprisonment with fear and the impulse to escape, motifs that resonate through both narrative trajectories. The atmosphere of entrapment has clear literary echoes: the first one that comes to mind is the episode of the stately, chilly red-room in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), a place that, like Lucrezia's hunting lodge, is "a kind of patriarchal death chamber" in Gilbert' and Gubar's words (1979, 340). Closely resembling the split perception of herself that Lucrezia has, in the red room little Jane Eyre perceives her own image reflected in the "great looking-glass" as a "strange little figure" (Brontë 1908, 8), alien and disturbing, floating towards her. Even more apposite for the marriage dynamics they both evoke is "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, another story of a woman's suffocating confinement and urge to escape from a censorious and paternalistic husband, a narrative punctuated by the presence of a figure – her 'double' – imprisoned behind the wallpaper. In all three texts, the relationship between imagery of enclosure and the use of doubles are complementary signs of female victimization, signifying existential conditions in which the protagonists are "confined within uncomfortable selves as well as within uncomfortable spaces" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 443) that they desperately yearn to escape.

Lucrezia is trapped all her life: to begin with, in her family's grand palace where, as underscored by the second epigraph to the novel from Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (1353), "the ladies ... are forced to follow the whims, fancies and dictates of their fathers, mothers, brothers and husbands, so that they spend most of their time cooped up within the narrow confines of their rooms". Here, still a powerless teenager, she is "used as a link in [her father's] chain of power" (282), an object of exchange, a socially and politically prized, exchangeable body, existing in relation to two men who are involved in the 'market' as active participants, to ensure political alliances that would cement Medici power. It is a commodification that rests on a dual, hierarchized opposition and the abasement of woman, a conceptual organization that upholds the patriarchal status quo in which the "subordination of the feminine to the masculine order [...] appears to be the condition for the functioning of the machine" (Cixous 1980, 92). Then, within her marriage, she feels "nailed into a wooden box and placed in [a] tomb" (80) with a series of requirements and constraints as a young bride, imprisoned both literally in her husband's palaces and symbolically in the eponymous marriage portrait, actually a correlative objective of her condition.

Short chapters recounting the on-going events of the following hours, alternate with much longer ones giving us Lucrezia's backstory. So, in the second chapter, the narrative shifts back in time to Lucrezia's conception in 1544 and to Florence.

A caged tigress and a framed Duchess

In Lucrezia, O'Farrell portrays a sensitive, solitary young girl, with an intractable wild streak since childhood, in her mother's view, a daughter of privilege but rebellious to the constraints of her station. Confined to a court in which she struggles to be fully accepted in her diversity, she restlessly scrutinizes the distant horizons, almost yearning after an *other* dimension to find her true self. Historical records corroborate Lucrezia's melancholic disposition, exacerbated by her austere mother who sequestered her indoors, and also report that Duke Cosimo was fond of calling her "Obstinate one!", adding, "She is just like us!" (Mandel 2000, 732), a true Medici. She is well-educated and gifted with true talent in the artistic sphere. During her art lessons she learns that "the world had different layers and depths, [...] and could be constructed from lines that converged and intersected" (31). She tries this theory out in her pictures with such compelling perfection of perspective and wealth of details that her drawing tutor is taken aback, because they are surprisingly complex for a small child; he even shows them to the court artist, Giorgio Vasari, who is truly impressed by her skills.

Yet, scholarly opinions on Lucrezia differ: some "suggest that she was quite worthy of adulation, both intellectually and personally" (Mandel 2000, 736). Others maintain that she was "unprepossessing, lacking in vivacity", less intellectually bright and "less physically appealing than her sisters" (Langdon 2006, 140); however, some scholars note that her grace and fine appearance, as mirrored in her official portrait, were praised and acknowledged in court correspondence. Gabrille Langdon attributes the negative critical views to past scholarship, and asserts that "Lucrezia

was schooled in Greek and Latin and knew how to play a musical instrument and to sing" (2006, 132), a view that is embraced by O'Farrell in her description of the girl.

In the novel, Lucrezia's restless and free spirit resents the stifling atmosphere of the family palazzo that is like a prison to her. This constant sense of oppressive restrictions finds its best symbolic representation in an episode that comes towards the beginning of the novel. Lucrezia, still a tiny but curious, untamable child, sneaks around the palace secret passages all by herself at night, eavesdropping at doors, unafraid, and sees guards bringing a caged tigress into the palace dungeons. She is upset by the desperate, mournful cry of "a creature captured against its will, a creature whose desires have all been disregarded" (18), a line that sounds more and more prescient of what Lucrezia will feel like when she is married off to Alfredo. Once her father takes the children into his exotic menagerie, to show them the animals he keeps there, and Lucrezia is moved to tears by the terrible, sad beauty of the lonely tigress, sympathizing with the imprisoned creature's "searing pain" (45). She fearlessly reaches through the bars of the cage and strokes the tigress, unarmed, identifying with the caged feline, even believing that "she was the new tigress" (26).

The tigress is a signifier of Lucrezia's existential condition: as a child, her behaviour terrifies her mother, who decides to have her removed from the nursery and banished to the basement kitchen because, her wet nurse Sofia remarks, she is "like a wild animal" and "run[s] like a savage" (13). When she is four years old, she likes spending hours "looking out at the city and the distant hills beyond" (13), yearning for freedom and refusing to perform the usual duties expected of her. As a young adolescent, she is 'caged' in a marriage contract in which she has no say and trapped at her husband's court where she realizes that, like the tigress, "captivity had been her destiny all along" (21).

The other major symbol of her condition of entrapment in the novel, a correlative objective of Lucrezia's condition, is the titular marriage portrait that Alfonso orders to his court painter, Il Bastianino, actually Alfonso's favourite artist.

The portraits

Though both Browning and O'Farrell are inspired by a portrait of Lucrezia de Medici, its representation as well as its function and role in the two texts are different. In the dramatic monologue, Browning chooses the Duke's eyes as filters to introduce the Duchess who is only observed, commented on and talked about, but whose voice, obviously, is never heard. The Duke's controlling male gaze is more interested in admiring the finished portrait, in which the Duchess is objectified and fetishized for his own pleasure, and in praising the painter, Fra' Pandolf, who captured her glance's "depth and passion" (l. 8), rather than the young woman herself. The Duchess, in fact, as already observed, is actually the object of the Duke's severe censure, having proved less docile than he expected and incompatible with the hierarchic principle he embodies.

Interestingly, in the novel, the portrait that inspired Browning, by "the master artist Bronzino", her figure "depicted in a black dress, with pearls around the neck, one hand raised", is heavily criticized both by Alfonso, who thinks that it is a terrible portrait of her, and especially

Lucrezia, who "sees nothing of herself in it and cannot bear to look upon it" (174).

Unlike Browning who observes Lucrezia through the Duke's eyes, the dramatic monologue being actually a portrait of Alfonso, despite its title, O'Farrell's female perspective redirects the reader's attention. She wants to reach towards the girl "trapped on the other side of [the portrait] and help her to climb out" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 16), to liberate her from the confines of the painting, flouting the classical tendency of art to reduce female figures to passive objects offered to the male gaze.

Besides, the portrait in Browning's dramatic monologue is a finished art object, to show proudly as evidence of the owner's fine art connoisseurship, whereas the marriage portrait in the novel is an ongoing process that unfolds before the readers' eyes, under the watchful control of the Duke who expects the painter to follow his instructions faithfully. The final product, in both texts, is "a wonder" (378); moreover, in the novel it is the device through which O'Farrell allows the reader to follow Lucrezia's growing powers of perception and emotional maturity. More importantly, it also encapsulates Lucrezia's transformation from Lucrè, the Florentine adolescent Lucrezia de' Medici, into the new Duchess of Ferrara, weighed on by anxieties and nightmares, who sees her portrait bloom, brush after brushstroke, until it becomes a masterpiece, whereas she declines.

Through this period of existential liminality, she is a subject-in-process, a condition that generates in Lucrezia a "feeling of incorporeality, of displacement" (377) when she observes her image in the portrait: "The Duchess is present, in the painting. There she stands. Lucrezia is unnecessary; she can go now. Her place is filled; the portrait will take up her role in life" (377). The artistic process that underpins the completion of the portrait, dictated and directed by her husband, not by the artist, in all details transforms Lucrezia into the Duchess, and she senses that it actually substitutes her living self with the painted, lifeless image of her.

However, there is also something else in the portrait that at first puzzles Lucrezia; when she regards it, she is almost transfixed:

> In the painting is a woman who looks like her, or a version of her, or an ideal – she cannot tell which. This is her, yet not her; it is so disturbingly like her, while being completely unlike her. It is Lucrezia, but it is also someone else (375).

Her look is frank and defiant, her expression bold; it is a portrait, she concludes, "at once scaldingly public and deeply private" (376). A sudden flash of enlightenment makes her realize that the ability to capture the complexity of her emotions in her facial expression and the profound understanding of her nature that the picture transmit cannot be the outcome only of the artist's skills or of her husband's detailed indications, but of someone who can truly read into her most intimate, passionate spirit and feel empathetic to her. She rightly suspects that it is the work not of Il Bastianino, the portrait painter, but of his apprentice, Jacopo, a young boy whose life she saved, by mere coincidence, when she found him unconscious in a corridor of the *delizia* palace the summer before.

"The underpainting and the overpainting"

The portrait has a dual symbolic significance: on the one hand, it freezes her image and transforms her into an 'object', albeit artistic, to be gazed at, trapped both within its frame and in the dress that she is ordered to wear for it, "an outfit designed to [her husband's] specification" (333), in which, however, "she cannot recognize the person she is" and that makes her look as if "a woman has been cut into four pieces" (334). It is an image of fragmentation that echoes the Lacanian 'body in pieces', a psychic dismemberment that flaunts the illusory nature of her perceived unitary self. When she looks at the mirror image her portrait reflects back, she does not identify with the creature imprisoned within its frame, the product of an oppressive, censorious Symbolic Order. This split in the self, already observed before, will be dramatically foregrounded in the last chapter.

To Alfonso, the painting must convey "her majesty, her bloodline", because, as he sternly murmurs to Il Bastianino while looking at the sketch the painter is showing him, "she is no ordinary mortal. [...] I want everyone who looks upon this to know instantly what she is: regal, refined, untouchable" (333). Alfonso's indications for the marriage portrait are consistent with scholars' observations that portraits of women in Renaissance Italian courts are dynastic portraits, "not studies of the self", in which family lineage is stressed. Actually, "what is presented to the viewer is an ideal, or rather, an identity shaped by an ideal. It is not so much an individual but a cypher [...] fashioned to convey a specific role", and portraits are visible signs speaking of "nobility and *magnificenza,* and therefore of virtue" (Tinagli 1997, 49, 51, italics in the original).

On the other hand, the portrait, unexpectedly and paradoxically, is also the instrument that indirectly allows Lucrezia to escape the pre-ordained destiny of death that history had written for her, flout the traditional patriarchal paradigm of subjection and tyranny, and re-write her story. This will happen thanks to Jacopo, to whom O'Farrell assigns the structural role of 'helper', who will play a crucial role in the deft plot twist that the writer deploys in the novel's climactic conclusion.

After delivering the finished portrait to the Duke and before leaving, unexpectedly and unseen by everyone, Jacopo approaches Lucrezia. Addressing her in a "strange tongue" (259) that no one except her can understand, being the Neapolitan dialect that her nurse used to speak in the *palazzo* nursery, he warns the Duchess that she is in danger. His words do not surprise her at all, but simply confirm what she has been dreading all along; she is both stupefied and even moved by his gentleness and care, his look "full of concern" (381) for her, something she has long forgotten and "far from anything she has felt" (382) in her short married life. Then, before hurrying to leave the palace, Jacopo tells her that he has tampered with the lock of the servant kitchen door so that she may open it and escape, adding that she must leave as soon as she can and he would be waiting for her in the forest.

In the present of the narration, Lucrezia wakes up in the middle of the night, still feeling ill but also struck by a sudden hunger. She is in her room with Emilia, her faithful maid, daughter of Lucrezia's wet nurse, who has reached her undercover with Il Bastianino; in fact, she had been left behind when Alfonso had suddenly decided to take Lucrezia to the country lodge, the episode that is narrated at the beginning of the novel. Emilia's presence at the lodge has a key function in the denouement of the story.

While Emilia sleeps in her bed, Lucrezia dons her maid's dress to go and look for some food in the kitchen. In that moment, the disembodied motif returns and she sees herself from outside: "It seems to her" that "perhaps" there are three Lucrezias in her bedroom. She is an external passive observer of the other two, and addresses the "one who cowers still in the bed" as "this girl", the other "who appears in the painting [as] the Duchess Consort", and even refers to herself in the third person as "the girl in the drab dress" (418) who hears someone talking to her inside her head. Lucrezia is experiencing a disintegration of the self, paradigmatic of a traumatized psyche, a psychological condition intensified by her emotional tension and fear for her life at such a critical moment.

She sneaks out and, once she reaches the kitchen, she tries the door handle, even though she is skeptical that Jacopo's plan would work, thinking that rags "triumph[ing] over all that Alfonso has at his disposal, [...] is nothing less than madness" (423). Against all odds, the door swings open and she "stands on the stone ledge of the threshold" (424). She is actually in a liminal position: inside, "at her back is death, her death. She is certain of this"; outside, before her, another form of death "somewhere in the woods or out on the road, in the open countryside, with Alfonso bearing down on her on horseback" (425). So apparently she has no choice because, she muses, "she has never had any choice" (423). Yet, if going back is sure death, she decides to embrace risk and escape in the forest.

This surprise ending comes in the last chapter, "The underpainting and the overpainting" (413), where O'Farrell deploys a narrative switch that echoes *Hamnet*'s, a climax that departs from historical records of Lucrezia's life. In fact, while Lucrezia pulls shut the door behind her, Alfonso and his henchman Baldassare sneak up to her bedroom, unaware that the woman who is sleeping in bed is Emilia, and suffocate her to death. Even though the girl is strong and fights back, she is no match for the two of them who actually "crush [...] her face and torso" (426). The physical brutality of the murder leaves her so disfigured that she is unrecognizable, and no one ever realizes that a substitution has unwittingly been made.

Emilia's disfigurement is proleptically foreshadowed by an episode halfway through the novel when, as small children, while playing hide-and-seek in the kitchen, a boiling pot fell. Lucrezia narrowly escaped being hit, whereas Emilia was scorched and disfigured, somehow offering herself as a sacrificial victim: "If it had to be one of us, it was better that it was me who was disfigured" (231), Emilia concludes when she recollects this episode with Lucrezia a few hours before she is murdered.

While Alfonso and Baldassare leave the bedroom, after their brutal effacement of a human life, the narrative shifts back to Lucrezia, who "is moving across open ground, through the dark winter night, running, running, with all her strength, towards the merciful canopy of trees" (432). This is the last image of Lucrezia on which the novel ends. However, between this final moment and the previous view of the girl taking "a leap from the ledge" (430) and running away from the fortress, there are two pages that switch consistently to the future tense. Here O'Farrell's narration appears to oscillate between fantasy and desire, holding out some possibilities for the protagonist to offset the choicelessness that has dominated Lucrezia's whole life. While escaping, Lucrezia "*hopes*" (italics added) that Jacopo "is waiting in the trees" (430), so that maybe, with his help, she will escape Alfonso's

predatory clutches. In these few paragraphs, that are even typographically separated by three asterisks from the rest of the text – a sort of window opened onto another fictional dimension – O'Farrell envisages a shift from the 'real' to Ricoeur's "kingdom of the *as if*" (1983, 64), which is emplotted in the narrative to configure a possible world that challenges the real one and counterbalances Lucrezia's tragic destiny.

The moment when she will actually reach Jacopo is left as a silence, the "*absence"* postulated by Macherey and mentioned at the beginning of the article. It is an evasion that must be embraced as being part of the book's unconscious, a zone of indeterminacy left for readers to refigure. The text's silence, however, "is not a lack to be remedied, [but] the juxtaposition and conflict of several meanings", a conflict that "is not resolved or absorbed, but simply *displayed*", revealing "the inscription of an *otherness* at its margins" (Macherey 1978, 84, 79 italics in the original).

Lucrezia's expression of hope is followed by the narration of the long journey that she and Jacopo will begin and that will eventually end in Venice, "a city of uncertainty, where land and sea meet and mingle" (430), where she will finally become the artist that she had always been at heart. Her miniature paintings, coveted by collectors, apparently hide secret layers beneath the uppermost painting, a palimpsestic presence of fantastic images and creatures that she has secretly drawn and cherished all her life. In fact, since she was an adolescent, they have enabled her to express in secret the most intimate, wild side of her that she was expected to suffocate, but that she had to cover up after with more 'innocent' figures for the censorious viewer to see.

The underpaintings of these miniatures are visible only to "the bravest" who discover, when they rub away the surface, "the face of one particular woman" looking at the viewer with "an enigmatic, unfathomable gaze" (431) at the centre of their frames. Yet, not even this is certain, because others find no underpainting, no hidden vision, but simply a plain *tavola.*

The deliberate indeterminacy of this brief section lends itself to alternative critical interpretations: on the one hand, this narrative segment might textualize the fulfillment of Lucrezia's hope of escaping and becoming an artist, a sort of act of compensation for her tragic real life story. On the other hand, these two pages might be pointing to one more instance of Lucrezia's disembodied perception of herself from outside, 'dreaming', even hallucinating, of escaping. This interpretation, however, would not coherently accommodate the presence of Emilia in her room and her murder.

However, when Lucrezia closes the servants' back door behind her, she openly flouts the plot that history had assigned to her and breaks free from her gilded cage; thus, "she becomes other and elsewhere" (331) as she used to do at night when Alfonso made love to her. In the end, what is left of the Duchess, as Lucrezia had foreseen, is her marriage portrait, intended to replace her, "hung in the Duke's private chamber, covered at all times in heavy velvet drapes. No one is permitted to pull back the curtain, and look upon the Duchess's face without the Duke's express permission" (429). The male process of reducing a woman to an object, mere property, to own and control, typical of patriarchal societies, culminates with this transformation, a point on which Browning's dramatic

monologue and the novel coincide. Yet, in O'Farrell's text, Lucrezia is given the possibility of escaping through art, finding her free voice in her artistic creations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, O'Farrell departs from historical record and replots female destiny, prising open an alternative space of freedom for the protagonist within the text, a site of resistance, because the shaping of the plot is another pervasive form of representation the novelist can deploy to envision a more active role for a woman. The writer offers the unfortunate Duchess a different fate to Browning's dark imaginings, but one no less dramatic, and her strategy of reversal has also a problematic side as it requires the sacrifice of an innocent young girl's life. It is a conclusion that raises questions, problematizes Lucrezia's personality and cannot be truly defined satisfactory in relation to her psychological make-up, as it jars with her sensibility and emotional world.

Lucrezia's loyal maid is brutally erased from the story, even linguistically: she is denied her own name in death, her body disfigured, and reduced to a "form in the bed, barely visible in the gloom" (425), an innocent life who vanishes from the novel without acknowledgement. The readers' rejoicing in the survival of one victim of violence ends up making them almost complicit in the death and erasure of another.

This is the textual 'overpainting'; yet, reading against the grain, exploring the silences in the "secret underpainting" (431), the unconscious of the text, and bearing in mind that a novelist who "exploits psychological Doubles" frequently juxtaposes "two characters; the one representing the socially acceptable or conventional personality, the other externalizing the free, uninhibited [...] self" (Rosenfield 1963, 328), an alternative reading is possible, "on a figurative and psychological level" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 361). The "girl" Lucrezia leaves behind in bed is her other self, her 'double', the compliant girl who should submit in obedience, and that must be relinquished in order to set herself free at last. It is a critical hypothesis authorized by the many traces where the motif of the double surfaces (160, 164-165, 229, 398) and the text underscores the physical similarity and complementary psychology of the two girls, who are even milk sisters, as well as their deepening relationship as equals. These complementary doubles may appear as opposites in the narrative, but what is important is "the way in which they reveal the loss of identity of the main character" (Rosenfield 1963, 328) and her psychic disintegration.

The Duchess in the portrait is her husband's ideal image of her, actually "a version of her" (375) framed in the portrait and trapped in Alfonso's patriarchal world of oppressiveness and ruthless violence. The Lucrezia that escapes is the passionate, free self whose mysterious power "refuses to stay in her textually ordained "place" and thus generates a story that "gets away" from its author" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979, 28). The authentic Lucrezia is the one who manages to break loose from both patriarchy and the 'coherence' of the text, with its stable, univocal reading and who, in her otherness, in her silent refusal to be enshrined in submissive domesticity, threatens her husband's world and authority.

What she leaves behind is a frame, a beautiful art object to contemplate and the mere illusion of possession of a man who, imprisoned in the fortress of his cynical egotism, fails to understand that, though he has a portrait that is a "wonder", it is not equal to the living, breathing creature that he has tried to suffocate.

Endnotes:

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Metamodernism: Navigating Discourse and Identity in Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life*

Rareş-Christian Vasilescu
Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University
31 Horea Street, RO-400202, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: rares.vasi@gmail.com

Abstract:

This paper investigates the articulation of metamodernism at the beginning of the 21st century and how this new paradigmatic apparatus of interpretation of the world can be applied to Kate Atkinson's novel, *Life After Life* (2013). Metamodernism was firstly formulated by Dutch theorists Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen and comes as a response to postmodernism. Metamodernism explores the topics of informed naivety, affect in fiction, authenticity, transcendence and the function of historical hybridity, while acknowledging and using the postmodernist pastiche and parody, combined with the modernist ambiguity, openness to innovation and importance of grand narratives. This paper examines the applicability of metamodernism to Kate Atkinson's novel, *Life After Life*, a historical fiction novel about the multiple lives and deaths of Ursula Todd as she navigates through various historical events in 20th-century Europe, exploring the themes of fate, resilience, and the impact of individual choices on the course of one's life. By incorporating the metamodernist "manifesto", a theoretical and critical corpus and by using a close-reading method on the novel, this paper demonstrates that metamodernism is a paradigm that tries to adapt to the contemporary state of constant crisis and its applicability to Atkinson's fiction. This analysis showcases the degree to which metamodernism contributes to understanding the complexity of the 21st century and whether it fits the aesthetic of the novel.

Keywords: metamodernism, historicity, crisis, identity, memory, affect, body

1. Theorizing metamodernism

Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker proposed the term *metamodernism* as a new paradigm that would aid the contemporary reader to achieve an understanding of the socio-historical and cultural presentness of the twenty-first century. The main thesis of metamodernism, according to what the two Dutch cultural theorists proposed in their manifestos, both in the 2010 philosophical article and in the 2017 collective volume, is to be authentic by appealing to contemporary practices and patterns of acquiring knowledge and experience. This paper attempts to discuss the paradigm from a theoretical perspective. The proposed analysis in this paper is diachronic because the article mostly states the main characteristics of the movement while the 2017 volume offers a more in-depth conceptualisation of the theoretical apparatus of metamodernism, which is characterised by a renewed

focus on/interest in affect and historicity. Both of these critical essays debate the development of metamodernism while testing its applicability to contemporary art, media and materials that can constitute subjects of interest for the authors. By formulating a theory, the contemporary becomes able to outweigh the destructive outcome of its own faultiness. The crisis of ideology of the 21st century resulted from the economic discrepancy caused by globalization, politically divided and governments and institutions, climate change, the sudden progress of technology and the minority-oriented political discourse which outweighs the efficient financial and real political struggles of the world. The crisis of ideology is the moment where the traditional left-right political paradigm is challenged because it does not grasp the complexity of the world. Theory would be a suitable response to this crisis because it brings a sense of understanding of the current situation in society and offers an ideological structure onto which a new potential mode of thinking can be built. This crisis might not be solved by the metamodernist philosophy, but it is nonetheless a theory that tries to offer a solution that is more adapted to the contemporary era and that surpasses postmodernism in terms of interpreting the world. This world seems to have lost all of its meaning, and thus the literature and philosophy of the present cannot stagnate because they have to make sense of the world.

1.1. Metamodernism against itself

In the 2010 article, entitled "Notes on Metamodernism," a first possible definition of metamodernism is attempted by Vermeulen and van den Akker. However the result is not a definition, but rather an outline of what metamodernism chose to select from what preceded it. Metamodernism is described initially as an "emerging structure of feeling (...) [an] oscillation between a typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment." (2) There are three main keywords that contour this conundrum. The first is what Raymond Williams initially formulated in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) as "structure of feeling", the other two being "modern commitment" and "postmodern detachment". They stand out because they lead the reader to think that it is a combination between the two trends of theory and responses to the world of the twentieth century. This reformulation denotes a lack of immediacy and originality, because they strive to bring back to the contemporary era the re-emergence of authenticity, which is what the postmodernists rejected. Further in the article, Vermeulen and van den Akker define metamodernism as something fluid that "oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity." (5-6) This oscillation is suggestive for the way in which both modernism and postmodernism defined the era they were used as ways of reacting to the world. However, according to Vermeulen and can der Akken, the third millennium is a more complex world where attributes of both modes of interpretation are necessary to create a new ideology, a new theory.

Regarding discourse and the aspect of history integrated in it, metamodernism faces yet another conundrum. Although it advocates for history as an epitome of presentness, it dismisses

what Fukuyama called the postmodernist end of history. The concept of the *end of history* was analysed and critiqued by Fredric Jameson in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1998* (1998), where he referred to the theory of American politics scholar and researcher Francis Fukuyama. Fukuyama indicates in his political work, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) the fact that humanity reached an ideological climax after the resolution of the Cold War and this is supposed to represent the end of history, also associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the eradication of totalitarianism in Europe. Jameson associated this terminology in relation to the postmodernist view of historicity. Metamodernism rejects Fukuyama's ending of history, but it "acknowledges that history's purpose will never be fulfilled because it does not exist." (Vermeulen, van den Akker 2010, 5) From this perspective, it is safe to assume that ideology without purpose is illogical, which is doubled by the tragically impressive turns of history that the 2000s faced. Seeing as, further in the same article, they support the idea that "history is moving beyond its much proclaimed end." (5), the interpretation of history surpassing its own end is contradictory to seeing history moving on without purpose. History for metamodernists is both continuous and catastrophic. Although the concept of history refers usually to the past and to what can be discovered by the return to it, metamodernism places under the umbrella term of history the events that have not yet been made part of it, like the future or the present.

1.2. Defining metamodernism and the contemporary

Apart from the article discussed in the previous section, which is a mere thesis statement in comparison to what Vermeulen and van den Akker tried to formulate seven years later, their arguments that mark the foundations for the metamodern theory are developed further in the opening chapter of the 2017 collective volume. They argue that crisis of ideology is so strong and so deeply entrenched in the universal consciousness that it turns into a philosophical weapon. In this context, metamodernism tries to seem like a natural transition to the philosophy following postmodernism, making the contemporary era understandable for the reader, even though it is characterised by the authors themselves as a paradigm that "moves for the sake of moving" (5) This movement is generated by the need of movement itself and not determined by a specific need for a certain philosophical theory. Society's highly dynamic nature makes the people in it searching for a way in which they can make sense of reality. This social unrest is caused by the vast informational turmoil which, as important as it is in the process of human evolution, creates confusion in identity, as people tend to position themselves in a more relative position to the surrounding reality.

For an ampler theoretical context, in order to understand the metamodernist strategy of oscillating between modernism and postmodernism, there needs to be a cleared delimitation between the two paradigms. According to Professor Stephen Kern in his critical overview, entitled *The Modernist Novel* (2011), modernism is defined as the "epistemological uncertainty (and) artistry that embraced pluralism" (229-230). This uncertainty is depicted in modernist works by a subjective narrator that does not acknowledge the full implications of reality, unlike Victorian realist narratives.

This polyphony and multiplicity of voices – supported by the modernist aesthetic and the discourse of constant progress and knowingness perpetuated by writers such as Woolf, Joyce and Lawrence – are relevant for the fragmentarity of human experience. In modernist fiction, the characters and the narrator – fictional entities which mostly coincide in modernism, as the first person narrator is a preferred literary technique of the modernist novel – are not fully aware of the reality that surrounds them. This exact uncertainty and fragmentation of experience is what causes the rise of the modernist affect, because only through this affect, through this the interiorised processing of emotions in the consciousness is the character able to understand reality and make sense of the world. Kern also theorises that although "modernists were acutely aware of the limits of language, they coupled such insight with broad recognition of its creative and generative power." (124) For modernists, the use of language is crucial to the understanding of the world because they believe that language offers access to a new universe and also constitutes an instrument of shaping reality. In novels such as Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) or Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), the function of language is to anticipate reality and to offer a mode of response to the world that, when deconstructed and analysed, provides meaning to an otherwise ambiguous and uncertain storytelling. The modernist model of a present dominated by affect is what inspired metamodernists like Vermeulen and van den Akker to shape their theory in terms of presentness and producing a language of representing the contemporary world, just like the modernist language and focus on the present shaped the way in which the readers of the early twentieth century responded to the world.

Regarding postmodernism, literary critics such as Linda Hutcheon and Brian McHale theorised a new emerging aesthetic following modernism, a response to the world that is adapted towards the new capitalist regime and the rising liberalist political tableau of the second half of the twentieth century and the modalities in which this aesthetic fits in the context of writing fiction. Hutcheon argues in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1998) that postmodernist parody "uses its historical memory, its aesthetic introversion, to signal that this kind of self-reflexive discourse is always inextricably bound to social discourse." (35) Parody is used as a device of subversion tied to the societal background of the novel, using traditional genres in order to invalidate their own artificiality and create a pastiche. The use of parody in the postmodernist fiction can be linked to the ironical stance of this literary mode of interpretation, because irony is integrated in postmodernism with the role of critique towards traditional literary practices. Irony also can be considered a commentary on fragmentarity and on the discontinuity in terms of the postmodernist world. Another fundamental element of postmodernism is the aspect of history, which is heavily documented and researched through fiction. McHale argues in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) historicity in the case of postmodernism in relation to the name of this theoretical and ideological response to the world by the fact that "the presence of the prefix *post* in literary nomenclature (...) merely signals the inevitable *historicity* of all literary phenomena." (5) McHale suggests that fiction reached its full authentic potential leading to postmodernism and there are no original stories to write. This is why postmodernist authors turn towards the reinterpretation of the past, because only through this regression in timeline is literature able to become original and

closer to authenticity. Authors such as Barnes, Rushdie and Amis used this technique in their novels in order to further augment the fact that history is a continuous stream of authentic stories that wait to be told, the only struggle being finding the modality in which these unrecorded fictional stories to be transgressed and perpetuated. Metamodernists, although trying to depart from these postmodernist literary practises, integrate some of the most important aspects into their own theory because they can still be made relevant in a contemporary context.

To a superficial eye, metamodernism is supposed to include an act of both critique and acceptance towards postmodernism, leaving the previously mentioned modernism aside. It is not entirely the case, because modernist qualities have heavily influenced the contemporary mind, making it long for the ambiguity and consciousness that seem to have been lost in the world of concrete irony. Many critics have argued over the course of the past decade that there is a return of modernism in terms of literary creation and mentality amongst the public. Modernism returns to the subjectively critical analysis of society, becoming inclusive in relation to the modern values which need to be perpetuated. The modernist qualities borrowed and validated by metamodernism are the importance of language and the affect that apparently return in this century.

Language in discourse is used by metamodernists to elevate affect and the inner self, and to reinvent the self and identity. Language becomes itself a vision of the world and an interpretative dimension of society and reality due to its dynamism because it is a critical and lively reflection of the way the reader lives in this world. This elevation is not achieved through the modernist fragmentarity, and neither through a detached and disinterested postmodernist pastiche, but through a discourse that resembles realism and a type of mimesis that rejects the Victorian tradition. This is a realism that makes it possible for the reader to excavate what the modernist psyche and the postmodernist ontology and possibilities wanted to showcase. The mimesis that gives the contemporary reader the impression of a realist aesthetic is dominated by affect. The metamodern narrative is subjected to the ever-returning solidified act of reflection on the self that the modernists supported. Mimesis comes back as a new mode of interpreting identity. In order to satisfy the reader's necessity to deliberately adhere to a model of behavioural and philosophical orientation that fits the age where there are no models anymore, metamodernism aims to create a new aesthetic of arbitrarity. The censorship of individuality is hardened and more totalitarian than in the past century, and this arbitrarity is the aesthetic of the self that metamodernism tries to support.

The authors even define the theory as being the invention of the language that would allow the contemporaries to sync with the age that they have been placed in and with the plagued social context that they have been subjected to. According to Vermeulen and van den Akker:

> what is needed is a new language to put into words this altogether weirder reality and its still stranger cultural landscape. This book is an attempt to create such a language, or at least series of linked dialects, to come to an understanding of our current historical moment, a language that allows us to come to terms with the gap between what we thought we knew and the things we experience in our daily lives. For us, this language is metamodernism. (3)

The dialectical form of this new metamodern language is supposed to induce the idea of a dialogic expression and transition of ideas and sentiments between the vernacular and the conceptual. Our present day is a "historical moment" because it registers as a string of moments rooted in *presentness* that culminate in another momentum, and only narrative is able to fully encapsulate such a burdensome weight that the contemporary crisis of identity and ideology brings along. The gaps between knowledge and experience can only be filled with discourse, which is supposed to exist in a context which allows for a new ideological language to develop. Language for metamodernists is a tool of reconstruction of the world. It can only be understood as a modality of creating form from discourse itself, but this form is closer to what the realist form of the novel proposed because the world is supposedly too disturbed to be able to be comprehended by the complexity of the postmodernist form any longer. A mimetic discourse makes the reader aware of the disturbances of reality because it investigates the issues of the contemporary world in the narrative, while reflecting on the ambiguity and uncertainty of the future. Like in the case of modernism, Vermeulen and van den Akker argue that the metamodern language is the only instrument that represents a finite infinite of possibilities that organises identity in a way that makes it possible for the contemporary to relate to it. Metamodernism is a language which provides a means of grasping the complexity of contemporary identity and which aims to provide a transparent understanding of history. History is integrated into the present without a link between assumed, pre-existent knowledge of the world, and direct experience with the world. The political cannot impose any longer the means through which the individual relates to the world, because the subject wants to act on its own agency in relation to the universe.

Mary Holland attempts to define metamodernism as a:

> modernism that is crucially self-aware, literature that is aware of being literature operating in a modernist vein, through postmodernist literary techniques turned towards modernist goals: metamodernism. (2013, 201)

This definition of metamodernism points to another similar standpoint to Vermeulen's and van den Akker's, which is that the postmodernist self-awareness is engaged in a modernist-conscious narrative. The reader of the twenty-first century is not fully aware of the experiences that they get and how they relate to the world. There are no parameters that can be used in order to measure the level of complexity and serious engagement with the present that the reader needs in order to get accustomed to the immediate reality. Vermeulen suggests in his essay entitled "The New 'Depthiness'" (2015) that the contemporary reader navigates the intricacies of the contemporary age in the same way in which the snorkeler "imagines depth whilst never experiencing it'. (41) This is the other plague of the contemporary man, because direct experience is so mediated by digitalisation, technology, superficiality and artificiality that authenticity is more difficult to achieve than ever.

Metamodernism attributes to itself this *trademark*, meaning that it has an inherent quality of self-validation, even though the validation of a paradigm comes from its applicability and the means

through which society as a whole identifies with the said trend. Readers need to individually determine and formulate their opinion and interpretation of their contemporary reality and to create themselves a chronology that would fit the universal consciousness of the 2000s

1.3. Metamodern historicity, affect and postirony

Historicity is the combination between history and authenticity. The purpose of history hand in hand with narrative and fiction offer meaning through written discourse, but if this discourse is void of historicity and is not rooted into a politically rich present it will not be able to emulate the source for novelty and renewal. Politics constitutes an important factor in our identity and conscience, leading to the perpetuation of certain cultural values. The prospect of historicity presupposes both the deconstruction of previous narratives that predetermined beliefs, as well as training an individual capable, through their own agency, of intuiting the truth value of a written discourse. The historical narrative is only a starting point, and historicity provides for discursive analysis and reinterpretation in current terms, constantly questioning universal truths. If in the past, a cosmocentrical view prevails, at present, the status of the individual is changed. The postmodern universe, including the metamodern, is anthropocentric and places the human condition on a pedestal. History is a subject where metamodernists seem to quarrel over feature-checking and validity with their predecessors. There are two opposing – but somewhat complementary – standpoints on historicity, the first being whether history can continue or not after the end of Western capitalism as a fundamental key to the organisation of the world. The continuation is immediately questioned and followed by the ending problem of whether history can be assigned true and authentic value. Metamodernists like Vermeulen and van den Akker agree that some points made by postmodernists are relevant in order to explain temporality and the limits that ideology and spatial world politics are legitimate and can aid the interpretation of the world in its current timeline.

Metamodernism tries to become what postmodernism was for that which preceded it, because postmodernism used irony and pastiche to try to subvert the tropes of realism and modernism while employing their tactics of expression and narrative. Metamodernism promotes pastiche and uses it to validate its ideology, but in a way that fits its agenda, which is to disengage from the neoliberal political belief that history ended. This belief that there is a continuation of the qualitative feature of history beyond what Fredric Jameson called "Fukuyama's end of history" (90) is dubbed by Vermeulen and van den Akker in the collective volume as the "bend of history" (2).

This bend represents that which shapes the contemporary discourse and formulates it in relation to the direct experience of history and to what counts as historical contexts in this century. This is an aspect contrary to the postmodernist constant reinterpretation of history, because metamodernists are not only interested in reinterpreting the past, but also the contexts of the present that can be considered to make up for historical times and situations in the future that seems more uncertain than ever. According to the authors, this previously discussed "bend of history" represents the:

> new metamodern regime of historicity that has, as a defining trait, that its present opens onto – in an attempt to bring within its fold – pasts possibilities and possible futures (defined as being with or among residual and emergent structures of feeling) (...) the metamoderns open a back door while walking through a front door as if re-enacting an M.C. Escher drawing. (van den Akker 2017, 22)

History returns for the metamodern, and that is the solution to the crisis of discourse and ideology that haunts the contemporary. The cultural phenomena of this century have to be mapped and conceptualized in order to be understood and integrated in discourse, because history determines a metamodernist narrative that manages to tie the present to the future and to make it *its* history. The exclusion of postmodernism in this case is erroneous because postmodernism reinterpreted history to grasp the complexity of the world.

At the other less objective pole of the metamodern ideology, there is affect. Vermeulen and van den Akker described this concept, in the context of the emergence of the new theory, as "structure of feeling" (4) This "structure of feeling" suggests that the emotion of the reader, following the interaction with the literary material, is a structurally independent formation that resuscitates the awareness of the text, because the reader is directly exposed to the psychology of the text itself. Moreover, the "structure of feeling" can be understood by relating it to another term, *mapping*. Mapping affect for metamodernism tries to provide an ideological objective framework that organises and explains the order of the world today. Emotions have to be organised in order to access validity and meaning after the turn of the millennium, making sense of the world through affect. However, the feeling of the metamodern, although inspired by the modernist sentiment, tries to escape its own trap of clustering the individual's inner accordance with itself and with the outside world and does not know whether it will succeed or not. The reason for this possible failure is that the twenty-first century society is subjected to a much faster change. The reader is thus left perplexed by their own lag in syncing with their contemporary timeline. Modernist fragmentarity of knowledge and of the self is reverted here into an attempt at rebuilding identity and creating a link between the pieces that are lost amidst the chaos of the world.

The metamodern affect is formulated as a modality that transgresses theory and is interpreted through the subjectivity that modernism promoted. Allison Gibbons argues in the collective volume on metamodernism that "identity is also acknowledged as a social category that is constructed by subjects and by larger structures of social power." (120) This involves the existence of the perception of the individual as subject again, as centre to the narrative and as a solution to the problems of the contemporary. Metamodernists support the modernists' opinion that individuality is the key that offers the reader access to the better comprehension of history and the time that stacks the cards against him. The navigation of identity represents the salvation of the world. Gibbons uses the word *subject* to show the metamodern reconstructionist approach to narrative: "in a crisis-ridden world, subjects are once more driven by a desire for attachment to others and to their surroundings" (130).

The aspect of the "in-betweeness" (10), of the "metaxy" (152), that Vermeulen and van den Akker attribute to the prefix *meta* and is interpreted in relation to the word *meta*modernism is

relevant for the way in which "readers want to be told how they should feel about an event – ethically, socially, politically – in place of authentically feeling." (Gibbons 2017, 117) One of the greatest problems that postmodernism formulated was the ethical turn, which was relevant for the rapidly changing world of that time. Now, the contemporary reader faces the same ethical problem. This ethical and interpretative conundrum differentiates itself from the postmodernist ethical turn because it is oriented towards the reader. This self-oriented paradigm of interpretation negotiates its status as a metamodernist conundrum only through identity and the manipulation of how the self is perceived. Metamodernism describes how the contemporary self is engulfed by affect, because it needs to be subjected to emotion and raw feeling in order to surpass the distanced and ironic style of postmodernism in the present-day society.

By surpassing the ironic postmodernist aesthetic of responding to reality, the metamodernist paradigm uses another mechanism that constitutes a source for satirical subversion of traditional genres and conventions. This new theoretical device of processing and producing knowledge of the world is more rooted into the technologically advanced world of media and communications of the contemporary: *postirony*. The precursor to the postironic movement is David Foster Wallace, an American writer and essayist who theorised postirony in two of his critical pieces: "Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young" (1988) and "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction" (1993). In these two critical works, Wallace argues that "the pop informs our generation's ways of experiencing and reading the world, so too will it naturally affect our artistic values and expectations." (1988, 5) worrying that the young authors of fiction would perpetuate a not-so-applicable detached postmodernist irony in a literary context which needs closeness and sincerity in order to engage truthfully with the world. He also discusses the influence of television and pop culture on American fiction and how the postmodernist response to the world becomes outdated, anticipating a new literary movement in fiction taking its place. He argues for an imminent return of sincerity in fiction, a sincerity which can be ironic in order to make itself available and accessible for the grand public. Wallace's postirony is a device which allows for both scepticism and emotional bonding to mix and form a post-postmodernist literary technique that applies to the tumultuous contemporary world. Wallace's perspective on postirony is perpetuated and developed by Vermeulen and van den Akker in metamodernism and the contemporary cultural and political context.

According to Gibbons, the need for closeness with the historical context of the present and with the inner psychological state and take on it can only be achieved through the new metamodernist postirony. Postirony is the process that allows the reader to achieve the seemingly impossible capacity to comprehend the context of contemporary history and presentness and to create a reconstruction of the world, a puzzle that is put together using the fragments that modernism and postmodernism left behind. Gibbons proposes as a definition of affect that it is the

> ability to process intensities so that we can articulate meaningful emotional reactions or cognitive responses to today's social situation in which another affective modality has substituted yesterday's fragmented and fragmenting euphoria. (86)

The euphoric fragmentation of modernism and postmodernism was necessary for a time in which continuity had no sense for the world, and reality itself was fragmentary and illusory, misleading and cold towards the individual. Postirony connects the continuously growing affect of the twenty-first century and historicity in the narrative, allowing for an interpretation that conveys all the answers. Postirony's ideological intention is to manage to enunciate and bring a solution to the rising issues that condemn the contemporary reader to being the prisoner of a society that does not allow the reader to express his incertitude towards the chaotic system that the world of technology brought about. By conversing in the terms of affective postirony, the reader is able, through narrative, to understand reality.

As a partial conclusion, the metamodernist ideology, in theory, attempts to grant humanity the wish of a concrete and immediate instrument of making sense of the world. Unless the world does not define its own specific necessity, the insertion of ideology becomes totalitarian, aspect which has been discussed extensively by the authors in their manifesto. Metamodernism is thus argued to be a "wishful attempt to think, feel and perceive historically, spatially and corporeally." (Vermeulen 2017, 149)

2. Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life*: a case study on applied metamodernism

When Kate Atkinson published her novel, *Life After Life*, in 2013, the metamodern collective manifesto was not yet released. The only conceptualisation of this theory was the article published in 2010 by Vermeulen and van den Akker, which was not as extensive as the 2017 volume. Nevertheless, the context of the 2010s allows for this interpretation of Atkinson's novel, surpassing the constraints of postmodernism because the collective volume proposes the characteristics of the literature of the 2000s. Even though many critics consider Atkinson's novel to be a late manifestation of the postmodernist aesthetic, there are considerable facets of the novel that illustrates the metamodernist aesthetic as well.

One of the most visible indicators of this metamodernist aesthetic is the postironic coming-of-age genre. Both of Atkinson's novels – *Life After Life* (2013) and its companion piece *A God in Ruins* (2015) – engage in this type of narrative, because they follow a structurally complex and socio-historically rich story of Ursula, who is reborn repeatedly throughout the novel. For the metamodern Bildungsroman, the postironic element is quintessential, showcasing how the progression of the character through society and life is written using the mimetic element. The postmodernist constant reinterpretation of a history that is very much relevant for the third millennium is outperformed by the contemporary necessity of feeling and of emotional complexity. The postironic realism that the metamodernists propose is subjected to affect, and as a direct consequence, it becomes the parameter with which the complexity of life is portrayed in the twenty-first century literary discourse. Atkinson's novel starts in 1910, with the Birth of the protagonist, Ursula Todd, and follows the life of the main character and her experiences until the end of the twentieth century, but the timeline always returns to 1910 every time Ursula Todd dies. This type of realistic engagement with style, by

placing the individual once again at the beginning of another century in the central position of the novel and then breaking the temporal development of the narrative to return to the same beginning, is contrasted by its preclusion of traditional realism, because there is an open ending. According to Lee Konstantinou:

> the most popular postironic mode is the postironic Bildungsroman. (...) They ostentatiously revive historical forms of realism (and other outmoded genres) to show that these conventions retain their emotional, intellectual and representational power. Such novels are a type of Bildungsroman because they often dramatise the development of central characters from a naïve origin through a phase of irony en route to a final postironic condition. (96)

Kate Atkinson's novel is from this perspective metamodern due to its quality of always changing its course and outcome throughout the text, just like the existence of the contemporary is constantly and prematurely challenged by the rapidly-paced social changes of the world. The Bildungsroman as genre is recycled as a mode of understanding experience and it is heavily subjected to the real struggles and issues that threaten the contemporary reader, thus resembling realism. With each revival, the protagonist is faced with an arbitrary corporeal direct contact with society, in which her choices predetermine an outcome that is acknowledged already: imminent death. Regardless of how much time she wins by deflecting a situation that would lead to a premature death, the temporary quality and the fragility of human life constitute matters of a universal conscious effort that characterises the metamodernist understanding of the world and construction of narrative. By employing techniques that have been dubbed outdated by modernism and postmodernism, Atkinson brings back chronology and order in the narrative, an organisation of discourse that implements structure in a society that has lost its own, only to subvert it immediately. This means that for her, the solution to the chaotic contemporary world is literature and writing, which offers the postmodernist quality to the novel. The twentieth century French critics of the literary movement that shared characteristics with postmodernism in France and in the Francophone countries is called *le Nouveau Roman*. The theorists of the *le Nouveau Roman* (translated into "the New Novel") literary movement argued that this convention of recycling of traditional genres perpetuates the fact that literature is the salvation from the issues of reality considered. According to Denis Labouret, the aesthetic of the *le Nouveau Roman* is a polarizing movement and that it is "radically questioning literature as institution"[1] (2018, 178). This practice transgressed into the next contemporary French literary movement, called *l'Extrême Contemporain* (translated into "the Extreme Contemporary"). Regarding the new French contemporary orientation in terms of genre and aesthetic, Denis Labouret argues this recycling of genres in *Histoire de la littérature française des XXe et XXIe siècles* (2018) by pointing out that:

> these 'returns' are not regressions, and the history of literature is not cyclic. The contemporary authors integrate the critical spirit and the playful meaning of the previous decades. (235-236)[2]

This transgression into the latter movement is important because it shows that the metamodern initiative of inspiration from what comes before is not singular and is a sentiment that developed in other cultures and literatures as well, metamodernism trying to be for Anglophone literary theory what *the Extreme Contemporary* is for Francophone literary theory. This seems to be the case for Atkinson's novel, as well, adopting a new emerging theory and mode of thinking and writing literature which can be considered as a new apparatus of interpretation: the revival of the genres and of tradition is connected to the constant rebirth of Ursula. Thus, by embracing the literary inheritance of the nineteenth century and by combining it with the literary ideologies that dominated the twentieth century, Kate Atkinson's *Life After Life* is a "stepping stone toward a full appreciation of the power of tradition." (Gibbons 2017, 97)

Another literary strategy recycled by Atkinson that can be considered a metamodernist technique of re-adapting the history of literature to a discourse of presentness is the use of the archetype as a mythopoetic strategy. From this perspective, it can be argued that one of her direct sources of inspiration was D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1914), because there are many similarities between the way both Atkinson and Lawrence employed the genealogy of interconnected history and mythopoetic strategies as devices for their novels. In order to understand the contemporary world, Atkinson creates Ursula Todd in order to formulate the myth of the contemporary woman, an epitome of the twenty-first century individuality and self, just as Lawrence centres Ursula Brangwen as the myth of the modern woman, almost one hundred years apart. According to Caroline Edwards, the narrative becomes contemporary because it contains "transtemporal, transmedial and transnational patterns of connection experienced in the twenty-first-century, in which time and space are felt as increasingly compressed, accelerated and abstracted." (2019, 6) The narrative always returns to the year 1910, which is a year in which modernism was rising to the top of the emerging trends of the century. Ursula Todd is born at the end of the season associated with death to which she always returns, which is another metaphor for the revival of mythology. This can be interpreted as a way in which Atkinson pays tribute to Lawrence and continues his creation of myths by making Ursula Todd a prototype of the contemporary, just like D.H. Lawrence made Ursula Brangwen the prototype of the modern woman.

2.1. Memory and historicity

The World Wars have been the most discussed topics in the history of world literature after the 1900s, and it is because they portray moments in the history of Europe when the world was at crossroads and when the masses were objected to the destructive forces of totalitarianism and war. Like many other contemporary writers – such as Martin Amis, Anthony Doerr and Kristin Hannah – Kate Atkinson offers a new perspective on the wars, starting with the first pages of the novel, when Ursula shoots Hitler in the chest and dies herself, too, shot by his agents and security guards. Atkinson integrated this scene at the beginning of the novel, although it reappears in the second half of the novel as well, for two reasons. The first reason is that she knows a shocking scene will attract the

reader, using a *click bait*-like technique that the contemporary reader is so accustomed to through the media. The second reason is because she announces a fragmentarity that will be reconstructed in the narrative later on, underlining a new mode of writing that will cover the history of the century and which will solidify the course of Ursula's development as a character. The novel's alternative history is articulated by the need of multiplicity and oscillation because in the twenty-first century the narrative needs to be challenged and because the reader, through these two above mentioned strategies, is supposed to search for authenticity in the novel, to explore divergent timelines and futures that would otherwise be ambiguous.

The metamodern feature of Atkinson's novel stems from this fusion between the modernist fragmentarity, postmodernist research and reinvestigation of the past and the contemporary forms and allusions to media and the way in which all of these external factors affect the reader and the world. Through these devices, Atkinson manages to excavate a past that is no longer available through direct experience but whose outcome shaped the century she lives in, while finding a way of bringing forth the imminent coagulation of technology and its effects on the mind and on the universal perception of presentness. Historicity comes from perception, where there can be no objectivity, because truth, covered in a reconstructionist postironic layer of engaged attempts at understanding the world, lies in the individual and is subjected to the plagues of the contemporary.

Atkinson combines these techniques with Marianne Hirsch's concept of *postmemory*, which refers to the memory of an event transmitted to the "generation after" that had no direct experience with the event itself, but the event is so rooted into the history of the world that it becomes a cultural inheritance which develops the reconstruction of identity of these descendants of trauma. Their existence is "dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousnesses, (the authors) risk having one's own life stories displaced" (2008, 5). For the concept of postmemory to make sense in the context of *Life After Life*, there has to be a relationship between the author and the history that she tries to investigate. Seeing as Kate Atkinson was not born at the time of the World Wars, she is part of the "generation after" and that is why this novel can be considered postmemorialistic. In her novel, besides the thorough research of the time of the wars, there is a certain necessity of dissipating the trauma that marked the reality that immediately followed the wars. Being born at the time right after World War II, the when the world was still plagued by totalitarianism – as Europe had not yet recovered from the Nazi sentiment and was at the time facing the threat of communism – the consciousness of her generation was plagued, as well, but by the trauma that was transmitted to them through the collective sentiment. In the case of the novel, postmemory is both corporeal and ideological because Atkinson wants to dissipate it using affect. Postmodernists had access to available sources of direct experience with the war, whereas Atkinson's writing is solely based on research and on the collective consciousness that carried the effects of the war all the way to the contemporary age. Her novel is considered metamodern because she does not only reinterpret the past, but she researches it thoroughly, as at the end of the edition used for the writing of this paper there is an impressive bibliography that Atkinson read before writing this novel.

This showcases again that there has been a mutation in approaching writing narratives of the past, which is that direct experience with history is exchanged with the availability of the sources that the internet and the media provided its readership with. What is authentic about this novel is the engagement with an event that is out of touch but has been corporalised, interiorised and made real through a discourse that validated what is considered otherwise distant and impossible to identify with.

> The prevalence of historicity and memory in contemporary criticism in recent years has led to a turn to the past; meanwhile, the future has attracted less attention, being understood only as potentiality of the present, as I will explore later. However, Atkinson's *Life After Life* stresses the drive towards the future and the inherent connections between past and future as another way of memorialising the past. (Arias 2015, 125)

For Ursula, history, and particularly her history, is temporary but can be made new again through revival. The protagonist's consciousness is unaware of her unconscious and repetitive timeline and of her possibilities of development in a society and world dominated by uncertainty, but her unconscious is and transmits signals through the body. This discourse of uncertainty makes it possible for Atkinson to exploit overly debated topics in a contemporary manner and through a contemporary character and prototype that tries to navigate the world through the lens of the discourse she is part of: "Ursula still harboured the feeling that some of her future was also behind her but she had learned not to voice such things." (Atkinson 2013, 108) Her story is authentic because it becomes an unrecorded history of progression and evolution, a prototype of metamodernist singularity due to its quality of parallelism between the history of the world and the history of the self.

Atkinson's novel is a novel of connectedness, where history plays the role of the link between timelines. The narrative is formed of gaps that need to be filled in order to counter-balance history's lack of certainty. The contemporary society is void of meaning, which is why the novel has to fill that void, because it is the only instrument left to humanity that can offer a consolation to the status of undeniable worry about the imminent dangers and threats of the world. According to Rosario Arias:

> Arguably, Atkinson succeeds in including "futureness" in *Life After Life*, and in so doing, she proposes a future-oriented approach to historicity. In fact, she looks back to the past by proposing alternative futures, in which repressed events are unlocked, thus connecting past, present and future, and activating change. (127)

Historicity in the novel is attained by Atkinson's unconventional take on the World Wars and on the twentieth century, the events of the narrative having no finality because they are always cancelled by the next narrative. This changing nature of narrative can be considered a metamodernist

technique, because it allows for many types of discourses to manifest themselves through the process of writing and to progress in the text just like it progressed throughout history.

The historical aspect of the novel is outlined in another two sections and scenes of the novel that make sense for the metamodern paradigm, which this paper will cover, because they add into the contemporary thinking by the displacement of timeline: thinking the contemporary in modernity. The first relevant scene is when Ursula Todd's first husband, Derek tries to write an official history textbook. Derek is an abusive husband and a scholar at a university and a researcher of history. The episode where he cannot write an official history textbook is important because it is metatextual for it suggests that authentic history is not recordable and it can be subjected to political bias, whereas individual histories are authentic because it is through these singular consciousnesses that the reader is able to access a direct experience with the world. Even though subjectivity is itself a sort of bias, it is not considered one because it is not written on paper, not documented or made official, it is arbitrary. Also, Atkinson through the character of Derek creates a sort of dialectic between fiction and reality by placing the political in relation to the textual: Derek is a patriarchal and violently traditional, which is a reality from both the perspectives of the political world – the twentieth century was threatened by male tyrants and totalitarian rulers like Hitler and Stalin – and the social world, because Ursula was also through this narrative made the prototype of the abused and neglected wife. Atkinson saves Ursula with a fictional death and revival whereas no women had this opportunity, which makes the novel metamodern precisely through this awareness that fiction is privileged and, just like life itself, unjust to some. The second relevant episode of the novel is when, almost at the end, Nigel, Pamela's eldest son, tells Ursula that: "History is all about 'what ifs'" (Atkinson 2013, 253) and summarises the novel's main principle, because the novel itself is a narrative of *what ifs* and of arbitrarity rather than fragmentarity.

2.2. Affect and corporeality

Andre Furlani wrote in 2002 that metamodernist history "is not subordinate to myth but to a web of narratives scored not, as in myth, upon collective consciousness but upon the individual body" (713-714). So, the body in the twenty-first century discourse is one of the only means through which the contemporary can access a direct experience and contact with the society that they live in. This contemporary opinion on the body was borrowed by Vermeulen and van den Akker when formulating metamodernism because only by reinforcing "the corporeality of bodies, of the self in the body and in connection with others" (Gibbons 2017, 129) is the contemporary able to make sense of the world and to actively engage in direct experience with history and with society. The body is individual for metamodernism whereas consciousness is not, because the generational trauma transmitted through post-memory from the previous century determines a distance between narrative and interiority, leaving way for physicality to become the means through which the "structure of feeling" can manifest itself. Consequentially, the discourse of fiction marks the anticipated return of modernist corporeality, making it the means through which fiction is inspired from reality.

The metamodern affect manifests itself in *Life After Life* via the body because Atkinson employs this strategy to impose an imperative of action on the readers of the novel. Aside from the transnational and transtemporal elements – that constitute reminiscences of the postmodernist novel of globalisation – the novel is what Caroline Edwards called a *networked novel* (2019, 7). According to Edwards, the networked novel is a twenty-first narrative of interconnectedness between different spaces and timelines across history and the globe, which culminate into a cluster of narratives that form a new mode of interpretation of the globalised world. These new aesthetical dimensions of the networked novel can "engage with the idea of transmigration" (2019, 7). "Transmigration" is defined as the realistically impossible movement of characters across space and time, such as Virginia Woolf's biographical work *Orlando* (1928) – where the protagonist lives for 300 years – or David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) – where the six concentrically structured timelines create a history of the text parallel to the history of the world. In the case of Atkinson's novel, there are no concomitant distinct timelines, but a multiplicity of variations of the same timeline of a narrative which contains many smaller narratives, spanned over many spaces. This sort of mapping suggests an ambiguity and uncertainty in the outcome of the novel, but creates anticipation and the feeling that there are numerous alternatives to a pre-determined timeline. The aesthetic of the networked novel can be considered as a pillar for the way in which the metamodernist apparatus makes sense for *Life After Life* because, through the novel, Atkinson also creates "distinctly new temporal engagements that move us beyond modernist and postmodernist timeframes." (Edwards 2019, 6) This oscillation also favours the metamodernist response to literature, because it develops on the idea of continuity and constant progress in terms of understanding time and creating genres that both fit and have the ability to encapsulate the complexity of the world.

In Atkinson's novel, the aspect of corporeality provides the novel its interconnected status, the body being a network in itself. It is the instrument of change and connection, and it is one of the few instruments through which interconnectedness and intraconnectedness can be realised, because it established links and relations between both the individual and the world and the individual with himself. A repetitive sequence that suggests the importance of the body in the novel is any gesture related to the hand, because these gestures are used in reality to establish connections and to mediate between people, like the shaking of the hand. One of the suggestive scenes for the importance of the body in the novel is when Ursula goes to London to have an abortion at Belgravia. The abortion turns out to be a very complicated and painful procedure, after which the protagonist needs to be hospitalised. In the hospital, where she thinks she will die, her father, Hugh, comes and holds her hand and helps her recover. In a later part of the same chapter, before being killed by Derek in a moment of fury and jealousy, Teddy Todd, her brother, holds her hand. This is a moment when she recalls her corporeal feeling and assimilates it to the moment when she was hospitalised and felt "very cold and tired. She remembered feeling this way in the hospital, after Belgravia. Hugh had been there, he had held on to her hand and kept her in this life." (Atkinson 2013, 154) This line is relevant for

the metamodern affect, because it is a scene which encapsulates raw and unmediated affect. Hugh is not only grasping Ursula's hand after she has been a victim of abuse and thus having her body and agency rejected for her. Hugh is holding on to something much greater than the body, which is time itself, but a time that is lost and that is so valuable in the twenty-first century. According to Peter Boxall, the understanding of time in the contemporary context of the novel is important because it allows the reader to make sense of a timeline that is unusual for the existing conventions. This contemporary "shifted temporality" is defined as a fluid component of fiction which fluctuates between a movement that is too rapid and one that is too slow. This fluctuation of time is suggestive for the metamodernist perception of its passing in the contemporary context, because it does not allow the reader to assimilate time's own limits, being left with piecing together a tableau of fractures and gaps. The twenty-first century fiction is characterised by a "time that passes in a way that we cannot quite capture, that eludes our narrative grasp" (Boxall, 2013, 9) Boxall's remark is relevant for the timeline of Atkinson's novel in a metamodernist dimension, because the author does not announce her programmatic time representation and the reader is expected to catch up with the displacement of the spatial and temporal frame of the novel.

By supporting his daughter, Hugh also accedes to a prototype of the contemporary, because, due to his being unaware of Ursula's repetitive rebirths, he is simply a supportive father in a time when things like abortions were taboo – which is a rejection of patriarchal domination, because her father provides her with agency and validation to stand up to her rapist, Howie, in the next timeline. Hugh is a father who tries to stretch time and to reach out to Ursula for healing her in a situation of crisis through hand touch, even though he is aware that he can only be a witness to suffering and to the constant challenge of history. This awareness of lack of power against a history that will move on regardless of what it brings about combined with the intention of meaningful connection with the self and the other is what makes this narrative metamodern.

Ursula's life can be considered an alternative manifestation of *postmemory* because she is unaware that she has already experienced history, but her body is the only source that doubles as intuition and that is sensitive of her repetitive timeline. The metamodernist quality of this manifestation of corporeality comes from the fact that her temporalities are so complex and overlapped with each other that the body is the only compass which allows her to navigate the world and her identity amidst the chaos of the British society afflicted by wars. Her body is intuitive because it somatises every decision from her past life that lead to a negative experience with the world that eventually directed her to death. Ursula's "unique form of corporeal memory" (Domínguez García, 4) withstands history and connects her to the contemporary instinct of deflecting crisis and impending doom. In the episode after she pushes Bridget, her maid, down the stairs, she realises that even though her action can be dubbed diabolical or even cruel, a "wicked thing" (70), it was the instinct of the body that made her do it, as she let herself be driven by her own corporeal consciousness.

> Ursula crept along the carpet runner. Took a quiet breath and then, both hands out in front of her, as if trying to stop a train, she threw herself at the small of Bridget's back. Bridget whipped her head

> round, mouth and eyes wide in horror at the sight of Ursula. Bridget went flying, toppling down the stairs in a great flurry of arms and legs. Ursula only just managed to stop herself from following in her wake. (...) Bridget might have died and she would have been a murderer now. All she knew was that she *had* to do it. The great sense of dread had come over her and she had to do it. (Atkinson 2013, 70)

This constant reliance on the corporeal suggests that her identity is no longer just enclosed in her consciousness, because even though subjectivity returns in the third millennium to offer a solution to the crisis of ideology that the world finds itself in, it cannot formulate a stable literary aesthetic without something material that would make it belong to the contemporary era. It is interdependent and thoroughly implanted in her body, in the physicality that allowed her to operate her place and status in a world of uncertainty. This instinct is suggested by Atkinson in the narrative, as well, but it is a feeling, an affect which cannot be encapsulated in words. Even though the highly experimental Woolfian or Joycean stream of consciousness is no longer a strategy of portraying the mind and the self, it heavily influenced Atkinson's discourse of self. The way she engages in the description of interiority is unique, reorganising the discourse mimetically in order to make sense to the reader who rejects instability and disorder because these are the only things that the world seems to be able to provide.

Ursula's personal idenity is linked with the identity of the world in the twentieth century, and the novel is not only a representation of the European society in the age of the wars and afterwards, but a recording of a parallelism between the concrete, factual and sometimes misleading history of the world and the historicity that is achieved through a dicourse that is "a constant movement towards her survival, towards self-realisation, but with most of them ending in annihilation" (Norquay, 126). Atkinson's novel is metamodernist because it demystifies the rationality that textbooks and totalitarian approaches to history try to impose and implement in the world and because she replaces them with original and authentic narratives that are able to connect the world of today to the world of the past through affect and memory.

Conclusion

Metamodernism is an emerging theory that culminates in the contemporary era in its undeniable quality of presentness and by offering the reader a new paradigm through whose lenses the contemporary can make sense of the society and digitally oriented world the reader lives in. Through the research of history and reconstructing authentic discourses that manage to encapsulate the complexity of the 2000s, metamodernism is a reconfiguration of two modes of thinking and perceiving the world simultaneously: modernism and postmodernism. This emerging theory selects the postmodernist irony and transposes it into a new form, that of postirony. Metamodernism combines this postironic element with the modernist subjective consciousness and subverts it to affect, underlining the emotional awareness of society. From a literary standpoint, metamodernism proposes that the novel is a complex instrument of change. The contemporary readers have the capacity to reach full awareness only through serious research of their individuality. Kate Atkinson's

Life After Life can be considered a metamodernist novel because through these innovations in theory, it can be multifaceted. Through the historical postmemorilaistic content, heavily researched by the author and subverted to affect, which is manifested through the corporeal and the body as a physical manifestation of timeline and alternative history, the novel succumbs to presentness and to what it means to be contemporary.

Endnotes:

1. "[...] mise en question radicale de la littérature comme institution."
2. "[...] ces 'retours' ne sont pas des régressions, et l'histoire de la littérature n'est pas cyclique. Les auteurs contemporains intègrent l'esprit critique et le sens ludique des décennies qui précèdent."

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Lovecraft's Murder Mystery: Revisit Poe's Haunted House

Justine Shu-Ting Kao
Department of English, Tamkang University
No.151, Yingzhuan Rd., Tamsui Dist.,
New Taipei City 251301, Taiwan (R.O.C.)
Email: kiwitreesky@yahoo.com

Abstract:

H.P. Lovecraft admired Edgar Allen Poe as his "God of Fiction," having stumbled upon the literary works of Poe at the age of eight. To Lovecraft, Poe then served to replace Greek mythology and the Arabian Nights as his muse. Unfortunately, the degree to which his writing style and mood were thus significantly influenced by Poe is unknown, since very few of his works completed during his juvenile years remain today. Moreover, he did not admit the implicit influence of Poe until 1935. Joshi attributed Lovecraft's denial of Poe's influence to Harold Bloom's concept of the "anxiety of influence."[1] However, it is still possible to trace the impact of Poe in Lovecraft's literary works. Lovecraft's idea of cosmic decline stemmed from his early reading of Poe, adroitly applying Poe's gothic setting of terror to his own 20th-century stories. Throughout his body of work, however, Lovecraft developed a more pessimistic tone of cosmicism, with his Cthulhu Mythos and weird fiction; therein, his works stand apart from Poe's. The following is a comparison and contrast of Lovecraft's murder stories and those of Poe.

Keywords: Poe, Lovecraft, haunted house, sublime, cosmic horror

In their discussion of terror and sublimity in Poe's murder stories, Poe scholars compare and contrast Burkean and Kantian sublimity with the sublimity of Poe. As Michael Cisco (2017) remarks, Poe's sublimity is pertinent to Kantian sublime, as both concern the relation between subject and object: "the Kantian sublime is a relation of subject and object *both*. This is illustrated in the bodily sensations that Poe minutely describes in his stories" (72). Relevant to Burke's theory of the sublime, Dennis Pahl (2009) points out that Poe adapts the process of encountering those terrible things associated with "the sensory-emotional effects of language and sounds on human subjectivity" (44). In the search for knowledge, Kant's "explorer enter[s] an unknowable territory beyond the subject, the

territory of the thing in itself" (Cisco 2017, 75); similarly, Poe's inner sense is connected with the something (object) that does not exist in the mind and his "inner beyond is madness" (75). Yet, the result of Poe's sublime experience – experiencing fear, melancholy or other sensory emotions – differs from Burkean and Kantian sublimity. Poe's sublimity is "an internal one, sparked by the domestic, unheimlich return of the repressed" (McGhee 2013, 56), whereas Kantian sublimity is "a grandiose experience of the external world" (56) that "ultimately sustains and upholds the self-contained subject" (57). While Burke's sublimity comes "with the sense of self-preservation, reverence, and awe" (Pahl 2009, 44), Poe's sublimity is the gothic experience of terrible things that result in "undermining the unity of the self, in throwing the self into an irrecoverable state of instability and displacement" (44). Furthermore, Poe scholars point to two items that affect the subject's gothic experience: one is the perverse character guiding the subject towards morbidity and self-destruction, while the other source is the exterior stimuli in the environment that affect the nervous system. This perverse character exerts dominance over the mind through executing the process of dissolution and disintegration of selfhood. These exterior stimuli (strange sounds or smells) catalyze the impulse of disintegration; the subject cannot help but get involved in self-destruction, as they are (un)consciously affected by such stimuli. In Poe's stories, the will of scheming destruction and the mind being overpowered by exterior stimuli go hand in hand. In terms of sublimity, the subject in the process of experiencing terror eventually gains access to its ultimate dissolution – Poe's sublimity.

In "Morbid Conditions: Poe and the Sublimity of Disease," McGhee (2013) argues that perversity might be a positive force ushering Poe's protagonists toward sublimity: Poe's "protagonists' diseased states allow them access to a special version of sublimity" through "the experience of a terrible void" (56).[2] As the perverse personality (the imp of the perverse) of Poe's protagonists leads them to transcend "downward, through dissolution and the embrace of annihilation" (57), they might finally "journey downward" to sublime divinity as they experience "eras[ing] meaning and experienc[ing] the sublime dissolution of the most ordinary of objects" (58).

In "Sounding the Sublime," Pahl argues that certain sounds in materials within the environment might serve as external stimuli that affect its listeners, destabilizing them or even bringing about a nerve-shattering experience. Pertinent to Burke's definition of sublimity, Poe's sublimity as caused by the musicality of certain sounds is associated with the sensory experiences of terror, pain, and pleasure (Pahl 2009, 43). Poe's sublimity differs from Burke's, as the former finally ends in the disintegration of selfhood while the latter comes with a sense of self-preservation (44).

In many of Poe's murder stories where Poe romanticizes death and dissolution – his monomaniacal characters striving "to assimilate others, especially female characters within the stories,

into their dissolving realities" (McGhee 2013, 60) – perverseness is connected to the mystery of "the ultimate aesthetic truths" and "a final unification with the divine" (60). In Poe's Gothic tales, such as "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Assignation," "Berenice," and "Ligeia," the murdered female characters are gradually drawn by an unknown force into death and sublimity as they are affected by the emotions of a monomaniacal/perverse male character. The female body proceeds with its "passive wasting"; female disease is the result of being contaminated by a contagious disease that comes from the perversity of the male character (61). Madeline, Marchesa Aphrodite, Berenice, and Rowena are drawn to death: their deaths are the most poetic because, as Richard Wilbur (1959) points out, their death represents the dissolution of earthly subject-matter in the process of elevation to spiritual beauty. Yet, the perversity of Poe's male characters is not the only element that causes death; perversity goes hand in hand with the atmosphere of madness in an environment that unnerves the mind. For example, Roderick in a ghastly Gothic space, "overly sensitive to music," can hear the unusual sounds of stringed instruments which point to "the sense of psychological disorientation, to the subversion of a whole, integrated, unified self" (Pahl 2009, 47).

The theme of sublimity in Poe's crime/murder stories such as "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Cask of Amontillado" is more complicated. These stories are more complicated by not operating within a typical condition of sublimity, but rather within variations from it. The two agendas – perversity in personality and external stimuli within the environment – still affect the psychology of Poe's protagonists. In his diseased state of mental deterioration, the narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart" schemes to murder the old man with an Evil Eye, though he in fact claims to love the old man. If the Evil Eye symbolizes the "Evil I," this story is read as one of self-destruction rather than one of murdering others. In this reading, the narrator in a state of perverse madness dismembers the body of the old man (himself), enjoying pleasure and suffering; he seeks the feeling of thrill and his own uncanny dissolution via committing a horrendous self-sabotage. His perversity at the moment of dismembering the old man (himself) therefore exemplifies Poe's theory of sublimity, which as posited by McGee (2013) is "always connected to bodily experiences of ecstasy and suffering" (65). The sound of the old man's heart beating echoes "the rhythms of the narrator's obsessive and murderous impulses" (Pahl 2009, 47). The sound in the narrator's fantasy urges him to destroy himself. If the Evil Eye is not read as the "Evil I" of the narrator, the story comes across as a murder story of the other. In this reading, the narrator experiences terrible things – murdering the old man – when he loses his humanity as a result of being affected by perversity and weird sounds in his mind, but he does not eventually gain access to the ultimate dissolution of meaning (the ultimate state of void/ultimate divinity). The narrator's final confession can have two interpretations. It might be

seen as "another form of perverse pleasure" deriving from "masochistic, self-destructive impulses" (56) if the confession is interpreted as a vehicle for further severance from rationality and a deeper plunge into self-sabotage. The other interpretation is that the narrator's confession signals his will to return to humankind and/or rebuild his social relationship with humanity (Dern 2001). In his confession, he cunningly rationalizes murdering the old man as "a solemn undertaking" (58) of destroying the demonic eye. If his confession reveals his desire of reconstructing meaning via rhetorical skills, and his purpose is to attain social acceptance instead of falling into the abyss, then the story does not describe a madman thrust downward into the ultimate dissolution of divinity.

The narrator's will to murder in "The Cask of Amontillado" is as strong as that in "The Tell-Tale Heart," and it continues to be the exterior stimuli that urges the murderer to commit the crime. In "The Cask of Amontillado," Montresor selects his family catacomb as the site of Fortunato's murder, as it carries with it an atmosphere of terror that disturbs the mind. The drunk Fortunato seems unaffected by the smell of nitre and the frightening human bones, but he starts feeling afraid as he awakens from intoxication, conscious of being fettered by Montresor. The smell of nitre, however, markedly affects Montresor; the deeper Montresor and Fortunato descend into the catacomb, the more morbid Montresor becomes. The sounds of Fortunato in immurement destabilize Montresor no less than the smell of nitre and dampness in the catacomb. As Pahl (2009) points out, "uncertain sounds" in Poe's tales cause terror and destabilize the mind, and finally they evoke sublimity: "Ligeia's low voice," "William Wilson's whisper," and the "low" and "flat, monotonous sounds" in "The Raven" are examples of uncertain sounds (54). "A succession of loud and shrill screams" ("The Cask of Amontillado", 1262) from Fortunato's immurement location terrifies Montresor. "For a brief moment I hesitated – I trembled," admits Montresor. It is not a moral consciousness that interrupts Montresor, but terror that makes him hesitate. Montresor continues piling up the wall of the niche. "A low laugh" "succeeded by a sad voice" (1263) from Fortunato before his last breath might be an echo of Fortunato's deepest self, containing the sensory power of sublimity. The smell of nitre and the sounds of Fortunato evoke a disturbing sublimity, but the story does not end in ultimate divinity. Though Montresor leads Fortunato to destruction and dissolution, he does not intend to do so in order to assimilate Fortunato into divinity. Montresor hates Fortunato as an enemy; he murders him in the diseased state to permanently sever his relationship with him, rather than holding them together through unification. Montresor experiences ecstasy while witnessing the suffering of the immured Fortunato; it satisfies his desire for revenge rather than accessing an ultimate divinity. He stands distant from the terror he foments for Fortunato. Later, in the confession of his murder, he intends to rebuild his relationship with society

through the rhetorical/speaking skill that he uses to ameliorate his crime of murdering Fortunato (Dern 2001). Montresor "appeals to a sense of chivalry and continually employs satire to denigrate and dehumanize his victim" (66); his purpose in dehumanizing Fortunato is to kill Fortunato rather than assisting him to raise himself up above the mundane. Nevertheless, "The Cask of Amontillado" is also Poe's story of terror, murder, and sublimity. Fortunato might be the one who experiences sublimity in the morbid world that Montresor creates. As McGhee (2013) remarks, the path to sublimity for Poe is "an internal one" (56); it is a psychological uncanny experience of "a terrible void" (56), rather than a dependence on external forces or objects. Fortunato, the tortured one in the situation of immurement, cannot unfetter himself from the chains with which Montresor locks him in, but he still can help himself to transcend through dissolution and death. Though Poe does not continue the story for Fortunato after the sadist Montresor has left him in the Gothic catacomb, another imprisoned character of Poe – the narrator in "The Pit and the Pendulum" – can serve as extension to the story of Fortunato in the situation of immurement.

Both Fortunato and the narrator in "The Pit and the Pendulum" are symbolically buried underground. While the muddleheaded Fortunato slips into the trap set up by Montresor, the narrator in "The Pit and Pendulum" is condemned to death by the Spanish Inquisition. In "The Pit and the Pendulum," the Spanish Inquisitors are the murderers of the narrator, though the reason why he is condemned to death is unknown in the story. As the narrator is confined in a cell, he experiences terror within a machine of terror. He faints several times; in his dreams, the narrator perceives "evil figures" that hail him to rest. As he awakens terrified, he is conscious of an approaching danger, yet he calmly figures out a way to escape. The most horrible dangers are the pit and the pendulum. He is tethered to a wooden frame by a long strap under a huge razor-edged pendulum swinging in a gradual sinking motion towards him. He escapes the razor-pendulum as ravenous rats gnaw through the strap after he smears the remains of his food on it to attract the rats, though he is then forced to withdraw to the pit as the walls become red-hot. At the last moment, the narrator is rescued by General Lasalle. The narrator's experience of terror in confinement and dreams of evil figures exemplify Poe's theory of terror and sublimity. The sounds and smells stir the sensual emotions; they have the sensory power that gives life beyond death. Allan Emery (2005) in "Evading the Pit and the Pendulum" argues that the narrator's experience in the cell/prison-chamber is actually a posthumous human experience of transcendence through death: the story is "Poe's allegorical account of the process of transcending life through death" in a grave (34). The story, according to Emery, echoes Poe's theory in "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" which posits that man's consciousness does not depart as he dies. The narrator's transcendence does not come easily

nor instantaneously, since he has to experience terror before such transcendence. His consciousness, as fomented by his fear-inducing church/education, has not departed as he enters the grave; thus, he is tormented by "moral horrors" (34). The pit, the pendulum, and the walls symbolize "the autocrats" of space and time – "the powerful constraints imposed on human existence" (36) – from which the narrator escapes thanks to "the direful disintegration of the body" as aided by the rats, Poe's "The Conqueror Worm" (35). Finally, his unexpected rescue by General Lasalle symbolizes "the Life Eternal" (37). "The Pit and the Pendulum" was written before "The Cask of Amontillado," but it can be seen as an extension of the story of Fortunato in immurement, in that it concerns posthumous terrors and a hope of transcendence in a confined space.

In Poe's murder stories, whether in the form of romanticization or maniacal revenge, the haunted space opens the door to sublime terror. The murderer might unexpectedly encounter an uncanny force within his surroundings: a strange smell or sound which disturbs the mind to morbidity. Or perhaps the murderer might have been merged into the unknown force; he becomes a master-artist employing the sensory power in the environment to scheme the structure of destruction. For example, Roderick Usher, in a specific house style – the Gothic style, the Arabesque design, the Egyptian pyramid, the Druid's Stonehenge, or the hybrid characteristic of any of them – creates a gothic world of gloomy and muffled atmosphere that propels himself and others toward dissolution. The murdered participate in the progress of transcendence through death. They might be assimilated into dissolution, absolute dissolution of humanity, or they might seek their access to transcendence through posthumous terrors.

Lovecraft, heavily influenced by Poe, reconstructed Poe's haunted house in his murder/crime stories regarding cosmic horror. Yet the elements of Poe's cosmic sublimity and the strong volition of a human murderer were removed from Lovecraft's cosmic horror. Like Poe's house engulfed in an atmosphere of terror, Lovecraft's is also filled with absolute terror. While Poe's characters experience ultimate dissolution and after-life cosmic transcendence, Lovecraft's characters are "completely overwhelmed and left in a state of unending terror" without transcendence (Houstoun 2011, 168). Lovecraft's characters cannot scheme either self-destruction or the destruction of others; they grapple with impending destruction as bodily instinctive reactions to impending extinction – there is no hope of an after-life in the destruction of selfhood. Lovecraft's theory of cosmic horror questions anthropocentrism and emphasizes the absolute meaninglessness of human existence: "The course of human existence will come and go and will have no effect on the monstrosity...his life is absolutely meaningless in the face of such an entity" (177). When Lovecraft's characters find themselves in a state of madness, they are "confronted by a phenomenon that they are completely

unable to grasp" (176), and "the creature" they are confronted with "is a signifier of an entire form of existence that [has] greatly predated mankind and will seemingly continue to exist regardless of mankind's self-believed control of the world" (177). In his murder stories such as "The Rats in the Wall" and "The Picture in the House," Lovecraft reveals that human beings, including the murderers and the murdered, will not find transcendence but will simply be swallowed up as something insignificant when they are unfortunately confronted by the cosmic monstrosity, the entity, or an unknown phenomenon.

While Poe celebrates the disintegration of selfhood, Lovecraft expresses extreme horror for the disintegration of humanity. Through curiosity or the quest for scientific knowledge, Lovecraft's characters embark on their in-depth scientific exploration for an unknown world; however, the result of their quest leads them not to a remarkable achievement, but to an unknown phenomenon that unnerves the mind and even disintegrates humanity. Pessimistically, Lovecraft did not hold that modern civilization could shelter human beings from unknown phenomena, since modern civilization "provides only a thin barrier against the cosmic and ever-present pressures ensuring our eventual destruction" (Link 2016, xiii). Though human beings choose to shelter themselves in a normative society, such unknown phenomena can still penetrate through religious rituals or cultural customs that have preserved the antiquated memories of the existence of monstrosities that predate mankind. The two most common themes in Lovecraft murder stories – interbreeding and cannibalism – exemplify the most ancient monstrosities in modern civilization; the murderers are no longer human, but represent the monstrosity or the "mankind" cooperating with/submitting to such a monstrosity. Lovecraft's monstrosity does not deliberately kill human beings; there is no deliberate design of the disintegration of humanity as seen in Poe's tales. Murder occurs indifferently to human beings whose existence is insignificant in Lovecraft's cosmic horror.

In contrast to Poe's murder stories that might develop into what Wilbur (1959) denotes a "mechanism of destructive transcendence" (17), Lovecraft denies transcendence in his murder stories. Poe is inclined to regard the destructive force as associated with biological or natural blight. For Poe, murder implies a blissful annihilation of earthly identity. Lovecraft also convinces readers of the irrevocable blight in life, but he at times links this biological decline to the decline of traditional New England civilization: humanity declines due to the arrival of an age of mechanized and democratic capitalism that will eventually destroy all heritage bequeathed by a prominent aristocratic intellectuality (Joshi 1990).

The Lovecraft horror story "The Picture in the House" is one of his horror stories regarding cannibalism in which the narrator escapes a cannibalistic murderer. The story begins with a

researcher of genealogical data (the narrator), who on the shortest cut to Arkham finds refuge from a big storm in an antique building. He is not impressed with the quaint apartment; both the house and its sole inhabitant inspire feelings within him of fear and hatred. At the beginning, curiosity overpowers his fears. Upon entering one chamber, the genealogical data researcher is attracted by Pigafetta's *Regnum Congo*, an old book that portrays gruesome details of a butcher's shop of the cannibalistic Anziques on Plate XII. In conversing with the inhabitant, a stout old man in tattered clothing, this book opens itself to the gruesome Plate XII. The narrator is gradually preoccupied by a sense of horror when listening to the inhabitant's account of his acquisition of Pigafetta's *Regnum Congo* and of his interest in the gastronomy of cannibalism. It dawns upon him that the inhabitant is a cannibal when the latter says that the picture of the butcher's shop began to make him hungry for victuals he cannot raise nor buy. A drop of red blood falling from the ceiling splashes on a page of the book; it is blood that falls from the floor of the room that the old man left an hour before. The story ends with a titanic thunderbolt destroying the house, though the narrator survives.

Lovecraft's "The Picture in the House" resembles Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" with its structure of gothic atmosphere, but it develops into Lovecraft's cosmic horror. Upon arriving at an old family mansion belonging to his friend, Roderick Usher, and perceiving the house and its surroundings to be in decay, the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" senses an atmosphere of gloom, depression, sadness, and terror. Moreover, he gets a sense of awe and sublimity: "there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth" ("The Fall of the House of Usher", 398). The narrator of "The Picture in the House" is not invited to any old house; he glimpses the house by chance under the circumstance wherein he has to escape the storm. This unexpected visit to the antique house does not arouse in him a feeling of sublimity, though he senses terror. He does not like the house, describing it as "the antique and repellent wooden building" ("The Picture in the House", 104). Upon entering the house, he feels "an increase in that aversion" (105); the atmosphere in the house seems "redolent of unhallowed age, of unpleasant crudeness, and of secrets which should be forgotten" (105). The narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher" is drawn to Roderick, as the latter is emblematic of an aristocratic and godlike aspect, delicate and remote; he even sympathizes with Roderick, as the latter is overwhelmed by grief and fear. In trying to alleviate Roderick's anxiety, he reads a medieval romance entitled *The Mad Trist*. In contrast, Lovecraft's narrator dislikes the inhabitant of the house. As the old man appears, the narrator dislikes his walking gait because it is heavy. The old man is characteristic of "horrible unkemptness" in "a mass of tatters" with a "Yankee dialect" (106). The narrator fears and hates him: "The appearance of

this man, and the instinctive fear he inspired, prepared me for something like enmity" (106). Evidently, the old man represents barbarism or the loss of the civilization that Lovecraft so valued within the traditional society of New England (Joshi 1990). The narrator translates the Latin version of Pigafetta's *Regnum Congo* into English as the old man asks him to read it, though the old man's proximity is obnoxious to the narrator ("The Picture in the House", 107). The narrator most certainly has reason to hate the old man; the old man is a cannibal, reviving the ancient ritual of cannibalism for satisfying his appetite and prolonging his life. Poe and Lovecraft did not define murder as simply "taking someone else's life." Poe's Roderick immediately buries Madeline as she has just passed away under the condition that he knows she might recover from the temporary lifeless phenomenon of catalepsy; as such, Roderick kills his twin sister to assimilate her into ultimate dissolution, thus transforming her and himself from earthly corruptive matter to Eternal Life. In contrast, the old man's act of cannibalism in "The Picture in the House" exposes a horrible reality in which an ancient monstrosity that predates mankind can still pervade humanity through the form of cannibalism, even though cannibalism has been forbidden in modern civilizations. For Lovecraft, the murder mystery does not bring Eternal Life to humanity. As Lovecraft's narrator escapes destruction at the moment of collapse of the house, he escapes being devoured as a monster's source of nutrients.

"The Rats in the Wall," another of Lovecraft's gothic murder stories, concerns a cannibalistic history in the venerable family of de la Poer. The story begins with the return of a New England man named Delapore to an old medieval house, Exham Priory – his ancestral estate in England – on July 16, 1923. Delapore (the narrator) recounts the history of the old priory that he has learned about from the villagers' tales. The priory was built on the site of a prehistoric temple which had experienced rituals regarding the Druids, ante-Druids, Roman Cybele, etc. It was granted by Henry the Third to an ancestor of the narrator, Gilbert de Poer, First Baron of Exham, in 1261. The family lived on the site for centuries. Based on the chronicle, the narrator finds that his family had a reference to being "cursed of God": the family living in the priory was regarded as race of daemons by nearby villagers, as it had harbored a series of deaths and mysteries that inspired fear among the villagers. Walter de la Poer, eleventh Baron of Exham, killed his family members – his father, three brothers, and two sisters; however, though not condemned to death for the murder, he was severely condoned by James the First. Walter de la Poer fled to Virginia, New England, and resumed life with a new surname, "Delapore." Since the tragedy, the priory had been uninhabited for centuries as owned by the Norrys, and the reason why Walter de la Poer went insane and killed his family had yet to be revealed before the narrator's arrival. Perhaps the secret was recorded and sealed within an

envelope, but the envelope was destroyed with the burning of Carfax where the narrator's grandfather died. The narrator purchased Exham Priory in 1918, and a war comrade of the narrator's son helped the narrator to restore Exham Priory after the death of the narrator's son. After moving in, Delapore and his cat are frequently disturbed by the sounds of rats scurrying behind the arrases, though there is no trace of any rats. Urged forth by curiosity, the narrator investigates the stone wall with Edward Norrys. When looking into the sub-cellar, Delapore and Norrys find an ancient altar in the center of the chamber. Through further exploration of the ground under the altar, with the help of Norrys and a team of archeologists, the narrator explores a vault deeper than the sub-cellar: a centuries-old underground city teeming with human and rat bones. It dawns upon the narrator that his ancestors raised "human cattle" – some of which had regressed to a quadrupedal state – as a fresh human replenishment. To put an end to this horror, Walter de la Poer killed his entire family in their sleep. As he left, the remaining "human cattle" were devoured by the hungry rats. In the darkness of the vault, suddenly overcome by insanity, the narrator eats Norrys, with his cat tearing at the narrator's throat. The research team arrives to stop Delapore, and they subsequently destroy the priory. Delapore is sent to a mental institution; he completely forgets what he has done to Norrys, claiming it was the rats that ate poor Norrys, and continues to hear the sound of rats within the walls.

Lovecraft's "The Rats in the Walls," in its disclosure of the murder mystery of the de la Poer clan, is a revision of Poe's Gothic tales. Lovecraft's murder mystery concerns a cosmic monstrosity/entity embodied as rat-like entities. Far from the rats in Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" which are allegorized as "the Conqueror Worm" in helping the dead to achieve transcendence through death to Eternal Life when they gnaw off the strap for the narrator to escape from the pendulum (a "moral horror"), the rats in Lovecraft's story symbolize an original primal state of savagery and barbarism. As the de la Poer had committed homicide for centuries – raising humans as livestock for consumption – they regressed back to the most primal state of bestiality. Walter de la Poer, while still holding a human conscience, killed his family members in order to stop this savagery. Nonetheless, this family was still unable to separate itself from primal barbarism. The narrator, the last linear descendant of Walter de la Poer, returns to Exham Priory and commits to restoring it. What the narrator restores is not merely a medieval building, but a place which harbors ancient memories of barbarism succumbing to the cosmic horror of a monstrosity. He is not conscious of his intrinsic savagery when hearing the sounds of the rats in dreams, and later, in madness, devouring Norrys. As Houstoun (2011) points out, the narrator's "actions within the grotto completely negate this separation as he acts exactly as the primitive and barbaric inhabitants of that subterranean realm" (172). Delapore's transformation into a rodent echoes Lovecraft's Mythos: "in terms of the drive to

destruction, or genetic, in terms of ruinous hereditary traits," each human being is inclined toward "the disintegration of our humanity" (Ralickas 2007, 371). In contrast to Poe's disintegration of humanity that leads to sublimity, Lovecraft's leads to cosmic horror, a primal state of "the subject's descent into the abyss of the id" (370): "mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and reveling in joy" ("The Call of Cthulhu", 394-395). By interweaving the three murder mysteries – the de la Poers' cannibalistic history, Walter de la Poer's murder of his families, and the narrator's devouring of Norrys – Lovecraft addresses both the horror of humanity's intrinsic primal barbarism as allegiant to a cosmic monstrosity as well as the impossibility of its obliteration.

Conclusion

The murder mysteries of both Poe and Lovecraft concern the gothic experience of terrible things that result in the disintegration of selfhood. Each of them confirms that the disintegration of selfhood is an irrecoverable state. For Poe, disintegration could be blissful, as it leads to the ultimate destruction of earthly matter in exchange for divine Eternal Life. Poe's outlook offers an alternative for this irrecoverable state of the absolute dissolution of humanity. In contrast, Lovecraft's murder mystery corroborates the disintegration of selfhood as a subjective crisis. He does not resolve the subjective crisis, nor does he offer any form of belief system. His theory of cosmic horror as concomitant to his murder stories corroborates the erosion of culture, reason, and humanity, and there is no belief system that can reconstitute transcendence within the afterlife.

Endnotes:

1. See S. T. Joshi's "Foreword: Poe and Lovecraft," page x-xi. See also Joshi's *H.P. Lovecraft: The Decline of the West*, page 56-57.
2. Cisco also mentions that experiencing madness might be the process of exploring unknowable territory: "Poe's inner beyond is madness, and his outer beyond is a cosmic indistinctness that makes madness impossible to distinguish from sanity" (p. 75)

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No Way Out: The (Im)possibility of Posthumanism in Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island*

Codrin Aniculăese
Faculty of Letters
"Babeș-Bolyai" University
31 Horea Street, RO-400202, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: codrinanic@yahoo.com

Abstract:

This article traces two opposed tendencies in Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* with respect to the contemporary discourse surrounding posthumanism. On the one hand, the text continuously hints at the emergence of an immersive mode of being which does justice to exteriority, while on the other it subverts the potential for such a being's actualization. While most of the criticism surrounding McCarthy's novel has optimistically emphasized the former intimation of a posthuman engagement with materiality, the present reading centralizes the latter tendency, attempting to show that the novel lucidly rejects such an optimistic view. Ultimately, I will attempt to show that McCarthy's *Satin Island* critiques a naïve contemporary 'choice' to be posthuman.

Keywords: Tom McCarthy, Satin Island, posthumanism, immersion, representation

Introduction

That posthumanism in contemporary theory, for those aligned with a poststructuralist frame, is ethical and desirable should come across as a relatively uncontroversial claim. Regardless of the way in which one defines the term[1], posthumanism as an end-game, as a future destination, or as a praxis to adhere to now is unequivocally an ideal state, towards which many of the contemporary philosophical discourses seem to draw. Problems emerge, however, when the question of applying the 'right' mechanisms through which one may become posthuman is posed. Indeed, such problematizations of the 'how' in posthumanism may very reasonably lead one to the conclusion that such an end is simply unattainable. Hardly is there any need for complex scholarship and criticism around this subject to sense the idealism in longing, as a human, for a posthuman condition. At the opposite end of the spectrum, nonetheless, the twenty first century has seen a number of leading voices advocate for the tenability of posthumanism. Though a comprehensive survey of such thinkers is impossible here, it could still be argued, in broad lines, that theirs is a shared sense of potential and possibility based chiefly on the performative nature of posthumanism. To this end, perhaps the most suggestive advocation is Ferrando's, who in their *Philosophical Posthumanism* argues that "according to Posthumanism, we can be posthuman now in the ways we are existing, in our modes of enactment, in our relating to others

and to ourselves as 'others', through the deconstruction of the human" (Ferrando 2019, 28). Taken in this sense, the posthuman project hinges entirely on performance: it is about behaving in a certain way, thinking, and acting in accordance to some specific norms. There is little to do here with technology and the literal disappearance of the organic, biological human being, and more to do with the death of the subject in a poststructuralist, eminently Foucauldian way.[2] Though this all too brief survey of the field is evidently reductive, it will suffice for the purposes of this essay to proceed with the following picture in mind: contemporary posthuman discourses teeter on the edge of (im)possibility, and their chief preoccupation is with the configuration of a praxis of de-subjectification which is to determine the side they tilt towards.

Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* treads the same fine line as the latter discourses. The novel – to the extent that it can be said to accept this name – is first and foremost concerned with the possibility of developing methods of accurate representation, conceptualization or understanding, in an increasingly complex, decentered contemporaneity described by a seemingly infinite relationality and interconnectedness. Simultaneously, the text interrogates the potential of any such established conceptualizations to facilitate immersion for the human subject – that is, the configuration of a posthuman, authentic, unmediated relation to exteriority. Throughout the text, these central theoretical questions are crystallized in the protagonist's struggle to literally write a report in which the entirety of the global human society's patterns, narratives, and frameworks are to be made sense of as a cohesive, monolithic unit. Though U's (the protagonist) corporate employers only aim to draw profits from the task, to him – an anthropologist - such a report has the potential to engender an absolute immersion in reality. By leaving nothing out, by incorporating everything, doing justice to everything, U aims to bypass all human prejudice. Through this report, the purpose is not merely to discuss the real, but to inhabit it.

In this essay, I will attempt to track two tendencies in McCarthy's novel. On the one hand, throughout *Satin Island* a gradual configuration of promising posthuman engagements with exteriority emerges. As U ponders his Great Report, he will become obsessed with everything discarded and marginalized by traditional humanism: an oil spillage, cancerous cells, trash, residue, etc. As this essay will argue, such engagements with the Other, with the Outside, are symptomatic of an optimistic view of the posthuman. The very idea of finetuning representations to the extent that nothing is treated unjustly, unethically, can be associated precisely with Ferrando's call for a new praxis of posthumanism. On the other hand, Satin Island simultaneously subverts the potential of U's report. If by the end of the novel the task is abandoned, this is because U comes to accept the impossibility of his project: as I will argue, engaging with the Outside always inevitably turns it into an Inside. This essay's thesis, thus, is that McCarthy's *Satin Island* can be read as a merger of two equal, but opposite vectors. In the wake of their mutual cancellation, no clear direction for posthumanism survives. In order to show all of the above, I will initially discuss the radical potentials of U's project, culminating in his "Present-Tense Anthropology", to then highlight the subtle ways in which McCarthy embeds the project's failure within its own radical claims, and finally to stress

the importance of the novel's ending, where the text masterfully precludes any illusions of progress and of certainty.

Present-Tense Anthropology

The novel's protagonist, U, is an anthropologist - that is, one who specializes in unearthing and emphasizing the many ways in which human society constructs and organizes performance within representations. Much more than merely accepting or affirming the inevitability of social constructs, U's trouble is that of understanding how such representations merge with one another on a larger scale. His work – around which everything in Satin Island revolves – deals with the unearthing and refining of those mechanisms which drive the contemporary socius. U's employer, the obscure "Company", is a corporation that deals "as Peyman liked to say, in narratives" (McCarthy 2015, 34), which is a vague and "convoluted way of saying: sell their product" (50). What is suggested here is that the traditionally philosophical and pure endeavor to understand reality is in fact deeply embedded within a capitalist frame. The point of it all, essentially, is not to discover the truth, but rather to refine an artificially configured world, to increase its productivity, to yield more profit. As Peyman, the head of the corporation, states, the Company "strives to a state in which the world is one hundred percent synthetic, made by man, for man, according to his desires" (92). Thus, the novel's opening configures an inescapable postmodern setting, in which questions of nature, essence, reality itself, can only be understood as artificial narratives themselves. There is no philosophical depth to McCarthy's text, other than the superficial one of capitalist networks. In such a space, even what one might call radical theory is transformed, repurposed as a product, into a consumerist artifice. U is a perfect example here – in his work, he employs Deleuze's philosophy, but by "[taking] out all the revolutionary shit (Deleuze was a leftie); and I didn't credit Deleuze, either" (69). Essentially, U is constantly "feeding vanguard theory, almost always from the left side of the spectrum, back into the corporate machine" (70). Nothing, in *Satin Island*, escapes the tyranny of capital; and if everything is already part of an intricately-woven human system, then a genuinely posthuman position is precluded right from the start. Though a postmodern condition does indeed collapse all traditional forms of humanism, thus promising new avenues of relating to the world, if nonetheless the subject – constructed and synthetic as they may be – still controls, reshapes, and reinterprets the outside, then nothing has really changed. The solipsism and ipseity of an anthropocentric world persist, even when the human subject's essence has vanished.

Given the above, when U is then assigned the task of compiling a so-called "Great Report", which structurally will form the novel's core narrative drive, it should be more than obvious that such a document is only meant to further a neo-humanistic tendency. This report is hoped to reveal a universal structure, a global network based on which all human activity and performance is conducted. For the Company, such an absolute knowledge of the world has little to do with a theoretical impulse to understand in order to liberate, or in order to be ethical. Rather, by integrating all representations in their infinite complexities, within a master-plan, U is meant to expand a

corporate potential for profit-making. The Great Report ought to be understood, thus, in Lyotard's terms: "the conduction of intensities should be able to take place on all the pieces of the social body, without exception" (Lyotard 1993, 254), with the cynical though essential acknowledgement that intensity is only ever meant to produce, to accelerate capitalism itself. U himself, however, adopts a radically different perspective. Though certainly a part of the corporate machine, he cannot help but see in his Great Report the potential for a philosophical breakthrough. In his past within the academia, we are told that U was heavily influenced by Levi-Strauss' own anthropological project, which mirrors this endeavor to understand, to fit everything in. Strauss searched for "some kind of infrastructural master-meaning of which any one layer was a partial, distorted transposition. This stuff bewitched me. Master-meaning! Concealed revealment! I spent my twenties wanting to be Levi-Strauss" (McCarthy 2015, 68). U too, then has such fantasies: "[I] sometimes thought I saw, moving in ripples on the surface of a long-cold coffee cup or in the close-up choreography of dust-flecks jumping on an unwiped tabletop ... the plan, the formula, solution ... to all, the whole caboodle" (40). The protagonist, thus, champions a more optimistic view of the world. His work, in contrast to the corporation's, manifests an inner desire for an achieved reality – he longs for an apparently deeper intimation, a more profound way of making sense of reality as a whole. Underlying all of this is a quintessentially posthuman, optimistic outlook: there does exist a way to transcend the artificial. To be authentic in one's relationship to exteriority is not a mere fantasy. Certainly, though, such potential cannot be actualized by revisiting traditional methods of understanding the real. As U acknowledges, "the 'purity' [anthropologists] crave is no more than a state in which all frames of comprehension, of interpretation and analysis, are lacking" (68). In other words, to be posthuman as a human is evidently naïve: "you end up lost in a kaleidoscope of masquerades, roles, general make-believe" (57). If the Great Report is to provide any meaningful insight, contributing to the emerging of a posthuman connection to the real, then understanding must be radically refashioned. As Beyes writes, the problem of McCarthy's text is that "of reporting on, and from within, the conditions and effects of today's ubiquitously networked – and thus pervasively organized – spheres of life" (Beyes 2017, 230). And, in what Quarrie calls his "explicit preoccupations with global flows and borderless networks" (Quarrie 2018, 156), U needs to negotiate some sort of non-conceptual understanding of representations. If this could succeed, then artificiality would vanish, and the real Outside could exist uninhibitedly, non-anthropocentrically.

It is from the perspective of this monumental challenge that U's obsession with some of the novel's key imagery ought to be understood. In the beginning of the novel, U witnesses an oil spillage, broadcasted in an airport. Oil, it is suggested, is a surplus, unwanted matter, the spillage of which constitutes a disaster for human organization: "those oil-drenched men ... [were] moving now, laying booms, trying, without any apparent success, to herd and corral the flow of water-borne oil as it forked and turned and spread out" (McCarthy 2015, 28). To reign in unwanted, surplus matter, to control the world such as to eliminate anything 'toxic' to the humanist project, is precisely what the Company aims to do. Their goal, once again, is to refine the narratives of the world, to synthetically

preclude chaos, contingency, and so on, such that organized profit-making may prevail, all of these are crystallized in the oil-drenched men's efforts. Far removed from these efforts, U is entranced by the oil itself the way it corrupts and spreads. And throughout the entirety of the novel, U will return to the motif of the oil, admiring more and more its 'unwanted' advance into the sea and eventually into land. Along similar lines, U will come to genuinely admire his friend Petr's terminal cancer. In the encroachment of those unwanted, chaotically reproducing cells, U appears to glimpse at something that evades, or that escapes all forms of human organization. It is in this type of imagery, we are given to understand, that U senses a deeper, seemingly more natural, authentic reality. Overwhelmingly, the novel's critical reception agrees in portraying such surplus matter as oil or cancerous cells as a posthuman emergence of the radical Other. In their postcolonial reading of Satin Island, Quarrie argues that there is an ethical dimension in the presence of matter which corrupts the world; that there is a "disorientation and groundlessness in the face of ... environmental collapse" (Quarrie 2018, 162), suggesting that matter destroying the man-made global system is a signal of the shame on the part of the protagonist as well as society as a whole in having imperialistically controlled the world. In much the same vein, Reinfandt writes that there is a "tension between the vanity of human wishes and the remainder of matter" (Reinfandt 2015, 43), in which case, clearly, "oil stands for materiality" (52). *Satin Islan*d, then "seems to call for a new mode of writing that is ... alert to the material dimension of reality" (59). This interpretation seems to be doubly validated by McCarthy, once in an interview in which he succinctly mentions that "pollution is good in this book" ("Tom McCarthy: 'Writing has nothing to do with self-expression'" 2015, 2:40-3:05) and twice through U's own reflections on oil. In an imagined version of a presentation he holds, U declares that to reject oil constitutes "Bad aesthetics, at that: misguided and ignorant. They dislike the oil spill for the way it makes the coastline look "not right", prevents it from illustrating the vision of nature that's been handed down from theologians to romantic poets to explorers, tourists, television viewers: as sublime, virginal and pure. Kitsch, I tell you ... kitsch, kitsch, kitsch!" (McCarthy 2015, 238). Perhaps, then, the authentic posthuman position should be that which advocates for the residual. Maybe it should select that which capitalist order stifles as the truly post-anthropocentric.

Yet, on closer inspection, U's declarations reveal not an affirmation of materiality, but of the inevitability of representation, of artificiality in and of itself. When fighting against a bad aesthetics, what U is really advocating for is not a realer state of being, but simply a good aesthetics; that is, a system of representations and mediations of the world in which all intensities are allowed to pass through, not just those preferred by a Romantic mindset. U is only attacking, in fact, the idealisms of the "sublime", the "virginal" and the "pure", that is, the assumption that there even exist such things. And in such an attack there is no suggestion that oil in and of itself, or Petr's cancer, are somehow more real. The poststructuralist imperative echoes loudly here: there are no primitive societies, and there is no original point to which one may return in order to authentically engage with materiality.[3] The advent of an oil-covered world, then, does not entail an eruption, a coming forth of materiality which would impose a posthuman condition, but simply a different type of representation. It should be clear

to us, after decades of postcolonial study, that the Other is nothing but the product of the Self. There is no qualitative difference, in this theoretical sense, between oil and water. If one is bad, while the other is good, both are still deeply embedded in an all-too-human understanding of the world. Cancer too is not realer than a 'healthy' bodily state. Both are equally real, or in this case, equally artificial, just like oil is never realer than water, but always equally fake. As U points out, "what the anthropologist encounters when he ventures beyond civilization's perimeter-fence is no more than its effluvia, its toxic fallout" (285). It is always 'its' toxicity – never real toxicity (a concept which, when closely scrutinized, is absurd). If, then, as McCarthy declared of his own novel, pollution is good here, it is only because it contributes towards U's dismissal of such naïve conceptions of a posthuman engagement with exteriority. Whatever it may be, the Great Report cannot champion any formal category of the material over another. It cannot champion anything at all, since in this very idea of advocacy, a lingering humanist trace persists.

In one crucial scene of the novel, the Company's network is overridden with so much information that the servers break down, causing frequent buffering on all the computers within the corporation. Consequently, whatever video the employees may be watching stops functioning normally; that is, the gray bar, loading the data, no longer speeds ahead of the red one which indicates where the watcher is located. It is at this point that U has a revelation with respect to his Great Report which deserves quotation in full:

> What I was actually watching was nothing less than the skeleton, laid bare, of time or memory itself. Not our computers' time and memory, but our own. This was its structure. We require experience to stay ahead, if only by a nose, of our consciousness of experience – if for no reason that the latter needs to make sense of the former, to ... narrate it both to other and ourselves, and, for this purpose, has to be fed with a constant, unsorted supply of fresh sensations and events. But when the narrating cursor catches right up with the rendering one, when occurrences and situations don't' replenish themselves quickly enough for the awareness they sustain, when, no matter how fast they regenerate, they're instantly devoured by a mouth too voracious to let anything gather or accrue unconsumed before it, then, we find ourselves jammed, stuck in limbo: we can enjoy neither experience nor consciousness of it. Everything becomes buffering, and buffering becomes everything. The revelation pleased me. (155)

We are constantly located within the red bar, at its edge. Immersion entails catching up to the gray one, bordering on unmediated, raw reality. As opposed to traditional anthropology, which would entail understanding reality in its entirety from within the red bar, U would like to no longer inhabit the red, but the gray one, which implies a complete rejection of understanding, or of conceptualization. U fantasizes about "just coexisting with these objects and this person, letting my own edges run among them, occupying this moment, or, more to the point, allowing it to occupy me, to blot and soak me up, rather than treating it as feed-data" (158-159). This is what U ends up calling "Present-Tense Anthropology" (160); full immersion. Precisely because, as previously shown, judgements and representations of reality, made by necessity from within the red bar, always uphold

a humanist outlook, U realizes that the Great Report must renounce understanding altogether. Crucially, though, immersion is not meant to bring one closer to a hidden, underlying material reality, but rather to merge the subject with the representations it creates. That is, the protagonist wants to inhabit the purely gray, not what is beyond it; he strives towards a non-judgmental, anti-categorical experience, not towards a naïve ideal of non-experience. In this championing of buffering, of bare experience over cognizing, the inevitable consequence is the disappearance of the thinking subject. A death of the self occurs, an annihilation which destroys the individual as one knows it. As Wrethed astutely points out with regard to such immersions in their reading of the novel, "the only thing the Anthropocene really adds is the return of the real in terms of the self-strangulation of humanity. The death of humanity is not a semantic game" (Wrethed 2021, 2-3).

This, then, is what a posthuman condition entails. If the goal is immersion within the world, then the solution is attained not by an attempt to bypass the totalizing complexities of narratives, representations, and structures which make up the world in hopes of discovering truth, but rather by further indulging in the intricacies of a synthetic society to the extent that one ceases to think them altogether. Posthumanism begins when buffering begins – that is, when the subject whose core privilege is that of retrospective sense-making, no longer benefits from such retrospectivity. By indulging in the flows of a postmodern capitalism, by accelerating these artificial, consumerist intensities ("a mouth too voracious" in McCarthy's words), to the point that thinking is not an option anymore, the death of the traditional, humanistic subject occurs. We, with our anthropocentric identities deeply rooted in the red, must catch up to the gray – and this never happens only by speeding up the progress of the red bar, but rather by also increasing the complexity of stimuli, exposing ourselves to such immense data, that the servers break down. As Deleuze and Guattari have it, a posthuman praxis of deterritorialization demands "not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to 'accelerate the process' as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven't seen anything yet" (Deleuze & Guattari 2000, 259-260). Nor will we see anything; not anymore, not while buffering – and that is the whole point.

No Way Out

Present-Tense Anthropology entails immersion within a global, artificial network, to the point that whatever was initially human in the subject is now annihilated. It is at this realization that the protagonist arrives. Thus, to endeavor to write – a conscious, human activity - the Great Report on it is impossible. Throughout the novel, we are told that the Great Report is always "finding its shape", that at some future point a moment of transcendence will occur, after which its form will present itself to U. This possibility of transcendence is further intimated through metatextuality. Contemplating the form of the Report, U asks: "If my Report had come to be completed, which side [fiction or science] ... would it have been written on? ... More to the point: to which side does this not-Report you're reading now, this offslew of the real, unwritten manuscript, belong?" (McCarthy 2015, 255). The direct suggestion is made, confirming what the reader may have guessed by then – perhaps the

book itself, *Satin Island* is the Great Report. What McCarthy manages to do here is to directly instill in the reader the hope, the joy, the energy of transcendence; to have us think we are reading the Report itself, which U will have completed by the end of the novel. Not three pages later, though, in a moment of failure and disillusionment typical to McCarthy's fiction, U comes to realize that the Report is an impossibility: "this Great Report was un-plottable, un-frameable, unrealizable ... Not just by me ... but fundamentally, essentially, inherently un-writeable" (258). If at the core of posthumanism lies a clear imperative to become posthuman, then the notion of a human subject bearing witness to, and then writing about, the posthuman, is absurd. For reasons detailed in the previous section, one cannot become posthuman and simultaneously write about it. To be immersed while also capable of reporting on one's own immersion is not feasible. It is at this point that *Satin Island* makes a clean break from the optimism of a posthuman praxis. The question is no longer that of accessing reality, of experiencing some intensity, and through that of treating materiality justly by intensifying representation, but rather that of coming to terms with the reality of a posthuman condition which is never, and will never be 'our' condition. For us, there is no way out. Consequently, by the end of the novel, the protagonist, increasingly disillusioned with his project, is more and more driven by a dream he has – the dream of Satin Island. In this vision, U sees a city, which turns out to be The City: a merger of all the greatest structures, civilizations, achievements of humanity. Near it, at its edges, lies Satin Island, where all the trash, the remainder, the erroneous, the unwanted, burns continuously. Towards this island, or at least towards its real-life equivalent – Staten Island – U finds himself drifting: "Present-Tense Anthropology? The Parachutist Mystery? Trashed, pulverized, dissolved back into the whimsy-froth from which they'd bubbled up... What dot-codex could be salvaged from that? And yet the rich and vivid island-dream had stayed with me, cached itself somewhere deep inside, and was now growing, pulsing" (362) What grows within the narrator is his desire to become a part of the Island. As he gives up on his project, he longs for the oil to envelop him, to turn him part of the machine, just as Petr had been immersed by his cancerous cells. His revolutionary fire extinguished, U cynically, defeatedly, and indifferently accepts the emergence of the posthuman. Thus, we find him at the harbor, ready to board the ferry to Staten Island. The novel could have very well ended here, like an arrow, a vector pointing to the inevitable direction one must follow.

Yet there he notices a series of screens, projecting advertisements of Staten Island, drawing tourists in. From the very beginning of the novel and up to this point, screens, virtuality have constantly followed U. If *Satin Island* had opened thus: "around me and my screen, more screens: of other laptops, mobiles, televisions" (19), the closing of the text is permeated by the very same technological omnipresence. Assuming the role of the passive watcher, U is fed with an idyllic, utopic, civilized representation of the island. Watching the advertisement, the protagonist has one final bout of optimism: "Maybe I could somehow nest there too, I told myself; float, calmly, to some spot, some tract from which other terrains might open, realms where everything was different" (370). And then, as he turns his gaze away from the screens: "I turned my head from the screen and looked at the real harbor, the real water. These, with low sunlight bouncing off them, also looked unreal, idyllic" (371).

Which is the real, and which is the projection? This passage suggests, as I have previously argued, not only that there is no difference between the two, but that there is no difference between the City and the Island themselves. Part of the virtuality of technology, of the system, of representations, Satin Island, along with all its oil, its cancerous cells and dirty windows melts into the City. It is the City. All of this leads to U's final decision: "I didn't let myself be carried through the doors ... To go to Staten Island – actually go there – would have been profoundly meaningless ... What tangible nesting space would I have discovered there, and for what concrete purpose? None. Not to go there was, of course, profoundly meaningless as well" (375). I consider this passage to be crucial when it comes to the analysis of any discourse associated to notions of posthumanism. U wants to be immersed: he actively chooses to go towards Staten Island. In a final bout of cynical yet optimistic humanism, he wants to choose to become posthuman. It is this sense of agency that I wish to scrutinize here. Irrespective of one's incapacity to discuss, to talk about, to write a Great Report about a truly posthuman sense of being, a naïve consensus seems to suggest that one can at least choose to yield to a praxis of posthumanism. Yet, as the previous passage shows, this is absurd. More than meaningless, the act of willingly submitting to a 'posthuman' future masks a yet-alive sense of humanism. Stuck in the liminal space of the harbor, U realizes that any sort of orientation is impossible if immersion is what one seeks. Anywhere he goes, he is still within the confines of the City. Posthumanism as the death of the subject is certainly a reality – it happens now, and it will assuredly happen more and more as consumerist, addictive capitalism grows. But, crucially, it always 'happens' against and without the human subject. If there is no way out, as I previously argued, then there is also no way in.

As *Satin Island* draws to a close, the ferry slowly moves away, towards a posthuman future which U is not ready to embrace. Throughout the entirety of the novel, he had thought he could do it. He had dreamt of a universal representation, had dreamt of a system channeling the intensities of the entire world, had envisioned its making, and had longed to write his Great Report. But immersion can never be willed into existence; instead, in *Satin Island*, if oil (or water, there really is no difference) is to corrupt, it can only corrupt in the absence of the human subject. U is stuck at the border between human and non-human. And so, while the ferry sails forward, towards the Island, the novel ends with U going back: "back into the city" (382), back where he belongs.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay, I have attempted to confront and contrast two opposed tendencies in Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island*. On the one hand, the protagonist's conscious, directed attempts at configuring first an accurate understanding of the world (The Great Report), and then an authentic immersion in it (Present-Tense Anthropology), I have argued to be symptomatic of contemporary discourses surrounding the topic of posthumanism. Throughout the entire novel, U earnestly and astutely rids himself of the most imposing remains of humanistic thinking, encapsulated in the dichotomy of 'the system' and its exterior, its chaotic, toxic remainder. In doing so, he draws near a conceptually sound understanding of what posthumanism entails. On the other hand, it is precisely

such a sound understanding which subverts the possibility of actually configuring a posthuman condition. The Great Report is impossible, and the immersion it discovers and promises is never a choice one makes. U comes face to face with the posthuman 'truth', and realizes that, from such a position, there is no choice to make, no direction to follow – only in their, and in his absence can the posthuman occur. It is in this hollow, inertial final setting of McCarthy's novel that I would argue the most clear and honest affirmation of posthumanism's demands are met. If there is anything I draw from McCarthy's *Satin Island*, it is this: about posthumanism, there is nothing to be said, nothing to be done; no way out, no way in. And there is no need to, anyways – it is with our final humanist toxicity that we cling to such 'necessities'.

Endnotes:

1. See *Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction*, ed. Sorgner, S. L., Ranisch, R. Peter Land Press, 2014 for an overview of the various acceptations of the notion of posthumanism. Throughout the collection, all accounts of posthumanism start from the premise that a posthuman condition is fundamentally desirable, to then problematize the mechanisms through which one may attain such a condition. It is this premise which I adopt in the present essay.
2. See Foucault's critique of humanism in his *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966). Routledge Classics Press, 1989, e-book edition. In particular, I refer here to Foucault's arguments in the second to last chapter, "Man and His Doubles".
3. Such arguments are posited in most of the poststructuralist philosophical canon (Deleuze, Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, etc.). The formulation closest to the one suggested here can be found in Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *Libidinal Economy*. tr Grant, Iain Hamilton. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. 1993.

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Ambivalent Domesticities: Exploring the Unfolding and Obscuring of Alternative Social Imaginaries in Laurent Mareschal's *Beiti*

Kasper Tromp
Leiden University
Frieseweg 34 1823 CD Alkmaar
Leiden, The Netherlands
E-mail: kaspertromp@gmail.com

Abstract:

Laurent Mareschal's site-specific installation *Beiti* is situated ambivalently in our imaginations of Israel/Palestine. Its geometric tile carpet, consisting of herbs and spices, effectuate multisensory experiences of the domestic, a place of memory, family and shared tastes and scents, but also of conflict and dispossession. Adopting a Heideggerian framework, this study will examine the formative hold of power (*Macht*) over cultures, histories and politics in the region and explore how *Beiti* simultaneously withdraws and submits to this. Olfactory art theory will help conceptualise how the artwork affects audiences corporeally, through its scents, and how this draws them into various temporal experiences; from the cyclical alternations of nature to personal memories as well as interrupted histories. The article concludes with a strategy to salvage the de-escalatory potential of *Beiti*'s multiple temporal entanglements.

Keywords: Laurent Mareschal, olfactory art theory, Israel/Palestine, corporeal affect, Martin Heidegger, (non)power, temporality, memory, social imaginary

Introduction

Last year, long existing tensions between Israelis and Palestinians escalated in a series of attacks mounted by Hamas and the subsequent military response by the Israel Defense Forces, resulting in an ongoing war in Ghaza. Since Israel's declaration of independence in 1948, its relationship with the Palestinians has been characterised by asymmetrical warfare, land occupation, terrorist attacks, the building of border walls and ill-fated attempts at diplomacy. The international image of Palestine/Israel is one of permanent conflict, while its inhabitants are typically imagined as perpetrators and victims implicated in routine acts of violence. Such persistent representations of the land and its people obstruct alternate social configurations, re-affirm the status quo and legitimise antagonistic politics between the parties involved. Contemporary art, though often perceived as either autonomous from the political realm or, contrarily, outspokenly activist and thus implicit in existing relations of power, may actually carry within it the potential to critically question status quos and explore possibilities for imagining the world alternatively. Indeed, the literary theorist

Krzysztof Ziarek defines artworks as spaces in which relations "become re-oriented and transformed, given a new momentum, as it were, beyond what appears possible within the historical parameters of the existing society." (Ziarek 2004a, 19)

This article will examine such critical potential of art to work otherwise than reproduce dominant political imaginaries formative of, and reproduced in, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In so doing it will present an extensive case study of Laurent Mareschal's *Beiti*, a temporary and site-specific installation. Mareschal's work consists of a selection of herbs and spices that together form a fragrant carpet of decorative tile patterns. The immediacy of experiencing the artwork's textures, colours, designs and scents challenges us to expand the metaphysical paradigm dominant in art-historical hermeneutics, which typically privileges linguistic constructions of meaning over considerations of embodied presence and affect. During the so-called "affective turn" in the humanities, scholars from multiple disciplinary angles developed strategies for understanding how art "works" besides signifying phenomena exterior to itself. Art became variously theorised as a physical presence which works on our senses, an indexical sign that traces off its referent, or a social agent; a system of action capable of transforming the world, among other perspectives.[1] This study, alternatively, adopts a phenomenological framework that will help examine the critical social implications of interacting with Mareschal's artwork on a corporeal level. Phenomenology implores us to think beyond constructivist considerations of identity and ideology through which the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is already made known to us, and helps us think about our pre-discursive "being" which, as we shall see, *Beiti* may re-connect us with.

Martin Heidegger's ideas concerning being and power will form the primary theoretical foundation of this inquiry. In Heidegger's thought these concepts are mutually interdependent. The former is conceptualised as an event that continually discloses itself rather than defines, whereas the latter operates on the logic of making; fixing beings as objects, commodities or identities. This tendency of power is reflective of the Palestinian-Israeli situation wherein human beings, cultural practices and geographies become produced as properties of national projects that, in turn, are constructed as negatively interdependent opposites embroiled in an endless zero-sum game for survival (Kelman 1999, 588-589). Heidegger's theory will help analyse how *Beiti* withdraws from such articulations of power and opens up a space in which social relations become transformed beyond their formative hold. At the same time this study accounts for the consequences of power's (re-)surfacing made possible by this very withdrawal.

This dynamic, between being's withdrawal and power's persistence, will be elaborated with reference to the work of Krzysztof Ziarek, who extensively refers to Heidegger's writings in his own analyses of modern art. This article will elaborate on Ziarek's framework by putting the multiplicity of possible viewer's perspectives centre stage. The artwork's particular configurations of being and power are, after all, dependent upon the window of possible engagements between artwork and viewer. To account for *Beiti*'s multisensory affect, owing to its dimension of smell, this hermeneutic process cannot be conceived solely in terms of linguistic decoding. Rather, it must be broadened in scope to include a sensorial reception of phenomena in the world, through a consciousness that is

intentional and involved, but also pre-reflective, that is to say prior to language (Iared 2016, 194). Ziarek typically applies his understanding of Heidegger in analyses of visual and verbal expressions, a sensory range which this study expands through inquiries into the field of olfactory art theory. This interdisciplinary discourse will help investigate how *Beiti*'s scents affect audiences emotionally, what kind of relations they establish between artwork, viewer and cultural context, how they transform relationality to engender new social imaginaries, and how they immerse viewers into different experiences of time.

The study of scent in art, primarily theorised in Euramerican cultural contexts, will be de-centred and re-traced through discourses in Islamic, Jewish and Arab cultural studies in order to examine how olfactory experiences in the Levant are related to broader aesthetic, religious and political themes. This will help explore three distinct experiential perspectives on Mareschal's artwork; the first one based in Islamic metaphysics, the second on Palestinian diasporic life, and the last on the migrant conception of the "New Jew". These reflect the particular disciplinary expertise of the author and are emphatically no endorsements of any political orientation; a taking of "sides". Rather they are frames of subjective or collective experience through which *Beiti*'s relationship to power *may* be investigated, while accepting the possibility and legitimacy of other discursive avenues.

The following section will introduce Mareschal's artistic practice, with a focus on the works he produced and exhibited in Palestine/Israel. A brief visual analysis will contextualise *Beiti* within this oeuvre. Finally, Heidegger's key concepts of being and power will be elaborated.

Mareschal and Heidegger

Laurent Mareschal (b. Dijon, 1975) received his artistic education in France, having studied fine arts in Paris and contemporary art in Tourcoing (Mareschal 2019). In the early 2000s he lived in Israel for several years. There he created and exhibited artworks in various media pertaining to Palestinian culture, history and (geo-)politics. For example, in 2003 he created photographic works on the *keffieh*, the headwear worn traditionally by Palestinian farmers which has turned into a symbol of the Palestinian land, identity and resistance to occupation. On these themes Mareschal created two video works titled *Green Line* (2005-8) and *White Line* (2007-8), reflecting on human-made borders winding through Israeli and Palestinian lands. The former animates images of plants and trees painted on the Palestinian side of the border wall, enabling them to "break through" the concrete and offer spectators a glimpse of life beyond the wall. The latter documents a performance by Mareschal during which he walks through Wallajeh, Palestine, and pours chalk from a bag he carries, drawing a white "border" through the landscape.[2]

Mareschal continued his exploration of the region in the form of performance-installations, whereby he uses food items to evoke domestic settings. *The Curtain* (2010) for example, consists of intricate laceworks made out of wheat, while *The Carpet* (2003) was made from humus paste and spices, around which Mareschal sat with guests/participants, with whom he ate from the carpet and shared experiences of Palestine (Mareschal 2016). These works suggest shifting attitudes towards

imagining Palestinian life, departing from public symbols of identity, oppression and resistance, to examine the privacy of the domestic sphere. A place in which conflict is not centre stage but simply "there" as one of many factors that shape the daily life of Palestinians. The conflict remains discernible in the ephemerality of the works, which have come to characterise Mareschal's creative practice. In his online portfolio he paraphrases Eugene Ionesco's statement that "[o]nly the ephemeral is of lasting value" (Kershaw 2008, 263), suggesting that experiences become valuable and meaningful once we realise their impermanence. In this light the ephemeral in Mareschal's work may be seen as referring to Palestinian culture, which gains a particular meaning and expressive urgency because it is under threat of erasure by Israeli practices of land occupation and house demolition.

It is the dynamic of these shifting perspectives, between Palestinian lives as simply "going on" (or "let be" in Heidegger's terminology) on the one hand, or constantly interrupted, contested and politicised on the other, which are brought into dialogue by Mareschal's site-specific installation *Beiti*. This artwork consists of five different types of herbs and spices, ground to powdery substances of various shades and colours. each of which is carefully sieved through stencils on the museum floor (Fig. 1 and 2). Together the ingredients form an expanse of decorative tiles that follow a regular square grid. The pattern on each individual tile is asymmetrical, though in pairs of four they form radial symmetries. The spice palette, here constituting as well as sensuously enriching the traditional colour palette, that Mareschal uses to "draw" his designs, consists of the following ingredients: ginger powder and za'atar provide the light beige and deeper shade of brown; curcuma and sumac add to this the brighter hues of Mediterranean yellow and dark red; finally, the white of the ground pepper completes Mareschal's selection of fragrances and colours (Van Abbemuseum 2013). These ingredients are grown across continents, from North-Africa and the Middle-East to South-East Asia. The combination of all five however specifically characterise the Levantine cuisine, with za'atar in particular being a collection of locally grown herbs. Thus, by stimulating different senses *Beiti* evokes the atmosphere of an eastern-Mediterranean domestic space.

The object of this article is to examine how Mareschal's installation engages experiences of domesticity through sensorial affect, in order to open up a space in which social relations operate based on "nearness" and remain unaffected by the distancing practices of power. Power here will be understood in Martin Heidegger's conception of *Macht*, a force which operates on the logic of production. In Heidegger's thought, power comes about in the process of being. Being is conceived as a temporal event, a futural openness to social relations, rather than a thing (*a* being) that is already discursively or technologically produced. As an event, being withdraws from presence, to the point that it collapses into and becomes indistinguishable from beings (things). For Heidegger, this disappearance of the so- called ontico-ontological difference, between the thing and the event, and the subsequent forgetting of the event, marks the inception of power. As an event, being unfolds continually on its own terms. However, with the event forgotten, power emerges as a force that subjects beings and relations to processes of production, manipulation, representation and knowledge (Ziarek 2004b, 104-106).

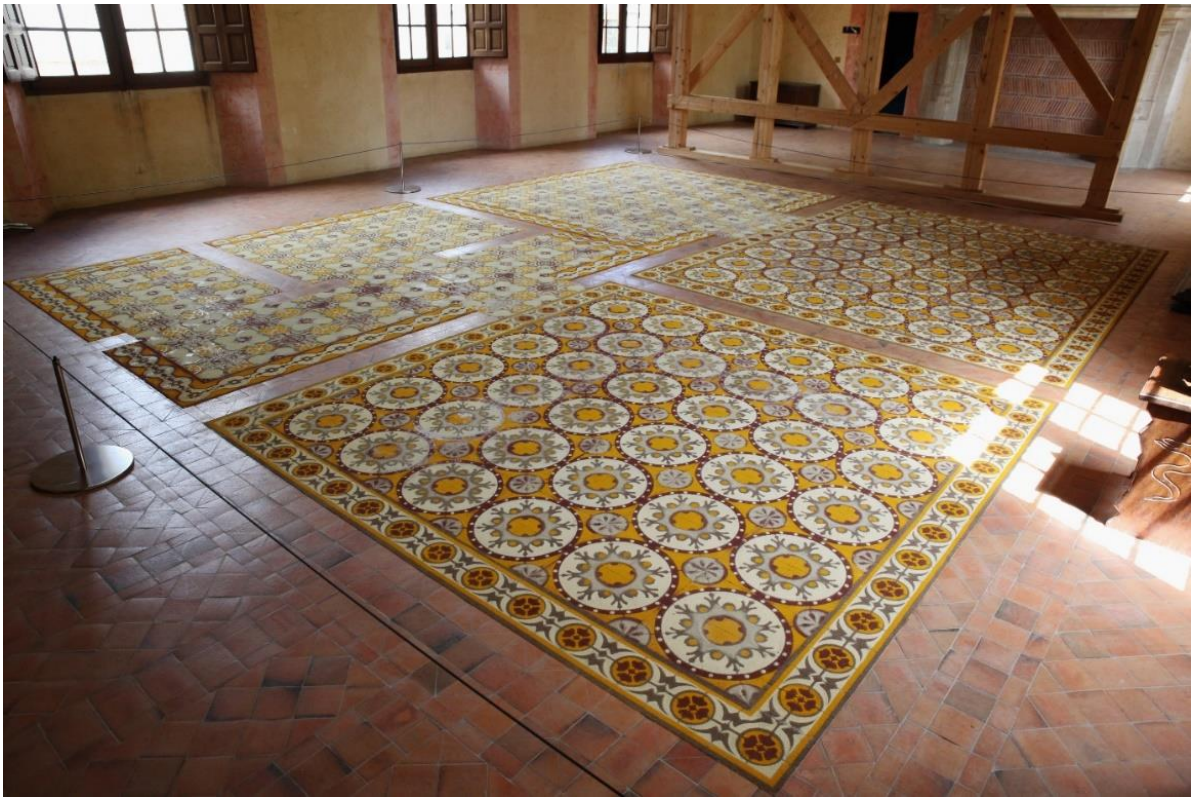

Figure 1. Laurent Mareschal / Adagp, *Beiti*, 2021. Sumac, za'atar, ginger, turmeric, white pepper on linoleum, 6.80 x 5.80 m. Château de Fougères-sur-Bièvre. Photo: Tami Notsani.

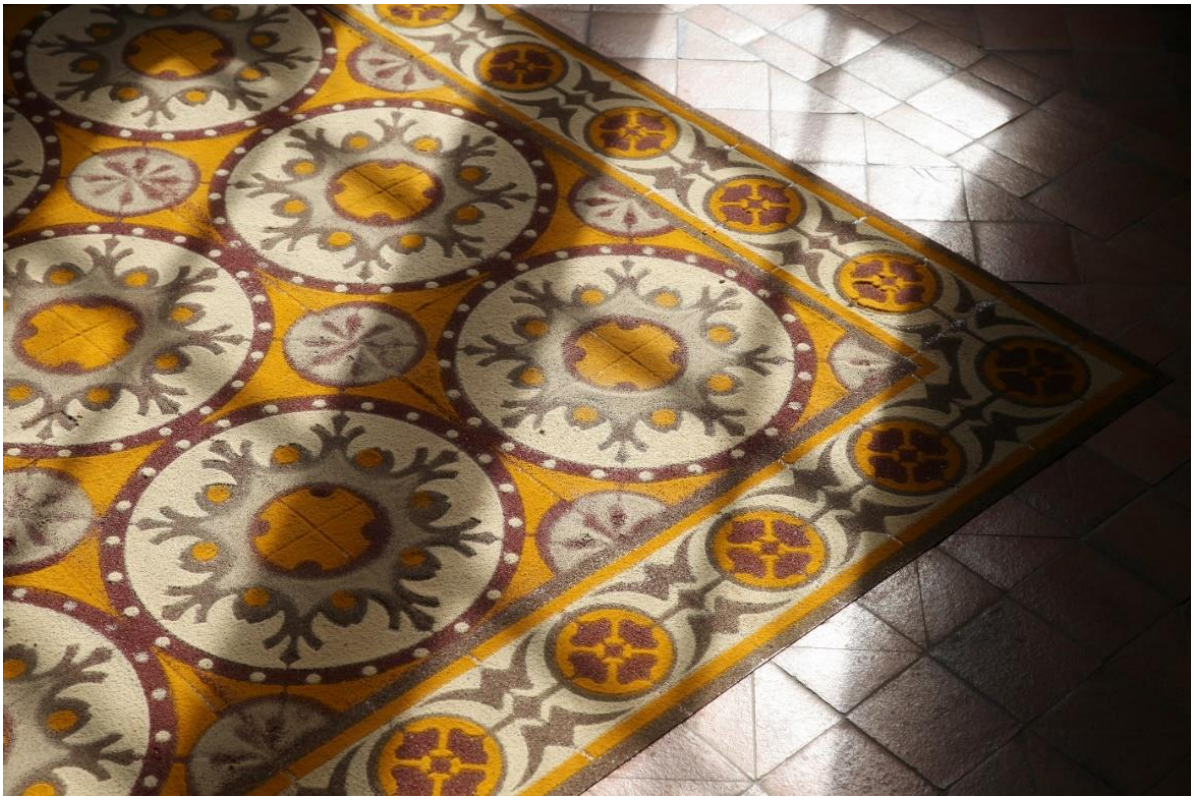

Figure 2. *Beiti* (detail), Photo: Tami Notsani.

Ziarek suggests that, even though the withdrawal of being offers power the space to exert its formative influence over beings, at the same time a dimension is opened up that remains event-like (temporal) and power-free. Thus, by withdrawing, being does not surrender to power. Rather, it simply gives room to its formative practices, while maintaining itself as power-free (Ziarek 2004b, 107). While power's influence on beings is characterised by the process of making (*machen*), non-power constitutes a releasement from power's hold by way of letting be (*lassen*). It is important to note that non-power does not equal powerlessness, since the powerless are ultimately implicated in the same dynamic as the powerful. Rather, non-power constitutes a dimension "beyond power and powerlessness" (Heidegger 1997, 187). It is neither passive, indifferent nor actively power-negating, but rather a transformative undoing of power's hold over social relations.

It is this power-free dimension that Ziarek identifies as "something other" in Heidegger's observation: "[i]n the work of art something other is brought together with the thing that is made" (Heidegger 2009, 285). In its thing-ness the artwork is the result of production, while the origin of the work of art, its temporal being, remains event-like and other than power. Interestingly, in its temporal unfolding, Mareschal's installation reconstitutes relations of power inherent in the history of its own emergence as an object. After all, in the process of its production, the artwork's primary components, herbs and spices, are subjected to various forms of processing, commodification, physical re-ordering as well as discursive construction. These machinations of power seem to mirror the myth-making practices of the nation which re-inscribe the meaning of culinary and domestic products into hegemonic narratives that force coherence upon its citizenry (Shapiro 2000, 80). Regionally harvested food items and decorative tile production are appropriated by the nation to strengthen cultural identity and geared towards a seemingly inevitable future of othering and distancing that mark an increase of power's hold on relations.

I will argue however that *Beiti*'s pre-discursive temporal dimension marks a constant cyclical unfolding of being that disorders the linearity and historicity of such national narratives. The artwork effectuates a "rupturing open" (Ziarek 2004a, 33), as Ziarek calls it, of a space in which relationality remains free from power's hold, through a combination of its strong fragrance, grainy textures, rustic colour pallet and the repetition of its geometric tessellation. These features must not be taken as representations of cultural phenomena, which signify through difference and point to something outside of themselves, rather than revealing their own being. Instead, as an event, *Beiti* constantly discloses and oscillates between its various sensuous modalities and intensities.

Making "Sense" of the Critical Force of Domesticity

In encountering Mareschal's installation, we experience a shift from Cartesian subjects who cognitively come to know and discursively contextualise the art object, into creatures who must sense their way around its "landscape". It is through a simultaneity of haptic, visual and olfactory sensations that Mareschal's artwork re-orients the exceptionality of our museum experience, and its own role within this as a remarkable piece of food-art, to encapsulate us in the ordinary; the slow

and repetitious unwinding of domesticity. Its textures, colours, patterns and scents draw us out of what the geographer Douglas Porteous calls the "sensuous death" of modern urban life (Porteous 1985, 368), and by extension the white cube of the museum, and into an intensified engagement with nature; that is, rural existence and the circular motions of daily rhythms and seasonal alternations. In *Beiti* the phenomena of the world look, feel and smell "of earth". These unfold cyclically, as visually reflected in the repetition of its circular patterns, and condition our perception as we gauge the artwork's dimensions. In this sensuous conditioning we are transformed into rural dwellers whose daily rituals are enacted synchronously with the movements of the constellations across the sky and the agricultural cycles which intimate us with the life-giving elements from which we originate.

It is at this point in the discussion that we move from describing the qualities of Mareschal's installation and how they might affect audiences, to examining the critical implications of such affects. In so doing, our interactions with the artwork inevitably become defined in academic discourses and conceptual constructs, which necessarily obscures the power-free dimension of the artwork before we even arrive at an understanding of its unfolding. This is illustrative of the paradoxical hermeneutic practice of contextualising a phenomenon that ceases to exist when discursively defined, a problem which Heideggerian perspectives in interpretive studies are bound to run into. For our current discussion, *Beiti*'s tendency to transform exceptionality into mundaneness and linear temporalities into cycles, are understood with reference to Islamic ontologies. These allow for conceptualisations of human natures and states that occur prior to cognition, definition and construction, yet exist themselves within the epistemological horizon of the Islamic revelation. A discursive construction of pre-discursive being if you will. It is from this epistemological vantage point that the space into which Mareschal's artwork draws us, and consequently opens up within us, can best be conceptualised in terms of *fitra*, denoting our primordial human nature. The *fitra* is described as a panhuman intuition by which we aspire to live in accordance with our creation, which is understood to unfold in "metaphysical correspondence" with the cosmos (Leaman 2006, 210-211).[3] It suggests that we are most at peace when we exist in spatial, temporal and ethical harmony with all created beings. The *fitra* must not be conceived as an automaton programmed to act out a predestined life, but as a disposition by which we strive, within the full range of possible life paths, for peaceful and balanced co-existence.

In *Beiti* we find this window of ontological possibility, as situated within a structured natural and social order, reflected in its "tile floor". From a distance the space appears strictly ordered by geometric forms which extend regularly across the artwork's plain. Its repetitions seem to reach out to us from beyond its own borders and encompass us in its hypnotic rhythms, which harmonise our being within the warp and weft of the greater socio-cultural as well as rural landscape. When we draw sensorially closer to the artwork, we find the smoothness of the colour fields and the clarity of the borders dissolve into a grainy surface. From this proximity, the regular tessellations begin to appear as irregular shapes; colours that engage in a dialogue with neighbouring forms, shifting into constellations of patterns that are possible but never definite.

Such constantly oscillating plain of formal possibilities may reflect an alternate experience of conviviality. From a constructionist viewpoint, identity is understood relationally and plays out differentially in subject-object dichotomies. However, Heidegger's phenomenological perspective envisions an alternative economy of relations based on "nearness" (*nähe*). According to Ziarek, nearness characterises relations between beings that are at once too close to be defined in terms of difference, yet too distant to produce oneness. It neither increases otherness, nor negates it. Rather, it respects otherness and lets it be (*lassen*). Instead of producing fixed constructions of social relationality, nearness allows for a futurity of relations, projecting itself ahead of what becomes defined. As such, an economy of nearness facilitates "an ethico-political openness to the other" (Ziarek 2000, 139-140). This openness that respects otherness, may be understood with regard to Gayatri Spivak's discussion of relational ethics. Spivak contends that in social interactions something necessarily does not get across, namely a subject's lived experience, which cannot become tangibly felt or "inhabited" by the other. Rather than signalling the impossibility of ethics, this acknowledgement of otherness actually prevents one to interpret, represent or speak for the other, thus promoting ethical engagement (Spivak 1996, 270).

Beiti's aromatic qualities are key in understanding its disclosure of a space in which exchange may occur ethically, on the principle of nearness. Much like its illusion of endless geometries extending outward in all directions, its scents move beyond the physical plain of the artwork and encapsulate the audience. The art historian Jim Drobnick describes how smells "permeate the atmosphere", within which they become environmental, immersive and inescapable (Drobnick 2002, 33). Through their diffusion, the installation's fragrances draw us, as *fitraic* beings, into a corporeal nexus between it, ourselves and others, in relationships that are characterised by sensorial intensity and proximity rather than differential identity. These embodied relations are intensified by the neuro-chemical effects of olfaction. The marketing scholars Annamma Joy and John Sherry state that chemical senses such as smell transform and absorb scents into the body, lodging and dissolving airborne odour particles in the cilia of the nose. They argue that olfaction, as an interment of exotic matter into the body, dissolves the traditional subject-object distinction (Joy 2003, 275).

Encountering *Beiti* thus becomes an intimate experience, to such a degree that fragments of the installation fuse biologically with the bodies of the audience. This literally makes it become "part" of its viewers while their simultaneous olfaction draws each individual experientially closer. The artwork folds difference into a proximity that engenders a corporeal awareness of the affective world of others. The artwork thus provides what the philosopher Jacques Rancière calls a common *aisthesis*, a shared horizon of affects (Rancière 2010, 2). For Rancière, this shared experience potentiated shifts in hierarchies of power between those capable and incapable of sensible speech. However, *Beiti*'s unfolding constitutes a releasement of power more radical than merely allowing the marginalised access to the realm of common sense. Rather, by opening up a space of common "sensing", the artwork marks a wholesale withdrawal from articulations of power through which centre and margin become differentiated in the first place.

In fact, the cultural theorists Caro Verbeek and Cretien van Campen posit that the olfactory

process makes for a physical encounter that is experienced emotionally rather than generating linguistic-semantic knowledge cognitively (Verbeek 2013, 139). Such an "out-of-language" experience allows for explorations of nearness that do not operate on the mechanism of infrastructural differing inherent in language (Ziarek 1995, 393), but facilitate a type of being together that may be characterised as "unarticulated", or even more urgently, "unscripted". I say urgent, because news reports, social media and state narratives script the Eastern Mediterranean as a contested geography broken up into states and provinces which serve the interests of national projects and sectarian groupings and along the lines of which civil strife and military engagements are frequently enacted. The kind of domesticity that *Beiti* evokes, as well as the location on which it unfolds, is not simply a private matter separate from public discourse, but a highly politicised phenomenon subject to extreme forms of contention (Ross 2015, 247).

In this, we see power's formative hold on the social world and its impact on our thinking about geopolitics. This inclination demands us to script Palestine/Israel by carefully tracing national borders and mapping ethnic communities, privileging notions of identity, majority/minority, ownership and control. *Beiti* however offers no such narrowly defined description of locality, leaving the audience to ponder whose domesticity they are actually partaking in. It is not an active refusal to produce its residents in terms of national identity or state allegiance; not a negation, but rather a positive interest in what domesticity can be when power loosens its hold on our social imagination. When, in other words, relations are allowed to draw nearer through a radical un-scripting of a pre-scripted social world. Even the title of the artwork un-scripts constructed difference, since the word *beiti* is used by speakers of both Hebrew and Arabic to refer to one's house.[4] By spacing experiences of domesticity through our immediate senses, the artwork's temporal unfolding "remains beyond the threshold of representation, slipping away from the parameters of discursivity" (Ziarek 2004a, 32). Yona Fischer, who curated one of Mareschal's exhibitions in Israel, speaks of incommunicability in a multilingual region, citing the biblical story of the tower of Babel. She then likens Mareschal to the prophet Moses as a mediator, albeit one who does not "bring together" by means of the written word but with more immediate, sense-able material. While *Beiti*'s economy of nearness potentiates both social exchange as well as the recognition of otherness, it does so phenomenologically, beyond the mechanisms of linguistic constructions. Fischer aptly describes Mareschal's role in facilitating a sense of openness and nearness between audiences, without defining their positions discursively, describing the artist as a "bringer" rather than a "conductor, arbiter or playmaker" in the dynamic of audience participation (Fischer 2016).

Fischer's imagination of Mareschal as an implicit force that merely creates the conditions of "being together" instead of an active agent of social ordering and definition, can be likened to *Beiti*'s emphasis of regional characteristics, conjuring a landscape of potential sociality, over the ordering presence of the nation-state. The notion of Levantinism may be particularly illustrative here when defined as a disposition that enables positive social being and imagining. *Beiti*'s Levantinism is not activist, characterised by the literary theorist Rachel Harris as "a *refusal* to conform", a "*rejection* of

constraints and boundaries" and a *subversion* of "ideological purism" [author's emphases] (Harris 2012, 108). Rather, the artwork's critical force implicates audiences into open explorations of the social world, akin to historian Fernand Braudel's description of Levantine sociality, operating on the acknowledgement of a shared climate, temperament and food, from which flow regionally common agricultural practice, trade, urban culture, education and monotheistic religion (Braudel 2001, 96). The political theorist Bashir Bashir moreover contends that Levantine imaginaries could make visible the exchanges, interconnectedness and intertwinement of various cultures in the region (Bashir 2015, 811), and accommodates their "shared sovereignties" as well as "multiple loyalt[ies]" (Bashir 2015, 803).

As the proverbial *farsh*, that is, the outstretched carpet of the earth (Nasr 1987, 39), *Beiti* provides a literal common ground, an evocation of the Levant, on which difference is allowed to be and unfold relationally, without a pervasive tendency to fold into distance. As a literal *farsh*, a carpet or tile floor, it opens up a domestic space for enacting humanity freely, in all of its valences and intensities, as we may glimpse from the photograph of a Christmas party in Ramallah (Fig. 3). Indeed, *Beiti*'s suggestion of everydayness, the common experience of sitting down with others to feast on a meal prepared with shared tastes and scents that engender familiarity and sociality, foregrounds the subtleties of partaking in Eastern-Mediterranean life. Rather than scripting the region solely as one of conflict and violence and reducing its residents to well-worn abstractions (heroes, villains, martyrs, victims), *Beiti* captures the mundaneness of daily life suggestive of a multifaceted humanity (Harker 2009, 329).

By spacing the Levant through the home, Mareschal's artwork invites for productive comparisons with Mona Hatoum's artistic allusions to the domestic sphere. Like *Beiti*, Hatoum's artwork *Grater Divide* intimates us with experiences of domesticity by engaging our senses. The sculpture is a representation of a cheese grater blown up in size to evoke a metal fence. It relies on our haptic memories of using this particular kitchen utensil to effectuate what the cultural theorist Anna Ball calls "empathetic visual intimacy" (Ball 2012, 177). Ball observes that Hatoum's artwork connects the emotional "grating" that Palestinians are subjected to near Israeli border walls and checkpoints, with the supposed safety of the home, suggesting that the violence of the border haunts Palestinian families even in the privacy of domestic life (Ball 2012, 183). Hatoum thus takes a culturally non-specific culinary activity and folds it into a particular national experience or condition, which can be temporarily inhabited by museum visitors through sensory interactions. She thereby places another border (or fence) that Ball has missed out on discussing in her article; namely between those who actually live such dehumanising realities every day and those privileged enough to briefly share in the experience by choice, to culturally enrich themselves or to express sympathy for the fate of Palestinians. *Grater Divide* thereby pre-emptively anchors its take on the home in experiences of dispossession, estrangement and humiliation, which viewers can only relate to by assuming a role in the artwork's nexus of geopolitical power relations.

Figure 3. *A Glimpse of Christmas at al-Nahda Women Association in Ramallah*, 1977. Photograph, 14 x 9 cm. Ramallah. The Palestinian Museum Digital Archive.

Mareschal's installation on the other hand seems uninterested in predefining any social hierarchies that charge living spaces with the realities of conflict. This does not mean that it is altogether indifferent towards its audience's cultures and experiences. It merely suggests that its sensory stimuli do not cross the line from letting relations be to producing, ordering and fixing them. *Beiti*'s living space is one in which a constantly shifting economy of social forces is allowed to unfold, because the circulation of its audiences and their potentially inexhaustible range of dispositions, experiences and imaginations are not tightened by the noose of discursive pre-scripting. The artwork's leisurely rhythms, visual harmonies and olfactory intensities intimate its viewers in a sense of "peace in belongingness", what may be characterised as *sakina*. This word brings together the experience of thriving spiritually with the notion of belonging, of being at home. From its Semitic root *s-k-n* are derived verbs for "inhabiting", nouns relating to "dwellings" and emotional conditions described by "serenity" and "tranquillity" (Quranic Arabic Corpus 2009-2017). *Beiti* draws us into a feeling of "at ease-ness", as opposed to a state of conflict, as a productive starting point for enacting a myriad of potential modes of sociality. Though this seems to establish Mareschal's installation as apolitical and critically mute, it actually discloses a perfect vantage point from which to offer social critique. After all, true critique of power cannot be implicated in its mechanisms, but must remain radically "otherwise" than power (Ziarek 2004a, 138). *Beiti* does so through subtle atmospheric immersion that celebrates a complex and thriving humanity.

Memories and Ruins

Mareschal wrote a short story titled "What once was home" to elaborate what *Beiti* means to him. It follows a Palestinian boy who enters his family home and walks upstairs to present his school achievements to his mother. The child's sensory experience is described vividly, evoking an atmosphere that is familiar, safe and intimate. However, all of this is undone by the end of the story;

> The tiles slowly disappear, almost evaporating into thin air as he opens his eyes. The scents, sights and sounds vanish, as he lay on the ground of a tent in a refugee camp, cold and hungry with only a small rag to shield him from the chill in the air. His mother comes into the room embraces him and rocks him back to sleep singing the familiar lullabies she used to sing to him as an infant. He wills himself to sleep in his mother's arms in hopes of reliving his beautiful dream that had taken him back to the days when he was safely home, happy in school and without a care in the world. If only things could go back to the way they were. Back in Palestine. Back at home. (Mareschal 2014)

With this story, Mareschal situates *Beiti* in the context of exilic Palestinian experience. From this perspective, the artwork evokes memories of a home lost in the aftermath of Israel's declaration of independence and the subsequent 1948 war. The notion of home and the separation with it constitute a cornerstone of Palestinian refugee identity. Expanding on the idea that belongingness is a primary human need, the Middle-East scholar Victoria Mason contends that the home provides a safe space in an emotional sense and is intimately bound to the possibility of having a future existence

(Mason 2007, 274). Mason's descriptions of a primary need and a safe space of futural being, are reflected in the terms of *fitra* and *sakina*: emotive experiences that *Beiti* immerses us in. As a testament to what Palestinians have lost however, Mareschal's installation makes us aware that refugees have no access to such experiences of peace and wholeness.

We can ground emotional responses to exile within the same conceptual sphere of spirituality from which *sakina* derives; in particular the notion of *ghurba*, which describes a feeling of homesickness (Peteet 1995, 173), the exact opposite of *sakina*. A person in a state of *ghurba* will constantly mourn the separation from the place of belonging and long to return there. The sociologist Avtar Brah describes the Palestinian exilic idea of home as a "mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination" (Brah 1996, 192). In a secular sense, this desire may be seen as an inactive state of being that is unable to materialise any real change in the world. For the classical Sufi thinkers however, this longing was the pre-eminent inspiration for aesthetic expression which helped guide to a feeling of steadfastness in separation, emotional healing and spiritual growth. As the thirteenth century poet Jalal ud-Din Rumi illustrated:

> Longing is the core of the mystery.
> Longing carries the cure within itself.
> The only rule is: suffer the pain.
>
> Your desire must be disciplined,
> and what you want to see fulfilled in time,
> sacrificed. [Author's translation] (Groot 2010, 25)[5]

Thus, instead of a passive and definite state of defeat, *ghurba* inspires introspective reflections on separation and aesthetic expressions on how to "suffer the pain" of exile. In Palestinian refugee experiences, this idea of sustaining oneself through separation is referred to as *sumud* (steadfastness), which can be described as "cling[ing] to a sense of self and nation, no matter where they [Palestinians] live" (Falah 2013, 300). Various ritual enactments in diasporic communities revolve around the idea of "reconstructing home" in order to maintain identity. One such practice concerns orally passing down detailed experiences of the home(land) to younger generations, making Palestine almost "tangible" to the point that children are able to describe the textures of bricks and scents of trees in and around the family house (Mason 2007, 273). These narrations of home function as what the cultural theorist Carol Bardenstein calls "acts of memory", insofar as they proliferate "around points of perceived and experienced breaks, ruptures, and loss", making present a time or place that no longer is (Bardenstein 1999, 148).

Seen within the context of Palestinian exilic existence, it is this notion of memory and the ritual enactment of it, on which the dynamic between *Beiti*'s ontic being (as a thing) and ontological being (as event) hinges. Memory can be explored through emotive experiences, which anchor the meaning of contemporary existence in the past. In the proximity of its aromatic atmosphere, Mareschal's installation may suddenly trigger very specific memories of domestic life, which the individual viewer

may mentally "re-enact" in its vacuous "living room", like a projection on an empty screen. The viewer may be understood as "re-inhabiting" an experience of home which was, at some point, interrupted by exile and now made present by the artwork's sensorial stimuli. Indeed, smells are particularly powerful inducers of what Verbeek and Van Campen call "autobiographical memories" (Verbeek 2013, 134).

Beiti does not however induce a strictly solipsistic experience. According to Joy and Sherry, the meaning of odours is culturally defined and shared odours increase sociality in groups (Joy 2003, 276). The artwork may thus induce episodes of shared memories which shift, one into the other, depending on particular recollections held among different groups of viewers. From this perspective, *Beiti* continually discloses collective pasts which are co-inhabited and re-explored beyond the historical parameters of lived experience cut short by exile. This constitutes a dimension of non-power within which the possibilities of future social imaginaries are projected ahead of the world as it is (historically defined to be). Such temporal continuities of interrelated existences, from remembered pasts to imaginative futures, may strengthen the spirit of *sumud* amongst those who persevere in lives of exile.

Memory can be alternatively traced through national discourse. Palestinian memory practices seem to function as "invented traditions", a term coined by the historian Eric Hobsbawm. It describes "existing customary traditional practices (...) modified, ritualised and institutionalized for the new national purposes" (Clement 2014, 549). Hobsbawm contends that such newly instituted traditions become established by their relentless repetition, creating an impression of continuity with the past (Hobsbawm 1983, 1). Invented traditions provide political orders with historical legitimisation, they cement the social cohesion of a national people (Hobsbawm 1983, 12), and create the feeling of historical continuity in "the constant change and innovation of the modern world" (Hobsbawm 1983, 2). In the case of exilic Palestinian experience, the idea of continuity plays an especially important role in bridging the temporal gap left by separation. Through narrative repetitions, Palestinian refugees are accorded a proper place again, as a coherent people among the nations of the modern world. This "production of a people", occurs in corporeal interactions between subjects (individuals) and objects (of cultural identity), each bestowing a stronger sense of Palestinianness onto the other in incremental stages.

This situates *Beiti* within the logic of production which reveals its ontic being. In its thingness, the artwork is not only made in a physical sense, but also discursively produced as a distinct set of identity markers. Dialogical interactions between the artwork and its viewers, slowly differentiate in-group (Palestinians) from out-group (other museum visitors) and facilitate increasing familiarity with, or estrangement from, *Beiti*'s fragrant contents. As a result, both groups become experientially distanced, mirroring power's inclination to increase and escalate. This differentiation of sense communities is problematised by the contradictory effects of olfaction. Douglas Porteous suggests that, because of the so-called "habituation effect", odours to which we are continually exposed become imperceptible. Smells are thus noticed most intensively by newcomers (Porteous 1985, 358). This may disturb experiences of familiarity and intimacy. Through its olfactory affect, *Beiti* mimics ritualised narrations of the homeland, eliciting in diasporic Palestinians personal memories of places

of belonging, but at the same time produces them as outsiders by making a "first (olfactory) impression" on them, estranging them from memories that were believed to be intimate.

Such alienation from the familiar pertains particularly to Palestinian exiles who fell victim to Israeli politics of expansion and occupation. It applies to refugees who grieve their forced separation from home, but in a more literal sense also to inhabitants of houses converted by the Israeli army into military outposts (so-called "straw widows"). In this situation, Israeli soldiers take ownership over a house and use its domestic appliances as if they are the actual inhabitants. Meanwhile Palestinian families are relegated to a single floor, limiting their movement and effectively making them "strangers in their own homes" (Grassiani 2012, 108).

The notion of finitude plays a particularly captivating role in Mareschal's installation. Vulnerability and decay are inherent in its light powdery substance and the organic nature of its biological materials. The development of the artwork, from careful production to inevitable erasure, though seemingly a processual event playing out along a temporal axis, should not be understood as a transformative dimension of non-power. Ziarek argues that being's event is not to be confused with "becoming", but rather a constant temporal unfolding (Ziarek 2004a, 32). The gradual organic process of decay can be more readily understood as a reflection of the fate of Palestinian tradition and culture: its increasing ruination in the present day by the Israeli practice of house demolition (Fig. 4). Preparing the installation is a long and laborious process, during which Mareschal and his team carefully sieve herbs and spices through ten different stencils, filling out one portion of the pattern each time in order to achieve the intricate geometry. Seeing as these templates represent only one colour of a single decorated tile, the procedure must be repeated countless times to complete the entire floor, all the while moving about in utter concentration and wearing facemasks in order to prevent breath from displacing the material (Fig. 5).

This monumental effort seems to be in vain with the realisation that the artwork can be ruined in a flash when entered. However, this is exactly Mareschal's point, suggesting his work deals with the impermanence of the "Palestinian condition". In order to demonstrate this ephemerality, he encourages visitors to enter and efface *Beiti*'s spice carpet by picking up, tasting and walking over it (Edible Geography 2014). Letting visitors become part of its domestic sphere indicates the ease with which intimacy and privacy are violated, family life is disrupted and cultural heritage destroyed. Though this may underline the fragility of the installation's tilework and perhaps the futility of Mareschal's arduous endeavour of constructing it, it powerfully evokes the sudden demolition of that which has a long history of dedicated development. Later incarnations of the installation are fenced off by a rope and visitors are no longer allowed to physically interact with it. Yet, its organic material is still altered by the slow passing of time and subject to eventual decomposition. In fact, when I went to see *Beiti* in the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, it had become covered by a layer of dust, which slightly obscured its bright colours and completely drowned out its scents. Five containers holding samples of the installation's ingredients were attached to the adjacent wall. These were to reintroduce the dimension of smell, in a sense preserving what was created to fade.

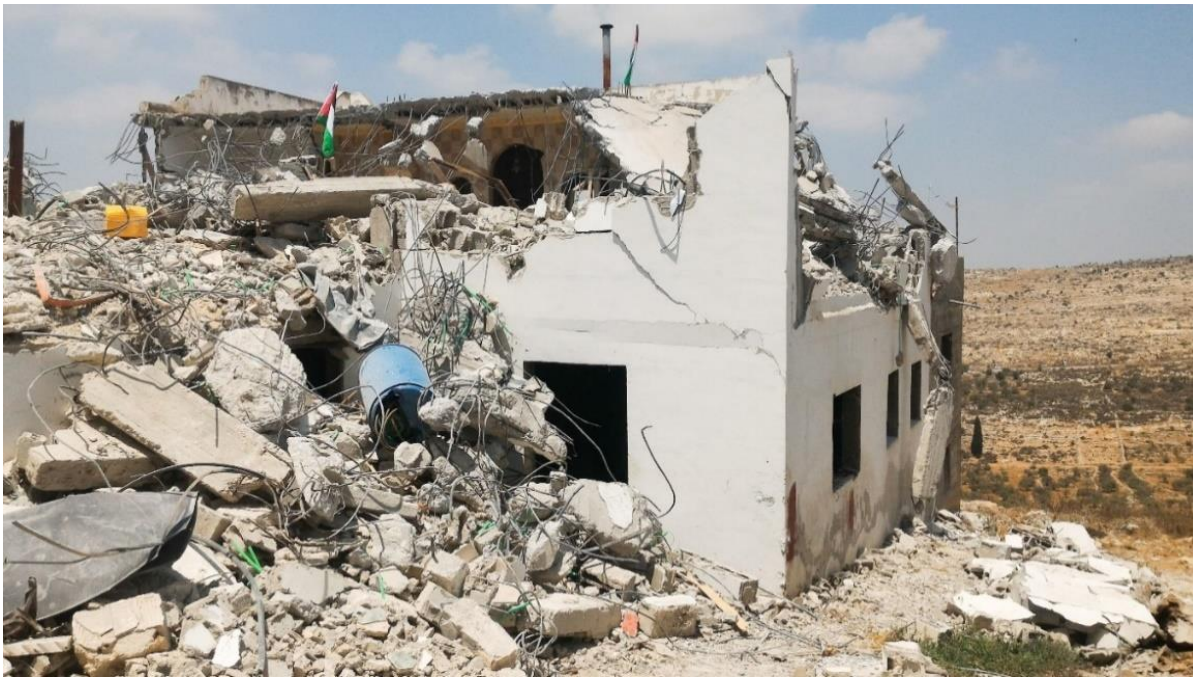

Figure 4. *Ruins of Saleh family home, Deir Abu Mash'al*, 2017. Ramallah district. Photo: B'Tselem / Iyad Hadad.

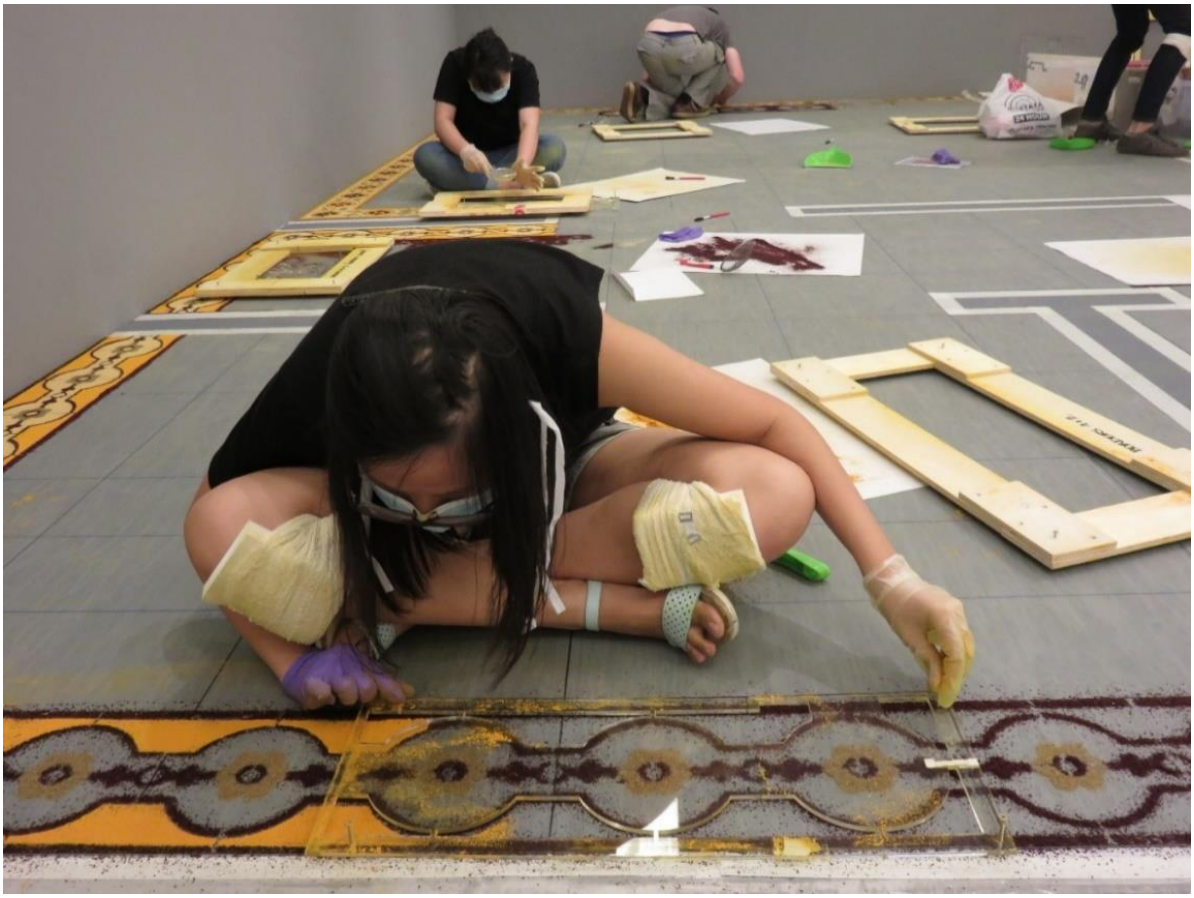

Figure 5. Laurent Mareschal / Adagp, *Beiti* (installation process), 2021. Sumac, za'atar, ginger, turmeric, white pepper on linoleum, 6.80 x 5.80 m. Haifa: Beit Ha'Gefen Art Centre. Photo: Tami Notsani.

Whether by swift human intervention or slow natural processes, *Beiti*'s suggestion of home eventually fades, leaving a physical ruin in its place, or a mental image, a memory. The artwork speaks to the idea that, what constitutes the core of Palestinian identity, is at once close to people's hearts and unattainable, far removed in time and space. As an act of memory, *Beiti* draws viewers into a remembered place to belong to, be safe in and build a future out of (the spirit of *sumud*), but at the same time attests to the tragedy of separation from such base human needs (the state of *ghurba*). It becomes a national monument attesting to the tragedies of exile, by which we stand mourning, remembering and empathising with those who were displaced. In this, Mareschal's installation mirrors Banksy's famous graffiti on the border wall between Israel and the West Bank. The painting is a *trompe-l'oeil* depicting a hole in the wall which reveals a paradisiacal landscape behind it. Like *Beiti*, Banksy's work alludes to what was in the Palestinian past, but reduces it to a highly idealised and romanticised image that lacks any of the complexities of lived realities. It monumentalises and aestheticizes the Palestinian condition, not for local residents who express estrangement with Banksy's paintings (Ganivet 2019, 117), but for a progressive audience whose worldviews it confirms and valuates.

Likewise *Beiti* fashions, for museum audiences around the world, a space of ritualised remembrance of what Palestinians have not. As such, the artwork folds its critical space of alternative social imaginaries, into a memorial space in which cultural Others become further abstracted by the frame of conflict. As a testimony to political injustice *Beiti* becomes implicit in producing Palestinians as dispossessed victims and ensnares them in a power dynamic with the Israeli oppressor. Rather than re-arranging relations into a power-free momentum, *Beiti* re-articulates social paradigms produced over and over by hegemonic narrations of Palestinian lives. In a sense the artwork moves from its own being, as art, into activist modes of solidarity and resistance, which inevitably positions its audiences into hierarchies between insider and outsider, powerful and powerless. As a representation of a historical conflict situation, *Beiti* is seemingly unable to locate within itself a power-free dimension from which to effectively critique dominant articulations of the status quo, which it ends up reaffirming.

De-escalatory Temporalities and the Imaginary of the "New Jew"

I have demonstrated how Mareschal's installation induces us into different perceptions of time, depending on the particular experiential worlds and hermeneutic faculties of its audiences. It may involve us in histories of violence and exile, only to take us out of the linear sequence of historical time and into the circularity of our being in nature. It can make us doze off into personal memories of care-free youths, or condition us into ritual commemorations of the national origins. It allows for thinking temporal continuities and futures yet unexplored, but also dwells extensively on interrupted pasts and continued lives in their aftermath. *Beiti*'s different temporal imaginaries result, as we have seen, in a complex set of dealings with power. In this, the artwork and our relationship with it are marked by ambivalence in the definitional sense that "contradictory emotions or attitudes towards the same object or situation" become possible (Brown 1993, 64).

On the one hand *Beiti* reinforces the dominant social paradigm, which obscures alternate configurations of conviviality and cements the already given identities at play in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. On the other hand it unfolds a power-free space wherein the fixity of these identities is released and new affinities and solidarities can be explored. This approach to Mareschal's work, as a single constellation in which (non-)power constantly (un)folds, may help understand its ambivalent attitudes by recognising that the very same artistic media, cultural practices and embodied experiences that withdraw from power, also offer power the opportunity to envelop them in its operations. Therefore, the installation finds itself at the critical intersection between national separation and social integration, distance and nearness, producing and letting be, ever leaving open the possibility of unfolding and revealing, only to be folded back onto and obscured.

The analytical challenge lies not in conceptualising an eventual "overpowering" of power, for it is not in being's nature to dominate and colonise; only to maintain itself as power-free. Rather, it is power's de-escalation which should be sought when *Beiti*'s whirling patterns, soft textures and inviting fragrances seduce us to explore beyond the horizon of what seems possible. We have seen how every hermeneutic act, each corporeal interaction with the artwork, immerses us into one or multiple entangled trajectories of time, some of which escalate power's hold over beings, some de-escalatory in their temporal unfolding.

One such temporality, firmly rooted in sensory subjectivities similar to those that *Beiti* engages, is the historical imaginary of the "New Jew". Although it is well-known that Palestine saw its greatest influx of Jewish immigrants after the Balfour Declaration of 1917, fewer studies are made of the smaller numbers of refugees who reached Palestine's shores before this official British government sanction. They fled discrimination, persecution and poor living standards in Europe, in pursuit of a safer and healthier society. Interestingly, the historian Gur Alroey found that their leaders preferred rural existence and agricultural work over city life and commercial professions. They even stated that "if there was not a large sector of workers close to nature and the productive materials of nature, such a people would end by degenerating physically and spiritually and would have no right to exist" (Alroey 2014, 177). In this rhetoric, cultivating the land was often associated with health "in body and soul" which was expected to help transform the migrant's ghettoised urban European identities into the idealised figure of the "New Jew" (Ranta 2014, 423).

This is a telling episode which *Beiti* draws us into by engaging our historical consciousness or intergenerational memory. It is telling because this narrative conveys how easily power takes hold of relations when a victimised people have their sights set on a brighter future. Indeed, it has done so historically by increasingly differentiating between migrant Jewish identities and the local Palestinian cultures, escalating into tensions, riots and wars that finally concluded in a complete national rift. This temporal intersection of forces seems predetermined to end the way it did historically. However, *Beiti* may help uncover bits and fragments of sense-experiences and memories, which transform the social *potentiality* (as opposed to historically determined reality) of this past and de-escalate its outcome. For this we have to take a closer look at how migrants made sense of rural life through spiritual narration.

Figure 6. *Harvest in Rehovot*, year and maker unknown. Photograph in album, 16 x 11 cm. Lenkin Family Photography of the Holy Lands Collection at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries, Library at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania.

The political theorist Ronald Ranta and the Middle-East scholar Yonatan Mendel state that migrants who settled in the countryside of Palestine found communities there which grew, harvested and prepared their own foods in manners they associated with the Jews of Biblical times (Ranta 2014, 423) (Fig. 6). In this Orientalist romanticisation of the land as an unchanging geography, we see an opportunity for power to stereotype and dominate. Spacing the land through religious imaginaries may, moreover, initiate a claim to ownership by the young Jewish nation. However, contrary to this, the early rural settlers, by learning from local agricultural and culinary practices, recognised in the Palestinian fellahin the mythical origins of their own *uomo nuovo* ideals. Various concepts discussed earlier are of particular interest here. Firstly, the idea of spiritual transformation by adjusting to the cycles of nature and the firm conviction that this would make for a healthy and peaceful co-existence. It was the migrants' belief that awareness of such existential condition was not developed historically, but rather originated in the temporal zero-point of revelation.

The idea of Levantine sociality is also instructive for its promotion of conviviality based on the principle of nearness. Shared Abrahamic traditions, natural habitats and cultural practices promote togetherness without un-making otherness. In this dynamic, otherness is "let be" (*gelassen*), rather than nullified or escalated. However, history turned out differently. As we know, the Israeli state-building project would gather speed and forge a distinct nationality, forcing the adopted rural lifestyles of local Palestinians to be re-branded in exclusionary Israeli terms (Ranta 2014, 430). And so it came to pass that the very same experiences of the land, life in rural dwellings and the textures and scents of food that had facilitated the migrants' integration into, and peaceful co-existence with Arab Palestinian communities, eventually folded into markers of exclusivity and contestation.

Sigmund Freud once stated that civilisation required the assumption of an upright position and the raising of the nose from the ground, diminishing the importance of the sense of smell (Freud 1962, 64). Freud suggested that smell is the least civilised of the human senses, an idea that had a lot of currency in his day. It was echoed by contemporary philosophers who deemed olfaction to be emotional and irrational and who idealised a purely cognitive, disembodied reason (Joy 2003, 278). Such ideas originate in Cartesian subject-object structures which are, ironically, undermined by modern-day scientific insights into how scents affect, through immersion and fusion with our bodies, making alternative relationships between the self, the other and the environment possible. By re-tracing Freud's views through this observation in olfactory art theory, corporeal experiences of *Beiti* enable an affective "de-civilisation", an un-scripting of the national myths of origin that have blocked the way of rapprochement and co-existence. If the distancing practices of nationalisms have lured people into destructive conflicts, one may indeed be tempted to "restart", quite literally from the ground on up; from the primeval senses by which Palestinians and Israelis share in a common humanity. Laurent Mareschal imagines a home for them, an intimate domain in which being at peace may serve as a point of departure for viable ways of being together. However, the installation is not idealistically naive but, rather, ambivalent in its suggestion that such a pan-human reset may ever be attained. Just as visible in *Beiti* are the spectres of dispossession and violence that haunt the

idea of home in the region, making its transformative potential for thinking relations otherwise ever more urgent.

Endnotes:

1. See also Alfred Gell. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998; Hans Gumbrecht. *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004; and Joan Gibbons, "Memory and Indexicality," in *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2007. 29-51.
2. In this latter work, towards the end, Mareschal draws the "white line" through a residential area, which understandably angers the local residents who tell him to go away. This may remind one of an earlier artist who was preoccupied with the aesthetics of the border wall: the British street artist Banksy. In an oft-discussed interaction, an old Palestinian man approached the artist to tell him that he made the wall look beautiful. Banksy thanked him, but the old man responded that he should not, because they hate this wall, and then told him to go home. This is illustrative of the tensions between the sometimes self-centred, highly moralised yet insufficiently informed views on border conflicts by Western progressives and the complex realities of lived experiences around such borders. In this regard, Elisa Ganivet states that "this ideal projection of Banksy for the Palestinians was sometimes out of step with their realities, habits and customs." Elisa Ganivet. "Some Consideration on the Aesthetics of the Geopolitical Wall." *Borders in Globalization Review* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2019): 115-122.
3. The idea of *munasaba* (metaphysical correspondence) has long been discussed by authors in the field of *tasawwuf* (spirituality) and *falsafa* (philosophy), including by the Brethren of Purity and Sadr ad-Din al-Qunawi. They believed that human beings as microcosms united the universe as macrocosm within themselves, thus giving them access to knowledge of all things, through knowledge of the Self. See also Seyyed Hossein Nasr. *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*. London: Publishing Co. and Thorsons Publishers. Ltd., 1976; and Samir Mahmoud's lecture series on the relationship between human beings and their built environment: *Architecture & the Luminous Ground – Session 2: Human Being as Microcosm*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oGRGlc-d8k&list=RDLVcDvfKYt83Q&index=7.
4. This un-scripting within language is exemplified by the poem with which Ibtisam Barakat opens her memoir *Tasting the Sky*. The poem goes as follows:

   To Alef, the letter
   that begins the alphabets
   of both Arabic and Hebrew–
   two Semitic languages,
   sisters for centuries.

   May we find the language
   that takes us
   to the only home there is–
   one another's hearts.

   Ibtisam Barakat. *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood*. New York: Melanie Kroupa Books, 2007.
5. Original text:

Verlangen is de kern van het mysterie.
Verlangen zelf draagt zijn eigen genezing in zich.
De enige regel is: verdraag de pijn.

Je begeren moet worden gedisciplineerd,
en datgene waarvan je wilt dat het in de tijd wordt vervuld,
opgeofferd.

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CONTRIBUTORS:

IULIA NISTOR
RICHARD MCDONOUGH
LAYNA DROZ
JOSHUA ANDERSON
RACHID BOUTAYEB
JUSTINA ŠUMILOVA
JOÃO ALMEIDA LOUREIRO
ALEXANDRU CASIAN
LINDSAY PARKHOWELL
MARIA ANTONIETTA STRUZZIERO
RAREŞ-CHRISTIAN VASILESCU
JUSTINE SHU-TING KAO
CODRIN ANICULĂESE
KASPER TROMP

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