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TIMING THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Ariadne: Gibt es kein Hinüber?
Sind wir schon da?
Wie könnt' es geschehen?

Hofmannsthal, *Ariadne auf Naxos*

Even if we accept the arguments of those who argue against the very notion of “aesthetic experience”,¹ there is still some latitude for questioning how the experience of artworks can affect or be affected by the duration of that experience. There is the issue, on the one hand, of the way aesthetic transactions manipulate our sense of time and, on the other hand, the issue of whether we can assess the proper duration of those experiences. The former looks for a kind of intra-chronology of the work involved, and is the topic of numerous investigations, for instance, as to the specific nature of fictional time. The latter inquires about the duration of the exposition to artworks and whether we can stipulate or otherwise evaluate the time needed for a relevant or rewarding aesthetic transaction to take place. To the best of my knowledge, this issue has been seldom and only indirectly addressed.

The two topics are related, of course. In order to produce effective fictional time illusion, proper duration is required – take the case of the masterfully planned “Breakfast Scene” in Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane*. And some specific stylistic devices require that the right calibration of time be attained so as to allow those devices to work. For instance, when discussing the import that point-of-view-editing and the Kuleshov Effect have in contemporary Hollywood movies as a way of mimicking the viewer’s daily perceptual behaviour, Noël Carroll (Carroll 1996) introduces the issue of the exact time length of this device. A point-glance shot of a character’s face activates in the spectator the need to read out that character’s expression which in turn calls for the behavioural conditioned reflex of following the gaze of that character. The movies’ particular characteristics allow for the fulfilment of this behavior to be done in a way much closer to our “perceptual prototype”, i.e., in a consecutive way, first glancing at the “facial range” – the point/glance shot acting as an emotional “range finder” (Carroll 1996: 132) – and then considering the “filtering object” – the point/object acting as “focuser”. Whilst point-of-view editing deletes the perceptual pathway between both, it allows for the possibility of playing with the timing of that “revelation”. A proper detention of the spectator on a point/glance shot is important in order to allow her to

¹Most notoriously, Dickie 1964.

quickly survey the range of the character's possible emotional states, oscillating between interest and excitement, enjoyment and joy, surprise and startle, distress and anguish, caution and terror, etc. A shot too short won't activate the spectator's attention that derives from the need to anticipate the character's exact expression. A shot too long disperses that concentration. If done properly, the duration of the shift between point/glance and point/object shots acts as a visual filter guiding the viewer to what is salient in the point/object shot: "we will then attend to the open sores on the zombie's body and not his designer jeans" (Carroll 1996: 132).

But our question is wider and encompasses the so-called "spatial arts", the visual arts where the issue of "proper duration of experience" is much less debated. Naturally, there is a minimum amount of time required to acknowledge and grasp the visual information provided by any picture and this varies with the picture's complexity. Some paintings are presented as visual palimpsests with a variety of graphic and symbolic levels. For instance, some paintings present what Gestalt psychologists call "reversible pictures", i.e., images like the famous "Duck-rabbit" head that can be seen as one object or another. Dali's output offers numerous examples (e.g., "Bust of Voltaire in the Slave Market") but one could also consider a painting like Vermeer's *The Lacemaker*. The shift from different "seeing-as" aspects may require some time of adaptation but does the duration of this adjustment constitute a significant part of the aesthetic experience, or does the painter somehow prescribe it as an intentional component of the piece? Many other genres of painting – e.g., *trompe l'oeil* depictions, such as Andrea del Pozzo's massive frescoes – also require some time to for the mere seeing-in to occur, i.e., for the spectator to discern a landscape in what *prima facie* looks like distorted geometric shapes. The fact that their full presentation isn't available on a first look may be taken as exemplifying – in the Goodmanian sense – a characteristic of all painting. But this requires some scrutinizing.

So: what intrinsic variables affect the amount of time needed in order to attain a relevant or rewarding aesthetic transaction? Or, to put it in George Dickie's more skeptical terms (1964): how long should our span of attention be in order to allow us to say that we are paying proper attention to the artwork? I am using the expression "intrinsic variables" here because I want to restrict this inquiry to the conditions that may impose a specific attention span from within the artwork itself. Naturally, there are all sorts of external conditions that affect the time needed to perceive an artwork. For instance, some philosophers have recently drawn attention to the influence that joint attention has upon aesthetic appreciation (Cochrane 2009: 59-73) When we listen to music together with an audience or visit an art gallery with a friend we are sharing a cognitive environment and our perceptual activities are integrated or interdependent mainly because we are biologically predisposed to share emotional reactions towards the objects we perceive. In particular, there is a constant "preparedness" (Cochrane 2009: 62) to alter the way we attend to these objects should our fellow observer direct our attention to a specific aspect so that "my awareness of the subject is also an

awareness of the person sitting next to me” (Cochrane 2009: 64). And this too alters our inner sense of time. Phenomenologist Alfred Schutz claimed that music had a special capacity to align the listeners’ sense of time and that there is a significant difference between listening to music in a concert hall and radio listening (Schutz 1971: 159-178). Public listeners sharing the same concert hall, or even better the same noisy environment, acquire a sense of simultaneity with other listeners or, as Schutz put it, a sense of “growing older together”. The fact that they all attain a basic level of coordination and that they are more aware of the response of the others also means that their experiential time is environmentally conditioned and synchronized.

But let us return to our search for intrinsic ways of timing the aesthetic experience. The quest for these intrinsic temporal prescriptions could start off by analyzing an insightful text by Jerrold Levinson and Philippe Alperson, “What is a Temporal Art?” (Levinson & Alperson 1991). In this text the authors have proposed a number of time-related characteristics that could be taken as conditions for qualifying some artistic objects as “temporal” and they went on by proposing a repartition of these conditions in three different groups. For expository reasons, I shall alter their order of appearance.

First, we have “content-based” characteristics. This set of characteristics applies to temporal properties of what the work represents and is particularly significant in the case of those objects that somehow adopt time itself as their reference or subject.

I believe an eloquent case will suffice to exemplify this kind of characteristics. In 2004 Christopher Williams produced “Supplement 04”, a video presenting what seemed at first an ordinary morning talk show with the usual culinary segment. The cook and the TV hostess prepared a tasty pie and placed it inside the oven. The audience cheered. The camera then focused on the oven’s window but no ellipse occurred, i.e., the video showed the slow cooking of the pie for an entire hour. This sudden shift to real-time representation produced some discomfort and no spectator remained sitting on the Franz West sofa throughout the entire video. Resisting the video’s sequence and timing became an important part of the work’s experience but, on the other hand, time became its content in an unexpected way. We leave this set of characteristics behind since it is not directly connected to our quest, although it seems true that, as in the case of the Williams video, there are artworks whose temporal manipulation of the spectator’s attention is often exemplified within the art object itself.

Second, there are “object-based” characteristics. This set of characteristics refers to the temporal properties of the work itself since most art forms and artworks require time for their being presented to the audience, essentially because they imply (a) a vectorized “sequentiality” and (b) a prescribed pace.²

²The second set: objects of the art form require time in presentation, i.e., they require performance or exposition of some sort and their parts are not available at any one moment, but only consecutively; objects of the art form consist of elements or parts arranged in a linear order, with definite direction, from first to last; objects of the art form are such that non-temporally extended parts of the objects are

Finally we have experience-based characteristics and these refer to the temporal properties of the observer's experience of the work and derive from the fact that the interaction with the art object "possesses some non-trivial duration (...) or imposed linear order" (Levinson & Alpers 1991: 446). This final set is directly connected to our inquiry, although it isn't exactly clear how we can establish a clear cut distinction between object-based and experience-based characteristics. For instance, an object's inherent sequentiality obviously conditions the timespan needed for proper appreciation and it seems fair to anticipate that "sequential" art objects will require more time for proper appreciation than, say, instantaneous or "in your face" objects such as haiku poems, easel paintings, and small facades or reliefs (Levinson and Alpers's examples). Some art objects odd sequentiality may even condition the attention timespan in a symbolically significant way (e.g., Joyce's *Ulysses*, Alain Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad*, Christopher Nolan's *Memento*, or Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible*). Partly to respond to these objections, the authors propose a final characteristic that straddles the "experience-based" and the "content-based" classifications:

Objects of the art form are such that their proper appreciation centrally involves understanding of the temporal relations within them.

We proceed by taking a closer look at the experience-based characteristics proposed by Levinson and Alpers:

1) "Objects of art require time for their proper aesthetic appreciation." This is such an obvious idea and so universally applicable to all artworks that it doesn't seem sufficient to isolate the way time relations may be aesthetically relevant. We shall discard them as insignificant in this context.

2) "Objects of the art form require a significant interval of time for the mere perception or apprehension of their full extent." This notion is closer to our purpose although we are looking for something a bit different than the time requirements for "mere perception or apprehension" of the complete work, namely what are the intrinsic variables in the work that affect the amount of time needed to attain a relevant or rewarding aesthetic transaction.

3) "Objects of the art form are properly experienced in the order in which their elements are determinately arranged and at a rate that is either inherent to the artwork itself or to its prescribed mode of presentation." However, sequentiality and pace are not always simultaneously present in determining proper fruition of a work. We may even propose a typology of forms of art according to the way their intrinsic sequentiality and pace determine the way these objects are to be experienced:

not aesthetically significant (their isolation does not contribute to the full experience of the object); objects of the art form are created in the act of presentation, so that the time of creation, time of presentation and (usually) time of reception all coincide; objects of the art form require presentation in a time lived through and by the presenters; objects of the art form lack relatively fixed identities over time, but are mutable and shifting.

a) *Unchangeable sequentiality and pace*. This seems to be characteristic of the “performing arts” and *a fortiori* of improvisational performances where the artist’s fixed sequentiality and pace control determine the audience’s attention and prescribe proper timing for proper enjoyment.

b) *Unchangeable sequentiality and flexible pace*. Novel or poetry present a fixed sequentiality, if by that we mean the mere ordering of letters, words and sentences that form syntactic meaning. Sequentiality at the higher level of semantic sections is not always univocally prescribed since some literary works – like Fernando Pessoa’s *The Book of Disquiet* – may be followed in no particular order. The reader however is able to control pace and, therefore, fruition time is quite flexible as well (although there are also exceptional cases where poets try to prescribe a certain reading speed³). The content of some recorded music and film also allows the user to determine pace of the work *in toto*. Home fruition of some artworks, with the use of DVD and CD players, has emancipated the viewer or listener from observing the timing prescribed in the work or altering its pace of presentation – interrupting a Bruckner symphony to pick up the phone, for instance. This possibility turns the experience of these artworks as at least potentially similar to the experience of literature or poetry. Notice that we are referring here to the pace of presentation of the whole work, like an entire Bruckner symphony, and not to the pace of its musical rhythm. It seems doubtful that a more intense interaction with the work, like changing the viewing speed of a DVD or constant shuffle of a CD, would qualify as a legitimate fruition of *that* work – and above a certain degree of interaction one could start thinking that a new and altogether different work is being produced. (One could argue, of course, that a piecemeal and / or elliptical approach to a recorded work is in fact segmenting the work in smaller artistic bits and that these are aesthetically experienced *per se* and with their respective pace and sequential order so that the object of aesthetic attention is no longer, say, the entire *St. Matthew’s Passion* but just the aria *Können Tränen*, with its sequence and pace intact.⁴ If we accept this amendment then the real difference here would lie between those artworks that *determine* and those that merely *direct* the sequence of their experience, i.e., between the performing arts and recorded music and film, on the one hand, and literature, on the other.)

To some extent, I think that architecture matches this strategy of determining aesthetic timing. But one should beware not to confuse here mere time for apprehending the work (Levinson and Alperson’s characteristic number 1) and the way artworks may condition the spectator’s inner sense of time in such a way that it becomes a part of the experience thereof. *Mutatis mutandis* one can easily compare

³ Levinson & Alperson mention the case of Nicole Broissard (442).

⁴ Naturally, we are considering here a distinction between live performances and recorded-versions-of-performances justified by the different role that sequentiality and pace play in our experience. At least in this regard, they constitute two different works.

sequentiality in fictional works and the notion of “itinerary” in architecture. But are these merely referring to configurational properties of the objects involved or do they also hint at something of an experiential nature, something similar to the way artistic sequence and order affect the spectator’s time of experience?

Psychologists have studied the means through which architects have learned how to guide locomotion and indeed the relative duration between passages and dwelling spots. “Progression”, “constriction”, “expansion” are all concepts that literally define spatial experiences but can easily become characterizations of the wanderer’s temporal relation with buildings: “any passage from a corridor to the sudden expanse of a room quickens the visitor’s experience with a visual shock” (Arnheim 1977: 157); if when guided through a corridor the viewer finds herself suddenly traversing a large room whose main axis is being crossed at a right angle, she loses the visual and kinaesthetic support provided by the corridor’s walls and “enjoys the freedom tinged with anxiety of being on [her] own” (Arnheim 1977: 157). There is a quickening of experience that is often accompanied by a simultaneous impulse to slow down the walking and draw closer to the walls, so as to resist this sudden “freedom”. Temporary retardation is also an important feature of particularly dynamic architectural pieces, such as Francesco de Sanctis’ Piazza di Spagna in Rome. The piazza is quite unusual in its rather paradoxical condition of being both a scalinata, i.e., a passing corridor, and a piazza, i.e., a dwelling spot. On the one hand, it is a highly vectorized spatial organization thrusting and orienting both the visitors walking downwards as well as those who climb the Spanish Steps (notice that the fact that it is a highly segmented staircase means that it is not perceived by the climbing visitor as an insurmountable or difficult obstacle but rather as an amenable path towards the church of Trinità dei Monti). On the other hand, it is constantly stopping the motion flow with obstacles and belvedere. Its complex arrangement of staircases, balustrades and spatial buffers conditions the pedestrian experience in such a way that it could be compared to a musical sequence of tension (climbing yet another staircase) and resolution (temporarily dwelling on an intermediary balcony): “after climbing the first groups of steps, one runs into a balustrade, which splits the flow of traffic toward the left and right; and hardly has the flow reunited when it is stopped again by another bulwark, surmounted by an obelisk” (Arnheim 1977: 159). Robert Venturi (Venturi 1966) has also called the attention to the unusual dynamics provided by the entrance to Sainte Madeleine’s Basilique in Vézelay in the way it generates a tension of sudden constriction, soon to be resolved into new expansion: the access to the church is interrupted by a large central column perceived as a clear obstacle that slows down the visitor and makes her look up just to find a bas-relief of a welcoming Christ with open arms. The symbolism of the architectural gesture is obvious – the entrance becomes an announcement, literally an announcement of the main hall – but in view of the massive open space that lays ahead it is literally a breaking point – a “traffic-stopping post”, as Arnheim calls it (Arnheim

1977: 161) –, holding back and slowing down the visitor, both visually and kinaesthetically.

Thus, at least some highly engaging works of architecture are capable of determining a sequence and of conditioning the pace of their experience. A first visit to these buildings makes the experience somewhat similar to that of watching a live performance. But higher familiarity with the building turns its experience closer to reading a literary work. The fact that every visitor of such works retains the option of altering the prescribed pace is comparable to the way CD or DVD owners may also alter a prescribed mode of presentation. (But likewise, segregated smaller portions of the building may still retain a sense of sequence and pace.)

c) *Flexible sequentiality and fixed pace.* Some authors argue that videogames should be considered as art. If it is so, then some videogames are the closest thing to adopting this kind of aesthetic *time warp*. The ability to change the object's sequence without changing its pace requires a kind of interaction that we probably will only find in this kind of products. Of course, not all videogames preserve a fixed pace of presentation since different playing modes or styles, and the joint intervention of other co-players, inevitably alter the pace.

d) *Flexible sequentiality and pace.* If the spectator is free to alter sequentiality and pace then it looks as if there's no more room to believe that phenomenological timing is being driven or directed by the piece's inherent timing. But the fact that to follow a prescribed order and pace is not necessary for an adequate appreciation of the work does not mean that order and pace are not suggested and that this suggestion is not integrated in the observer's experience. It also does not mean that to follow that suggestion is not sufficient to have a proper experience of the work. The fact that the observer is free to choose becomes an important component of the object's appreciation. I would like to argue that if time matters in the aesthetic experience of at least some painting, then flexible sequentiality and pace constitute the strategy with which pictorial art controls the viewer's time of contemplation.

But how can we talk about sequentiality and pace in painting? We can acknowledge the fact that duration is a component of the appreciation of paintings in at least two ways. First, we may rather obviously observe that, as in any other visual experience, time is a necessary part of the aesthetic experience of paintings due to the biological limitations of our visual sense. Our visual acuity has three distinct sectors. From less to higher visual acuity: 1) Peripheral vision, encompassing a visual angle beyond 10 degrees. At the extreme end of our peripheral vision, we can only detect an object if it is moving. 2) Parafoveal vision, encompassing a visual angle of up to 10 degrees. 3) Foveal vision, which encompasses a visual angle of only 1-2 degrees. Since the majority of our visual neurons (rods and cones) are concentrated in a very small portion at the centre of the retina, we can only see clearly what we are directly gazing at. Because of this, eye movements or saccadic movements are constantly being made. Through this process, objects are constantly being scanned and indeed composed. Saccades occur

extremely fast. A 2-degree saccade takes 25 milliseconds and a 10-degree saccade takes about 45 milliseconds. Frequency and duration of visual saccades can be controlled and are dependent upon human volition, intention and attention. More recently, and following the pioneering work of Soviet psychologists in the sixties, cognitive psychologists have introduced technology that allows them to measure the frequency and duration of eye movements and have used this to measure the visual scanning of artworks (Solso 1996). Experimental data shows that the time of fixation is related to the information contained in a picture. Different styles and periods of art produce different kinds of saccades and fixations and that the duration of gaze varies accordingly. For instance, the average duration of fixation for a Baroque painting, such as Tintoretto's *Origin of the Milky Way* (1580), filled with all sorts of graphic and chromatic details, was about 60 milliseconds briefer than for a more classical picture, such as Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538). In general it is admitted that complex pictures (such as Baroque paintings or paintings by Pollock or Vasarely), produce shorter fixation times than simple pictures (like those by Mondrian) (Molnar 1981). Now it could be rightly argued that acknowledging the occurrence of different types of saccades is not peculiar of the perceptual activity involved in painting appreciation. Gazing a large natural landscape or a small room will induce similar types of gazes. For sequentiality and pace to become factors that distinctively guide the spectator's experience they need to be somehow assumed by the painting itself. Thus, duration as intended in this first sense is naturally involved but is not aesthetically relevant.

A second way would be to consider duration in the way the painter tries to guide the perceptual activity of the viewer in a distinct way, namely by proposing a relatively flexible (but nonetheless suggested) sequential structure. The eye-brain recursive loop, which implies a constant interplay between the eye and the brain (top-down and bottom-up visual processing), is intentionally controlled and there are ways of inducing the brain as to *how* (namely, in what order and according to which pace) and *what* in a given object should be causing our attention. For instance, a hypothesis is planted in the subject's mind, who then seeks confirmation by moving her eyes to selected areas. Norton and Stark have named these visual itineraries "scanpaths" and have noticed that, although the norm is to find idiosyncratic scanpaths, some objects – notably, artistic paintings – are able to *guide* their viewers through a significant number of consensual or pre-formatted paths (Norton & Stark 1971: 34-43). Group portraits such as those by Rembrandt or Frans Hals belong to the kind of paintings that influence the viewer's intentionality and consequently her eye movements and fixations. An important part of this visual guiding technique is based on the fact that primates are biologically conditioned to follow the gaze of the primates they are observing. A large portrait painting such as Frans Hals' *Banquet of the Officers of the St George Civic Guard* (1616) offers a complex trail of gazes, which the viewer tends to follow. But even if the viewer resists the path prescribed, that sense of inertia is added to the experience and arguably influences the duration and sequence of her visual scanpaths. The degree of

control that some paintings have over their viewers is quite remarkable but the causes of this control are diversified. A related psychological experiment started off by asking two groups of fine arts students in Paris to contemplate Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson* (1632) (Molnar 1981: 385-414). Some idiosyncratic trails notwithstanding, the map of both groups' visual saccades was remarkably similar both in terms of average fixation and movement frequency: notably, they all try to follow the gaze of the characters involved and shuttle from each character's face to the corpse that is being analysed.

Therefore, visual complexity but especially content (e.g., trying to decipher the hierarchy or social connection between the characters that are being portrayed) influences intentionality and intentionality determines the scanpath. But these are not the only ways – and arguably not the most aesthetically relevant or cognitively rewarding – to condition the timing of visual art experiences. In realistic paintings or, more generally, paintings where graphic verisimilitude is a criterion for appraisal, optical anomalies may prompt the viewer to engage on a more attentive and timed relation with the artwork – we know something is being represented (i.e., something other than that which is being figuratively represented) but we don't know exactly what.⁵ Take the case of Van Dyck's *Equestrian Portrait of Charles I* (1638). The apparent realism of the portrait is shattered when the viewer starts noticing intriguing discrepancies in the painting: we can see the sole of Charles' riding boots and the belly of his horse so we assume that we are watching the scene from a lower ground. But when we consider the King's face one realizes that it is not depicted in the way we would realistically expect, if we were to be watching from underneath it. Quite the contrary, the King's head is displayed as if the viewer was looking at him face to face. This anomaly prompts the viewer to consider other discrepancies such as the odd illumination of the entire scene. This intentional scanning takes time. The painting prescribes an experiential duration with proper sequentiality and pace. Step by step, the viewer starts to understand that this is not only the portrait of Charles I but an iconic representation of a political agenda: the King as *primum inter pares*, placed above the viewer but looking her face to face.

4) "Objects of the art form generate a kind of time that is peculiar to them, that exists for the perceiver only in and through experience of the work."

At some point in his theory of aesthetic attitude, Jerome Stolnitz has argued that art – all art, that is – provides the observer with a special awareness of time. His argument begins with a quite intriguing reinterpretation of the classical notion of "disinterestedness". It goes like this: unlike practical perception, "which serves some ongoing purpose pointed toward the future", when having an aesthetic experience "the individual does not look ahead to some future goal" but is "concerned only with the

⁵ This corresponds to what Noël Carroll calls the conditional generic type of representation in art (Carroll 1999).

enjoyment of the present moment” (Stolnitz 1960: 65-66). Negating Lessing’s traditional distinction between “arts of time” and “spatial arts”, Stolnitz proposed instead that the temporal character of aesthetic appreciation constitutes an essential aspect of every aesthetic transaction. Art provides the spectator with a special awareness of time by drawing attention to the significant connection between the instants that compose the experience of art objects. By annulling the utilitarian nature of the object, the aesthetic gaze cuts it off from a sort of subservience to the future and allows the observer to linger on a circle of meaning where past, present and future dimensions are more tightly knit together in a vivid way.

Certainly, this interrelation is also present in everyday life but the ordinary succession of events does not generate any particular interest. Some instances of practical experience, however, engage our interest in a far more intense way. A “well played chess game”, a doctor’s constant monitoring of her patient’s serious condition and, particularly, aesthetic appreciation, are among such instances. In them, our “interest is engaged at each moment” and “each moment creates forward-looking interest in the next” with an “ever increasing interest in the climax (Stolnitz 1960: 67). In art, however, this awareness of the temporal fabric is more intense for each moment seems to condense a forward-looking tension – the “protensive” dimension – and a vivid memory of the instants that preceded the present one – the “retensive” character. The aesthetic kind of protensive expectation, however, should be distinguished from its mundane version. Practical anticipation means that we are looking forward to something that comes as a consequence of the experience – a gain of a non-phenomenological nature, so to speak – whereas aesthetic keenness awaits for something which is an inextricable part of the experience “which is had just for the sake of having the experience” (Stolnitz 1960: 69). Sitting in the concert hall, instead of anticipating the way this performance will provide a great conversation topic while hanging out with my friends after the usual Saturday night concert, I notice the way every passage in the last movement of Mahler’s *Sixth Symphony* prepares the autobiographic hammer blows that close the piece.

The fact that this intentional imbrication of “before” and “after” is integral to our appreciation of art forms characterized by sequentiality and pace seems undisputed. But how can we apply to painting, sculpture and architecture Morris charming description of each aesthetic moment as “an elegant present having a future”? Stolnitz tries to do this by employing two temporal notions: “rhythm” and “movement”. As we have done in point 3 above, Stolnitz notices that the experience of “spatial arts” also occurs in and through time and that every work prescribes a given “rhythm” of apprehension, namely because of the way eye movements anticipate future “occurrences” as they scan the object. Significantly, the “rhythmic pattern” can be altered and thus the rhythm in which the viewer apprehends a painting or a building may shift as a kind of variation on top of the object’s visual dynamics “just as the ‘beat’ in music can be syncopated or as subtle modifications can be made in the meter of a

poem (Stolnitz 1960: 70). The awareness that some visual artworks prescribe a rhythm of apprehension that is seldom perceived in more common objects “helps to unify and ‘hold together’ “ the viewer’s experience. But of course rhythm – if by that we mean a “rhythmically ordered succession of like elements” (Stolnitz 1960: 71) – is not a common characteristic of all visual arts. For the most part, we would rather speak of “movement”. “Movement in the picture” refers to the way a vectorized graphical sequence guides the spectator’s gaze and it is thus a phenomenological trait of aesthetic appreciation. We referred earlier to the way group portraits of the Flemish tradition inspire the viewer to follow a visual track. But Stolnitz provides an even more eloquent example: Roger Fry’s description of Correggio’s “Jupiter and Antiope”:

... The figure is lying on the ground turned diagonally to the picture plane, so that the eye in following the sequence of its planes carried forcibly back into the depths of the wood behind, whilst a counterbalancing diagonal movement of the figure of Jupiter brings us back again with a kind of spiral movement, thus closing and completing an asymmetrical but perfectly self-contained rhythm phrase.

Along these lines, one could add that a way to perceive “movement within the picture” is to consider how some variation paintings allude to their model painting’s graphic dynamics thus inducing a kind of temporal shift in the spectator’s experience. This is what happens when we compare Manet’s *Olympia* to its model, the *Venus of Urbino* by Titian.

Visual cues in sculpture are even more numerous given the wider extension of its stylistic tools and its hold of the viewer’s attention: “thrust and recession, light and shadow, heaviness and buoyancy can create a little drama in its own right” (Stolnitz 1960: 72). All things considered, the tighter control with which the so-called temporal arts prescribe a sequence of events and a pace of experience is merely a difference of degree *vis-à-vis* the “spatial arts”.

Thus, if all these elements hold, then Stolnitz is justified in concluding that “all art is temporal when viewed aesthetically”. An important caveat though is that familiarity with the work of art is necessary in order for the observer to be engaged on a proper “recollection of the past and imaginative anticipation of the future”. Aesthetic experience is therefore cumulative and suitable awareness of a work’s structure, formal organization and unity is often the product of repeated exposition to the work. Anticipating the objection that this addendum seems to neglect the performing arts, for which repeated experience is not available, Stolnitz mentions the importance of the reprise in jazz as a way to achieve something of a retentive and protensive nature:

[I]mprovisation can be so fanciful that it seems to take us thousands of light-years away from the original melody. But then the music simply turns a corner, and we are back at the melody. The experience has been rich and diverse, but it is tied together by this return (Stolnitz 1960: 75).

However, the “familiarity” clause may complicate things a bit because it reveals the persistence of a strong difference between our awareness of time in the so-called temporal and spatial arts. In temporal arts, the duration of implementation runs together with the duration of appreciation. I.e., the time necessary for exposing the work necessarily affects the spectator’s psychological time, what Bergson called “la durée”, or inner time. This does not seem to be the case within the “spatial arts”. Even if the spectator loses herself in contemplation of a painting it isn’t clear how the painting’s “rhythm” or “movement” necessarily affects her. Scale and level of detail may play an important part in this respect but familiarity with the work will eventually smoothen and facilitate our perception of the whole. Familiarity with a musical piece or a narrative fiction, however, will never reduce the physical amount of time necessary for the retentive-protensive attention to work. Using my CD’s remote control I may fast forward to the different climaxes in the fourth movement of Mahler’s *Sixth Symphony*. But this will annul its momentum, which has to be experienced as searching for closure in successive waves of anticipation. The succession of musical instants up to that moment is a necessary condition for a proper – call it “prescribed” – appreciation of that instant with its complete and complex load of *retentions*. Nothing of this sort seems to be possible in the visual arts. Fascinating as it may be to follow Fry’s spiral movement in Correggio’s Jupiter’s painting, each visual segment can be appreciated *per se* without necessitating the following of a visual track.

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