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INTRODUCTION*
Art and Aesthetic Experience

Since XVIII century philosophers from different philosophical traditions (English empiricism and French Enlightenment, German classical philosophy, positivism, Italian neo-idealism, phenomenology, pragmatism, existentialism, hermeneutics, analytical philosophy, etc.) have addressed the issue of aesthetic experience, questioning its structures, its specific properties, its importance and relevance to the perception, the understanding and the evaluation of art as well as to human relationship with nature and technique.

Some of them, starting with Kant, investigated the specific quality and the supposed autonomy of aesthetics; other ones argued for its relevance to the learning experience as well as to the moral and the political experience, extending its scope beyond artistic production and enjoyment; someone else highlighted above all the value of this experience for artistic practices, articulating aspects and dynamics of aesthetic experience especially in relation to the ontological properties characterizing these practices and trying to answer to aesthetic and theoretical problems that emerged with certain kinds of avant-garde art, in which the Kantian notion of aesthetic experience seems to be taken out of the game; finally, some analytic philosophers (in particular George Dickie and Noël Carroll), in disagreement with the idea of the autonomous nature of aesthetic experience, recently considered this concept as a “myth”, while – especially in the German area– other philosophers (Rüdiger Bubner, Albrecht Wellmer, Christoph Menke, just to name some of them) defended, on the basis of Hegel’s philosophy of art, the fundamental reflexivity of aesthetic experience and its crucial significance for human experience as a whole, also because of its potential of disruption and transgression of ordinary everyday experience.

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Hence, aesthetic experience and its connection with old and new artistic practices are a classic topic of philosophical thought, that interestingly concerns the ordinary life of people. Since opinions and arguments about it diverge, this issue deserves to be further investigated, in order to understand the reasons behind the different positions, if not to attempt an improbable conciliation.

It is precisely with this spirit that in April 2014 the Department of Human Studies of the University of Udine, together with SIE – Società Italiana di Estetica, Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación (Spain), CIM – Centro Interuniversitario di Morfologia “Francesco Moiso”, Comune di Udine, Udine Musei, Doctoral Program in History of Societies, Institutions and Thought (Udine/Trieste), and ARCI Udine, organized a workshop entitled *Art and Aesthetic Experience*.¹ Its aim was to gather researchers from different countries (USA, Germany, Portugal, Spain, and Italy), who showed various scholarly and critical approaches to philosophical aesthetics and philosophy of art.

The main purpose of the papers and of the discussants’ replicas delivered at the Workshop was to articulate –through the dialogue between some of the protagonists of the international contemporary philosophical scene– different ways of conceiving the connection between art and aesthetic experience, by investigating whether and how the notion of aesthetic experience can (still) be effective for the philosophical definition of art or at least of some artistic practices. As it has been shown by the lively and fruitful discussions that followed each session, the Workshop was indeed *very* successful.

The current issue of *CoSMo. Comparative Studies in Modernism* bears witness to this excellent achievement. Apart from a couple of exceptions,² all the Workshop’s papers and replicas (now in the form of full articles) are collected here. Moreover, this volume also contains the article authored by Augustine Dumont, who could not attend the meeting in Udine for personal reasons, and the essay written together by Jèssica Jaques and the famous chef-artist Ferran Adrià. I am particularly grateful to Mr. Adrià, who has been kind enough to give the journal such a precious personal research contribution, which enriches the section “Percorsi”, devoted to the topic of Gustatory Aesthetics, today more than ever riding high thanks to EXPO 2015, whose core theme is “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life”.

The articles in this issue of *CoSMo* explore possible ways to understand the specific qualities of aesthetics, its areas of application, its relationship with the practices of artistic production, aesthetic enjoyment, and critical interpretation. They also discuss the complex relationship between the reflection on aesthetic experience and its quality and, on the one hand, the problems raised by contemporary art (which often seems to require a kind of non-aesthetic experience of understanding and appreciation) and,

¹ I am very grateful to all mentioned institutions that supported this workshop.

² Dorothea Katharina Ritter’s and Simone Furlani’s talks.

secondly, the emergence of new potential areas of aesthetic enjoyment (like cooking and food appreciation).

In the historico-philosophical essay that opens the section FOCUS and introduces the topic (“The Lost Experience of Art”), Federico Vercellone argues that our modern aesthetic experience of artworks has lost the synesthetic and erotic dimension that characterized the aesthetic object as provided with the beauty – defined by Alexander Baumgarten *perfectio sensitiva* –, that is able to make us appreciate the completeness of the world. The Hegelian “death of art” is therefore an integral part of that process of rationalization and fragmentation of aesthetic experience that, from Batteux to Adorno, assigned different artistic practices to the individual senses, de-realizing the art object and causing all art to lose the ability to involve us entirely. Hence, Vercellone concludes that:

On one hand modern art is forced to dissociate from life, admitting and declaring its fictitious, unreal status, making modern aesthetics reveal its platonic roots, validating an art which is inexorably embedded in the sphere of illusory mimesis and ineffective experience. On the other hand, and as a consequence of this, the systematic consideration of the single arts reflects the abstract spider’s web of the world it is part of.

This, Vercellone elaborates, reflects how the different spheres of our lives become more and more abstract, “giving rise to what Max Weber called the ‘disenchantment of the world’”.

In his article, “Aesthetic precariousness”, Gerard Vilar integrates Vercellone’s point of view by focussing upon another crucial aspect of the aesthetics of the contemporary world: its precariousness. He writes:

as a specific condition of contemporary art and aesthetics in late capitalist culture [..., precariousness] is a disorder that creates a new order for artworks and practices, for kinds of publics and audiences, and for aesthetic judgement and art criticism. [As such precariousness] is an essential trait of what Jacques Rancière calls ‘aesthetic regime’ of art.

Precariousness affects the ontological status of contemporary art as well as the existential condition of artists. Thanks to some concrete examples, Vilar explains how contemporary art, also understood as *artistic research* – a field that today is riding on the crest of a wave (see Badura *et al.* 2015) – can make us think about precariousness as a crucial aspect of our contemporary world. A matter of fact,

the aesthetics of precariousness, this art of the precarious, is a very real and appropriate manner of producing political art today, a place to think and rethink aspects of our world, our culture and life, as well as a place of comprehension, of something that is more ambiguous and even beyond knowledge.

Precarious, however, are today also the discourse and the enjoyment of art. Art suffers in this way the same fate as philosophy, which is also dispersed in the multiplicity of the possible truths in the market of thought. Following Robert Groys (Groys 2010), Vilar calls the precarious condition of contemporary art “weak universalism”: art is universally present in our everyday life; the reason for this, however, is that everything, even the most ordinary image, can be artisticised, becoming a “device for aesthetic reflection”, by means not of being shown in a museum as untouchable original artwork, but of being offered to the universal aesthetic contemplation in the blogs of each one of us.

The concept of precariousness developed by Vilar is related to Heidegger’s notion of *Ereignis* in Alberto Martinengo’s article “Dall’*aletheia* al *topos*. Ontologia della precarietà in M. Heidegger e G. Vilar” (“From *aletheia* to *topos*. Ontology of precariousness in M. Heidegger and G. Vilar”). On the basis of Heidegger’s topology, Martinengo, following Vattimo and Malpas, shows that in the essay “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes” (1936) Heidegger had already conceived of art as a “device of stability and even habitability”, whilst later, in the essay “Kunst und Raum” (1969), he dealt with art potential to *make room*. A monumentalistic view of art ensues from this, which Martinengo reconnects to the practice of installation and to the precariousness that characterizes it ontologically, in the sense explained by Vilar. For “the monument is a kind of event that produces new forms of social bonds, at least in the sense of the birth of new meeting spaces.” Today, however, the very concept of the monument undergoes a kind of deconstruction. Martinengo writes in regard to this: “The monument is no longer an object that aspires to be permanent [...], but is a product with a ‘best-before date’”. Yet, although precariousness disassembles the artwork as an object of aesthetic contemplation, it is the harbinger of a “social performativity” able to re-signify the monument, in topological as well as in political sense, as a meeting place: art becomes a “performed theory”. As such it can, even better than philosophy, account for the precariousness that characterizes our relationship with the truth.

In general, this commitment of art to truth or truths characterizes much of the avant-garde art. As Matilde Carrasco (“Aesthetics and the Meaning of Artworks”) writes, in XX. Century

the idea of an art made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye or emotions extended and conceptualism, in this global sense, became the basis of all-encompassing contemporary artistic practices, particularly in visual art.

In this way, art turned its attention to cognitive and moral values beyond formal and expressive properties. Hence, one has to respect precisely the conceptual distinction between aesthetic and artistic properties and values. Carrasco’s argument starts from Arthur Danto’s late turn to an “aesthetics of meaning” and from the notion of “embodied meaning” (one of the main themes of the current debate in philosophy of art) and discusses the concepts of “aesthetic value” and “artistic value”, in reference to

the main protagonists of contemporary analytic aesthetics (McFee, McIver Lopes, Walton, Stecker, Goldman, Budd, and Levinson). Her point is that “aesthetic value doesn’t exhaust artistic value. But in the aesthetic experience of artworks our sensuous, cognitive, and affective faculties are simultaneously addressed, and often challenged”.

In this regard, the question arises once again: “What is aesthetic experience?” Jerrold Levinson, one of the philosophers called into question by Carrasco, opened his article with this question in “Towards a minimalist conception of aesthetic experience”. Levinson debunks George Dickie’s criticism to the concepts of aesthetic experience and aesthetic attitude and argues that the aesthetic attitude at the basis of the aesthetic experience is a certain kind of disposition to perception and attention. He argues that to adopt a minimalist conception in aesthetics –“one according to which aesthetic experience is just experience in which there is perception or cognition of aesthetic and/or formal properties of some object”– is theoretically disadvantageous. In fact, only a non-minimalist account of aesthetic experience can safeguard the insight that aesthetic experience is rewarding and valuable. Such non-minimalist account allows in other words to understand adequately the appreciative and evaluative dimension of aesthetic experience. But what is then the aesthetic appreciation? By discussing Iseminger’s position on the matter, Levinson suggests that such appreciation involves an active approval of the perception process and that indeed “an aesthetic state of mind, in which one appreciates or values-for-its-own-sake some embedded perceptual-imaginative experience, is [...] an aesthetic experience as well”. The thesis defended by Levinson is therefore the following:

Aesthetic experience is experience involving aesthetic perception of some object, grounded in aesthetic attention to the object, and in which there is a positive hedonic, affective or evaluative response to the perception itself or the content of that perception.

As such, aesthetic experience shares some important qualities of –but significantly differs from– other experiences, like the sexual experience, the mystical experience, and the pharmacological experience of taking drugs. Moreover, and most importantly, this view of aesthetic experience makes us understand the deep significance of our interest in art.

The positions articulated by Levinson are extensively and critically discussed by Elisa Caldarola in her “Comments on Jerrold Levinson’s *Toward a Non-Minimalist Conception of Aesthetic Experience*”. In particular, Caldarola points out that Levinson’s view of aesthetic experience is not entirely satisfactory, because it does not grasp two questions raised by Carroll’s account. First, it seems unable to explain how one can have aesthetic experiences of conceptual art. Second, it cannot give an account of how to have aesthetic experiences through memory or testimony. In Levinson’s view, Caldarola suggests, these experiences can be understood only as indirect aesthetic experiences. But some other points are even more puzzling: among these, the only positive characterization of the response associated with aesthetic experience and a

swing in the theoretical characterization of disinterested attention as an ingredient of aesthetic experience. Moreover, “it remains an open question whether the perception of aesthetic properties is *necessary* to aesthetic experience” and whether aesthetic experience of bad art is possible.

Some of the issues highlighted by Caldarola and Levinson are also addressed by Georg Bertram’s article “Aesthetic Experience as an Aspect of Interpretive Activities”. In reference to Kant, Bertram argues that aesthetic experience is characterized by two contrasting aspects: an aspect in which the subject is passive and an aspect in which the subject is active. In other words, “aesthetic experiences are experiences in which the objects experienced play the primary role and [...] are experiences in which a subject is confronted with itself”. But, “how is it possible that a subject can reflect on itself if it is merely passive?”. This is the “conundrum of aesthetic experience”: Bertram’s thesis, in part obtained by referring to philosophers such as, for example, Gadamer and Adorno (and further developed in Bertram 2014), is that this is possible by means of conceiving aesthetic experience in a practical way. In fact, “aesthetic experiences are based in forms of practice that the subject performs in encountering works of art”. These practices are generally interpretive in nature: they concern the different ways (not only linguistic, but also, eg., physical and emotional) in which subjects are confronted with objects and events (artworks and performances) that have self-referential nature. In this sense, defending the interpretative character of aesthetic experience, Bertram understands it “in terms of the way the object affects the activities of recipients”, thus resuming explicitly Levinson’s non-minimalist setting. This solves several problems of traditional theories of aesthetic experience, from Schopenhauer to Martin Seel.

In his paper “Being tied to what, and why? On the objective side of (Bertram’s notion of) aesthetic experience” Filippo Focosi terms the conception developed by Bertram “relational”, because it “states that an experience is aesthetic if it is the experience of a distinctive kind of relation between an object and a subject”. Appreciating especially “the emphasis that Bertram puts on the ‘positive’ side of passivity”, and in particular the importance he assigns to the active user’s understanding of the constituent elements of the works of art, he observes some similarities between Bertram’s approach and the thought of some of the protagonists of the history of aesthetics, including: Monroe Beardsley, John Dewey, Luigi Pareyson, and Peter Lamarque. In any case, Focosi argues in favor of an object-oriented notion of aesthetic experience, based on the distinction between aesthetic form – “the organic interconnectedness of parts/elements of an artwork, including its semantic or expressive components” – and expressive form – “the organic interconnectedness of the semantic and expressive properties of an artwork as considered *also for what they are*, i.e., as embodying a distinctive (representational, symbolic or emotional) content”. His view is that “aesthetic experience requires the recipient’s active responsiveness to the object configuration. But it demands also that the work on which our attention is directed is capable of eliciting and supporting our interest”, in virtue of its formal and

semantic properties. According to Focosi, this is precisely what certain manifestations of contemporary art, such as the much-praised performances of Marina Abramovic, “The Artist is Present”, lack.

Regarding “present”, but also past and future, it can be observed that one of the less discussed issues about the active response to art concerns its temporality, i.e its duration. The question at issue is not just to understand how an aesthetic transaction manipulates our sense of time, but also what is the proper duration of an aesthetic experience of an artwork. Victor Moura’s paper “Timing the Aesthetic Experience” deals with this issue, rarely considered by scholars (with some exceptions, like Noël Carroll’s philosophical research on cinema: cf. Carroll 1996). But how much time does each painting require in order to be appreciated? Is the time required a deliberate part of the work? How much do other factors – such as the fact that one is having this experience with others, as it often happens when we are at a concert, or technological innovations that allow, for example, to stop listening to a registered symphony – affect this time? How is the spatial arrangement of a work (for instance an architectonic work) interrelated with the temporality of perception? In what sense does the temporality of aesthetic experience differ from ordinary experience? How do the temporal characteristics of aesthetic experience affect the distinction, established by Lessing, between arts of space and arts of time? Integrating philosophical analysis with empirical and scientific information and with a wide range of examples from art history, Moura makes us reflect on a crucial –although often neglected– issue for understanding the ontology of art as well as the phenomenology of aesthetic experience.

Augustin Dumont’s article, “La duplicità del simbolismo nella pittura romantica tedesca. Da Runge a Friedrich passando per Tieck” (“The Duality of Symbolism in German Romantic Painting. From Runge to Friedrich through Tieck”) broadens the range of this issue of *CoSMo* with a specific study on painting criticism in German Romanticism. Dumont’s thesis is that by Friedrich as well as by Runge,

the pictorial language is expressed through the mediation of the symbol, but in some respects also the tale. The difference is that the symbolism is meant to be self-reflective and self-criticism in the case where the second trend aimed at closing the horizon of sense favoring clearly the allegory. Friedrich belongs to the first trend, Runge to the second.

The main question Dumont is concerned with is, of course, the way romantic art, in this case painting, in constant dialogue with the great literature (Tieck, Wackenroder, Schlegel, Kleist ...) and with the great philosophical reflection of that time (in particular Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Schopenhauer) thought to express the absolute, in a cultural context where the aesthetic experience was considered, in many ways, one with the experience of the tragic and with the mystical experience. Painting (and art in general) is not intended as mimetic, but as reflexive. However, this does not prevent artists and philosophers from paying specific attention to means and materials of artistic production (also for their symbolic value), the research on which made

enormous progress in the Romantic era (as shown by the large amount of essays and books regarding sounds and colors produced in this period). Hence, the vocation of art is philosophical and in this sense Dumont embarks on an intellectual journey full of historical, artistic and philosophical references, which make the readers understand that some of the most important views of the current debate in the philosophy of art – think for example about Danto’s thesis of the philosophical transformation of art – have their roots in a time far more remote than the one which saw the flowering of artistic avant-garde: I am referring to Romanticism, of course.

The section “Percorsi” of this issue of *CoSMo* is devoted to a field of aesthetic studies that today is very relevant: *gustatory aesthetics*. On the one hand, aesthetic experience deals also with our everyday life – as it is shown by the flourishing of research concerning everyday aesthetics. On the other hand, practices like *cooking* can now acquire the art status. As a matter of fact, cooking obtains this status, for example with a master of creative cuisine such as Ferran Adrià, the creator of the restaurant *El Bulli*. Thanks to his creation of dishes which are considered artworks in their own right, a few years ago Adrià was invited to the art exhibition *Documenta* in Kassel as one of the main great protagonists of contemporary art. Adrià presents here, along with Jèssica Jaques, an outstanding contribution entitled “For an Applied Philosophy of Gastronomy”, in which he argues that food is now becoming a source of philosophical ideas, “a discursive generator of new ways of thinking”. Also through the narration of the history of culinary thought as well as of the biography of the great chef-artist-philosopher, the article develops the view that cooking can be a kind of “applied philosophy”. In regards to this Adrià elaborates a theory of creativity symbolically exemplified by his “creative pyramid”, which refers explicitly to Plato’s allegory of the line. The organization of the epistemological, poietic, ontological (etc.) issues on which he elaborates resumes the Aby Warburg’s Atlas model. In this conceptual context the artistic-creative scope of culinary practice becomes philosophical by means of becoming artistic research and educational project (*paideia*).

On her part, in her own article (“The Main Issues on Gustatory Aesthetics”), Jèssica Jaques provides an informed philosophical background of gustatory aesthetics. Jaques defends that aesthetics does not only deal with nature, on the one hand, and art, on the other hand. As a philosophical theory of a particular kind of human experience, it deals with phenomena and human practices that are kinds of borderline cases between everyday life practices, technology, traditional forms of art, and new artistic ways of expression. In this vein, Jaques explores gustatory aesthetics as experience of, and reflection on, practices that pose “new challenges to the old term *taste*”. According to her, the reasons why gustatory aesthetics poses these challenges are tied to the connection between artification and de-artification of human practices as well as to the rise of performance as an important way of having aesthetic experiences. The aesthetic experience we have with food is an intense experience that involves all the senses. It is characterized by the involvement of the body and is ephemeral, because the object of

the experience is consummated during the experience and in order to have the experience. Hence, the experience as well as the art of food is a performative experience, and due to some of its features –such as the ephemerality of the work, the performative and interactive character of the experience, and the involvement of the receiver’s body– it is an aesthetic experience that has some of the typical traits of the artistic movements that, searching for new forms of aesthetic experiences and being more free from social and cultural constraints, wanted to overcome art as an institution.

In the Museum of Modern Art “Casa Cavazzini”, a cultural institution which is very important for the city of Udine, two events took place that were integral parts of the workshop. The duo Mirio Cosottini (trumpet) and Enrico Malatesta (percussion) offered a performance of improvised music, and this was indeed a moment of intense authentic aesthetic experience for everybody. Moreover, before this performance, in Casa Cavazzini also the presentation / discussion of a book on deartization authored by Gerard Vilar (Vilar 2010) took place. The book was discussed by Federico Vercellone, Simone Furlani, Matilde Carrasco, as well as by myself. Since my contribution to this discussion already appeared (in Italian) in Bertinetto 2014, the section “Lecture” of this issue of *CoSMo* is covered by a second valuable contribution written by Matilde Carrasco. Reading Vilar’s important book, the Spanish scholar concludes consistently, and excellently, the deep and illuminating reflections proposed in the whole current issue of *CoSMo*. She leads us inside Vilar’s book and, through it, inside the great debates of art theory and art criticism of the avant-garde and post-avant-garde eras. Referring to the theses of Kuspit, Bürger and Foster, as well as to philosophical positions like the ones of Hegel, Nietzsche, Danto and many other philosophers, Vilar’s book discusses the paradoxes of an art that did not want to be art anymore in order to gain more influence upon human existence, but, in so doing, it became another one of the many consumer goods, losing in this way all its subversive power. Vilar’s point is incisive, because, as Carrasco writes, Vilar

defends artistic autonomy understood as the capacity of art for ongoing re-definition and re-invention as the best way of fighting the forces of neutralization, aestheticization and weakening.

The thesis developed by Carrasco, in her reading of Vilar’s essay, is that the avant-garde as well as the transgressive power of art are not dead, but the reflexive and critical potential of art, understood as “a privileged mode of thinking about the world” depends upon a regeneration of the “aesthetic dimension of art.”

We hope that –at least at a conceptual level– we have contributed to this regeneration –a regeneration artists themselves are now appealing to (see for example Pagliasso 2015)– in this issue of *CoSMo*, entirely devoted to the various facets and dimensions of aesthetic experience, as well as to its controversial and complex relationship with the arts ... from XVIII century to 2015, from painting to cooking.

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