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## **The Shock of the New: The Experience of Groundlessness in Vattimo's Aesthetics**

### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine the themes present in Gianni Vattimo's *Art's Claim to Truth*. I argue that there is a central phenomenon that links his aesthetics to his hermeneutics: the experience of groundlessness. I consider how three aspects color this experience: the artwork's lack of foundations, the ungrounding of our world, and an element of a-rationality/irrationality indicated by the event of art as experience—i.e., as expressed in affectivity.

### Keywords

Gianni Vattimo, Aesthetics, Affectivity, Novelty, Groundlessness

### Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine the themes present in Gianni Vattimo's writings on art, with a focus on *Art's Claim to Truth (Poesia e Ontologia)*. Perhaps against Vattimo's explicit stance, I will argue that there is a central phenomenon present in his philosophy and that this is the experience of groundlessness. His hermeneutics of weak thought might easily give the impression that at issue is simply an experience of nihilism or relativism. This is not the case. However, it is also not intuitively self-evident what this experience of groundlessness is. By focusing on Vattimo's aesthetics, I aim to provide a more balanced representation of this phenomenon.

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My investigation is partly motivated by a particular discrepancy between Vattimo's hermeneutics and his aesthetics. Therefore, I will first make some contextual remarks that, in brief, introduce Vattimo's notion of weak thought. However, these introductory remarks are only meant to give the reader a point of anchorage. As to the inquiry into Vattimo's aesthetics, I aim to bring forth the phenomenon at hand: the experience of groundlessness. The presentation of his aesthetics will be thematic, with a focus on the novelty of art. I will emphasize three fundamental notions that clarify this experience: dwelling/inhabiting, ontological difference, and affectivity. Each of these notions introduces a sense in which "groundlessness" could arguably constitute our experience of art.

However, I must address two problems with the suggested approach. First, it presumes that there is a coherence between Vattimo's aesthetics and hermeneutics. From Vattimo's perspective, this assumption is potentially problematic, depending on the implications drawn from this presumed coherence. For example, we can find such coherence in Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.<sup>1</sup> In Gadamer's hermeneutics, this coherence implies that a notion of the experience of art grounds his hermeneutics. Vattimo, for his part, makes no such explicit claim. On the contrary, he (1997, 103) reproaches Gadamer on exactly this point. Vattimo argues that the effort to base hermeneutics on a particular experience is contradictory to the hermeneutic endeavor. In his critique of Gadamer, Vattimo notes that Gadamer is not self-consciously "plagued" by how radically, seriously, the fact of interpretation needs to be taken.<sup>2</sup>

Vattimo's position is not un-complicated. On the one hand, his theoretical—post-metaphysical—convictions seem to demand that his hermeneutics cannot merely be based on "an experience of art" (1988, 12). On the other hand, however, he admits that "[i]n order to describe, on a subjective level, this experience of ungrounding [...] the only model we have at our

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<sup>1</sup> See Gadamer 1989, xxiii & 164. In the introduction to *Truth and Method*, Gadamer presents his task as follows: "the following investigation [aims] to defend the experience of truth that comes to us through the work of art [...] it tries to develop from this starting point a conception of knowledge and of truth that corresponds to the whole of our hermeneutic experience" (1989, xxiii). Later, Gadamer states that "hermeneutics must be so determined as a whole that it does justice to the experience of art." The key phrase is that "hermeneutics must be so determined."

<sup>2</sup> Thaning calls Vattimo's hermeneutics "a hyper-allergic overreaction to foundationalism" (2015, 13). Thaning's assessment is that "Vattimo's constructivist hermeneutics rejects an intrinsic connection between phenomenology and hermeneutics [...] [in that] Vattimo claims that such use of phenomenological analysis inevitably entails the self-contradictory pretence to provide an 'objective' description of reality" (2015, 23).

disposal is precisely that of *Erlebnis*, of aesthetic consciousness" (1988, 128). In other words, he admits that the only way to make sense of his hermeneutics is to consider the experience of art. At the same time, he maintains that his account is theoretically incompatible with any attempt to provide fixed foundations.

In examining Vattimo's aesthetics, I will entertain the possibility of coherence between his aesthetics and hermeneutics. I do not think that Vattimo would categorically object to this phenomenologically oriented approach, as long as it remains so-to-say hermeneutically self-aware: aware that it is primarily an act of interpretation tied to texts.

This proposal brings me to the second problem of approaching hermeneutics phenomenologically—be it Vattimo's or Gadamer's. It is a problem tied to the fact that, in *Art's Claim to Truth*, Vattimo primarily interprets texts and engages with the philosophical tradition. However, he admits that he is concerned with interpretation to the extent that it allows him to further his argument. Thus, in "Art, feeling, and originality in Heidegger's aesthetics," Vattimo remarks that he will offer an interpretation that attempts to recover "the unity of Heidegger's thought [...] above all [in order] to draw some useful indications for my argument on art" (2008, 59). Alternatively, in "Critical methods and hermeneutic philosophy," Vattimo states that "my current project is not a matter of following Heidegger but of drawing inspiration from him" (2008, 116). These statements I take as additional support for my approach.

However, considering Vattimo's aesthetics as part of his hermeneutical project gives rise to a perplexing discrepancy. It has to do with a difference in the emphasis accorded to the experience of groundlessness. Specifically, while his hermeneutics revolves around the notion of weak thought, his aesthetics speaks of art as an event of truth in the most vital possible sense: as an event that changes our world and shocks us. This discrepancy raises the following question: if the truth of tradition (art included) is somehow "weak," mediated by a sense of historical contingency, then how are we "shocked" by it? It is this paradoxical experience that I aim to clarify.

## Weak Thought

I have chosen to focus on Vattimo's aesthetics, which means that there will not be enough space to sufficiently consider his hermeneutics of weak thought. The reason for my choice is that his account of art more emphatically brings to the fore the experience in question. Also, the secondary litera-

ture is partial to Vattimo's nihilistic hermeneutics. Nevertheless, let me briefly introduce the notion of weak thought to provide some background and intimate the point of contrast.

For my concerns, the critical question is, to what kind of experience does the logic of weak thought allude? Is this a "weakened" experience of truth? Vattimo (1992, 42) uses precisely this expression in *The Transparent Society*, but what does it imply? The expression might lead us to think that Vattimo is speaking of a truth experience corresponding to relativism. However, he (1992, 38-39) distinctly distances himself from a position of cultural relativism because this view bypasses the problem of history.<sup>3</sup> Thus, a "weakened" experience of truth does not necessarily refer to a "weak" experience of truth.

In *The End of Modernity*, Vattimo states that he aims to "open up a non-metaphysical conception of truth," which is tied to a "post-modern—in Heideggerian terms, post-metaphysical—experience of truth" (1988, 12). By referring to a post-modern experience of truth, Vattimo can be taken as analyzing modernity as post-traditional.<sup>4</sup> However, my purpose here is to focus more narrowly on the logic of weak thought as an experience of truth and not to get tangled up in Vattimo's account of modernity and postmodernity—although these two accounts are closely linked. Let me conclude this section by presenting what I take to be one of Vattimo's most emphatic renditions of what he considers weak thought.<sup>5</sup> The description is tied to an explication of Nietzsche's "philosophy of mourning":

[w]hat he [Nietzsche] calls in *Human All Too Human* a "philosophy of mourning" is precisely a kind of thought that is oriented towards proximity rather than towards the origin or foundation. This way of thinking about proximity could also be defined as a way of thinking about error, or better still, about erring. The latter emphasizes that it is not a question of thinking about the non-true, but rather of examining the process of becoming of the "false" constructs of metaphysics (1988, 169).

"False" is here within quotation marks in that one cannot confidently speak of these "constructs" as merely false. This statement would presuppose access to a "true" foundation upon which this judgment is made. Accordingly, Vattimo continues,

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<sup>3</sup> According to D'Agostini, "[w]eak thought isn't some sort of amalgamated, all-purpose relativism; it's a calculated combination of different modes of relativism [epistemological and historical] in order to get to somewhere else beyond relativism" (2010a, 3).

<sup>4</sup> See Giddens' "Living in a post-traditional society" (Beck, Giddens, & Lash 1994, 56-109).

<sup>5</sup> See also D'Agostini 2010a, 4.

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there is no longer a truth or a *Grund* that could contradict or falsify the issue of erring, all these errors are to be understood as kinds of roaming or wandering [...] [the] only rule is a certain historical continuity that is in turn devoid of any relationship to a fundamental truth (1988, 170).

In short, Vattimo's notion of weak thought is tied to an acute sense that history is all there is—without teleology or ultimate grounds. However, there is still this past, this tradition, to which we belong. We cannot disregard it or simply leave it behind. Therefore, with the advent of postmodernity, our traditions are not overturned, “recognized” as errors, but conserved, albeit in a distorted fashion, stripped of much of their legitimacy—or claim to truth.<sup>6</sup> Thus, according to Vattimo, the transition from modernity to postmodernity engenders a “weakened” experience of truth” (1992, 42).<sup>7</sup> To understand this experience, Vattimo suggests that we consider the experience of art. However, what we find there is an experience that can hardly be said to be “weak.”

### **Vattimo's Aesthetics: The Novelty of Art**

The two central elements of Vattimo's aesthetics are novelty and shock. Before going into more detail, let me first provide an overview of his aesthetics. In *Art's Claim to Truth*, Vattimo argues for the novelty of art, and he does this differently. He (2008, 68) characterizes this novelty as “absolute” and “underivable” (from the world as it is). He ties it to a notion of “originality” (2008, 99) and speaks of art as an “origin” (2008, 100-101). In short, art is, for Vattimo, an ontological event in the Heideggerian sense. What Vattimo (2008, 13) takes himself to be articulating is an ontological aesthetics: i.e., an aesthetics that does not “forget” what Heidegger calls the ontological difference (i.e., the distinction between Being and beings). This distinction means that art represents an encounter with the “radically other” (2008, 22). Art is not just a being among beings. Art—the accomplished work of art—makes us aware that it is not part of our world. Therefore, art bewilders us, and it shocks us. Now, what manages to

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<sup>6</sup> See Valgenti 2010, 67. He notes that “[t]his does not mean, however, that weak thought rejects all foundations; rather, it points to a situation where foundations are inherited from a tradition but never accepted as truly foundational.”

<sup>7</sup> See D'Agostini 2010b, 44-45. In her words, “such a theory implies that—culturally speaking—we are now faced with a sort of disappearance of truth; yet, this is only the symptom of a new conception of truth” (2010b, 45).

shock us is less something specific depicted by art than the simple “fact” of art: the fact that there is art. This train of thought roughly summarizes how Vattimo presents the phenomenon of art.

In other words, when Vattimo argues for the novelty of art, he is trying to take the fact of art as seriously as possible. One could say that he is asking, what does it mean that there is art, that this object I see before me is not just an object (of use) but art—something that challenges and breaks with my usual comportment towards things? In what follows, I will consider three ways the novelty of art is present in the essays of *Art’s Claim to Truth*, three ways that clarify how Vattimo takes art seriously. First, I will briefly introduce his distinction between art as essential and inessential; then, I will consider Vattimo’s appropriation of Heidegger’s notion of dwelling; and finally, I will look at how Vattimo uses the notion of ontological difference.

The distinction between art as essential and inessential is the basis of Vattimo’s argument in “The work of art as the setting to work of truth.” In this essay, he offers a critique of representationalism and formalism. In contrast to these positions, he defends a Heideggerian account of art. In short, Vattimo argues that representationalism and formalism fail art because they both presuppose a given “outside” correlate to the artwork. Representationalism defines the task of art as representing a given state of affairs. The formalist view explains aesthetic enjoyment by the workings of our intellect or sensibility. Vattimo (2008, 153-155) maintains that these positions are both variations of the correspondence theory of truth, which for him entails that the actual work of art becomes “provisional” and/or “inessential.”

### **Dwelling and Belonging**

The way Vattimo takes art seriously is perhaps best captured by his appropriation of Heidegger’s notion of dwelling.<sup>8</sup> Vattimo (2008, 102; 1967, 86) understands Heidegger’s notion of dwelling more or less in terms of being-in-the-world: to “dwell,” for him, means to inhabit (*di abitare*) the world founded by the work of art. However, what exactly “inhabiting” the artwork’s world amounts to, varies slightly in different texts. In “The work of art as the setting to work of truth,” Vattimo speaks of living “in the light of” an artwork, and “rearranging one’s own existence” according to the world of the artwork (2008, 159). Similarly, in “From phenomenological aesthetics to ontology of art,” Vattimo suggests that the encounter with art amounts to

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<sup>8</sup> See further Heidegger’s “Building Dwelling Thinking” (1975, 143-161).

“a reconfiguration of our being-in-the-world” (2008, 102). However, in “The ontological vocation of twentieth-century poetics,” Vattimo offers a more modest suggestion. Dwelling, or “inhabiting,” means “to enter into dialogue with”: “that is to say, to grasp and to be grasped by the work at the same time” (2008, 53). To enter into a dialogue suggests something more open-ended—uncertain—compared to the decisive act to rearrange one’s mode of existence; nevertheless, as we shall shortly see, these are not contradictory elements for Vattimo.

Vattimo also introduces some supplementary distinctions that further clarify the appropriate relationship to art proposed by the notion of dwelling. In “Critical methods and hermeneutic philosophy,” he presents the distinction between the closed and the open work of art. Vattimo advances an argument in the form of a critique of criticism—which he (2008, 116) considers the prevalent approach to art. He reproaches this view for considering the artwork “as a fact of the past,” “as a final point” (2008, 112). For Vattimo, this method is equal to historicism’s, which “freeze[s] the work of art into the category of the past” (2008, 112). The problem is that the artwork’s significance is thus closed off: the work only relates to the past. In this case, art only functions as a witness to the past. He further develops this argument in terms of belonging. With this notion, Vattimo distinguishes the practice of criticism from dwelling in the following way. Whereas the former establishes a relationship where the work “belongs” to the reader, the latter overturns this relationship so that “the reader belongs to the work” (2008, 116).

To illustrate what this means, Vattimo (2008, 118) turns to the example of the Bible and provides the following assessment:

this relationship [i.e., that of the Western tradition to the Bible] in its broadest sense is an example of the founding character of the work and of the interpreter’s belongingness to the work [...] In the case of the Bible, we stand before an entire civilization that constitutes and develops itself as the exegesis of a book. The history of the West is in its essential development the history of the interpretation of the Bible. To belong to this civilization signifies belonging to that specific text, and in this sense we should conceive of the belonging of the reader/interpreter to the work in its fullest form (2008, 118-119).

We could take this example of the Bible as the most explicit elucidation of how Vattimo understands Heidegger’s notion of dwelling. For Vattimo, the Bible is “the hermeneutic phenomenon par excellence” (2008, 118). However, I cannot help but wonder, is Vattimo still talking about “art”? Or is

he taking art too seriously? Vattimo defends his choice in the following way. He claims that if we want to know what it means that there is “art,” we need to consider how the Bible has affected our world and shaped the Western tradition. He (2008, 55-56) admits that the Bible is an example of “huge proportions” and cannot be equated with art in general. Nevertheless, with this portrayal of the Bible’s place within the Western tradition, Vattimo clarifies how dwelling—inhabiting—accommodates the different definitions presented above: how a work can reconfigure our being-in-the-world and remain open to interpretation.

In sum, Vattimo appeals to the Bible as an example to argue for a sense of belonging to art in the most robust possible sense. In contrast to the closed work belonging to the critic, Vattimo claims that art can form the future in being open to interpretation. However, Vattimo invites specific problems by appealing to such a world-founding example as the Bible. For example, by defining the encounter with art as dwelling, it becomes difficult to differentiate the aesthetic experience from being-in-the-world (2008, 160). Vattimo is aware of this problem. Nevertheless, the example of the Bible provides the first glimpse of the experience of groundlessness. According to the above, the artwork’s founding character is tied to a sense of being unfounded in being open to interpretation. In more general terms, Vattimo accordingly states that art “founds the world while showing at the same time its lack of foundation” (1988, 128).

### **The Ontological Difference and the Experience of the World**

Let us move on to consider Vattimo’s use of the ontological difference and his argument for how art affords us an experience of the world.<sup>9</sup> The argument that the experience of art is an experience of the world builds upon two notions: the novelty of art and the ontological difference. It is also with reference to these two notions that Vattimo differentiates his ontological aesthetics from traditional aesthetics.

In “Towards an Ontological Aesthetics,” Vattimo (2008, 16) argues that, in general, aesthetics either forgets the ontological difference or assumes that it is based on a positive relationship between Being and beings. In contrast, Vattimo’s aesthetics emphasizes two implications of this ontological difference. First, the relation between Beings and beings is negative: Being

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<sup>9</sup> Vattimo (2008, 103) uses “world” in the Heideggerian sense: i.e. to refer to a meaningful totality.

is not a being among beings. Second, a beautiful work of art generates a movement from the work to the world founded by it (2008, 102). In Vattimo's words, "the ontological difference does not simply signify that Being is not a being, but also positively that the truth of a being consists in its relationship with the other, in being open to an other that is radically other than itself" (2008, 22).

In other words, the ontological difference—as well as his account of the novelty of art—implies that there is a disjoint between the artwork and our world: the work of art "does not allow itself to be set into the world as it is" (Vattimo 2008, 98). This disjoint between the artwork and our world signifies that art suspends "our habitual relationships with the world." Also, the artwork "puts our own world into crisis" by a "refusal" to be "set into the world" (2008, 99). More accurately, art suspends the self-evident validity of our habitual compartments by questioning our "world" (2008, 102).

According to Vattimo, the work of art does not "set" itself into the world (as it is) because it is not just "another thing in the world." Thus, we do not encounter art in the same way as we encounter other everyday objects. The difference is that the encounter with art is an encounter with "another perspective on the world." As a perspective on the world, art offers a view, a take on the "comprehensive totality" that is the world.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, art is also "the real foundation of a new world" (2008, 99).

With these considerations, Vattimo adds another layer to the experience of groundlessness. It is not only the interpreted work that shows itself to be ungrounded; it is also the foundations of our world that become shaken in the encounter with art. In the following, I turn to consider Vattimo's "Art, Feeling, and Originality in Heidegger's Aesthetics." In this essay, Vattimo adds a third layer to the experience of groundlessness with his account of affectivity.

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<sup>10</sup> With that said, it is interesting to note that Zabala suggests that "Duchamp's Fountain is probably the best example of art's ontological bearing" (2008, xv). This example is worth considering. Of course, Duchamp's *Fountain* (and his ready-mades) are objects "derived" from the world. Yet, the *Fountain* was refused entry into the exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917. To make sense of this, I find Groys' (2002, 56) distinction between the cultural archive and the profane room helpful. According to Groys, the event of the new is, in essence, a readjustment and re-evaluation of the boundaries, the relationship, between these two domains—or "worlds." Thus, before Duchamp invented the ready-made and presented his *Fountain*, the urinal was not part of the cultural archive. It was only perceived as a use object. The event of the ready-mades changed the cultural archive as a totality of meaningful relations.

## Affectivity and Shock

With “Art, Feeling, and Originality in Heidegger’s Aesthetics,” Vattimo ties the notion of the novelty of art to the experience of shock. In short, Vattimo argues that art shows us the world “being born,” “the world in its nascent act” (2008, 69). This birth is an experience of shock—*Stoß*—which Vattimo considers analogous to dread or angst.<sup>11</sup> However, from a phenomenological point of view, Vattimo’s argument presents us with two difficulties. First, there is a challenge because Vattimo’s primary concern is interpretation. What he sets out to do is to offer a unified interpretation of Heidegger’s thought, one that reconciles *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) with the later Heidegger. Second, there is a difficulty with how Vattimo deals with the shock of art. He is not concerned with any specific response to art but primarily deals with emotions’ structure—or affectivity.

Let me begin with a brief presentation of Vattimo’s interpretation of Heidegger in this essay before moving on to the second issue. As mentioned, Vattimo offers an interpretation that aims “to recover the unity of Heidegger’s thought” (2008, 59). The way he does this is by first locating “an emotive view on art” (2008, 58) in *Being and Time*, an account that considers poetry as tasked with articulating the possibilities of attunement—or “affectivity,” which is how Vattimo (2008, 61) translates *Befindlichkeit*. Subsequently, he (2008, 66-67) turns his attention to Heidegger’s “The origin of the work of art,” where poetry—through language—brings forth something “radically new” and founds a world. In short, Vattimo ties together these two accounts of poetry.

As to the second difficulty, Vattimo does indeed admit that a shock is “produced by the work” (2008, 69) and that “the *Stoß* is a ‘subjective reaction’” (2008, 71). However, despite these admissions, Vattimo maintains that the phenomenon under consideration—the experience of art—should primarily be thought of ontologically: i.e., concerning affectivity. In Vattimo’s words, “[t]he equivalent of this [ontological] event for readers or consumers of works of art is a phenomenon that must be thought above all at the level of affectivity” (2008, 68). What is the reason for this emphasis? As noted, Vattimo is articulating ontological aesthetics tied to Heidegger. This articulation means that the focus is on art as an “ontological event” (2008, 104):<sup>12</sup> i.e., how art relates to Being, how it constitutes an event of Being. Vattimo

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<sup>11</sup> See also Skorin-Kapov 2015, 108-109.

<sup>12</sup> “Fatto ontologico” (Vattimo 1967, 88).

expresses the matter as follows: “[a]rt has to do with feeling not to the extent that it expresses this or that determinate and individual feeling, but only inasmuch as it is a work, namely, an ontological event” (2008, 72).

However, at the level of affectivity, Vattimo’s account is also not without its difficulties. There are two issues that I will address: first, his claim that affectivity grounds the other existentials; second, the claim that shock refers us to the groundlessness of the emotions. Both issues are somewhat difficult to critique in that Vattimo’s argument is closely tied to an interpretation of Heidegger—and I will not dispute the validity of Vattimo’s interpretation of Heidegger. Nevertheless, I will try to make sense of the phenomenon as presented. In his interpretation of Heidegger, Vattimo argues for the primacy of affectivity. He maintains that “attunement comes first insofar as it has a grounding position with respect to the others [i.e., understanding and discourse]” (2008, 62), that “pre-understanding is more originally rooted in *Stimmung*, attunement” (2008, 62),<sup>13</sup> and that “before being inside a web of meanings, being-in-the-world is inside attunement, an affective valence” (2008, 63).<sup>14</sup> In these ways, Vattimo claims that affectivity is ontologically primary in relation to the other existentials.

I feel compelled to ask, what has happened to Heidegger’s (2010, 138) claim that understanding and attunement are *equi primordia*? Such an account is understandable. It would also be understandable to claim that attunement has a specific epistemological priority: i.e., to find oneself in a specific affective situation is how we initially become aware of the world. Vattimo does hold this view: in his words, *Befindlichkeit* “more clearly and more directly” makes known “the fact of being-thrown” (2008, 64). However, Vattimo also seems to make the stronger ontological claim: that the emotions are groundless.

To be more precise, let us consider how these two claims are present in Vattimo’s text. We can find the argument for the epistemological priority of affectivity in the following remarks: “[i]t is affectivity that allows the fact of existence and finitude to come to light in all its groundlessness” (2008, 66); and “feeling is solely [...] the way in which Dasein encounters the origin, that is to say [...] a certain world” (2008, 72). With such remarks, Vattimo claims that through affectivity, we primarily experience our thrown-ness: the “fact”

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<sup>13</sup> “La precomprensione stessa, piú originamente, si radica nella *Stimmung*, nella situazione affettiva” (Vattimo 1967, 151).

<sup>14</sup> “Prima di essere dentro a un sistema di significati, è un essere dentro a una situazione affettiva” (Vattimo 1967, 152).

of existing in the world. We could take these remarks to indicate that affectivity is grounded or equiprimordial with the world. In this case, the emotions would understandably mirror a certain pre-understanding of the world.

However, Vattimo's argument seems to be that the experience of groundlessness reflects the groundlessness of the emotions/feelings. This argument brings us to his ontological claim. Vattimo claims that "[w]hat comes forth in the groundlessness of feeling is the same groundlessness that is constitutive of existence" (2008, 65).<sup>15</sup> Note that he is not speaking of the feeling of groundlessness but the groundlessness of our feelings. Thus, I read this claim as stating that the experience of groundlessness is also a reflection of the groundlessness of our feelings.

Vattimo develops this notion by claiming that feelings/emotions are fully realized as a shock. In his words, "what we are accustomed to calling feelings (i.e., love, joy, melancholy, and so on) are to be considered from an ontological perspective only as 'special cases' of the structure of feeling that is fully realized in the experience of *Stoss* and dread" (2008, 72-73).<sup>16</sup> This quotation indicates that Vattimo makes no clear distinction between feelings and emotions: e.g., he calls love a "feeling." This non-distinction implies that, e.g., love is said to have the same ontological structure as shock. It is undoubtedly true that love is tied to certain feelings and sensations. However, the non-distinction between feelings and emotions invites problems.

Such an account of affectivity is not unprecedented, but it does not correspond with a standard account of emotions. It might coherently fit into Vattimo's philosophy, but it is problematic as a standalone clarification of emotions' nature. Let me, therefore, conclude this section by noting how we could take Vattimo's account of affectivity to represent what Solomon (1993, xv) calls the "myth of the passions"—or the "myth of passivity." In Vattimo's text, this conception is perhaps given its most precise articulation in the following passage:

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<sup>15</sup> "Quel che viene incontro nella infondatezza dei sentimenti è la stessa infondatezza dell'esistenza" (Vattimo 1967, 155).

<sup>16</sup> "Quelli che siamo abituati a considerare i sentimenti (amore, gioia, melanconia, ecc.) vanno considerati, da un punto di vista ontologico, solo dei 'casi speciali' di una struttura del sentimento che è realizzata in modo pieno nello *Stoss* e nell'angoscia" (Vattimo 1967, 164). For a critique of the argumentative move that attempts to reduce all emotions to a choice example see Bollnow 1956, 27.

[t]o find oneself in such and such a [sic] emotional disposition—sympathy, antipathy, love, fear, mistrust, and so on—cannot be modified or commanded [...] *Stimmung* evades completely any form of control and therefore is the most visible sign of finitude. In this way, the ontological meaning of feelings emerges precisely from the character that are most striking in them, that is, their complete groundlessness (2008, 65).

Here, the essential point is that we say our “feelings” are beyond our control and completely groundless. Now, moods may be challenging to command, but emotions less so.<sup>17</sup> To consider “feelings” to be overwhelming “forces” beyond our command, Solomon equates with the “myth of the passions” (1993, xiv). According to Solomon, emotions are neither beyond our control nor groundless but are precisely grounded in our world. Solomon (1993, 62) would not deny that there can be a suddenness to the emotions. However, he considers it a fallacy to define emotions’ essence based on such a crisis or eruption. In his words, “[a]n emotion is not a crisis” (1993, 100).

Now, it might be the case that Vattimo is only generalizing his interpretation of Heidegger and that one should not read too much into this account of affectivity. However, I wish to highlight the possible implications of such an account—by mentioning Solomon—in that there is a crucial difference in the connotations accorded to Vattimo’s notion of the experience of groundlessness that depend upon the emphasis given to his account of affectivity. In other words, if one views Vattimo’s account as exemplary of the “myth of the passions,” then the experience of groundlessness acquires a sense of *irrationality*. Whereas, I would argue that the experience suggested by Vattimo’s hermeneutics at large is an experience of the *arationality* of the world.

### Concluding Remarks

I proposed investigating Vattimo’s philosophy as centered around the experience of groundlessness. From a certain point of view, this suggestion defies Vattimo’s anti-foundationalist position. However, I argued that such a judg-

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<sup>17</sup> Solomon presents the example of John stealing his car. Solomon points out that his hypothetical anger relies upon the belief that John stole his car. Now, if something were to affect this belief, then this would also alter his emotions. Thus, Solomon maintains that “I cannot be angry if I do not believe that someone wronged or offended me” (1993, 126). So, if or when Solomon finds out that John did not steal his car, then Solomon notes, “[m]y anger vanishes instantly, but the feeling—that is, the pulsing and flushing—remains for a moment” (1993, 119). See also Deonna & Teroni (2008, 11). They also argue that emotions such as fear are amenable to correction. They illustrate this point with a simple example: if someone were to fear the gentle dog Médor, one could say that there is no cause for fear, and this might slowly dissipate the fear.

ment depends upon the significance given to this experience. Vattimo himself acknowledges that his notion of groundlessness is best understood with reference to the experience of art. With a focus on *Art's Claim to Truth*, I emphasized three notions (dwelling/inhabiting, ontological difference, and affectivity) that clarified three aspects of this experience of groundlessness: first, as tied to the artwork's lack of foundations; second, as the ungrounding of our world; and finally, as expressed in affectivity, as an experience of irrationality and/or as an experience of the a-rationality of the world.

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