The Polish Journal
of Aesthetics

The Polish Journal of Aesthetics

61 (2/2021)
Jagiellonian University in Kraków

The Polish Journal of Aesthetics

Contact:
Institute of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University
52 Grodzka Street, 31-004 Kraków, Poland
pjaestheticsuj@gmail.com, www.pjaesthetics.uj.edu.pl

Published by:
Institute of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University
52 Grodzka Street, 31-004 Kraków

Academic Journals
www.academic-journals.eu

Cover Photo:
Monalisa, Sumanley xulx (Pixabay)

First Edition

e-ISSN 2544-8242

ART AND AESTHETICS IN PANDEMIC TIME

Edited by

Dominika Czakon,
Ineta Kivle,
Natalia Anna Michna

CONTENTS

61 (2/2021) | The Polish Journal of Aesthetics

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has directly affected the world of culture, art, and sociality, and both art and the human search for stability and new forms of life. This volume, "Arts and Aesthetics in Pandemic Time," presents a broad scope of various studies, including specific art examples and actual social events. The following articles present the analysis of the relations between internal experience and the environment, the aesthetical apprehension to bodily flourishing, and the representation of the coronavirus pandemic in comics or memes. Some sociological and psychological understandings show animated functioning systems in conjunction with experiencing art, and they examine the alternative usage of technologies and global networks and the perception of restructured social spaces. The importance of artworks is shown by people searching for an appropriate lifestyle. Art helps to keep and save oneself in unusual situations. The pandemic emergency shows that a person's life is not always in the same rhythm as their processes. They can confront and deconstruct each other. The virus infects human flesh and the world around us. In this situation, art can play a significant role. Art retains the ability to stimulate and strengthen the experiences and emotions of an audience, affecting a group's sensitivity. It turns out that the relationship between art and contemporary communication techniques and technologies in the social dimension is of great interactive and integrative significance, shaping the culture-forming aspect of "participatory society." The real world and virtual world merge through the creation of a new approach to reality. A street, rhythm, digital dimensions, and technology become a crucial communicative space and dwelling place.

The volume set forth forms a multi-colored mosaic, in which each element contributes to the philosophical and aesthetical reflections of extraordinary situations and stimulates new theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches. This diversity is made evident by the wide variety of sources used: Martin Heidegger's discussion about *techne* and *poiesis* as a root of the term "technology"; Benjamin's examples on reproduction and the artwork's aura;

Deleuze's approach to image-time and image movement and his analyses about territories and rhythm; Gadamer's hermeneutics of artwork; Baudriall's understanding of hyperreality, Husserl's views on intentional centers; Tolstoy's and Wittgenstein's comparison in the context of art philosophy as well as recent investigations in aesthetics and social strategies.

Authors from Australia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, and Poland analyze various national art examples and contribute a more profound understanding of actual processes. Concepts such as breathing, normality, health, justice, and others expand aesthetical investigations and open space for new interdisciplinary discussions. These approaches show how aesthetical dimensions are interwoven with sociality and the environment and that extraordinary situations open new areas for consideration.

Dominika Czakon, Ineta Kivle and Natalia Anna Michna

61 (2/2021), pp. 11–25 | The Polish Journal
DOI: 10.19205/61.21.1 | of Aesthetics

Chiara Caiazzo*

Disrupted Horizons: Potential Disclosures of Emergency Aesthetics

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic determined a radical restructuring of social and political spaces. This change affected artistic production and reception, influencing individual and collective aesthetic experiences. By losing its physical dimension, art has moved to the digital sphere, engaging with alternative possibilities for display and connectivity. This paper examines the spaces unfolded by emergency aesthetics. Alongside reshaping sense perception, emergency aesthetics inspires political intervention by disclosing new conceptual frameworks that help us recognize and withstand present social, ethical, and existential crises.

Keywords

Emergency, Aura, Digital Hyperreality, Immanence, Politics

Social and political configurations are always mirrored by specific constellations of images, symbols, meaning-making, and creative processes. The place of art has changed dramatically since the pandemic began because art's physical and material character has been transposed onto the digital sphere. Museums, exhibitions, and collectives are all closed in compliance with sanitary norms. There is no physical space for art, no direct contact between an artwork and its audience, nor among the spectators themselves. This condition results in two fundamental issues that respond to the question: W h a t h a s b e e n l o s t s o f a r?

* Italian Institute for Philosophical Studies in Naples
Email: mchiaracaiazzo@gmail.com

First, we shall address the collective character of artistic practices and sensory experiences. In theorizing the relationship between political and artistic practices, Rancière highlights the political power of aesthetics. Art can reframe the distribution of the sensible, intervening in the social structure favoring those whose identities, voices, and experiences are marginalized by the dominant societal order (2010, 139). The political power of aesthetics resides in its ability to create ruptures and interruptions within the sensible fabric. Art is a sensuous imaginary in which forms of life emerge, break down, and recombine (McKee 2016, 81). Aesthetics need not necessarily be a communal effort, but it has to function as a social glue to achieve the ultimate political effect. That regards the reception of artworks, which intend to create a shared aesthetic experience among the spectators. Reshaping sensory experiences by constituting "a new landscape of the visible, of the sayable and the doable," art helps create "the fabric of a common experience" in which "new possibilities of subjective enunciation may be developed" (Rancière 2010, 149, 142).

By reorchestrating the sensory fabric, art also restructures existing social bonds. This restructuration is due to art's capability of awakening consciences, essential to devise effective resistance tools and strategies (Rancière 2008, 85). How can art achieve political change when our social worlds have become atomized? Art's collective social function has dematerialized and moved to the virtual, digital space. As an inherently social space, cyberspace allows for a viral spreading of countless possible self-imaginings (Belk 2013, 487). Art has moved from community to communication, where resistance can be produced and disseminated through the rapid and dense networks of hyperreality.

This move leads us to the second issue, more intricately linked to the digital, mediated reception of works of art during pandemic times. Throughout his works, Benjamin conceptualized the aura. The aura, lacking a systematic definition, indicates the here and now of the artwork, pointing to its tiny sparks of contingency (1999, 510). The aura happens at a specific juncture of technological and social developments, conferring historicity to the work. Endowing aesthetic reception with a sense of uniqueness denotes a modality of exclusive, other than pure, presence. It can only be experienced through direct contact with the artwork, which is lost when the latter is reproduced. As Benjamin notes, "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art lacks in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (2007, 220). The shift to the digital space entails that the aura's unique, ecstatic, authentic experience is now just

a mirage. We have entered the dimension of repetition, the realm of mechanical reproduction. Even more so, we are experiencing the overwhelming flow of mass communication, hyperreality, and increasing centrality of the image. The image loses the potency of auratic images through its endless reproducibility on digital screens, marked by materiality and irreproducible uniqueness.

In this paper, I will examine these two issues in light of the ongoing emergencies. My discussion will move from the micro-sphere of individual aesthetic experience, highlighting the recent metamorphoses of the aura, to the macro-sphere of collective action and art's existential interventions.

Aesthetic Ruptures

As intended in its usual sense, an emergency is "the irruption of a threat that demands an immediate response," whose unsettling character can range from "a passing confusion to a conceptual revolution to the shattering of a world" (Polt 2015, 588). Polt points out that an emergency would be better defined as "an event in which excess challenges sense and resists being interpreted" (ibidem). This excess, or surpassing, of our usual sense-dimension, eludes our traditional thought patterns and analytical frameworks. Hence, emergencies are events that expose the vulnerability of our existence, opening our sense to reinterpretation (ibidem, 587, 591). States of emergency such as the ones we are currently experiencing disclose the revelatory potential of artistic works. Artworks present themselves as unique events, as events of truth disclosing the remains of Being, what is left at the margins of our thought horizons (Heidegger 2012, 201; Zabala 2009). The disclosure of Being is an event that goes beyond "the envisionment through which we constantly see" (Heidegger 1979, 139); it is a rupture within the sensible fabric of reality (Rancière 2008, 85). Being's remains emerge as "an alteration, an event, or an emergency of the world picture," thus appearing as "an interruption of the reality we have become accustomed to" (Zabala 2017, 17). Art exposes the hypocrisy of historically constituted regimes of perception and intelligibility, revealing that the real is a fiction maintained by consensus thinking (Rancière 2009, 50; 2010, 148-149; Chanter 2017, 110). Art presents an ontological appeal we are invited to respond to, and, given its highly disruptive power, it presents itself in the form of a shock, as something that escapes our rational understanding (Zabala 2017, 17).

Similarly, Gadamer considered the work of art as an event that appropriates us into itself: "it jolts us, it overturns us, and sets up a world of its own, into which we are drawn" (2001, 70-71). Artworks have tremendous power

to reshape our social worlds, disclose new ways of being and understanding, which challenge conventional ethical, logical, and aesthetic frameworks. Hence, aesthetics has to be conceived as the critical analysis of the affective and cognitive artistic forms "against the socio-political and ontological background" of various dimensions of human life (Kelly 2012, 22).

Reframing the Aura: The Digital Revolution

The digitization of art and its practices led to an overturning of the aura, which used to indicate "a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be" (Benjamin 1999, 518). This distance has been effaced when art has turned into an immanent, ontological dimension. Benjamin viewed the loss of authenticity as a negative phenomenon, arguing that the aura derived from the artwork's singularity. The advent of photography marked the beginning of a new era, revealing the existence of the optical unconscious and bringing art into the frame of collective consumption (1999). The human unconscious inhabited the visual space of photography and, through the illumination of detail, it opened multiple perspectives that could have a creative or a political turn (ibidem, 510, 519). Reproducibility mirrored the new demands of the masses, which aspired to bring things closer, "spatially and humanly," and overcome every reality's uniqueness by accepting its reproduction (2007, 223). Notably, photographic developments contributed to subverting traditional aesthetic criteria and aesthetic judgment (1999, 523). The free play of interpretations supplanted the aura, and artworks were made available to a broader public, bridging the gap between artistic practices and social worlds.

Incompatible with reproducibility, authenticity endows the work with a mystical value that is also the basis of the cultic and ritualistic dimensions of earlier artworks in history (Benjamin 2007, 223-224). Cult and ritual are cultural dimensions that illuminate the close link between authenticity and authority. The artwork exerts authority over the spectator when it retains the mark of singularity and embeddedness in space and time; it records the signs of time, acquiring the traits of uniqueness that would make it even harder to replicate (ibidem, 220-221). Ultimately, the aura represents the anxiety of ephemerality, the fleeting transitoriness of the present moment.

The metamorphoses of artworks' distinctive traits can be schematized on a temporal spectrum. There is physical, material art on one side of the spectrum, i.e., art in its unique space and time, as an exclusive presence in direct contact with its audience. It is the original version of a painting, a distinct

moment of uniqueness in a given spatiotemporal continuum. In the middle, there is photography. Photography unveiled a new mode of perception informed by the masses' desire to get closer to things; artworks could be endlessly reproduced, equal to their original, albeit the photograph itself mediates artworks. On the opposite side of the spectrum, digitized art travels on the networks of virtual mass distribution and retrieves the aura in the form of pure, immersive presence.

Originally, aesthetic experience happened as ecstatic immobility, unfolding in the momentum of ahistorical transcendence triggered by the artwork's historical singularity. Today, the mystical dimension of art has acquired a new significance that poses it on the plane of hyperreality and hyperconnectivity. The pandemic has unveiled alternative spaces for artistic production and reception, primarily through digital technologies. These reshaped aesthetic experiences through digitization and 3D archives. Most artistic works are available in a digital form, making them accessible "regardless of location, wealth, or ownership" (Chaumont 2015). While being the hallmark of physical distance, the screen is also the portal that makes infinite connections possible. Entire museums and exhibitions have been digitized, making elitist art accessible to everyone. Art has become more widespread, and, in many cases, it has exited the capitalist market, becoming free and easily accessible. This expansion goes with the increased intimacy surrounding aesthetic experiences, which can be consumed inside our homes. Finally, digitized artworks preserve their form, as they remain unaffected by organic deteriorations. The idea of a unique and exclusive original has lost its relevance. What matters now is how art helps us reframe our thinking.

The virtual reception of art in pandemic times proved that physical space is not all there is, even for the visual arts. Through digitization, visual artworks can exist in virtual, digital spaces, interacting with each other and their audience in unforeseen versatile manners. An analogy can be drawn between the visual arts and music. As the most immaterial of the arts, music develops as a temporal unfolding that has a physical impact on its listeners. Music pertains to the immediate perception of time in its relationships with the sound material (Grisey 1987, 258); it absorbs the audience in a temporal continuum. The lack of materiality characterizes musical performances, which form bodies without organs—that is, "bodies with initially indeterminate functions where specific capacities are formulated and defined only in the course of their working out" (Campbell 2013, 164; Deleuze 1981, 47-48). Music always expresses a potentiality, a virtual possibility of being and becoming.

Nonetheless, in Western music theory, composition follows a rigorous logic that is often overturned. The sonic form of the score is articulated in a series of variations of an idea presented through diverse occurrences and manifestations. The idea is virtual as it preexists all themes and acts as the condition for defining authentic images and their developments (Campbell 2013, 14). Musical performance's material is deduced from an abstract network of possibilities in which the threshold of perceptibility is constantly being crossed (ibidem, 16). The variation theme denotes an alteration of a standard form; it is a rupture within a somewhat predictable scheme. Each listening experience reveals something new about a piece, as the latter will never be played in the same way multiple times.

Moreover, notwithstanding its immaterial character, music is the art form that affects the body in the most direct and absolute manner. Music is never observed or contemplated; it is experienced as it relies on sonorous vibrations and direct bodily stimuli. The expressive power of music, mirrored by its virtual potentialities, reflects the needs of emergency aesthetics. Music and its experience express modes of becoming in ways that suggest opening alternative perspectives for thinking about the world (Campbell 2013, 2). A contemporary aesthetic of experimentation must build upon music's virtuality and performative openness. Aesthetic experience is centered on sensory responses, and art's immanence does not simply denote a pure presence but is projected onto the virtual possibilities of the future.

The retrieval of the aura through digitization has proved that, regardless of their visual or acoustic form, artworks absorb the spectators into alternative spaces of creation, reception, and collective participation. Digital aesthetic experience, the predominant mode of artistic reception in 2020, forced us to rethink art in less spatially and historically bounded terms. The shift from the real to the digital world denotes a shift from the transcendental to art's ontological dimension. When it enters the digital sphere, art acquires a new force that is as powerful as the transcendental quality of the aura. Art loses its transcendence in favor of pure immanence, pure presence, pure existence.

The Ontological Dimension of Art: From Perception to Sensation

The digitization of artworks and the proliferation of digital art and techniques have emphasized the ontological dimension of aesthetics, especially within the emergency framework—the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. Then, the way human

sense perception is organized and the medium in which it is accomplished is determined by historical and natural circumstances (Benjamin 2007, 222). That is why, usually, the mode of aesthetic experience changes over extended periods. However, an emergency is a sudden interruption in the usual framework of reality; it functions as a shock, an event of understanding that concerns our existence (Zabala 2017, 123). Inside an emergency, the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist, and the audience is overturned and "disturbed, agitated into new action by the danger its interventions reveal" (ibidem, 132).

The transcendental quality of art has been reframed into an immanent dimension (Deleuze, Guattari 1991, 48). Immanentism always presupposes a subjective stance that is not intentionally oriented towards the world and its objects but is involuntarily traversed by a series of vibrations (Michalet 2020, 84). Aesthetic experience is no longer a matter of contemplation but a cascade of stimuli and vibrations that directly affect the body and mind of the audience. In such a context, it seems anachronistic to speak of aesthetic perception. Perception is not a total immersion into an artwork but a cognitive synthesis of its components (Bundgaard, Stjernfelt 2015). Given all the stimuli produced by the digital display of artistic works in pandemic times, aesthetic perception has been substituted by aesthetic sensation, a modality of experiencing art that stresses its affects.

In his studies on cinema, Deleuze elaborates on the concepts of image-time and image movement. The image-time directly emerges from a rupture of the sensory-motor scheme, and it is denoted as a pure optical and sonic situation. These pure optical and sonic signs liberate the audience's senses, directly relating with time and thinking (Deleuze 1985, 28). The image-time is the actual immanent image, as it establishes an experience of integration between subject and object; that is, an experience of the absolute, intended as pure contemplation where the mind and the body, the interior, and the exterior, the world and the individual merge together (ibidem, 274-275). Pure contemplation occurs when our contact with the world is not mediated, in a moment where temporality is introduced only to think of this state of fusion (ibidem, 26; Michalet 2020, 160). The image-time derives the image-movement, which articulates the complex spatial motifs of processes of subjectivation, marked by a continuous displacement. The subject is continually displaced and deterritorialized on continuous variations, where no equilibrium is achieved, only constant metamorphoses (Deleuze, Guattari 1980, 621; Deleuze 1983, 39). The connotations of the image-movement mirror those of digital hyperreality in that they emphasize the endless, dynamic deferral of information and meanings.

Meanwhile, the image-time illuminates the immanent character of artworks and their relation to thought processes. The contemporary dimension of aesthetics is sensation because of the forces and vibrations that art transmits by being a pure presence rather than a mere representation of something else. These pure affections must find another deployment mode, i.e., thinking, to be effective (Michalet 2020, 109).

The function of art is to bring us to a state of contemplative passivity where our thought is put in motion with the absolute (Deleuze 1983, 191). The spectators discover a passivity, a suspension of action favoring an immersion in thought (Michalet 2020, 220). The role of the spectators is reframed as they engage in a critical enterprise that, through the interpretation of the artwork, makes them aware of the urgency of the latter's political message (Rancière 2008, 85). By having its ontological status, art moves the spectators' senses, engaging them in a critical work of interpretation and questioning. Authenticity and authority have been replaced by artistic autonomy, and aesthetic experience is reframed through a displacement from perception to sensation. Aesthetic reception translates the spectators' passive contemplation into active engagement when the artwork triggers an alternative motion of thought that defies its conventional horizons.

An artistic shock discloses these alternative horizons. The sensible perceptual shock does not depend on the aura, but it is caused by "the uncanny, by that which resists signification" (Rancière 2009, 63). According to Rancière, this artistic shock redirects artistic practice to the field of social intervention. It is the point where art disrupts the usual regimes of perception, reorchestrating the political through "a reconfiguration of the given perceptual forms" (2010, 133; 2009, 63). Extraordinary and unimaginable, art must be shocked into emergency (Heidegger 2012, 94). Philosophy and art, considered as parallel endeavors, are different modalities of understanding the same phenomena: the former by forming concepts, the latter by creating images and producing affects. These modes of thought converge and intertwine, yet without synthesis or identification (Deleuze, Guattari 1991, 187). Each has its specific creative mechanisms, constantly in flux and subject to experimentation. Philosophical aesthetics is the philosophy of experience (Jørgensen 2015, 620-621). The development of an aesthetics of experimentation is crucial to the reconstruction of alternative spaces in emergency aesthetics. The analysis of a work of art is substituted by disclosing its experiential possibilities whereby new conceptual frameworks can be formed.

Philosophy should adopt a new image of thought leading to a radical transformation. This image must derive from a state of crisis following the collapse of the sensory-motor matrix (Rancière 2008, 67). As a result of this

collapse, we find ourselves confronting something "unthinkable within thinking itself" (Deleuze 1985, 220-221). As states of crisis, emergencies force us to reconsider our thought patterns. Sensation precedes perception, so internal reverberation precedes exterior projection (Michalet 2020, 104). Deleuze explains that all perceptive syntheses recall organic syntheses, such as the sensibility of senses. Therefore they recall the primary sensibility that we exist (1968, 99). Each organism is "in its receptive and perceptive elements, in its guts, a sum of contractions, retentions, and expectations" (ibidem)., Aesthetic experience stemming from within is an expanded form of thinking that triggers new motions of thought. The digital screen functions as a plane of immanence, marked by an incessant continuum of images and sounds in a state of flux (Deleuze, Guattari 1991, 39-62). The screen blurs the line between materiality and immateriality to the extent that even our sense of self is extended to cyberspace (Belk 2013).

Ontology, aesthetics, and ethics converge into an immanent understanding of artistic practices, essential to conceive a philosophical aesthetics of experimentation. The ethical dimension of aesthetics emerges when considering the experience of a work of art as a hermeneutical phenomenon concerning humanity (Gadamer 1989, 87). Aesthetic experiences articulate a mode of self-understanding, which occurs through the projection of our possibilities on the artwork, alongside "understanding something other than the self, and includes the unity and integrity of the other" (ibidem, 83).

Politics and Art in Cyberspace

The problem of ethics naturally poses the question of emancipatory and revolutionary politics. The Covid-19 pandemic posited unforeseen challenges to contemporary societies as, alongside the sanitary, environmental, and economic emergencies, social spaces and habits have undergone a radical transformation. Communities have been restructured as empathy and mutual respect shifted towards a physically atomized dimension: it is no longer going towards the other but moving farther away from them.

The necessity of social distancing has determined a radical reconfiguration of social and political spaces, which have rapidly been relocated into digital hyperreality. We are fully experiencing what Baudrillard (1983) called "the ecstasy of communication," where the operations of culture, commodities, mass movement, and social flux all converge into the immanent operational surface of the screen. This hyperreality derived from the sheer speed, intensity, and extensiveness of virtual relational networks has

acquired centrality in pandemic times. Baudrillard speaks of ecstasy because the saturation of the space, so high that it flows into a delirium of communication, produces "a state of fascination and vertigo," a singular form of pleasure, but aleatory and dizzying (132). This ecstatic, saturated digital space has increasingly gained prominence in our daily life, as our interpersonal relationships have almost entirely become immersed into the amorphous, fluid networks of virtual mass communication. Social and artistic practices have been decentered and deterritorialized into these networks. Technological developments opened new spaces of interaction, self-fashioning, and artistic creation and reception. The digital sphere offers and distributes a wide range of alternative aesthetics and cultural texts, a set of meanings that generates its sensorium.

For this reason, the real and the digital are no longer distinct. We live in a world of incessant image-making, meaning-making, and mass communications where the media are an integral and fundamental part of social reality (McRobbie 1994, 203). Social reality is partly extended to the digital world, entangled in its networks of hyper-communication. The pandemic time is an epoch of mediated contacts that prompted a shift from communities to communication and from contact to connection. Hyperconnectivity and new media present a highly disruptive potential linked to their rapidity and diffusion (Mróz 2019, 6), opening new avenues for practicing resistance and enacting dissensus. Cyberspace offers countless sites for experimentation and reworlding (Belk 2013, 486). The collective dimension is oriented towards potential developments and virtual restructurings of social spaces and political subjectivities in the digital sphere.

Rancière asserts that art becomes a social, revolutionary practice when taken outside the workshop or museum, inciting us to oppose the system of domination by denouncing its participation in that system (2010, 135). It mobilizes us by disrupting how bodies fit their functions and destinations; it is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable, and the feasible, thus allowing for new modes of political constructions of everyday objects and new possibilities of collective enunciations (2008, 72-73). Artistic practices create a sensorium, a specific partition of the perceptible (2010, 122). The material sensorium of everyday experience is what ties communities together. This connection does not entail that collective unity stems from the fact that everybody agrees, but that sense is in agreement with sense (ibidem, 81). A new sensorium signifies a new ethos (ibidem, 119). It is crucial to start thinking about the future trajectories of art and aesthetics concerning politics and

ongoing emergencies. Emergency aesthetics, which is also aesthetics of experimentation, creates the conditions that allow us to respond to the existential call of art in the twenty-first century (Zabala 2017, 111).

Danto notes that art today is not for connoisseurs or collectors alone. The globalization of the art world means that art addresses us in our humanity (2006, xvi). However, while Danto believes that we seek meanings in art that neither philosophy nor religion can provide, the role of art, especially in a condition of emergency, should not be that of finding some transcendental meanings. Instead, art should use its power of affection to foster existential interventions. As struggles proceed, art will proliferate as a force of imagination and action, anger and joy, resistance, and community (McKee 2016, 81). We need new art spaces as resistance camps to articulate contemporary collective visions, as collective liberation always has an aesthetic dimension, understood as an activity of dissensus that never ends (ibidem, 80). Dissensus enables that "previously discounted voices are made to count through a reorganization of what counts as meaningful" (Chanter 2017, x). In pandemic times, art should not be a consolation or a haven. Instead, it is essential to use the accessibility of digitized art to form new political subjectivities and rethink the established political and social orders. Now more than ever, art should thrust us into an emergency rather than rescue us outside of it (Heidegger 2014, 281; Zabala 2017).

Fostering Emergency Aesthetics: The Art that We Need

What has emerged during the pandemic is the existential call of art, most evident through its enhanced immanence. The ontological appeal of art is linked to its existential undertakings. Present times require that works of art demand different existential interventions, prompting projects of social transformation. In today's atomized world, the need for politics becomes pressing. Emergencies generate the sense-dimension of possibility as they reshape the possible, the past, and the present (Polt 2015, 594).

Most importantly, emergencies call for "emergent thinking," which must be able to stand the emergency itself, staying with it, enduring it, speaking from it (ibidem, 596). Within our current globalized system, "the problem is not only the emergencies we confront but the ones we are missing" (Zabala 2017, 2-3). The most significant emergency we face today is the lack of a sense of emergency (ibidem). As Vattimo notes, one can never theorize the lack of emergency without considering a shift to praxis, multiplying the conflicts at every level (2015, 586). Absent emergencies demand a new artistic

shock (Zabala 2017, 5). By rupturing the sensible fabric, political and artistic practices hollow out and multiply established realities in a polemical way (Rancière 2010, 149). Instead of offering reassurance, art should be relentlessly unsettling and disturbing, as "the art that reallymatters engenders rather than removes anxiety" (Taylor 2011, 3). Emancipatory politics blooms from art that intervenes against the indifference and absent-mindedness permeating our social existence (Zabala 2017, 124-125).

The screen has become the main immanent surface where operations unfold, rapidly creating meanings and circulating information (Baudrillard 1983, 127). We are constantly already thrown into this restless flux, where art's social and political stance is highly convoluted. To understand how art is to impact, it is necessary to ask what it means, for art, to make an impact. In establishing a new horizon, a work of art displaces us by carrying us into the openness and out of the usual realm (Heidegger 2002, 40). Art refuses to install itself within an already open horizon, and this refusal results in the artistic shock that defines us by the traditions and the relationships we stand in (Zabala 2017, 121-122). From this stems the ontological appeal of art, which sparks existential interventions. Artworks are existential projects of social transformation. (ibidem, 124). This transformation is the core of emergency aesthetics, a philosophical stance capable of interpreting the existential disclosures of contemporary art (ibidem, 6). Emergency aesthetics is an aesthetics of experimentation that reflects the nature of our being, which is subject to possibilities; our existence is vulnerable, and our sense is always open to reinterpretation (Polt 2015, 597). Creating the possibility of a world, art "opens on to the world's political possibilities, the possibility of the political, the world as a political possibility, and the politics of the possible" (Dronsfield 2015, 166).

The aesthetic quality of philosophy resides in its openness and its profound relation to thinking (Jørgensen 2015, 622). Aesthetic experience is emotional, perceptive, suggestive, and, by expanding our thinking, it is a prerequisite for philosophy to take shape as an art of interpretation (ibidem, 615, 620). Interpretation is an anarchic endeavor because it can never strive for completeness, but it attempts to grant an open field to what is singular and unrepeatable (Zabala 2017, 113; Bruns 1992, 17). Art aims to produce a new perception of the world, thus creating a commitment to its transformation (Rancière 2010, 142). Artworks are points of departure to change a world that requires new interpretations rather than better descriptions (Vattimo, Zabala 2011, 5). Philosophy is not a disengaged, contemplative, or neutral reception of objects, but the practice of an interested, projected, and

active possibility (Vattimo, Zabala 2011, 14). Emergency aesthetics is where aesthetics and politics can thrive together, creating new critical spaces for aesthetic, ethical, political, and social intervention.

Future Projections

The problem we are facing today concerns the translation of art into a political change in an atomized world. Starting from evaluating how aesthetic experience has changed in pandemic times, we have now come to the question of political action. Politics and aesthetics are intertwined because they create new subjectivities and expose new visibilities (Rancière 2010, 125). Enacting dissensus, artistic and political practices are inherently revolutionary and creative. Art can rupture the sensible fabric, disrupting the dominant order of perception and altering the sphere of perception and visibility. In producing these affects, art influences the social world. Naturally, this dimension has changed when art has become immanent and when aesthetic experience has turned into a more connected, immediate, widespread dimension. A primary goal of aesthetics today is to explain how, in some contemporary art, demands on art are turned into demands by art (Kelly 2012, 22-23).

Art in all its forms demands to reframe horizons of perception, giving way to sensation, to a more direct and total experience of artworks. This reframing is mirrored by expanding our horizons of thought, which unfold alternative possibilities for creative, political, and social propositions. Aesthetics must become "a modus operandi" because art "generates a set of aesthetic possibilities" that then translate into political thinking (Bennett 2012, 2, 51). Philosophical aesthetics must incite a transformation project for the future, intervening against indifference and working through the paradoxes of social realities (Zabala 2017, 124). The emergencies we are facing concern our social, urban, environmental, and historical existence; they demand "a general reconsideration of our standing in the world" that will "save us from the indifference that continues to prevail" (ibidem). Foster argues that what is most valuable is a sense of actuality in the powerful sense of the term: artworks that can constellate different registers of aesthetic, cognitive, and critical experience and different temporality orders. This actuality should open onto future work rather than experience (2015, 155). We must strive for an art that does not linger onto the past, and an aesthetic experience that, having absorbed all of the digital aura's vibrations, inhales the present and is projected onto future projects of existential intervention. This aim is, to me, the future direction that emergency aesthetics should take.

Bibliography

1. Baudrillard Jean (1983), "The Ecstasy of Communication", [in:] H. Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Washington: Bay Press, pp. 126-134.
2. Belk Russell W. (2013), "Extended Self in a Digital World", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40, pp. 477-500.
3. Benjamin Walter (1999), "Little History of Photography", trans. R. Livingstone, [in:] M. W. Jennings *et al.*, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 507-530.
4. Benjamin Walter (2007), "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", trans. H. Zohn, [in:] H. Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, pp. 217-251.
5. Bennett Jill (2012), *Practical Aesthetics: Events, Affect, and Art After 9/11*, New York: Tauris.
6. Bruns Gerald L. (1992), *Hermeneutics: Ancient and Modern*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.
7. Bundgaard Peer F. and Stjernfelt Frederik (ed.) (2015), *Investigations Into the Phenomenology and the Ontology of the Work of Art: What are Artworks and How Do We Experience Them?*, New York: Springer.
8. Campbell Edward (2013), *Music After Deleuze*, London: Bloomsbury.
9. Chanter Tina (2017), *Art, Politics and Rancière: Broken Perceptions*, London: Bloomsbury.
10. Chaumont Pierre (2015), "Reshaping the Experience of Art: Digitization and 3D Archives", [online] http://digicult.it/news/reshaping-the-experience-of-art-digitization-and-3d-archives/ [accessed: 21.12.2020].
11. Danto Arthur C. (2006), *Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap Between Art and Life*, New York: Columbia University Press.
12. Deleuze Gilles (1983), *Cinéma 1: L'image-mouvement*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
13. Deleuze Gilles (1985), *Cinéma 2: L'image-temps*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
14. Deleuze Gilles (1968), *Différence et répétition*, Paris: PUF.
15. Deleuze Gilles (1981), *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation*, Paris: La Différence.
16. Deleuze Gilles and Guattari Félix (1980), *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
17. Deleuze Gilles and Guattari Félix (1991), *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
18. Dronsfield Jonathan Lahey (2015), "Immanent Surface: Art and the Demand for Signification", [in:] S. Dejanovic (ed.), *Nancy and the Political*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 164-191.
19. Foster Hal (2015), *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency*, London: Verso Books.
20. Gadamer Hans-George (2001), *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.
21. Gadamer Hans-George (1989), *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall, London: Continuum.
22. Grisey Gérard (1987), "Tempus Ex Machina: A Composer's Reflections On Musical Time", *Contemporary Music Review*, 2, pp. 239-275.
23. Heidegger Martin (2012), *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. R. Rojcewicz and D. Vallega-Neu, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
24. Heidegger Martin (1979), *Nietzsche*, trans. D. F. Krell, New York: Harper & Row.
25. Heidegger Martin (2002), "The Origin of the Work of Art", [in:] J. Young and K. Haynes (eds. and trans.), *Off the Beaten Track*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

26. Heidegger Martin (2014), *Überlegungen X*, *Gesamtausgabe*, 95, trans. R. Polt, Frankfurt: Klostermann.
27. Jørgensen Dorthe (2015), "Philosophy at a Crossroads", *Philosophy Today*, 59, pp. 611-625.
28. Kelly Michael (2012), *A Hunger for Aesthetics: Enacting the Demands of Art*, New York: Columbia University Press.
29. McKee Yates (2016), *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition*, London: Verso.
30. McRobbie Angela (1994), *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, London: Routledge.
31. Michalet Judith (2020), *Deleuze: penseur de l'image*, Saint-Denis: PUV.
32. Mróz Adrian (2019), "Aesthetic Dissonance: On Behavior, Values, and Experience through New Media", *Hybris*, 47, pp. 1-21.
33. Polt Richard (2015), "Propositions on Emergency", *Philosophy Today*, 59, pp. 587-597.
34. Rancière Jacques (ed.) (2010), *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. S. Corcoran, London: Continuum.
35. Rancière Jacques (2008), *Le spectateur émancipé*, Paris: La Fabrique.
36. Rancière Jacques (2009), *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. G. Rockhill, London: Continuum.
37. Taylor Mark C. (2011), "Financialization of Art", *Capitalism and Society*, 6, pp. 1-19.
38. Vattimo Gianni (2015), "Emergency and Event: Technique, Politics, and the Work of Art", *Philosophy Today*, 59, pp. 583-586.
39. Vattimo Gianni and Zabala Santiago (2011), *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx*, New York: Columbia University Press.
40. Zabala Santiago (2009), *The Remains of Being: Hermeneutic Ontology After Metaphysics*, New York: Columbia University Press.
41. Zabala Santiago (2017), *Why Only Art Can Save Us: Aesthetics and the Absence of Emergency*, New York: Columbia University Press.

61 (2/2021), pp. 27–41 | The Polish Journal
DOI: 10.19205/61.21.2 | of Aesthetics

Alice Cortés*, Matthew Crippen**

Phenomenology and Ecology: Art, Cities, and Cinema in the Pandemic

Abstract

COVID-19 infects cities, here grasped as quasi-living functioning systems, and the changes inflicted can poetically open us to certain things. Drawing on ecological psychology, we maintain that this brings people into contact with different realities depending on their overall wellbeing, arguing that the aesthetic experience of cities accordingly varies. We then consider iterations of these ideas in dystopian cinema, which portrays global threats altering human relations with technology, art, and the world.

Keywords

COVID-19, Cities, Dystopian Movies, Ecological Psychology, *poiesis*

Introduction

This article explores the COVID-19 pandemic in cities and in relation to art, especially science fiction movies. The plain fact is that lived experience of the pandemic has sometimes gotten close to dystopian cinema with people isolated behind masks, unable to travel, and occasionally confined to their local city district. Although the less privileged are often forced out to make a living, the better-off have the option of staying at home with food delivery services and possibilities of an almost cybernetic existence by integrating with remote technologies. By merging humans with electronic tools, COVID-19 approaches the techno-viruses found in science fiction—viruses that

* Universidad de Valladolid, Spain
Accademia San Pietro, Italy
Email: aliceandreacortes@gmail.com

** Pusan National University, Republic of Korea
Berlin School of Mind and Brain, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany
Email: matthewjcrippen@gmail.com

transform biological agents into techno-organic entities. Simultaneously, cities share characteristics with living systems: they are influenced—one might even say infected—by illness. COVID-19 has impacted human movement, including economic, social, and political activity. It has thus altered the heartbeat of cities and the circulation of people through them.

We consider these issues through the psychology of James Hillman (1972, 1999, 2005, 2008). His writings identify poetry with both nature and soul. He regards the two as ecologically bound and uses mythic archetypes to capture experiences of existential threat. Examining how COVID-19 affects the world's "composition" in the twofold sense of "ecology" and "aesthetic arrangements," we reinforce Hillman's ideas with another psychological school that is widely characterized as "ecological." This school organizes around the thought of the perception scientist James Gibson (1966, 1967), which in turn evolves out of phenomenology, Gestalt psychology, and pragmatism (Heft 2001; Chemero and Käufer 2016). The aim here is to show that socioeconomic wellbeing affects aesthetic engagements with urban surroundings and that COVID-19 amplifies these outcomes, an idea that can be understood within phenomenological philosophy.

To explicate the techno-virus that shows up in both cities and science fiction movies, we call upon Martin Heidegger's (e.g., 1954) discussions of Greek understandings of art, both practical and fine. The Greek word for art is *téchne*—which is understood as the kind of knowledge that brings about changes in the world. *Téchne* is associated with *poiesis*, the root of the word "poetry" and also an ancient term that connotes "creating," "making," or "producing." According to Heidegger, *poiesis* means more explicitly "bursting open," "bringing forth," and "blossoming into bloom" and hence "out of concealment" and "into the open" (Crippen 2007). For Heidegger, then, "*téchne* is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsperson but also for the fine arts and beautiful arts. *Téchne* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis*" (1954, 16). Thus, when creative making and bringing forth occur, something has "passed from non being to being, from concealment into the full light of the work" (Agamben 1999, 68-69). We see this in poetry proper, for by means of innovatively bending language, it can open us to things that we formally missed, almost as black light divulges what was previously hidden (Crippen 2007).

Thus, while *téchne* is at the root of the word "technology," Heidegger rescues the concept to show that it is more than production and, in fact, a mode of revealing (Cortés 2009, 55). Along these lines, we want to suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has generated new ways of coping and hence see-

ing, partly through the creative use of technologies. However, ways of coping are not evenly distributed, nor is access to technology. Hence people in varying situations do not respond in the same ways, so that they bring forth different realities, aesthetic and otherwise. This situation is reflected in dystopian movies, many dealing with outbreaks and other catastrophes, highlighting the differing experiences of subgroups. Insofar as cinema helps us see realities that escape attention, one can regard it as a truth-disclosing poetical dialogue that reveals what the daily grind of existence obscures.

Poetry and Sick City-Souls

James Hillman expresses relations between nature, art, and poetry through the Neoplatonic concept of *anima mundi* or world soul. Hillman regards his work as ecological, and *anima mundi* captures this. The Greek formulation is *psuchè kósmou*. The word *psuchè* simultaneously connotes "psyche," "mind," "soul," "life," and "breath, and the Latin term *anima* has similar meanings. Accordingly, an ancient view was that vital life functions comprise the human soul; these form societal elements integrating into a quasi-living city soul; and organic and non-organic forces ecologically unite into a world soul. Thus, to speak of a world soul is to characterize the Earth as a kind of organism or living system.

Hillman (1999, Ch. 3) sees this integrated outlook as a call for psychological principles that do not start with the subject but rather with the world in which the human soul is situated. He characterizes this approach as one that does not separate people from nature and takes as its starting point not only human desires but also the interests of the Earth and its beings. In short, Hillman asserts that our *psyches*—our being and ways of living—are characterized and defined by the world soul or *anima mundi*. Again, the Greek term is *psuchè kósmou*, so Hillman sees himself as expressing the cosmic psychology already at play on our planet. Our breath, for example, belongs to the world: we cannot distinguish the air from the oxygen dissolving on our lungs' surface. What happens in the external *anima* happens to us. For Hillman, this applies to psychology as well.

The pandemic is a variation of this point since the virus, by infecting us, also infects the soul of cities—"soul" here understood as societal elements integrating with physical form and other constituents such as rocks and gardens that add to urban spaces. The pandemic's assault has brought about loneliness, isolation, sorrow, and nostalgia. Hillman (1972) suggests an archetype for such loss and disarray is found in the myth of the nature-god

Pan. Pan is a protector of animals and also a god of panic and loneliness. Pan, as Hillman writes, "was in panic when the animals ran," and "this vision of Pan's panic set the world in terror" (p. Iiii). Seen thus, "Pan was himself a victim of nightmares […] and the horror that he brings. The God is what he does; his appearance is his essence" (p. Iiii).

The notion that appearance *is* essence is repeated in Heidegger's later work and is closely paralleled in classical American pragmatism, and it connects to the earlier discussed conception of poetry. The principle, in John Dewey's (1920, Ch. 5) phraseology, is that things *are* what they do and what can be done to them, so that pine shows up as a softwood because of the ways (*téchne*) in which artisans build with it—how it appears in the structures they erect (Crippen 2017). Dewey sees art and poetry as forms of creative making, which is etymologically appropriate. Speaking of poetry proper, Dewey (1925) adds that it "radiates the light that never was on land and sea but that is henceforth an abiding illumination of objects" (360). Dewey thereby suggests with Heidegger that poetry is a form of revelation.

Understood in Dewey's practical manner—which is, in fact, an ordinary and phenomenological way of grasping things—COVID-19 is not merely a microscopic agent, nor even just a medical illness. Like Pan, it is also what it does: it is the loneliness and panic that it has caused and that has characterized our experience of it, particularly among those who are not physically infected. The pandemic has aggressively inflicted itself in places where social intercourse is intense, such as urban centers. Hence the virus showed up in empty parks, in people going out masked and distancing from one another or else barricading themselves at home. It appeared in shuttered businesses, unemployment, or anxiety about these possibilities. It also manifested in people ignoring safety protocols to make political statements and positively discover their own work rhythms in remote situations. The outbreak of COVID-19 has accordingly brought about altered human ecologies and thus infected and thereby changed how cultural landscapes knit together—what might be called the aesthetic composition of city-souls.

Ecological Aesthetics and the Pandemic

At the outset, we suggested COVID-19 affects people differently depending on their situation since the more privileged can better integrate with remote technologies and avoid exposure to the virus. We want to add that there is reason to think that personal situations—in terms of health, socioeconomic standing, and so on—affect aesthetic contact with cities. We also wish to underline the importance of Hillman's (1999, 49) idea of psychology as

a subject for which the limits cannot be defined because it blends into the world. He suggests that this means that psychology merges with ecology. We specifically think Hillman elucidates environmental catastrophes and the current COVID-19 crisis. The latter is human-made, not because it was manufactured in laboratories. Instead, it is because the pandemic one way or another appears to have roots in the close confinement of various species—including humans—for commercial purposes. The global economy ensured that the outbreak escalated, thereby revealing the highly integrated nature of the world and human activities. Viewed this way, our panic does not merely originate in us; it is also grounded in the living world we are part of, as Hillman argues.

Another ecological variant of psychology is organized around the work of James Gibson (1966, 1979). Influenced by phenomenology, pragmatism, and Gestalt psychology (Heft 2001; Chemero and Käufer 2016), Gibson likewise has a world-oriented psychology in that he thinks that the structure of our surroundings adequately accounts for how things show up in experience. He is particularly famous for his insight that we see the world in terms of affordances, defined as features that allow or limit certain kinds of action. Gibson is a realist in that he believes that affordances, while relative to an organism's capacities, exist in the world independently of agents and their temporary interests. Thus standard Gibsonian accounts would hold that a chair affords sitting, irrespective of whether anybody is there or interested in using it, and its features remain even if it is in an empty room (Heft 2020). However, this seems overstated since people in the same physical space can at one moment bring out significantly different features, undermining the realist insistence that affordances persist independently of agents, albeit leaving anti-subjectivist aspects of the theory intact. For instance, a lake surface affords very different things to people hitting it at slow speeds and terminal velocity (Crippen 2020). Along somewhat related lines, studies show that emotional disposition affects how distant or steep hills appear (Riener *et al.* 2011). Once again, however, this leaves Gibson's anti-subjectivist standpoint intact since the perception of increased steepness and distance correspond to hills being objectively less accessible when we are depressed and hence deprived of energy. Nevertheless, this critique does give additional stress to Gibson's observation that agents play a role in defining the ecological structures they negotiate.

In recent times, affordances have been used to understand functioning in urban settings and specifically aesthetic engagements with cities (Crippen 2016a; Crippen and Klement 2020). Scholars have long suggested that im-

plicit boundaries funnel human movement (e.g., Jacobs 1961; Newman 1972) and thus function like affordances (Crippen 2016a, 2021a, 2021b). Such features might include a curb, followed by a lawn, decorative fencing, and shrubs with a walkway and run of stairs rising to a lobby. Non-residents penetrating these networks of what might be called "symbolic affordances" are apt to experience a sense of increasing conspicuousness. They are also likely to be more pronounced to inhabitants, who may feel licensed to question them. Adding aesthetic features such as gardens and ornamental brickwork may enhance the effect by drawing residents outside and cultivating a protective sense of ownership. Other decorative features such as neogothic ornamentation—which derives from medieval architecture—may further amplify the effect. This amplification happens because, however aesthetically appealing such adornments are, their original purpose was to repulse entry, meaning they tend to convey hostility semiotically (Crippen 2021b). The broader point is that design can "make both inhabitant and stranger […] perceive that an area is under the undisputed influence of a particular group" (Newman 1972, 2-3).

The critical idea for our purposes is that the psychological cordoning of space can operate differentially depending on people's wellbeing, making design selectively permeable. Thus polished wood and marble in banks signify reliability and trustworthiness to those with financial resources. They may accordingly feel invited to enter. These same features might indicate a level of prestige that may ward off those of more modest means, therefore closing the space to them. Experimental research finds that fatigue, carrying a heavy weight, low blood sugar, and sadness—in short, anything that degrades energy or mobility—make affordances more severe (Bhalla and Proffitt 1999; Riener *et al.* 2011; Schnall, Zadra and Proffitt 2010; Zadra *et al.* 2010). There is also empirical evidence that the implicit markers work more effectively with marginalized groups such as the homeless, who suffer more malaise (Crippen 2019). Almost everybody is fatigued by COVID-19. However, one can speculate that this is more so with people worn out with various forms of stress and who were already struggling before the pandemic. This case might be especially so for those precluded from the luxury of working at home and who cannot afford to lose income even temporarily. None of this implies that they cease to experience spaces as aesthetic. It instead means that specific aesthetic spaces are likely to be imbued with a forbidden status, analogous to a gothic castle that we can admire for its beauty and yet feel excluded.

Expressing the situation in Heidegger's and Hillman's terms, we can say that the poetics of space varies for different people—"poetics" again in the sense of *poiesis* and *téchne*, that is, manners of comportment that bring out realities in particular ways. The COVID-19 disaster has brought widespread pain in anxiety, depression, panic, and loss. However, the panic of joblessness and infection has likely been worse for the poor. By contrast, the affluent—while undoubtedly awaiting the end of the crisis—are at least better positioned to enjoy personalized work rhythms and escape the daily grind of commutes. Gardening, home baking, and even foraging wild foods are on the rise, but again likely more so for those having the luxury of setting their work schedules by themselves.

These reflections reiterate the opening claim that the virus has not merely infected human tissue but the surrounding world, which simultaneously means how it is poetically brought out according to our dispositions and actions. These reflections thereby highlight that the virus is techno-organic, for it is altering the technological world around us and how we meld with it, again differentially depending on personal situations.

Cinematic Dystopias and Technological Reproduction in the Age of Covid-19

The techno-pandemic has repeatedly been rehearsed in art and especially science fiction films. At the same time, we are living new realities. One reason is that COVID-19 is the first planetwide pandemic in the context of a global world in which people are accustomed to rapid international travel and trade. This habituation hastened the spread of the disease, and pre-pandemic activities were accordingly curtailed. Another factor differentiating this pandemic from past ones is the availability of networks of remote technologies, which are literal extensions of our minds insofar as computing and communicating tools are welded to the substance of our thinking (Clark and Chalmers 1998; Clark 2008). Accordingly, COVID-19 nears the viruses in science fiction that transform biological agents into techno-organic entities. The virus changes our functioning and that of cities too. Recalling that in ancient contexts, the functioning of systems is their *psuchè*, *anima,* or soul—terms also connoting life—we can see that the virus has not only infected humans but cities as well.

The contemporary technological situation can itself be seen in terms of pandemics because it is all-encompassing. Cinema is an example of this: the viral reproduction of images and sounds leads to near-total dissemina-

tion. Available on computers and cellular phones, films reach people without them needing to go out to theaters. In the process, cinema alters social functioning. Walter Benjamin (1936-39) formulated much of this in his "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Given the viral reproduction of movies, it is fitting that pandemic catastrophes form a subgenre in science fiction films. The theme of mass infection shows up in *Contagion* (2011) and earlier still in *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968), along with many productions that have framed zombies and vampires as outcomes of viral contamination. The COVID crisis has seen Netflix and other companies marketing movies about pandemics.

Benjamin regards film as a powerful agent of the masses. Though one can make the case that newer forms of electronic media surpass conventional cinema, these same technologies are also expanding the reach of movies. Benjamin says: "These are processes that are in close connection with the mass movements of our day. Their most powerful agent is the film" (1936-39, II, 356). He continues: "Its social significance, principally in its most positive form, is unthinkable without its destructive, cathartic side, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage" (1936-39, II, 356). Benjamin vacillates between two poles. Positively, his prediction about cinema presents film as an emancipatory art and one open to nearly all. On the negative side, he frames the socialization inculcated by mechanically reproduced movies as the failure of the unique aura that goes with handcrafted art. His reflections suggest that film may be circuses for the masses, an observation that perhaps applies more so during the pandemic since escape from monotony and tedium—as opposed to artistic illumination—become primary temptations during the lockdown.

The advent of COVID-19 has increased massification: entertainment is funneled into homes to greater extents through network technologies like TV cable or internet enterprises making record profits such as Netflix and Amazon Prime. Optimistically, the situation may supply a renaissance of the possibilities to remotely screen movies and experience concerts and theater. Pessimistically, COVID-19 may be pushing us towards the consumption of popular art that surrenders more power to contemporary technological arrangements that strip the unique being out of things. Heidegger suggests (1954) that the Rhine is ceasing to be a river with singular qualities that show up according to the lived experiences of those dwelling on its shores. Instead, it is becoming a "standing reserve," that is, something measured in terms of undifferentiated energy stockpiled behind dams. Fruit and meat are likewise industrially produced and sorted such that grade-A products are

treated as identical. Food thereby ceases to manifest unique land, sunlight, and the personal care that nurtured it. Franchising similarly aims at standardization as a marketing device, and many movie series, actors, and even directors are, in effect, brand names, very much like Macdonald's. Because commercial art is thus standardized, people know what is on offer before screening a Tom Cruise or Marvel movie (Crippen 2016b). Art has long transmitted ideas, but with such franchising, it may be that art increasingly standardizes and virally spreads human socialization patterns, more so, again, during COVID-19. This example provides another sense of how "viral" spread is techno-organic: it infects flesh, technologies, and personal and social functioning and thus individual souls, along with those of the *polis*, community, or city.

COVID-19 has significantly standardized behavioral functioning. We say this without criticism because the standardized behavioral precautions to prevent transmission are only prudent. Still, they are there and are yet another illustration of how human tissue is not the only victim of the virus since it also infects city and individual souls—"souls" once again used in the ancient sense to connote functioning. There is no shortage of films and television series that capture this idea. One example is *Elysium* (2013), a movie depicting a future in which technological advances have provided an equivalent to the long-sought mythical elixir of life. However, this is only for the elites, who dominate and have access to new technologies that keep them young and healthy. These same elites live in a space station, albeit one with pleasant if uninspired green spaces resembling gated communities. The rest of humanity remains in the dangerous terrestrial setting of Earth. The obvious parallel between the movie and social functioning in the COVID-19 pandemic is that the affluent have had more opportunities to enjoy the luxury of working and living in protected spaces. Another parallel is that people in developed nations are more likely to receive vaccines first while looking at the less fortunate from afar. This vaccination is just like the elites of *Elysium* dwell in their heavenly utopia, almost like gods looking down on a ravaged earth, with the distance bleeding empathy away.

Another example mentioned earlier is *Contagion*, which has anticipated many aspects of the COVID-19 crisis. This film encompasses everything from its likely origins in bats in an East Asian region to its worldwide spread to the largely empty streets that marked the early phases of the pandemic. It also includes masked masses, social distancing, isolation, and even people spreading fake information to serve their interests. Though partly inspired by the SARS 1 outbreak, Dr. Ian Lipkin (BBC 2020), a scientific consultant on

the film, has said that the movie was "made in the hope it might prevent a future worldwide pandemic like coronavirus." Understandably, the movie gained renewed prominence in 2020 on streaming sites, and it reiterates that viruses do not just infect flesh, but human functioning too, or what might be called "*psuchic*" life. The film thereby conveys that the lived experience of a pandemic—phenomenologically speaking—is not just about the spread of illness; it is additionally about the infectivity of fear, which is even more inescapable than the virus: the risk of illness brings panic, causing social disorder.

We can interpret this again in terms of *téchne* and perhaps a warped *poiesis* since human actions bring forth harsh realities. In *Contagion*, the virus originates in the non-human natural world, in this case, bats, then spreads to pigs that are raised in a quasi-industrial manner, in some sense as a "standing reserve." The film also displays the integration of the human and non-human natural world—in short, *anima mundi*. The virus originates outside of human circles but spreads to people because of our technological imposition on nature: we keep animals in cramped pens; we handle them like mere things; we fuel viral transmission through global travel. This is not to say that human and non-human spheres would be separate without technological imposition, but rather that the latter alters ecological interrelations in ways that come back to hurt us. From Hillman's (1999) perspective, the film shows how the sickness of our industrialized arrangements translates not only to illness in us but also to the degradation of the world's living soul, again through domination over nature. As Hillman observes, "the idea of a deep psychology that mixes with the ecology would say that today to comprehend the sickness of the soul we refer to the sickness of the world, to its sufferance" (49-50).

The series *Dark* (2017-2020) is another cinematic production—a TV series—that explores concerns that Heidegger and others have expressed about technological domination. Based on philosophical and physical theories advanced by luminaries such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Einstein, and Nathan Rosen, the series broadly embodies the tragedy of ecological catastrophes and resultant crises in human relations with one another and the environment. The plot unfolds in Winden, a city dominated by a nuclear plant with caves that are a gateway to wormhole-generated time loops between different realities in the 20th and 21st centuries. In one episode, set in 1986, the two protagonists—Jonas and Martha—find shelter in a bus station to escape acid rain. Jonas asks Martha what she wants to change, and she expresses a wish that Winden disappears. Later, in 2052, most of the city is destroyed.

At various ages and in several realities, Jonas and Martha take on new names: Adam and Eva. The overriding sense is that loops from the past, future, and present cannot be closed so that time is circular, leading to and from the same fixed destiny. This state of affairs recalls Nietzsche's proposal of the eternal recurrence of the same, which he first mentioned in *The Gay Science* (see §341), initially published in 1882. The reference to the Garden of Eden carries an insinuation of falling into original sin, in this case through knowledge that opens possibilities of technological destruction. The circularity of the eternal return here involves traveling through time in the same city in non-linear ways. Each phase repeats the tragic destiny of humanity that orbits an apocalypse that occurs around the same time that COVID-19 took hold of the world. In the post-apocalyptic city of 2052, the urban landscape is desolate. There is a handful of ragged survivors wearing masks and using military equipment—some dated and some advanced—to impose their technological will on what remains of Winden. This scenario mirrors much of our history as if it is our eternal destiny at all times.

The 100 (2014-2020), a TV series based on novels by Kass Morgan, restates several dystopian themes in the context of a pandemic. It portrays a future ruined by the betrayal of artificial intelligence and nuclear and viral warfare with some survivors confined to a space station. Their limited food, oxygen, and medical supplies press them into drastic decisions such as birthrate control combined with promiscuous use of the death penalty and massacres to cull the population. In the first season, 100 young criminals are sent to investigate the post-apocalyptic Earth. Upon arriving, they find surviving terrestrials struggling with them, along with the dangers of biological infection. Here, too, we see how the imposition of technology by violating nature ravages the souls of individuals and communities, "souls" again used in Hillman's sense. We also see technological organization imposed on people to accentuate class divisions that already exist, paralleling the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overarching links between *The 100*, *Dark*, *Elysium,* and *Contagion* portray accentuated versions of lockdown realities associated with COVID-19. It is not just that many of us are isolated, but again that safety is disproportionally afforded to the affluent, who have better medical access and the luxury of working from home and connecting-in-the-world through the network of new technologies. All these cinematic works additionally convey how certain technological impositions degrade the world soul. Along Hillman's lines, who argues that psychology derives from the state of the world, this entails an assault on the human soul. Many philosophers have observed that humans,

by nature, are political. By this, it is meant that people can only fully function in a community or the context of a *polis*. Insofar as this is so, these cinematic works outline, in exaggerated terms, the infection of city souls around the world that COVID-19 has brought to the fore.

Conclusion

We began this article by exploring the COVID-19 pandemic through ancient concepts revived by Hillman and Heidegger, which emphasize artistic practices and draw on mythic stories. We then connected these outlooks to more recent work by Gibson and many dystopian filmmakers in order to highlight aesthetic implications of the pandemic in cities and art. We will briefly review what has been said.

Ancient Greek understandings identify something soul-like with basically anything that resembles interactive living systems. Accordingly, we can regard "soul" as the pulse and rhythm of activity that forms an entity's core and makes it what it is. On such a view, it is not just human tissue that is infected by the COVID-19 virus, but cities too and the world beyond them insofar as functioning is disrupted. Leaving heavy-going philosophical outlooks behind, this is the shared experience of the pandemic. Above all, we see the viral transmission of fear and panic. We also have witnessed direct manifestations of the pandemic in shuttered businesses, in people wearing masks and gloves, and eerie tented testing sites with workers in hazmat suits, not to mention receding economies and stymied global travel. While the non-human environment may have benefitted because of COVID-19, the illness's roots can be traced to the hyper-industrial ascendancy of humans. We place caged animals in proximity that would typically be too far apart for novel viruses to jump between them and ultimately to us. We worsen matters through casual global travel and other practices that are environmentally destructive due to emitted pollution. It is almost as if the world soul has a fever and humans are the pathogens from which the planet is trying to rid itself. One can say broadly that the pandemic, by inflicting all these changes, temporarily altered how the world functions and holds together, hence the world's aesthetic composition.

An idea expressed by Hillman and Heidegger, along with others such as Dewey, is that things *are* what they do. So, the appearance of particular circumstances becomes their essence. This idea is central to all these thinkers' discussions of art and poetry, and it is key to any phenomenological grasp of the pandemic, which amounts to an everyday understanding accessible to

non-philosophers. The virus is what it does: it kills; it also spreads fear and disrupts the lives of even those who are not infected. As discussed, however, these disruptions are not evenly distributed. The better off can mostly do their jobs from home. This privilege not only keeps them safer but has allowed many to realize the aesthetic pleasure of setting their work rhythms themselves and avoiding the choking grind of traffic—discoveries, one hopes, that will remain after the pandemic ends. The disadvantaged are afforded these luxuries less often, in addition to being more subject to the prospect of financial ruin. We further suggested that the same physical space may be inviting to the affluent and forbidding to the poor. This aesthetic signaling occurs because those already struggling are all the more worn out by the pandemic, and symbolic barriers that already make urban spaces selectively permeable become increasingly rigid to the exhausted.

The social filtering that arguably ensues connects directly to dystopian cinema about global destruction in which a privileged few often reside in a protected citadel that the disadvantaged look upon wistfully. Such films and TV productions search beyond the mere biological danger of infectious diseases and other disasters to highlight the social disruption and segregation that accompanies pandemics. Another idea advanced is that human technological impositions are often at the root of global threats, which also applies to the COVID-19 crisis. An additional lesson is that technological solutions are unequally distributed so that the rich and poor are sorted and valued differently. One primarily overlooked case in point is emphasized in *Elysium*. Here, aesthetic experiences—even if somewhat bland ones—are afforded more to the privileged than to the poor, for the elite in this movie live in spaces manicured to look like affluent suburbs.

Broadly, then, the elites in *Elysium* have greater access to the technological reproduction of images, sounds, and entire environments that allow them to look inward and away from ecological catastrophes on Earth. Hillman (1999) proposes a "theory of psychology to demonstrate that the human subject has always been implicated in the wide world of nature" (47). Heidegger suggests a similar idea. The notion is—or ought to be—almost too obvious to bear mentioning, but it seems people often neglect the point. In crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it could be that greater access to Netflix and similar platforms are helping one swath of humanity ignore the plight of others. Truth is sometimes revealed in exaggerations, and *Elysium* and other dystopian movies reveal societal imbalances and blindness to them in embellished terms. This revelation is perhaps contributing—ironically—to the difficulties that many dystopian filmmakers seek to highlight insofar as their works provide escapist entertainment.

These movies, then, disclose actual realities in creative ways. They are also premonitory warnings. COVID-19 itself has these same reality-revealing features, highlighting disparities, including aesthetic ones, along with the uneven threat of social and economic ruin. The question is whether humankind is prepared to learn from any of this. The prospects judged from past and current history do not look promising.

Bibliography

1. Agamben Giorgio (1999), *The man without content*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
2. BBC (2020), Dr Ian Lipkin, "Contagion movie made to prevent pandemic", *BBC News: Entertainment and Arts*, 16 June 2020, [online] https://www.bbc.com/news/av/entertainment-arts-53063584 (accessed: 21.01.2021).
3. Bhalla Mukul and Proffitt Dennis (1999), "Visual-motor recalibration in geographical slant perception", *Journal Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 25, pp. 1076-1096.
4. Benjamin Walter (1936-39, 1st ed. 2002), "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" (The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical (technical) Reproduction), [in:] *Walter Benjamin Medienästhetische Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
5. Chemero Anthony and Käufer Stephan (2016), "Pragmatism, phenomenology, and extended cognition", [in:] Roman Madzia and Matthias Jung (eds.), *Pragmatism and embodied cognitive science*, Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 55-70.
6. Clark Andy (2008), *Supersizing the mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
7. Clark Andy and Chalmers David (1998), "The extended mind", *Analysis*, 58, pp. 7-19.
8. Cortés-Boussac Andrea (2009), *El hombre en las redes de las nuevas tecnologías* (The Human Being in the network of new technologies), Bogotá: Publicaciones Universidad Sergio Arboleda.
9. Crippen Matthew (2007), "The totalitarianism of therapeutic philosophy: Reading Wittgenstein through Critical Theory", *Essays in Philosophy*, 8, pp. 29-55.
10. Crippen Matthew (2016a), "Intuitive cities: Pre-reflective, aesthetic and political aspects of urban design", *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology*, 3, pp. 125-245.
11. Crippen Matthew (2016b), "Screen performers playing themselves", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 56, pp. 163-177.
12. Crippen Matthew (2017), "Embodied cognition and perception: Dewey, science and skepticism", *Contemporary Pragmatism*, 14, pp. 121-134.
13. Crippen Matthew (2019), *A tale of two or three cities*, Paper presented at Philosophy of the City, University of Detroit Mercy, Detroit, MI, October 5.
14. Crippen Matthew (2020), "Enactive Pragmatism and Ecological Psychology", *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, p. 2598, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2020.538644.
15. Crippen Matthew (2021a), "Aesthetics and action: situations, emotional perception and the Kuleshov effect", *Synthese*, 198, pp. 2365-2382.

16. Crippen Matthew (2021b), "Contours of Cairo revolt: street semiology, values and political affordances", *Topoi*, 40, pp. 451-460.
17. Crippen Matthew and Vladan Klement (2020), "Architectural values, political affordances and selective permeability", *Open Philosophy*, 3, pp. 462-477.
18. Dewey John (1925), *Experience and nature*, Chicago: Open Court.
19. Dewey John (1920), *Reconstruction in philosophy*, New York: Henry Holt and Company.
20. Heft Harry (2001), *Ecological psychology in context: James Gibson, Roger Barker, and the legacy of William James' radical empiricism*, Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
21. Heft Harry (2020), "Ecological psychology and enaction theory: divergent groundings", *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, p. 991, doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00991.
22. Heidegger Martin (1954, 11st ed. 2009), *Die Frage nach der Technik in Vortrage und Aufsätze* (The question concerning technology in Lectures and Essays), Stuttgart: Verlag Günther Neske, pp. 9-41.
23. Heidegger Martin (1949, 1957, 2nd ed. 2005), *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge Band 79* (Bremen and Freiburg Lectures 1949 and 1957), Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Vittorio Klostermann.
24. Hillman James and Roscher W.H. (1972), *Pan and the Nightmare*, New York: Spring Publications.
25. Hillman James (1999, 3rd ed. 2005), *Politica della Bellezza* (Policies of beauty), Bergamo: Moretti & Vitali.
26. Hillman James (2008), *City and Soul*, New York: Spring Publications.
27. Jacobs Jane (1961), *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, New York: Vintage.
28. Newman Oscar (1972), *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention through Urban Design*, New York: Macmillan.
29. Nietzsche Friedrich (1974), *The Gay Science*, revised edition [1887], trans. Walter Kaufman, New York: Vintage Books.
30. Riener Cedar, Stefanucci Jeanine, Proffitt Dennis and Clore Gerald (2011), "An effect of mood on the perception of geographical slant", *Cognition Emotion*, 25, pp. 174-182.
31. Schnall Simone, Zadra Jonathan and Proffitt Dennis (2010), "Direct evidence for the economy of actions: glucose and the perception of geographical slant", *Perception*, 39, pp. 464-482.
32. Zadra Jonathan, Schnall Simone, Weltman Arthur and Proffitt Dennis (2010), "Direct physiological evidence for the economy of action: bioenergetics and the perception of spatial layout", *Journal of Vision*, 10, p. 54.

61 (2/2021), pp. 43–68 | The Polish Journal
DOI: 10.19205/61.21.3 | of Aesthetics

Tal Fitzpatrick*, Alyce McGovern**

Home, Health and Power: Exploring Experiences of and Responses to the Pandemic through the Global @covid19quilt Project

Abstract

This article explores the @Covid19Quilt, a global digital participatory art project started by Australian artists Kate Just and Tal Fitzpatrick, designed to gather and share people's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic via craft. Starting with an overview of this continuing project, this article applies an interdisciplinary lens to consider the significance of making and sharing during a pandemic. Drawing on a preliminary thematic analysis of the quilt, we discuss three broad motifs that have characterised the project thus far: home, health, and power. In exploring these three themes, the paper highlights the ways in which the @Covid19Quilt project is an important cultural artefact that draws together 'threads of collective meaning and understanding' (Ferrell, Hayward, Young 2015, 3) and opens up possibilities for transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Keywords

COVID-19, Pandemic Art, Participatory Art, Digital Quilt, Interdisciplinary

Introduction

In late December 2019 and early January 2020, reports began to emerge of a cluster of pneumonia cases in the city of Wuhan, China, without a known cause. Subsequently identified by the World Health Organisation as a novel coronavirus and named COVID-19, by the 11th March 2020, this fast-spreading virus was officially declared a global pandemic (World Health

* Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne
Email: tal.fitzpatrick@gmail.com

** University of New South Wales, Sydney
Email: a.mcgovern@unsw.edu.au

Organization 2020a). The rapid spread of COVID-19 obliged countries around the globe to respond, some taking action to minimise the threat more swiftly and effectively than others. Quite quickly, people found themselves subject to various government mandated control measures, including travel restrictions, the closing of borders, regional and national lockdowns, the introduction of mandatory mask wearing, and the quarantining of those afflicted with the virus.

As the world went into lockdown, people sought out activities to help them cope with the personal, social and economic challenges that coronavirus restrictions introduced or exacerbated. These activities were not only a way to fill the additional time some people suddenly had on their hands as entire industries shut down and communities were subject to various degrees of lockdown, but they also helped people deal with their anxieties and concerns around the pandemic itself (Inocencio Smith 2020). Notably, many people (re)turned to craft activities such as knitting, weaving, quilting, and embroidery, with "hashtags such as #quarantinecrafts #covidcrafts #covidcrafting #coronaviruscraftproject #coronaviruscraftchallenge… trend[ing] across social media platforms" early on in the pandemic (Fairley 2020).

As individuals (re)engaged with craft practices, a number of participatory quilt-inspired projects emerged as a way to encourage people to connect, virtually, whilst maintaining their physical distance.[1] In this paper we discuss one such project, the global @Covid19Quilt project, in order to provide an interdisciplinary analysis of the function these projects have played during this pandemic along with their significance as cultural artefacts that open up a space for contributors to creatively engage with issues that are important and meaningful to them during this significant point in history (O'Neill 2017).

We begin by providing an overview of the project, before moving on to explore the important role artists have played as facilitators, creators and curators of culture during this global pandemic specifically, and in momen-

[1] Including: Queensland Quarantine Quilt (2020) https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/blog/queensland-quarantine-quilt-comes-state-librarys-collection, Toledo Museum of Art's Covid-19 Virtual Quilting Bee (2020) https://www.toledomuseum.org/quilting-bee, Wisconsin Museum of Quilts & Fiber Arts Quarantine Quilt (2020) https://www.wiquiltmuseum.com/the-quarantine-quilt, Art Refuge's Corona Quilt (2020) https://www.coronaquilt.org, the Covid Hope Quilt Project (2020) https://www.hopequilt.org/events, Gina Kellogg and Shruti Sonthalia's Corona Quilt (2020) https://kelloggsisters.com/the-corona-quilt/?v=6cc98ba2045f, Jen Broemel's Collaborative Quarantine Quilt (2020) https://www.jenbroemel.com/coqquilt-2020, Madeleine Fugate's Covid Memorial Quilt https://covidquilt2020.com.

tous points in history more generally. Following this, we focus on three motifs identified in a thematic analysis of the @Covid19Quilt: home, health and power. In discussing these key themes, we juxtapose the personal and sociopolitical concerns evident in the quilt with the emergent interdisciplinary academic research around the pandemic and, building on the work of criminologists O'Neill and Seal (2012, 155-159), demonstrate three key points: one, the @Covid19Quilt provides individuals with a space "for dialogue and for listening and communicating experience across linguistic and cultural divides" (O'Neill and Seal 2012, 158); two, the @Covid19Quilt is a site where complex social issues are being explored in ways that not only complement academic discourse and knowledge, but in a forum that is more visible and accessible to the public; and three, the @Covid19Quilt, as a cultural artefact, exemplifies the possibilities of interdisciplinary, creative, and critical research that is "committed to exploring how culture is materialised in different contexts" (Woodward 2020, 17; O'Neill and Seal 2012, 159).

The @Covid19Quilt Project

Designed to enable contributors from around the world "[…] to gather, narrate and share their experiences of Covid-19 via craft" (Just 2020), the @Covid19Quilt project was started and is led by Melbourne-based artists Kate Just (@katejustknits) and Tal Fitzpatrick (@talfitzpatrick). The project began on the 5th of April 2020, one week after Australia's first nationwide lockdown and, at the time of writing, continues to accept submissions, with Just and Fitzpatrick committed to growing the project for as long as COVID-19 is considered a global pandemic. Part digital quilt, part time capsule, this project facilitates the integration of people's craft practices, their use of social media, their interior emotional lives, and their responses to current events as they unfold.

Contributions to this project are collected via the @Covid19Quilt Instagram feed, which as of May 2021 has over 3.9k followers, and is itself the digital 'quilt' at the centre of this project. To take part in the @Covid19Quilt project makers are invited to submit a square image of a textile-based work they created during the pandemic, along with a short statement detailing how the piece relates to their experiences of COVID-19, via direct message to the project's Instagram page. Just and Fitzpatrick then post the image and accompanying text on the main feed of the @Covid19Quilt Instagram page, along with the maker's name and/or Instagram handle and their location. As of April 28, 2021, they have received over 522 submissions from 28 coun-

tries around the globe including: Australia, United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales), United States, New Zealand, Germany, Canada, Brazil, Ecuador, Estonia, Spain, Greece, Austria, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Japan, China, Croatia, Romania, France, Georgia, Netherlands, Malaysia, Denmark, Switzerland, Vietnam, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates. Participants include professional artists, skilled amateurs and first-time crafters of all ages, working across a range of techniques from embroidery and hand sewing to cross-stitch and knitting.

While the primary site for engaging with this artwork is Instagram, the @Covid19Quilt project has been recognised outside this digital space, reaching a broader audience through its inclusion in online and physical exhibitions and publications, including the *2020 Incinerator Gallery Art Award for Activist Art*, where the @Covid19Quilt project was awarded the People's Choice Award (Incinerator Gallery 2020), and *The National 2021: Contemporary Australian Art* exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, which includes an installation of Kate Just's recent work. To date, the @Covid 19Quilt has also been featured on the Australian TV show *The Mix* (ABC TV, 2020) as well as in multiple online publications including *Art Guide Australia* (Downes 2020), *Crafts Council UK* (Crafts Magazine 2020), and *Frankie* (The Frankie Team 2020).

Making and Sharing in a Pandemic

As facilitators, creators and curators of this project, Just and Fitzpatrick state that they started the @Covid19Quilt Instagram page as "a way of responding to the distress, illness and loss arising globally due to the pandemic" (Just 2020). Sensing that in this moment of crisis, many of the artists and makers who constitute the online communities they are a part of would turn to their creative practices as a way to process what was happening, Just and Fitzpatrick chose to create a communal space where groups of predominantly women could use digital technologies to come together to narrate their histories through craft (Robson 2021).

In this way, the @Covid19quilt project builds on a long legacy of participatory and collaborative textile art projects that use craft as a way to centre women and other marginalised communities and to document significant historical events, including other pandemics, as they unfold. Other notable examples include: the US-based *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt* (National AIDS Memorial no date), which aimed to memorialise the lives of those lost to AIDS at a time when key political and medical figures were si-

lent on the crisis; the Gee's Bend Quiltmakers (Arnett, Herman 2006; Collins 2015), who since the early twentieth century have been creating quilts that "rank with the finest abstract art of any tradition" (Livingstone quoted in Wallach 2016), while also contributing to the Civil Rights movement and supporting their own community by establishing a foundation that fosters economic empowerment, racial and social justice, and educational advancement (Souls Grown Deep 2019); the *Monument Quilt* (FORCE: Upsetting Rape Culture no date), which featured the personal stories, in the form of "written, drawn or stitched" quilt blocks, of survivors of sexual violence; and, the global *Universal Declaration of Human Rights Quilt Project* (2017), which constituted a series of quilts created to celebrate the Universal Declaration of Humans Rights on its 70 year anniversary, as well as document the current state of human rights (Museum of Australian Democracy 2018). Each of these participatory art/craft endeavours demonstrate the role that creativity can play in not only "capturing human experiences" and chronicling events (Hunter 2019, 10), but also drawing attention to and calling for action on a range of social concerns (McGovern 2019).

The @Covid19Quilt project is also informed by the practice of 'craftivism' (Greer 2007), which brings together craft and activism and is defined by Fitzpatrick in her self-published book *Craftivism: A Manifesto/Methodology* (2018, 3), as:

> […] both a strategy for non-violent activism and a mode of DIY citizenship that looks to influence positive social and political change. This uniquely 21st Century practice involve[s] the combination of craft techniques with elements of social and/or digital engagement as part of a proactive effort to bring attention to, or pragmatically address, issues of social, political and environmental justice.

As this definition highlights, contemporary forms of 'craftivism' often rely on 21st century technologies, such as home computers with access to the internet, digital cameras and smartphones, as well as blogs and social media platforms that allow the rapid sharing of user-created content and the coalescing of online communities of interest.

These technologies, as craft critics Robertson and Vinebaum (2016, 6) explain, "[...] played a central role in moving textiles from the private to the public sphere" and have become essential for facilitating and encouraging interventionist collaborative practices at a global scale. Indeed, as social theorists argue, digital technologies have "have transformed *how people engage* with one another" (Stratton *et al.* 2017, 24, emphasis in original). Through its integration of social media into its design, this project functions

as a digital space where makers come together to express their views on broader social, political, and environmental concerns with public audiences. As the following analysis of the @Covid19Quilt highlights, the project serves as a dynamic record that traces "the wider socio-political impact of COVID-19 as participants reflect on broader issues and systematic inequalities highlighted, intersected and/or exasperated by the pandemic, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, domestic violence, wealth distribution and healthcare access" (Robson 2021).

@Covid19Quilt—Themes of the Pandemic

A preliminary thematic analysis[2] (Braun, Clarke 2006) of the contributions made to the @Covid19Quilt Instagram page has highlighted a number of broad themes evident across the contributions submitted thus far. These themes not only demonstrate the key reflections of contributors during the pandemic, but also indicate how these reflections have evolved and shifted over the period of the pandemic, from a focus on the personal to the community to the political, mirroring the socio-political climate that contributors were no doubt experiencing while creating their pieces, or what photographer and artist Nick Jaffe (2014, 3) refers to as a "shared subjective experience."

For the purposes of this paper, we discuss three key themes that feature repeatedly in the @Covid19Quilt: home, health and power. We explore these three themes in turn by using a range of submissions from the @covid19 Quilt[3] to highlight the way that these works intersect with interdisciplinary concerns and scholarship, as discussed above, before engaging in a discussion about the ways in which this global project has made effective use of digital and social media to foster the sharing of stories and recognise how "[...] creative expression can provide individuals with an important avenue for empowerment and emancipation" (Fitzpatrick 2020).

[2] According to Braun and Clarke (2006, 79), "[t]hematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data."

[3] Just and Fitzpatrick requested permission to share these images and accompanying statements from all the participants of this project and have only shared those where express permission was granted for their work to be included in publications.

Home

In the early days of the pandemic, home became a very familiar place to people, as governments across the globe requested—or mandated—that their citizens stay at home to stop the spread of the virus. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, 'home' has been a prominent theme in @Covid19Quilt contributions, initially as a call to action—'Stay Home!' (Fig. 1)—then as a critique of who is affected by such mandates and in what ways.

Fig. 1. Stay Home Orders
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

As people found themselves confined to the home for extended periods, the home suddenly took on a very different meaning and role than it had pre-pandemic. This contribution from @jayneraven from London, England (Fig. 2), for example, reflects on how stay at home orders have impacted those without a home, raising questions about the governmental failures to provide support for vulnerable populations such as the homeless. As public policy and administration scholars Benavides and Nukpezah (2020) note in their examination of local government responses to the homeless during the pandemic, there are serious moral, ethical and human rights considerations that need to be addressed when managing the needs of these populations at this time. Such concerns have similarly been front of mind for a number of contributors to the @Covid19Quilt project.

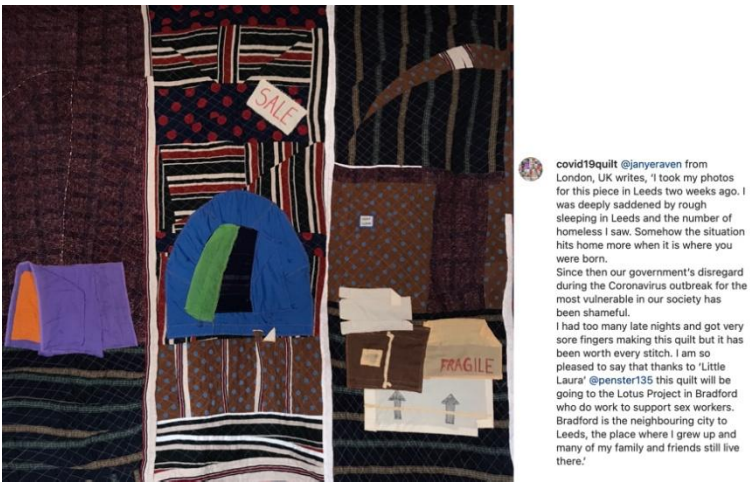


Fig. 2. Rough Sleeping and Homelessness
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

The situation for homeless populations sits in stark contrast to those who do have a home, as evident in the quilt. Contributors to the @Covid19Quilt spoke of the safety and sanctuary that their homes provided them during the pandemic. For example, for @dougwebb91 in Melbourne, Australia, being confined to the home initially gave them the opportunity to engage in activities that aligned with their values and enabled them to care for and nurture others (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Home as Sanctuary
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

With many unable to continue working in their usual setting, the home space also suddenly became a workplace, with bedrooms, kitchens, living spaces, and dining tables serving dual functions as workspaces. Navigating the blurring of home/office boundaries was particularly challenging for those who were also taking on carer and/or childcare duties, particularly women. As sociologists Collins *et al.* (2020, 1, 5-8) found in the US context, "[s]chool and daycare closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic have increased caregiving responsibilities for working parents," with mothers of young children more likely to reduce their working hours to manage these dual demands than fathers. In highlighting these complexities, @Covid19-Quilt contributors show how the pandemic has made visible the structural and systemic factors that see women not only take on more domestic and caregiving responsibilities, but also become marginalised from the labour market as a result (Reichelt *et al.* 2020). However, as @taisnaith explores (see Fig.4) in their piece, for many spending more time at home with children was a rewarding challenge, and craft activities suddenly became important tools for home-schooling.

Fig. 4. Home with children
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

While the home was a sanctuary, a place of work, and/or a space of caregiving for some, for others, being confined to the home was a source of danger. As @cobbjulian's piece depicts (see Fig. 5), for victims of domestic and family violence, being confined to the home is anything but a sanctuary; it is

a literal prison. As doctors, nurses, psychologists and criminologists noted, the social isolation measures put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 placed many at an increased risk of family and domestic violence, cut off from support services and trapped at home with their abusers (Usher *et al.* 2020a). One Australian study conducted with family and domestic violence support workers, for example, found evidence that "the incidence and severity of domestic violence has increased in Australia during the COVID-19 restrictions" (Pfitzner *et al.* 2020; see also Boxall *et al.* 2020), findings which are also reflected in available data from North and South America, Europe and Asia (Usher *et al.* 2020a). The urgent need for governments to respond to the immediate risks facing victims was a theme across a number of @Covid19Quilt contributions.

Fig. 5. Home as Threat
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

Additionally, As illustrated in Fig. 6, the way in which the pandemic has separated many from their families has resulted in some individuals existing in a liminal space, physically in one location but mentally and emotionally wishing to be elsewhere, hoping that at any moment travel and other restrictions might lift so they can be reunited with their families. With there being no clear end in sight to the pandemic, this liminality has had a growing emotional toll on those who have found themselves far from home during this pandemic. Separated by closed borders and without any indication of when travel (in particular international travel) will once again be possible, families long for the day when they will be reunited.

Fig. 6. Far from Home
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

Health

Naturally, given the context of the pandemic, health was another common theme across contributions to the @Covid19Quilt project. The virus itself featured in a number of works, particularly as more became known about its characteristics and form. For example, @pleatybunny's work (Fig. 7) uses thread and beadwork to depict the physical attributes of COVID-19 in comparison to other well-known viruses, such as influenza, while @nicole_p_oloughlin's (Fig. 8) uses pom poms, french knots and tassels to depict the coronavirus cell itself. As those working in the social sciences, arts and humanities argue, paying attention to the sensorial allows us to gain an understanding of individual experiences that draw on knowledge beyond language (Pink 2015, 96-96).

Fig. 7. The Virus
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

Fig. 8. CoronaVirus Testing
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

Other contributions also demonstrated the differential ways in which countries were responding to the virus, and the various policies and practices that either facilitated or impeded access to personal protective equipment (PPE), testing and vaccination. While multiple submissions touched upon the protective and preventative measures that individuals were encouraged to take in public health campaigns designed to limit transmission, including the washing of hands (Fig. 9) and the wearing (and making) of masks (Fig. 10), some raised concerns about the provisions available to the community. Indeed, as Fig.10 shows, many crafters took it upon themselves to produce their own cloth masks, with many donating masks to health professionals and community members where access to PPE was limited or expensive (Kipp, Kretz 2021).

Fig. 9. Hand Hygiene
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

covid19quilt @preprint from Melbourne, Australia shares, 'Making masks during #Covid19. I've watched quite a few different mask making youtub clips and searched for patterns online. I settled for a simple design that enables the insert of a filter. This was a pattern designed by a nurse and shared when PPE shortage was highlIghted. I used cotton fabric quilting squares that are sewn together providing three layers. There is an opening to insert an extra filter and a pliable metal insert to enable molding around the nose. Today I had a team conversation online discussing PPE as schools prepare to reopen next week. Our library is definitely a high traffic area. Wearing masks was a topic uncomfortably raised. Yes I will be wearing a mask. This square is a self-portrait of me making masks. You can be asymptomatic and not know it. At least we can protect each other with a simple measure.' #covid19quilt

Fig. 10. Mask Wearing and Mask Making
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

In globalising the discussion and highlighting the inequities experienced around the world, the @Covid19Quilt is making visible the very real impacts that differential public healthcare systems have on communities around the world. Furthermore, the quilt is highlighting the difficulties some populations are experiencing in accessing information, and support and treatment for the virus, mirroring calls from scholars and the WHO to ensure poorer nations are provided safe and affordable access to healthcare and vaccination (Kamradt-Scott 2020).

Aside from the health concerns directly related to the virus itself, the @Covid19Quilt also captured adjacent mental health concerns generated or exacerbated by the virus on individuals, their family and friends, and the global community more broadly. As @leratomotaurartwork from Johannesburg, South Africa (Fig. 11) explains in her piece, there was a great deal of anxiety around the virus and how measures taken to control the spread would impact on people's lives and mental health. Once again, such works shed light on the need for more awareness around the mental health impacts of the pandemic, and the need for better support from governments for those affected, echoing responses from experts and practitioners that "[r]ecovery from the negative impacts of this pandemic must include plans for addressing mental health issues for both public and healthcare professionals" (Usher *et al.* 2020b: 316).

Fig. 11. Anxiety and Mental Health
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

Another interesting element of health-themed submissions was the awareness raised by those suffering from chronic illness. A number contributions detailed how those with pre-existing health conditions, invisible disabilities/illnesses, and mental health diagnoses were already well-accustomed with many of the circumstances ushered in by the pandemic, such as self-isolation and strict hygiene measures (see Fig. 12).

The emergence of the pandemic, therefore, was not the first time many have been confronted by uncertainty, confusion, isolation, and health concerns. As has become evident, for some such concerns were exacerbated by and during the pandemic, particularly in circumstances where ongoing health care was compromised by lockdowns and restrictions, something similarly noted by support agencies (e.g. see Rääbus 2020). Furthermore, workplace responses during the pandemic—such as allowing people to work from home—brought into sharp relief what is actually possible in terms of making adjustments and accommodations for individuals to work off-site, something those with disabilities had faced a degree of resistance to prior to the pandemic (Schur, Kruse 2020). In examining the way in which health emerged as a key theme in the @Covid19Quilt then, we are able to see the intersections between public and academic discourse around the health-related concerns during the pandemic.

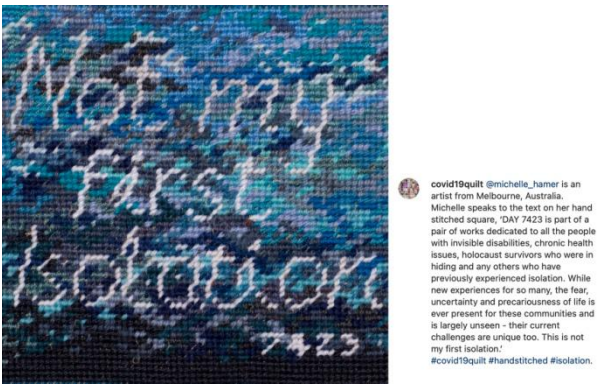


Fig. 12. Invisible and Chronic Illness
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

In addition to documenting personal experiences and concerns around health, many contributors also paid tribute to the amazing work and contributions of health professionals in responding to the pandemic (see Fig. 13). Contributors recognised the enormous sacrifices being made by doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals on the front line, assisting those stricken by the virus, but also at the mercy of catching the virus themselves and continuing to work in such a precarious environment regardless. According to the World Health Organization, in the early period of the pandemic up to one in 10 health workers were infected with COVID-19 in some countries (Lacinda 2020) and hundreds have subsequently died (see Fig. 14), with reports suggesting "that black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) doctors were over-represented in early deaths" in the UK (Kursumovic *et al.* 2020, 989).

Fig. 13. Supporting Health Workers
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

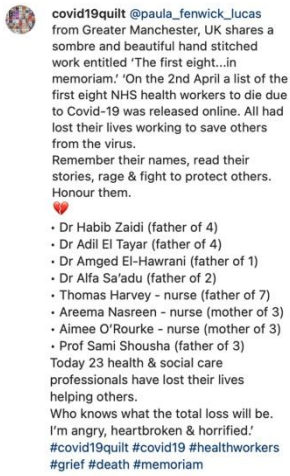


Fig. 14. Deaths in Healthcare
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

Such contributions served to underline the enormous pressures put on health services as the virus spread and also spoke to ongoing debates around government-funded health services and universal health care.

Power

The final theme woven through many of the contributions to the @Covid-19Quilt project was that of power. One dimension of power evident in submissions related to the way in which the virus has been politicised. As this piece from @o_corcoran of North Carolina, US, exemplifies (Fig. 15), contributors to the quilt documented the growing scepticism about the existence of the virus and expressed frustration with those who refused to comply with health advice or take the virus seriously. These tensions were particularly heightened in countries where the virus was treated as a partisan issue rather than a global health emergency.

These observations tap into larger public discourses that argue 'deep state' conspiracy theories seeded doubt in the minds of some in the community, with some reports suggesting a large proportion of the community believe that the virus was either manufactured on purpose, or did not exist at all (Uscinski, Enders 2020). A national survey conducted by Yahoo News/YouGov, for example, "found that 31% of Americans thought the threat of the coronavirus was being exaggerated for political reasons during the early stages of the pandemic" (Kerr *et al.* 2021, 2).

Fig. 15. COVID-19 Denial
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

It was not just in relation to COVID-19 itself though where power-relations were the focus of @Covid19Quilt submissions. The wider systems of governance that function to uphold oppressive practices and institutions also came into focus during the pandemic and within contributions to the project. While the pandemic might have illuminated a range of structural issues that had contributors and the broader public alike critiquing some governments and their institutions, concurrent events further fuelled community concerns. One incident in particular served as a catalyst for a social movement: the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police in the US state of Minnesota in May 2020, during the first wave of the pandemic. The circulation of mobile phone camera footage depicting a White police officer kneeling on the neck of Floyd for eight minutes and 46 seconds, (re)ignited debates around differential policing and institutional racism, and led to ongoing Black Lives Matter protests in the US and around the globe (see e.g. Kirby 2020).

Unsurprisingly, in this climate, critiques and commentary on structural racism were apparent in a number of contributions to the @Covid19Quilt. As @nayking_88 details in her contribution (see Fig. 16), the death of George Floyd bought together Black, Indigenous and First Nations communities, who felt a sense of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, particularly given the colonial histories of countries like Australia and New Zealand and their own experiences with police violence and deaths in custody.

Indeed, over time, the project increasingly became more than just a series of reflections on the individual experience of this pandemic, with participants contributing work that focussed on the growing number of power structures coming under criticism during this time. The growing momentum amongst social change movements calling for justice is exemplified by the work of @amorphophallus_titanium, who documented (see Fig. 17) that people were willing to risk their health during the pandemic to protest for the rights and treatment of Black communities in the US.

Fig. 16. Black Lives Matter
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

Fig. 17. Human Rights, Health and Black Lives Matter
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

The pandemic itself also revealed racism against other communities of colour, no doubt bolstered by the rhetoric of individuals such as outgoing US President Donald Trump, who continually referred to the Coronavirus as the 'Chinese virus' (Viala-Gaudefroy, Lindaman 2020). As @suyanhvisual writes in her contribution (see Fig. 18), the wearing of a face mask during the pandemic became politicised, and was a signifier for racist and xenophobic hatred. As one study from the Australian National University found, between January and October 2020, 84.5% of Asian Australians reported being discriminated against on at least one occasion (Biddle *et al.* 2020). Similarly, racially motivated hate crimes against Asian Americans have reportedly increased in the wake of COVID-19 (Gover *et al.* 2020, 647), with the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism finding a 146% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes in 2020 across 26 US jurisdictions (Levin 2021, 2).

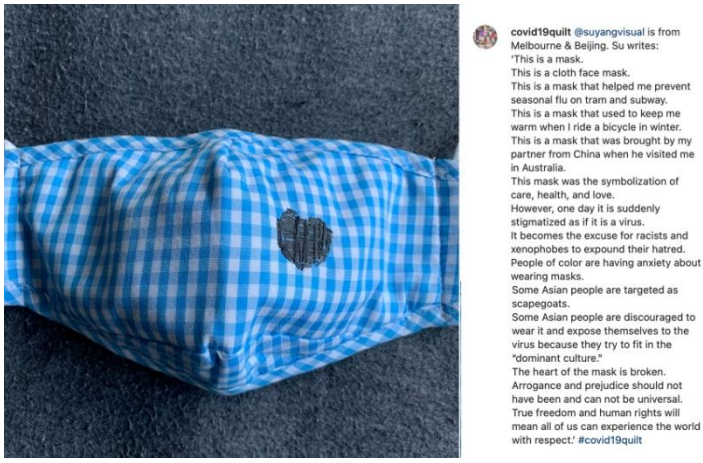


Fig. 18. Racism and COVID-19
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

The conversations raised by these submissions brought attention to the reality that while many politicians used the rhetoric that 'we are all in this together' the truth was that communities of colour, First Nations peoples, people with disabilities and other pre-existing conditions, and otherwise disadvantaged communities were disproportionately affected by this pandemic (World Health Organization 2020b). The devastating impacts of this unequal impact of the virus are repeatedly highlighted in the @Covid19Quilt including, as Fig. 19 highlights, the devastating death toll that has been a result of inadequate or neglectful government responses to addressing the virus (see also Shuster 2020).

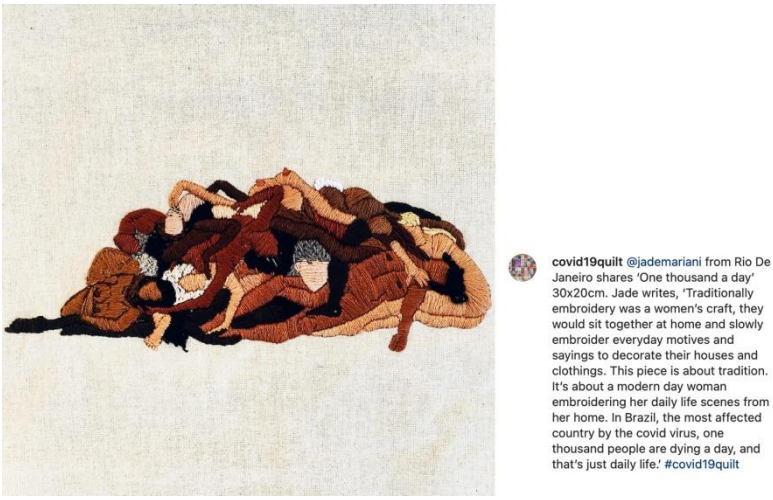


Fig. 19. COVID-19 and Death
Source: @Covid19Quilt Instagram

Discussion and conclusion

As this discussion of the three key themes from the @Covid19Quilt demonstrates, through their digital contributions to the quilt, participants were able to articulate and share their thoughts on a wide variety of topics, ranging from very personal explorations of isolation, anxiety and grief (much of which was experienced in the home due to COVID-19 restrictions), to expressions of concern about systemic issues in relation to healthcare, racial equality, and politics/democracy. In this way, the @Covid19Quilt serves to facilitate "engagement with aspects of experience such as affect states and understandings of the relationship between self and others, past and present, the individual and the collective" (O'Neill and Seal 2021, 134).

As a cultural artefact, the quilt documents, in digital form, the complex and multilayered experience of living through a pandemic, giving voice to and putting into context similar issues being discussed in scholarly and political circles. In the words of Just and Fitzpatrick, the project serves as a digital space where "[...] we can reclaim our connection to each other by continuing to make things with our hands and by sharing stories that highlight our shared humanity" (Fitzpatrick 2020). In this way, the @Covid19Quilt provides a window into the socio-political context of the pandemic in ways that cut across cultural, linguistic, and geographic divides (O'Neill and Seal 2021). It bears witness to the very real impacts and reflections of living through

a pandemic. To draw on the work of education scholars Adeniji-Neill *et al.* (2014, 26), the project can be understood as providing a space for people to "see and feel cultural differences and commonalities" as represented in both the creations that people share and the maker's statements which accompany these creations on social media.

Through its incorporation of physical craft based practices and peoples' use of social media, this project exemplifies what criminologists Stratton *et al.* (2017, 24, 26) argue is the increased blurring between people's online and offline worlds. As Stratton *et al.* point out, the digital society in which we now live has seen "a shift in structures, socio-cultural practices and lived experience that does not distinguish between the online and offline world," a shift that amongst other things, "arguably better captures the lived experiences of marginalised communities and the operation of power, inequalities and violence across every aspect of their daily lives" (Stratton *et al.* 2017). Furthermore, the quilt's digital form and the way it continues to grow over time, allows for a sustained engagement that enables contributors and audiences to expand their consciousness by participating in supranational conversations about these complex sets of issues. As a result, this project will provide those looking back on this moment in the future with a primary source that documents this pandemic through the viewpoints of everyday people around the world, a source that centres the stories and experiences of women who have historically been marginalised and excluded from the annals of history (see for example Hunter 2019).

Along with other digital creative participatory responses to this pandemic, the @Covid19Quilt project is collating significant records of first-person accounts of the pandemic. Artists Just and Fitzpatrick purposefully designed the project to encourage broad participation,[4] and to "value and recognise the creative contributions of 'non-artists' and enable participants to communicate 'their own truth' in a public space" (Robson 2021). Through their hand crafted work and their use of social media to share and reflect their experiences, contributors to the @Covid19Quilt project are articulating their wider concerns about the personal, social, and political impacts of COVID-19, alongside other events that have (co-)occurred during this time.

[4] Within the scope of this project, which is bound by its reliance on the internet and Instagram, the project looks to mitigate barriers to participation by: 1) Translating and sharing the project brief in 15 languages, including Australian sign language. 2) Accepting submissions from people who don't have Instagram accounts, accepting multiple submissions and accepting submissions in any language. 3) Only asking for images of the submitted artworks rather than the original artworks.

As our preliminary thematic analysis of this project reveals, the recurring themes raised in this work focus around the issues of home, health and power, with makers around the work using their contribution to the @Covid19Quilt as an outlet to reflect on, draw attention to, and even protest injustice, inequality, and the abuse of power. In this way, the @Covid19Quilt exemplifies how supranational communities use the public/private intersection of craft and digital technologies to narrate their histories and engage collective meaning making.

By examining the contributions to the @Covid19Quilt, what becomes clear is that the project operates on multiple levels, playing multiple functions, including: a platform through which individuals can advocate for and bring attention to specific social justice issues; a space for public conversations about complex often emotional issues; a time capsule of this significant moment in history as recorded by members of the global community; and a site for storytelling by those whose stories are often under-represented in the annals of history—women, people of colour, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, young people, people living with disabilities and/or chronic illness, as well as seniors. By exploring the themes that emerge in this project, this paper highlights the ways in which the @Covid19Quilt project is an important cultural artefact that draws together "threads of collective meaning and understanding" (Ferrell, Hayward, Young 2015, 3) and opens up possibilities for transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary dialogue. As such, it highlights how digital quilt projects can serve as cultural artefacts imbued with meaning, context and affect, and thus are a site ripe with meaning for interdisciplinary scholars wanting to gain new and interesting insights into the experience of living through a pandemic.

Bibliography

1. ABC TV (2020), *The Mix* (16 May), [online] https://iview.abc.net.au/video/NC2016H017S00 [accessed: 4.05.2021].
2. Adeniji-Neill Dolapo, Concannon-Gibney Tara and Weida Courtney (2014), "Craft Objects and Storytelling", [in:] Courtney Lee Weida (ed.), *Crafting Creativity and Creating Craft: Craftivism, Art Education, and Contemporary Craft Culture*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, pp. 19-28.
3. Arnett William and Herman Bernard (2006), *Gee's Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt*, Atlanta: Tinwood Books.
4. Benavides Abraham David, Nukpezah Julius A. (2020), "How Local Governments are Caring for the Homeless During the COVID-19 Pandemic", *American Review of Public Administration*, 50 (6-7), pp.650-657.

5. Biddle Nicolas, Gray Matthew and Yung Lo Jieh (2020), *The Experience of Asian-Australians During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Discrimination and Wellbeing*, Canberra: ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods, [online] https://csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2020/11/The_experience_of_Asian-Australians_during_the_COVID-19_pandemic.pdf [accessed: 27.11.2020].
6. Boxall Hayley, Morgan Anthony and Brown Rick (2020), "The Prevalence of Domestic Violence Among Women During the COVID-19 Pandemic", *Australian Institute of Criminology Statistical Bulletin*, 28, [online] https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/sb28_prevalence_of_domestic_violence_among_women_during_covid-19_pandemic.pdf [accessed: 9.09.2020].
7. Braun Virginia and Clarke Victoria (2006), "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77-101.
8. Collins Caitlyn, Landivar Liana Christin, Ruppanner Leah and Scarborough William J. (2021), "COVID-19 and the Gender Gap in Work Hours", *Gender, Work and Organisation*, 28 (51), pp. 101-112.
9. Collins Lisa Gail (2015), "Cycles of Mourning and Memory: Quilts by Mother and Daughter in Gee's Bend, Alabama", *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 8 (3), pp. 345-352.
10. Crafts Magazine (2020), "How the Craft World is Responding to the Pandemic", *Crafts Council UK*, [online] https://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/articles/how-the-craft-world-is-responding-to-the-pandemic/ [accessed: 17.04.2020].
11. Downes Briony (2020), "Quilting Together at a Distance", *Art Guide Australia*, [online] https://artguide.com.au/quilting-together-at-a-distance/ [accessed: 4.05.2021].
12. Fairley Gina (2020), "COVID-19 has Been a Boon for Crafts", *ArtsHub*, [online] https://www.artshub.co.uk/news-article/features/covid-19/gina-fairley/covid-19-has-been-a-boon-for-crafts-260157 [accessed: 6.08.2020].
13. Ferrell Jeff, Hayward Keith and Young Jock (2015), *Cultural Criminology*, 2nd ed., London: Sage.
14. Fitzpatrick Tal (2018), *Craftivism: A Manifesto/Methodology*, 2nd ed., [online] https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/bitstream/handle/11343/219289/Craftivism-Tal-Fitzpatrick.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y [accessed: 27.08.2020].
15. Fitzpatrick Tal (2020), *Covid19 Quilt Project*, [online] https://talfitzpatrick.com/at-covid19quilt-project [accessed: 20.04.2021].
16. FORCE: 'Upsetting Rape Culture' (no date), *The Monument Quilt: A Community-Based Approach to Sexual and Domestic Violence Policy Report*, [online] https://themonumentquilt.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-FORCE-Monument-Quilt-Project-Policy-Report-1.pdf [accessed: 17.11.2020].
17. Greer Betsy (2007), "Craftivism Definition", *Craft + Activism = Craftivism*, [online] http://craftivism.com/definition/ [accessed: 5.11.2020].
18. Grover Angela R., Harper Shannon B. and Langton Lynn (2020), "Anti-Asian Hate Crime During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploring the Reproduction of Inequality", *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45, pp. 647-667.
19. Hunter Clare (2019), *Thread of Life: A History of the World Through the Eye of a Needle*, London: Sceptre.
20. Incinerator Gallery (2020), *Incinerator Art Award 2020*, [online] https://incinerator-gallery.com.au/exhibition/incinerator-art-award-2020/ [accessed: 10.12.2020].

21. Inocencio Smith Rosa (2020), "Getting Through a Pandemic with Old-Fashioned Crafts", *The Atlantic*, [online] https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/04/crafts-coronavirus-quarantine-stress-relief/609187/?fbclid=IwAR2zss2MDDp_ZTFWm1ecHChxSJ2BWfLXcCMXrD45tREd9cLfH8USdAPHsyM [accessed: 31.08.2020].
22. Jaffe Nick (2014), "Introduction", [in:] Courtney Lee Weida (ed.), *Crafting Creativity and Creating Craft: Craftivism, Art Education, and Contemporary Craft Culture*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, pp. 1-4.
23. Just Kate (2020), "COVID-19 Global Quilt", *katejust.com*, [online] http://www.katejust.com/covid19-global-quilt [accessed: 6.08.2020].
24. Kamradt-Scott Adam (2020), "Why 'vaccine nationalism' could doom plan for global access to a COVID-19 vaccine", *The Conversation*, [online] https://theconversation.com/why-vaccine-nationalism-could-doom-plan-for-global-access-to-a-covid-19-vaccine-145056 [accessed: 4.05.2021].
25. Kerr John, Panagopoulos Costas and van der Linden Sander (2021), "Political Polarization on COVID-19 Pandemic Response in the United States", *Personality and Individual Differences*, 179, pp. 1-9.
26. Kipp Caroline and Kretz Kate (2020), "Masks, Art, Protection, and Politics", *The Journal of Modern Craft*, [online] https://doi.org/10.1080/17496772.2021.1896135 [accessed: 5.05.2020].
27. Kirby Jen (2020), "'Black Lives Matter' has become a global rallying cry against racism and police brutality", *Vox*, [online] https://www.vox.com/2020/6/12/21285244/black-lives-matter-global-protests-george-floyd-uk-belgium [accessed: 4.12.2020].
28. Kursumovic Emira, Lennane Simon and Cook Tim M. (2020), "Deaths in Healthcare Workers Due to COVID-19: The Need for Robust Data and Analysis", *Anaesthesia*, 75 (8), pp. 989-992.
29. Lacinda Linda (2020), "What's Needed Now to Protect Health Workers: WHO COVID-19 Briefing", *World Economic Forum*, [online] https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/10-april-who-briefing-health-workers-covid-19-ppe-training/ [accessed: 9.09.2020].
30. Levin Brian (2021), *Report to the Nation: Anti-Asian Prejudice and Hate Crime New 2020-21 First Quarter Comparison Data*, San Bernadino: Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, California State University, [online] https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/Report%20to%20the%20Nation%20-%20Anti-Asian%20Hate%202020%20Final%20Draft%20-%20As%20of%20Apr%2030%202021%206%20PM%20corrected.pdf [accessed: 4.05.2021].
31. McGovern Alyce (2019), *Craftivism and Yarn Bombing: A Criminological Exploration*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
32. Museum of Australian Democracy (2018), *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Quilt Project*, [online] https://quilts.moadoph.gov.au [accessed: 20.11.2020].
33. National AIDS Memorial (no date), *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt*, [online] https://www.aidsmemorial.org/quilt [accessed: 17.11.2020].
34. O'Neill Maggie (2017), "Studying the marginalized with mixed methods", [in:] M.H. Jacobsen and S. Walklate (eds.), *Liquid Criminology: Doing Imaginative Criminological Research*, London: Routledge, pp. 81-99.
35. O'Neill Maggies and Seal Lizzie (2012), *Transgressive Imaginations: Crime, Deviance and Culture*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

36. Pfitzner Naomi, True Jacqui, Fitz-Gibbon Kate and Meyer Silke (2020), "'We are in a Bubble that is Set to Burst,' Why Urgent Support Must be Given to Domestic Violence Workers", *The Conversation*, [online] https://theconversation.com/we-are-in-a-bubble-that-is-set-to-burst-why-urgent-support-must-be-given-to-domestic-violence-workers-141600 [accessed: 9.09.2020].
37. Pink Sarah (2015), *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 2nd ed., London: Sage.
38. Rääbus Carol (2020), "Coronavirus Lockdown Brings Extra Challenges for People with Disability", *ABC Life*, [online] https://www.abc.net.au/life/challenges-of-coronavirus-lockdown-with-a-disability/12345630 [accessed: 24.11.2020].
39. Reichelt Malte, Makovi Kinga and Sargsyan Anahit (2020), "The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Inequality in the Labor Market and Gender-Role Attitudes", *European Societies*, 23 (51), pp 1-16.
40. Robertson Kristy and Vinebaum Lisa (2016), "Crafting Community," *TEXTILE Cloth and Culture*, 14 (1), pp. 2-13.
41. Robson Megan (2021), *The National 2021: New Australian Art*, [online] https://www.the-national.com.au/artists/kate-just/anonymous-was-a-woman/ [accessed: 21.04.2021].
42. Schur Lisa and Kruse Douglas L. (2020), "Coronavirus Could Revolutionize Work Opportunities for People with Disabilities", *The Conversation*, [online] https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-could-revolutionize-work-opportunities-for-people-with-disabilities-137462 [accessed: 24.11.2020].
43. Shuster Martin (2020), "When the Pandemic Reveals Genocide", *Los Angeles Review of Books*, [online] http://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/essays/pandemic-reveals-genocide/ [accessed: 4.12.2020].
44. Stratton Greg, Powell Anastasia and Cameron Robin (2017), "Crime and Justice in Digital Society: Towards a 'Digital Criminology?", *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 6 (2), pp. 17-33.
45. Souls Grown Deep (2019), "The Quilters of Gee's Bend", [online] https://www.soulsgrowndeep.org [accessed: 3.05.2021].
46. The Frankie Team (2020), "The Global Covid Quilting Project", *Frankie*, [online] https://www.frankie.com.au/gallery/the-global-covid-quilting-project-554745 [accessed: 4.05.2021].
47. Uscinski Joseph E. and Enders Adam M. (2020), "The Coronavirus Conspiracy Boom", *The Atlantic*, [online] https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/04/what-can-coronavirus-tell-us-about-conspiracy-theories/610894/ [accessed: 4.12.2020].
48. Usher Kim, Bhullar Navjot, Durkin Joanne, Gyamfi Naomi and Jackson Debra (2020a), "Family Violence and COVID-19: Increased Vulnerability and Reduced Options for Support", *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, 29 (4), pp. 549-552.
49. Usher Kim, Durkin Joanne and Bhullar Navjot (2020b), "The COVID-19 Pandemic and Mental Health Impacts", *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, 29 (3), pp. 315-318.
50. Viala-Guadefroy Jerome and Lindaman Dana (2020), "Donald Trump's 'Chinese Virus': The Politics of Naming", *The Conversation*, [online] https://theconversation.com/donald-trumps-chinese-virus-the-politics-of-naming-136796 [accessed: 27.11.2020].

51. Wallach Amei (2006), "Fabric of Their Lives", *Smithsonian Magazine*, [online] https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/fabric-of-their-lives-132757004/ [accessed: 3.05.2021].
52. World Health Organization (2020a), *Rolling Updates on Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)*, [online] https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen [accessed: 6.08.2020].
53. World Health Organization (2020b), *Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): Situation Report* 182, [online] https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/333568/nCoVsitrep20Jul2020-eng.pdf [accessed: 4.12.2020].

61 (2/2021), pp. 69–80 | The Polish Journal
DOI: 10.19205/61.21.4 | of Aesthetics

Lilli I. Förster*

Art is Serious, Life is Serene

Abstract

By not being able to surround ourselves with works of art like we used to, we are painfully reminded of how important they are in our lives. In this essay, with the help of the Russian man of letters Leo Tolstoy and the Austrian philosopher of language Ludwig Wittgenstein, we will point out the critical role art plays in human life. In particular, works of art can be helpful in finding a new lifestyle, an appropriate way of living, and open new entrances and perspectives to the world around us.

Keywords

Leo Tolstoy, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Learning from Art, Art and Society, Pandemic Times

The Importance of Art and Artists

Do you remember the children's book *Frederick* by Leo Lionni, published in 1967? The little mouse Frederick lives with his family in an old stone wall. As the seasons change, all the mice collect stocks for the winter, except Frederick. He is sitting around and looks like he is doing nothing. In truth, however, he is also collecting something important: sunshine, colors, and words. When winter comes, as the food becomes less abundant and the mice feel down, Frederick shares his collections: the memories of sunshine warm them up, beautiful colors pop up in their heads, and Frederick also presents a poem he wrote. The mice end up saying: "you are a poet!" (Lionni 2017, 38).

* Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main, Germany
Email: lilli.isabel@web.de

Acknowledgment: Thank you, Prof. N. Milkov, for providing guidance and important feedback.

Artists like Frederick are those who keep us going in dark and grey times. Like in this story, we find ourselves set in such times, and we can flee to better ones with the help of artworks. Artworks—either in the form of online concerts, online movie festivals, virtual art galleries, or streaming services—can help to keep us safe at home and comfort lonely souls. Artworks take up an extraordinary place in our everyday life. A life without any form of art is barely imaginable, and if so, it ends up in disturbing visions ingeniously described in Ray Bradbury's dystopia *Fahrenheit 451*. Nevertheless, the first thing that comes to mind while thinking about art in pandemic times is closed concert halls, postponed exhibitions, canceled movies, and shows. We experience the loss of access to primary art forms and realize that we miss those artworks in our daily lives. This loss is a strong indicator of the importance of art. As humans, we long for it.

Our study of art's role in society will start with remarks on Leo Tolstoy and his conception of art. Tolstoy was convinced that works of art could communicate feelings from the creator to the recipient. The audience gets "infected" with those feelings, which are much more than just emotions. In this way, artists and consumers merge, and the uniting power of art is brought to light. For Tolstoy, art, just like language, can travel through time and space and is fundamental for human life.

After taking a closer look at Ludwig Wittgenstein's remarks on Tolstoy's approach, we will follow Wittgenstein's thoughts on works of art and their ability to help us live a good life. On this occasion, the title of this paper sheds light on Wittgenstein's evolvement from his previous work, the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, towards his later remarks. In his earlier years, Wittgenstein, alongside Gottlob Frege, followed Friedrich Schiller's famous saying, "Life is serious, art is serene" (Schiller 2017, Prologue), claiming that only propositions can picture facts of reality and communicate thoughts. In contrast, works of art are located outside the world of facts and therefore cannot teach anything. As shown in the lines below, after 1931, Wittgenstein enlarged his views on art. He realized that art is serious since it has a vital role to play in our lives. We can *learn* something from art, and this something concerns life itself.

Artworks Communicate Feelings—Leo Tolstoy

For more than 15 years, Leo Tolstoy, known for his masterpieces *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, actively reflected on the problems of art and its role in society. The results of these ruminations were published in 1897 in his book *What is art?* Some critics have taken it as "an attack upon both

the art and the aesthetic theory of the nineteenth century" (Guyer 2014, 290). In truth, it examines the role that art is supposed to play in society. In order to understand Tolstoy's thoughts on this topic, we will follow his arguments step by step.

To begin with, according to Tolstoy, his reason for dealing with art and its significance for society lies in the large number of workers tied up in its production (Tolstoy 1995, 3-4). While searching for a definition of art, he read more than 70 thinkers and aesthetic theorists, including Baumgarten, Kant, Schiller, Hegel, Hutcheson, Diderot, and Schopenhauer (ibidem, 17-30). He concluded that all the theories he studied only support the status of works of art recognized as exemplary by a particular group of people—above all, by the upper class (ibidem, 32-33). Tolstoy marked this approach as fundamentally wrong. In contrast to those theorists, Tolstoy put the term "feeling" instead of "beauty" in the center of his conception of art: "Art begins when a man, with the purpose of communicating to other people a feeling he once experienced, calls it up again within himself and expresses it by certain external signs" (ibidem, 38). In this way, the recipient of the artwork can feel the *same* feeling that the artist felt (ibidem, 38).

In *What is Art?*, Tolstoy refers to a variety of broadly-understood feelings that works of art can transmit: (i) general human sensations such as fear, sadness, or joy, often collected under the umbrella term of emotion; (ii) complex feelings like respect for specific objects or appearances, devotion to an inevitable fate, as well as elusive feelings such as the love for God or a feeling of a life force (Tolstoy 1995, 38; Zurek 1996, 280). Due to this multitude of sensations, Gary Jahn rightly pleads that the word "feeling" is better than "emotion" for the translation of the Russian *чувство*, the term Tolstoy uses. He classifies, for example, acts of will, impressions, emotions, feelings, perceptions, and moods under Tolstoy's usage of this term (Gary 1975).

For Tolstoy, all works of art that convey feelings that can be put into the list above are part of universal art. In such artworks, feelings are conveyed accessibly to all people, regardless of their origin, level of education, class, or age. Besides universal art, Tolstoy's account of religious art is based on religious feelings and deals with people's position in the cosmos or their relationship to God and other human beings (Tolstoy 1995, 132). The term "religious" should not be misunderstood here.[1] Tolstoy explained this religious consciousness, which can be conveyed via an artwork, in the following

[1] Authors like Zurek suggest that instead of using the critical term "religious consciousness" one should refer to a "philosophical" one (Zurek 1996, 317).

way: "The religious consciousness of society is the same as the direction of a flowing river. If a river flows, there is a direction in which it flows. If a society lives, there is a religious consciousness that indicates the direction in which all the people of this society more or less consciously strive" (ibidem, 124). This religious consciousness leads a society by providing a benchmark for what is good and evil and also "the worth of the feelings conveyed by art" (ibidem, 43).

Tolstoy emphasizes that the feelings conveyed by works of art can be good and moral or wrong and immoral. Both infect in the same way, with the same intensity. Bad art conveys bad feelings that separate people instead of uniting them, as good art does. If an artwork communicates one of those feelings just mentioned, universal or religious, it can be called good art. "A successful experience of a work of art is a moment of ethical performance, practical commitment and moral improvisation" (Darsel 2012, 170).

But what about the strange term "infection"? Connecting the term infection with art during a pandemic sounds like the last thing we should do. However, for Tolstoy, the term does not have a negative connotation. Instead, it summarizes a problem that he already addressed in *Anna Karenina*: "The spark of joy kindled in Kitty seemed to have infected everyone in the church" (Tolstoy 2015, Part 5, Chapter 6). It infects everyone involuntarily and immediately. This dimension of infection is widespread, and it inevitably can also be transferred to the infection of a feeling through works of art.

In his famous novella, *The Kreutzer Sonata*,[2] Tolstoy describes the infection of a feeling via a work of art in a vivid way:

> They [the wife of the protagonist and her alleged lover] played Beethoven's 'Kreutzer Sonata.' […] Music makes me forget my real situation. It transports me into a state which is not my own. Under the influence of music I really seem to feel what I do not feel, to understand what I do not understand, to have powers which I cannot have. Music seems to me to act like yawning or laughter; I have no desire to sleep, but I yawn when I see others yawn; with no reason to laugh, I laugh when I hear others laugh. And music transports me immediately into the condition of soul in which he who wrote the music found himself at that time" (Tolstoy 2014, XXIII).

In short, for Tolstoy, it is clear that the feeling felt by the artist can be communicated one-to-one (identically) to the recipient. Through the infection of the feeling of the work's creator, the recipient is "brought to the similar state of mind" (Mounce 2001, 65). The artwork's recipient takes on the

[2] It should be noted that the writing of this story happened parallel to his work *What is Art?*

artist's *mood* to such an extent that they now believe that the work was not created by a stranger but by themselves—the artist and recipient merge. It is important to note that this fusion of the creator's and recipient's feelings extends to all recipients of the work of art. The remarks made above help us see the power of art clearly: The aim of infection with one of the universal or religious (spiritual/philosophical) feelings mentioned by Tolstoy is to create a connection between people and unite them.

Tolstoy further compares this system of communication of feelings with language (Tolstoy 1995, 123). Language communicates thoughts from one person to another, just like art does with feelings.[3] However, works of art express something about the spirit of human beings that language cannot express (Eismann 1986, 61). In Tolstoy's words: "[I]t is that through the word a man conveys his thoughts to another, while through art people convey their feelings to each other" (Tolstoy 1995, 38). For Tolstoy, works of art and language are two means of communication between people to overcome different times and places and fulfill an essential function for the human race. In this way, knowledge and feelings of previous generations come into the present and thus advance human development. Tolstoy concluded: "Art is one of two [the other one being language] organs of mankind's progress" (ibidem, 138). However, how is it possible for an artwork to communicate feelings in the way language communicates thoughts?

The artist's objective is to communicate to a recipient a called-up feeling they have felt or imagined in the process of creating a work of art (ibidem, 39). However, in order to master this task, some conditions must be met:

(i) The artist must have experienced or imagined an intense specific feeling. The power of the infection depends on how idiosyncratic the feeling is. The basis of such feelings is life itself.

(ii) The artist must "stand on the level of the highest world outlook of his time […]" (ibidem, 90). The artist must also be aware of themselves and their position in their environment in order to be able to take a new position towards it. In general, they have a higher understanding of the meaning of life, of what society strives for as the highest good.

[3] Here a parallel can be drawn to Wittgenstein's claim in the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*: Propositions conveyed through thinking and language are actually one and the same thing, the only difference being that whereas language can be perceived by senses, thoughts cannot (T. 3.1).

(iii) The artist must also have the will, the desire to share this feeling with their fellow human beings and future generations.

(iv) The artist must demonstrate "a talent for some kind of art" (ibidem, 90). Significantly enough, "[i]nfection is achieved only when and in so far as the artist finds those infinitely small moments of which the work of art is composed" (ibidem, 99). All these conditions are based on what Tolstoy considers most important for creating a true work of art: sincerity. Above all, the artist has to be honest, sincere, and authentic (ibidem, 121).

Tolstoy believes that, in principle, all people can meet these conditions (ibidem, 40). In this move, Tolstoy expands the group of people who should be artistically active and widens the forms art can take. For example, folk dances, jokes, rhymes, and children's games could be listed (ibidem, 155). In this way, the content of art is expanded, and new possibilities of artistic expression can address new topics that are important for other human beings. Only this way can "works of art teach us about ourselves, the others and the world" (Darsel 2012, 167).

The results of infecting with feelings via a piece of art can be summed up in the following two points: (i) The feelings experienced or imagined by the artist enrich, by being infected with them, our treasure trove of feelings and our understanding of them. (ii) artwork triggers a community experience; it connects the artist, the recipients, and anyone else who experiences it.[4] Through these two processes, art expands our wealth of experience, lets us empathize with unknown feelings, and promotes people's understanding of one another, thus forming a basis for the acceptance of others. Human beings get to know themselves, others, and the world better and develop an interest in expanding their world. Furthermore, works of art can also trigger critical questioning of one's feelings and way of living.

Ultimately, the task of artworks in Tolstoy's conception of art can be formulated this way: "art, genuine art, guided by religion with the help of science, must make it so that men's peaceful life together […] should be achieved by the free and joyful activity of men. […] And only art can do that" (Tolstoy 1995, 165-166).

[4] Just like Israel Knox points out: "The dearest quality of art to Tolstoy is its power of union" (Knox 1930, 68).

A Theoretical Refinement— Ludwig Wittgenstein and Leo Tolstoy

Before taking a closer look at Wittgenstein's critique of Tolstoy's remarks on art, it is essential to draw a connection between both thinkers. Letters, diary entries, and other sources show that Wittgenstein read Tolstoy's works throughout his life, exchanged information with others on them, and spoke highly about them (Thompson 1997, 97). *The Gospel in Brief*, in particular, was significant for Wittgenstein during the First World War. He wrote 11.10.1914: "I always carry Tolstoy's 'Statements of the Gospel' around with me like a talisman" (Wittgenstein 2015, Ms-101, 37v).

The common ground of the two thinkers, at least until 1931, concerns the role intellectuals play in society. Tolstoy emphasizes that even people called wise and cunning know no more than the peasants, the ordinary people (Milkov 2012, 73). "For the teaching of a great man is only great because it expresses intelligibly and clearly what others have expressed unintelligibly and obscurely" (Tolstoy 2016, preface). Therefore, what intellectuals, including himself, have to achieve is an overview and a clear presentation of what everyone is already aware of. In short: "Tolstoy sees philosophy as an activity of clarification" (Thompson 1997, 106) of elucidation. Here the connection to the early Wittgenstein becomes apparent: "Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity" (T. 4.112). For years, Wittgenstein and Tolstoy shook hands on this point.

However, from 1931 onwards, Wittgenstein maintained that clarity alone is not a sufficient goal for philosophers. The point is that people themselves have inherent inhibitions about recognizing truths as such. As a result, Wittgenstein developed his therapeutic method in philosophy that should be formative for his later work.

Along with revising Tolstoy's views on the role of the intellectuals, in 1947, Wittgenstein advanced a direct critique of Tolstoy's conception of art. However, speaking of a critique seems to be a little too harsh if we look more closely at Wittgenstein's remarks: "There is *a lot* to be learned from Tolstoy's bad theorizing about how a work of art conveys 'a feeling'" (Wittgenstein 1980, 58e). Moreover, Wittgenstein goes on to say: "You really could call it, not exactly the expression of a feeling, bit at least an expression of feeling, or a felt expression. And you could say too that in so far as people understand it, they 'resonate' in harmony with it, respond to it" (Wittgenstein 1980, 58e).

At this point, it is crucial to keep in mind that Tolstoy was not a philosopher. He was just a man of letters. His argumentations and usage of terms are perhaps not "academically correct." Nevertheless, taking a serious look at Tolstoy's theoretical writings can provide a fruitful approach to art. As we see it, the corrections Wittgenstein made to Tolstoy's conception of art are not destructive but constructive.

On the one hand, it would be more precise to say that a successful (*gelungenes*) work of art is a "felt *expression*": the emphasis is now on the expression, not on the feeling. In addition, people are not "infected" by the expression they feel, but "in so far as people understand it, they 'resonate' in harmony with it, respond to it" (ibidem). In short, for the later Wittgenstein, Tolstoy's conception of art is crude and hastily constructed. However, it can be made more precise, and that is what Wittgenstein does.

Our first step in understanding those specifications is to consider Wittgenstein's concept of the gesture (*Gebärde*) as a further development of his earlier conception in his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* that the works of art do not transmit thoughts. Now "Wittgenstein came to adopt the view that successful art posits (*setzt*) gestures in this sense" (Milkov 2020, 511). This view had important implications because gestures in this sense often refer to different lifestyles (ibidem, 510). In short, works of art are assigned, similar to language,[5] the vital function of communication.

Furthermore, a work of art, just like a sentence, does not refer to anything outside itself—art does not communicate anything but itself. What successful works of art can convey to us, and what language cannot indicate is how to live. For the later Wittgenstein, it is now clear that artworks have a connection to our life—to our style of living.

This change in Wittgenstein's views after 1931 was an implication of what could be called the *creative turn* in his philosophy (Milkov 2003, 104ff.). At that time, he recognized that human activities of any kind should be included in his considerations. Whereas in the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* Wittgenstein stated that facts stand on their own, now he emphasized that facts are also connected and embedded in human actions and the feelings that go with them. Accordingly, Wittgenstein introduced "aesthetic gestures as potential actions or, better, as 'germs' of actions—something substantiated by the circumstances that like gestures, actions can be only performed or copied (mimicked)" (Milkov 2020, 511).

[5] In Wittgenstein's words: "This tune says something… And yet I know it doesn't say anything in which I might express in words or pictures what it says" (Wittgenstein 2015, 310, 138 [2]).

In addition to Wittgenstein's criticism of Tolstoy, Nikolay Milkov suggests: "A Wittgensteinainian refinement can be added here by suggesting that music expresses not simply an emotion in some general sense, but more precisely what it expresses is the species of cognitively informed affect that we term a 'mood'" (ibidem, 513-514). As Gilbert Ryle points out, in contrast to feelings or emotions, a mood is not short-termed like those and does not necessarily have to be related to a specific object (Ryle 1949, 131). A mood takes hold of the whole person and keeps them in it for a more extended period. They shape the entire human existence. If we follow this suggestion, the life-influencing power of art can be better explained and understood.

What We Can Learn from Art

Although Tolstoy distinguished good art from overwhelming art (Haldane 2017, 160), the thinker holds that all works of art impact their recipient's life. In Tolstoy's vocabulary, all works of art, regardless of whether they are good, unifying people, or bad, dividing people, infect equally. Wittgenstein argued that only *successful* art has the power to insinuate itself into our lives.

As the works of art insinuate themselves into the recipient's life, they become part of them and thus influence the life of the person concerned. Using the example of music, Wittgenstein states: "I adopt it [*this* musical phrase] as my own" (Wittgenstein 1980, 73e, italics added). In particular, successful art pieces can become part of our multi-layered life and thus can lead to a deeper understanding of ourselves and our lives in this world. In fact, "Wittgenstein's idea is that a successful work of art can prove of value in such cases by transforming the perspective from which we see our life" (Milkov 2020, 509). However, not only the way we see our lives can be influenced, but our entire way of living, our lifestyle. In exceptional cases, a successful work of art can help us solve the "problem of life": "The way to solve the problem you see in life is to live in a way that will make what is problematic disappear. The fact that life is problematic shows that the shape of your life does not fit into life's mould, what is problematic will disappear" (Wittgenstein 1980, 27e).

Therefore, the problems of life are not something that a singular answer can solve (ibidem, 4e). The real goal is to solve these agonizing questions and to achieve this, a change in the way of life itself is required. This change is not an easy one since "[t]he problems of life are insoluble on the surface and can only be solved in depth" (ibidem, 74e). However, not much in our life can penetrate the depths.

Science cannot provide any answer to the actual questions of life: "People nowadays think that scientists exist to instruct them, poets, musicians, *etc*. to give them pleasure. The idea *that these have something to teach them*—that does not occur to them" (ibidem, 36e). Nevertheless, successful works of art that can sneak *deeply* into our lives and can thus become part of us are capable of setting life-changing impulses: A work of art can become "a solution to the problem of life made manifest" (Tilgham 1991, 65).

In this way, works of art are sources of knowledge, conveyors of information about life: "[Wittgenstein] was convinced that in their different ways arts thus communicate knowledge" (Milkov 2020, 508). Works of art show new and different ways of life and can point the direction to them. Through pieces of art, we can become aware of what we hope for in life and in which lifestyle we feel comfortable and secure. In short, works of art "could be a real existential guide" (Darsel 2012, 167). What can be learned from works of art is relevant for human beings and their form of living and influences their actions and thinking equally. It has been clearly shown that the late Wittgenstein, as an extension to the author of the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, established that art could teach us something: art can have a directional effect on our lives. In this sense, art is serious and can make life serene.

Conclusion

The study presented in the lines above is based on the ideas of Leo Tolstoy and Ludwig Wittgenstein. It has shown that artworks are essential for human beings and society. In contrast to Friedrich Schiller's famous saying, "Life is serious, art is serene," it can also be said that art is serious since it plays an important role: it can help form our lifestyle. Moreover, life can be serene if it is accompanied by good art. This claim is also valid in pandemic times. Not being able to socially interact normally, being stuck in one's own four walls, art is one of the few forms that can keep people's minds open. Like Tolstoy highlighted, art can show society desirable directions for its development. Moreover, this troubled time is also a chance for new art forms, for new feelings and moods that can be communicated with artworks.

We need to keep in mind that our society needs characters like Frederick, particularly in pandemic times, just like we teach our children. Not only to lighten the mood but also to open up new perspectives on living and life itself.

Bibliography

1. Darsel Sandrine (2012), "Form Art to Ethics: Exemplary Nature of Art Works and Aspectual Perception", [in:], Arbo, Alessandro & Le Du, Michel & Plaud, Sabine (eds.), *Wittgenstein and Aesthetics. Perspectives and Debates*, Frankfurt am Main: Ontos, pp. 167-182.
2. Eismann Wolfgang (1986), *Von der Volkskunst zur proletarischen Kunst Theorien zur Sprache der Literatur in Rußland und Sowjetunion*, München: Otto Sagner Verlag.
3. Guyer Paul (2014), "Tolstoy", [in:] idem, *A history of modern aesthetics*, Vol. 2., New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 270-298.
4. Haldane John *et al.* (ed.) (2017), *Art, Morality and Human Nature. Writings by Richard W. Beardsmore*, Andrews UK Ltd.: Luton, digital version.
5. Jahn Gary R. (1975), "The aesthetic theory of Leo Tolstoy's what is art?", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 34 (1), pp. 59-65.
6. Knox Israel (1930), "Tolstoy's Esthetic Definition of Art", *The Journal of Philosophy*, 27 (3), pp. 65-70.
7. Lionni Leo (2017), *Frederick*, New York: Dragonfly Books.
8. Milkov Nikolay (2003), *A Hundred Years of English Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Kluwer.
9. Milkov Nikolay (2012), "Wittgenstein's Method: The Third Phase of Its Development (1933–36)", [in:] Marques Antonio (ed.), *Knowledge, Language and Mind: Wittgenstein's Early Investigations*, Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 65-79.
10. Milkov Nikolay (2020), "Aesthetic Gestures: Elements of a Philosophy of Art in Frege and Wittgenstein", [in:] Shyam Wuppuluri & Newton da Costa (eds.), *Wittgensteinian (adj.) Looking at the World from the Viewpoint of Wittgenstein's Philosophy*, Berlin: Springer, pp. 505-517.
11. Mounce H. O. (2001), *Tolstoy on Aesthetics. What is Art?*, Albershot and Sydney: Ashgate.
12. Ryle Gilbert (1949), *The Concept of Mind*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
13. Schiller Friedrich (2017), *Wallenstein's Camp*, Norderstedt: Hansebooks.
14. Thompson Caleb (1997), "Wittgenstein, Tolstoy and the Meaning of Life", *Philosophical Investigations*, 20 (2), pp. 97-116.
15. Tilghman B. R. (1991), *Wittgenstein, Ethics, and Aesthetics: The View from Eternity*, New York: State University of New York Press.
16. Tolstoy Leo (1995), *What is Art?*, trans. R. Pevear & L. Volokhonsky, London: Penguin Books.
17. Tolstoy Leo (2014), *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Stories*, trans. B. Tucker, Scotts Valley: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
18. Tolstoy Leo (2015), *Anna Karenina*, [online] https://www.web-books.com/ON/B0/E113R1228/TOC.html [accessed: 17.02.2021].
19. Tolstoy Leo (2016), *The Complete Works of Leo Tolstoy: Novels, Short Stories, Plays, Memoirs, Letters & Essays on Art, Religion and Politics*, trans. L. Maude *et al.*, Bratislava: e-artnow.
20. Wittgenstein Ludwig (1961), *Notebooks 1914–1916*, Oxford: Blackwell.
21. Wittgenstein Ludwig (1980), *Culture and Value*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
22. Wittgenstein Ludwig (2001), *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Routledge.

23. Wittgenstein Ludwig (2009), *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell.
24. Wittgenstein Ludwig (2015–), *Ts-310, 138 [2]*, A. Pichler (ed.), [online] http://www.wittgensteinsource.org/BTE/Ts-310,138[2]et139[1]_n [accessed: 17.02.2021].
25. Wittgenstein Ludwig (2015–), *Ms-101, 37v*, A. Pilcher (ed.), [online] http://wittgensteinsource.org/BTE/Ms-101,37v[3]_d [accessed: 17.02.2021]
26. Zurek Magdalena (1996), *Tolstojs Philosophie der Kunst*, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter.

61 (2/2021), pp. 81–94 | The Polish Journal
DOI: 10.19205/61.21.5 | of Aesthetics

Ineta Kivle*

Search for Stability: Rhythm in the Philosophies of Husserl, Deleuze & Guattari

Abstract

During the pandemic situation while the usual order changes and the search for new elements of security become more active, rhythm studies may provide a deeper understanding of human and ongoing processes. The current study views rhythm as a force of stability in the context of Husserl's and Deleuze & Guattari's philosophies. It seeks common substantiation for sociality, humanity, art, and nature, showing the organic connection between a person's internal constitution and outer environment, the rhythmic centre's manifestations, and surroundings.

Keywords

Philosophy, Rhythm, Territory, Horizon, Husserl, Deleuze, Guattari

Introduction

In the search for stability during a global emergency, rhythm studies promote new philosophical ways of conceptualizing and reveal the common ontological ground for philosophy, art, the environment, and humans. The current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic confirms how important is that the rhythm of one`s own mind-body is in harmonious connection with surroundings. How does the rhythm of people's lives change in unusual situations? How do rhythm's manifestations vary in philosophy, art, and nature? During the pandemic emergency, when the usual order changes, a search for new elements of security becomes more active. Rhythm studies give

* University of Latvia
Email: inetakivle21@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-6071-4131

a deeper understanding of the human and ongoing processes by developing original characterizations of the current situation in the world. The study reveals essential rhythmic components at the centre of rhythmic manifestations, the territory of pulsing space-time, belonging surroundings, and mutual movements. These components concern existential and ontological formations, human existence and being, and artwork structures and societal processes. Rhythm is a pulse that goes through various metric structures of music, paintings, poetry, and philosophy. It organizes the order of the mind-body, insinuates social processes, and determines nature. In the current study, rhythm will not be analyzed as a fundamental element of artwork composition. It will be explored as a thinkable concept for searching for new philosophical approaches and conceptualizing different processes, including art objects and music.

The notion of rhythm has been used in philosophy since its origin. In ancient times, it was mentioned in connection with the cosmos, nature, the internal constitution of the human, speech and language, poetry, sculpture, and music. Initially, rhythm was used as a technical term to describe order, movement, and changes.[1] As a uniting force, rhythm holds together different relations of different things: music and education, melody, voice, and motions of the body, virtue, and soul. Ancient times contain ideas that are still relevant in the 21st century. In the previous decades, rhythm was regarded as an immanent element of audial-visual spaces and times, a permanent research object in the social sciences, humanities, arts, information technologies, and meta-sciences.

> Studies of rhythm relate to different spheres, but simultaneously they form a complex application of appropriate and encompassing philosophical technique. The theoretical approach to rhythm transforms and changes together with conceptual ambitions; therefore, they broaden the scope of the concept's definition in correspondence with the explored philosophical stances. A multidisciplinary approach deepens the understanding of rhythm and shows the role of rhythm in the world around us. It gives new opportunities for philosophical reflections and makes human activities clearer. In general, rhythm donates to meter, sequence, repetition, order, measured time, and space,

[1] Sub-concepts such as measure, number, or periodicity were introduced in the definition of rhythm only by Plato during the first half of the 4th century. Before Plato, rhythm never denoted the order of a sequence of time but meant the temporary disposition of something flowing, a form that was itself changing during its performance. The Platonic approach to rhythm is concerned with education, the constitution of person, society, state control, the sacred, and mathematical order: *The Republic, The Laws, Philebus and Timaeus.* Rhythm is viewed as a human reflection of Heavenly numbers in Plotinus' *Enneads*. Aristotle writes: "all rhythm is measured by definite movement."

> thus showing quantitative assessments. Differently from the mathematically measurable, world philosophy studies the immanence of rhythm and opens the deepest levels of the human constitution (Kivle 2021, 312-319).

This article aims to show two different philosophical approaches to rhythm. In the first approach, the intensity and space of rhythm are mainly determined by the human, where subjective activities create a centre of rhythmic surroundings. In the second approach, rhythm is seen as an immanent force of surroundings, and centres of rhythmic manifestations formed by individual and social activities, and the natural and even cosmic processes. Both philosophical approaches show the human role in the organization of processes and the world's response to human activities, even in pandemic emergencies. In this case, Husserl's phenomenology and Deleuze & Guat-tari's philosophical vitalism are viewed as two different philosophies that show rhythm as a subject matter of investigation and a methodological instrument for opening rhythmic structures in the world even in unusual situations. Thus, this view shows the more profound philosophical aspects at work. These two philosophical approaches meet and cross each other, characterize the current situation in the world and the vibrant life of people, and are concerned with the processes of art and culture. Human constitution is not always in the same rhythm with outer reality, and the capability to form stability following one's subjectivity is fragile and transformative: a human and the world around them can confront each other and develop deconstructions. Pascal Michon,[2] a French philosopher of Rhythm Studies, writes:

> It is no coincidence that 'rhythm' has become, since the 1990s, in a growing number of disciplines, both a subject of investigation and a methodological instrument. Its success is so remarkable that it seems now on the verge of becoming a new scientific paradigm, somewhat like *system, structure, individual or difference* in the second half of the 20th century (Michon 2017, Back Cover).

The Methodological Approach

The present study examines only one form of rhythm's manifestation that shows movement between centres (a human, a central point in the territory) and surroundings (belonging territories, spaces, places, horizons). Rhythmic structures with only three essential components—the centre, surroundings,

[2] Pascal Michon, founder of the website www.rhuthmos.eu and the publication "Rhuthmos", is the author of three volumes of research, "Elements of Rhythmology" (2018–2019), and many other publications about rhythm including analyses of Deleuze & Guattari and ancient philosophers.

and joint movement—make it possible to compare different philosophical approaches: those who view rhythm direcly as an immanent force of art, society, nature, cosmos and those who do not write about rhythm directly, although they maintain a structure of the centree and surroundings. The study shows how in both cases, the elements of a rhythmic structure and its field of activity are revealed: 1) how rhythm can be related to Husserl's philosophy; 2) how certain aspects of rhythm's manifestation are marked in Deleuze & Guattari's philosophy. The article is structured by the introduction and methodological approach, two unrelated parts: the presence of rhythm in the phenomenology of Husserl and rhythm's manifestations in the philosophy of Deleuze & Guattari. Husserl's phenomenology makes it possible to consider rhythm as an experienced phenomenon like meaningful sound in the flux of internal time consciousness. It is distinct from Deleuze & Guattari's approach to rhythm as an immanent force of surroundings. These two different immanences of rhythm: rhythm as immanently given to subjectivity and rhythm as an immanent force of the cosmos, nature, chaos, *et cetera*, determine the layout of the present paper. The phenomenological approach is viewed separately from philosophical vitalism. A common principle for both is the relation between a center and the belonging surroundings. This principle permits the analysis of rhythmic interactions related to the pandemic disaster's time. The conclusion presents common aspects and differences of Rhythm Studies in philosophical approaches and tries to show their concern about emergency.

Rhythm and Its Surroundings in the Context of Husserl's Phenomenology

Following the rhythmic manifestations between a centre and the surroundings, phenomenology shows bilateral directions between "I" and meaningful rhythmic worlds. The intentional "I" constitutes the world and corresponds to it with the individual rhythms of one's own, in such a way the mutual relations of a typical meaningful horizon form. Rhythm unites those who have an akin sense of rhythm. "I" is in the centre of forming meaningful worlds, and by mind-body activities and empathy to others, an intentional intersubjective continuity is constituted. A person is viewed as incorporated in a We-unity by a shared experience of rhythmic manifestations.

The interactions of We-unity form rhythmic pulsations, including everyday rhythm, mind-body rhythm, artistic rhythm, and such fundamental components of being as silence, sound, light, dark, peace, and movement.

Silence, as opposed to sound, and light, as opposed to dark, maintain the rhythm of music and painting. By entering in or passing away from audible and visible horizons, a work of art maintains a rhythmic dynamic. Sound and silence are intentionally connected: sounds flux, then they are interrupted by silence. They organize a specific rhythm of speech, talk, or any other performance. Likewise, we can listen to silence overwhelmed by incoming sounds. A meaningful silence has adhered exclusively to the sounds determined precisely by this silence: the sound touches the silence and, conversely, the silence touches the sound. Absolute silence and absolute sound dwell into imagination, and experience is not possible. The living body always meets the rhythm of meaningful silence and meaningful sonority (Kivle 2018, 370-373).

Rhythm appears as a perceptual series of movements and vibrations, as repetitions of time-space fragments of a flowing experience. The phenomenology of internal time consciousness relates to the temporal experience of rhythm as the temporality of experience. The temporality of rhythmic experience insinuates and surrounds the perception of rhythm, bodily awareness, spaces of rhythmic vibrations, sounds and colours, human voices, and other people. Employing Husserl's cognitions, Don Ihde widens phenomenology with an existential experience of voice. He connects sound, rhythm, and stability in a common temporal background: the rhythms of sounds are structured by their auditory temporality where rhythm manifests repetition that Ihde calls "an index for auditory stability" (Ihde 1976, 108). By focusing not only on the manifestations but also on an experienced rhythm, phenomenology binds the multiplicity of different durations of rhythms. All these grasped durations are meaningful acts that constitute a particular experience. The rhythms of bodies, languages, sounds, and voices take intersubjective dimensions, including sensations and kinaesthetic perceptions, the flow of internal time duration and constituted space-time. The rhythm of dance occupies the body and mind, and via the body, movements forms sounding and rhythmic territories. It also relates to voice; the body vibrates with a rhythm that spreads out of speech and intentionally binds all elements included in the appropriate territory of the speaker.

On the one hand, the performer belongs to the created territories of dance, music, or speech. On the other hand, the artworks' intentions continue in a performer weaving and creating a rhythmic unity. While widening a sound with the existential experience of the voice and connecting sound, rhythm, and the voice in a common temporal background, it is seen how the rhythms are structured by their auditory temporality and repetition, form-

ing particular stability of the current fluxing event; simultaneously acting meanings and impressions form a world of rhythm belonging to a concrete situation. All kinds of constituted phenomenological worlds (theoretical, surrounding, intentional, intersubjective, life-world) have a common designation, a meaningful horizon:

> Every subjective process has a process "horizon" which changes with the alteration of the nexus of consciousness to which the process belongs and with the alteration of the process itself from phase to phase of its flow—an intentional *horizon of reference* to potentialities of consciousness that belong to the process itself (Husserl 1982, 109).

Horizons of human thoughts, intentions, and experiences show how a meaningful world fuses, changes, and expands. Applying the phenomenological usage of the horizon to a musical concert shows how the intentional territory of sonority changes, giving meaningful intersubjective and audible events and a thinkable horizon and common intellectual experience. Any concert is characterized by its rhythms, circumstances, and activities that make their environment and implement their forms: the sonority of words and music makes precisely this or that performance. Creative activities unite silence and words and sight, contemplation, and thinking, justifying that the human constitutes related spheres of sonority, visibility, sensitiveness, and understanding (Kivle 2009, 59-70).

The horizon is changeable, open, conditioned. It widens and narrows depending on what we are "focusing on" and what appears in it. A person is a listener and spectator, a contemplator, thinker, and performer open to the world and others. The centre of a horizon is formed by what is heard, understood, said, and perceived. It could be a conversation between two or more participants of the intersubjective world or a meaningful world of the inner speech of the self. A horizon is a field as it is seen from the centre. It is the limit of an extreme type of "observation": "Beyond this limit is a region of the invisible, because whatever becomes visible does so only within the field of vision and must be given to that field. Outside the field lies *nothing* visible" (Ihde 1976, 106-107). Opening and transforming horizons allow *the invisible* to become *visible*, *the silent* to become *audible*, and form particular rhythmic environments. Silence and invisibility belong to the infinite side of intentionality, and owing to this unexplainable emptiness, they form rhythmic relations with visibility and audibility appearing in different manifestations: music, speech, and everyday life. For example, Husserl's concept of the life-world affords the feasibility of interpreting rhythm in everyday life and forti-

fies that human life is understandable from what is heard and listened to, what is seen and what is touched, and what is contemplated, thought and performed. The life-world widens the interpretations of rhythm with the surrounding world as the realm populated by all kinds of things that present themselves to us in our everyday experience.

A centre is formed in dependence of realized activity; not only subjectivity governs a situation, but so does that what makes the central role: "The notion of a centre, however, calls for a preliminary and general location. Centre partly, but only partly, relates to the previously developed notion of a *focal core* within some dimension or the totality of global experience" (Ihde 1976, 150). The centre does not stand alone but is always located in one or another place of a belonging environment. It moves from a centre to the periphery, turns around, takes the central role, or detaches itself. The stability of rhythm is not determined solely by making a static centre but also by balanced rhythmic movement inside the territory per the significance of all included elements.

> The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of the narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth (Gadamer 1989, 302).

The horizon opens the flexibility of understanding and interpretations, giving exclusively empathic concern to others where the rhythms of the life of one's own include all the complexity of experience open to transformations. This opening is only one aspect of the phenomenological analysis of rhythm.

> Rhythm studies related to phenomenology have not yet been widely developed. The reason for it may be in the fact that Husserl does not write about rhythm directly. However, phenomenology gives an impulse for various interpretations of rhythm: rhythms of intersubjective communication; the flux of internal time, time-objects; rhythms of the internal constitution of man and rhythms of surrounding worlds; bodily and sensory perception of rhythm, *et cetera*. Phenomenology of rhythm is based on direct experience, therefore, giving feasibility for analyses of how rhythm is given, how its meanings are constituted and how rhythm differs from other meaningful phenomena (Kivle 2021, 312-319).

Rhythm's relations between the centre and surroundings also show the importance of human capability to control and maintain harmonious rhythmic interactions with world processes even in unusual situations like a pan-

demic emergency. "I" not only determines one's rhythms towards an outreach but also "listens to" the surroundings. These bilateral relations mark a joint approach with other philosophical branches, in this case, the philosophy of Deleuze & Guattari.

Deleuze & Guattari's Views on Rhythm

The article considers two aspects of rhythm present in Deleuze & Guattari's philosophy: rhythm as an activity that creates stability and rhythm as a force of becoming other. By separating chaos and establishing a centre of stability, rhythm maintains the order of belonging territories, and by becoming other, territories transform and obtain expressive qualities. These two aspects are intertwined and include crucial concepts that complement and relate to rhythm: refrain, milieu, chaos, territory, centre of stability, becoming other, repetition, circle of belonging, and in-between. These concepts have particular meanings, and their translation into English unites various interpretations: "milieu" means "surroundings," but in combination with "medium" and "middle"; "power" look as if it is a "capacity for existence," "a capacity to affect or be affected," *et cetera* (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, xvi-xviii).

Territory as a directional space and a circle of belonging has its own centre of intensity that is at once within the territory and outside it, and around what cosmic forces come together. Activities of such centres are not subjectively directed: the circles of a belonging move to other regions not by intentionality but by their capacity to be open themselves by themselves once over again. Opening a circle of belonging in another region means displacing and moving made by different elements such as lines, figures, sounds, *et cetera*. In other words, by including different milieus, various kinds of the exterior, interior, and other milieus are also included in moving and opening new territories.

Rhythmic manifestations concern correlations between three positions dedicated to the migration and the pulsations of territories: 1) territorialization—the taking of territory by separating from chaos and shaping boundaries; 2) deterritorialization—the decontextualization of an actual territory and leaving it; 3) reterritorialization relates to the establishment of a new relationship and the beginning of a new process and new territories. These fluid processes show "becoming" as fragile and penetrable structures maintained by refrain and rhythm. In the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the shaping of boundaries makes crucial actuality for the the maintenance of the safety of a territory:

> The territory is, first of all, the critical distance between two beings of the same species: Mark your distance. What is mine is, first of all, my distance. I process only distances. Don't let anybody touch me; I growl if anyone enters my territory, I put up placards. Critical distance is a relation based on matters of expression. It is a question of keeping at a distance the forces of chaos knocking at the door (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 319-320).

The territory is marked by a refrain that entertains internal relations and forms a continuity with other territories by three components: 1) a point of order, the centre of stability, or an inside: it can be home, song, voice, or a space of safety; 2) a circle of control that includes a safe inside as well as a containable outside; 3) a line of an outside, a movement of transformation and migration. It is impossible to divide these three components into separate parts. They increase each other, pass over to go to the outside, and flow together. Refrain organizes and marks territory, connects territory with internal impulses and external circumstances, identifies and reorganizes functions, and regroups forces to centralize the territory or go outside it.

> The refrain is a prism, a crystal of space-time. It acts upon that which surrounds it, the sound of light, extracting from it various vibrations, or decompositions, projections, or transformations. The refrain also has a catalytic function: not only to increase the speed of the exchanges and reactions in that, which surrounds it, but also to assure indirect interactions between elements devoid of so-called natural affinity, and thereby to form organized masses. The refrain is, therefore, of the crystal or protein type (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 348-349).

Territories—material, intellectual, musical, or spiritual—maintain relevance to the existing rhythm and refrain because they are created and maintained by rhythm and refrain: "Territorialization is an act of rhythm that has become expressive of milieu components that have become qualitative" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 315). The notion of "expressive qualities" refers to feelings and emotions. It shows relations of one another and expresses dynamics of interior–exterior circumstances. Not only rhythm and refrain but centre and frame also mark territory: there can be no territory with no frame or boundary, no art. A territory always comes together with spatio-temporal coordinates (location, concreteness, actuality) and immeasurable qualities. There are various kinds of rhythms, but one feature is shared: rhythm is immanent to a milieu initially. It is not directed subjectively; it is the primordial force that separates milieu from chaos.

> Rhythm is the milieus' answer to chaos. What chaos and rhythm have in common is their in-between: between two milieus, rhythm-chaos or the chaosmos: "Between night and day, between that which is constructed and that which grows naturally, be-

> tween mutations from the inorganic to the organic, from plant to animal, from animal to humankind, yet without this series constituting a progression […] In this in-between, chaos becomes rhythm, not inexorably, but it has a chance to. Chaos is not the opposite of rhythm but the milieu of all milieus" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 313).

These binary aspects of rhythm to be in day and night, to be in the world of animals and the world of humans, justify rhythm's possibility to be in-between two or more different milieus. Rhythm is in-between milieus and in-between milieus and chaos. A milieu is separated from chaos by rhythm, and "rhythm is milieus' answer to chaos." Rhythm and milieu can be considered an inseparable couple: one milieu relates to another by rhythm over one another, where every milieu is vibratory, constituted by the periodic repetition of the components. Kindred components limit every milieu. In other words, it would be a potency for opening and serving as a basis for another:

> Thus, the living thing has an exterior milieu of materials, an interior milieu of composing elements and composed substances, an intermediary milieu of membranes and limits, and an annexed milieu of energy sources and actions-perceptions. Every milieu is coded, a code defined by periodic repetition, but each code is in a perpetual state of transcoding or transduction. Transcoding or transduction is the manner in which one milieu serves as the basis for another, or conversely is established atop another milieu, dissipates in it, or is constituted in it (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 313).

Even in the situations where rhythm lies hidden, it takes place and stands "beyond" audibility and visibility. However, though being silently presented and hidden, rhythm maintains its substructures that come out from a milieu by becoming other where muteness takes visual and auditory shapes. That could be considered a movement from background to becoming other: to occur, possess something in a new quality, and be in rhythm.

> Becoming is undoubtedly not imitating or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation, or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all of its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, "appearing," "being," "equalling," or "producing" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 239).

There are various forms of becoming: voices alter from tenor to soprano by becoming-woman or becoming-child, birdsongs of Messianen's music take musical quality by becoming-animal. Language becomes other by human voice activity and occurs differently in music, talk, or performance. Becoming other is compared to becoming quality: philosophy measures

chaos and puts it in the form of a concept, science develops function to exchange with chaos, art is a response to chaos producing percepts and affects. These boundaries of becoming others are not self-protective but define a stage of performance that becomes property and territory quality. The approach to chaos is not controlling it but cutting fragments of chaos into philosophical discourse, into a work of art or experiment. Art generates sensations and perceptions never before experienced: the visual arts render visual forces that are themselves invisible, the musical arts *render non-sonorous forces sonorous*. In such an approach, art is not the activation of the sensation of a lived body, but art transforms the lived body into an unliveable power. Art intensifies resonance and dissonance between bodies and the cosmos, opens the universe of becoming-other: from the finite to the infinite, from the body of the living being to the universe itself. Creative activity shapes an artwork as the centre of dynamic processes that organizes chaos by words, sounds, colours, bodily movements, and others. Colours and sounds make frames of painting and music. Music becomes an open structure that permeates and is permeated by the world developing rhythmical relationships of sonic territories. Refrain wards off chaos by creating a rhythm, tempo, melody and creates a musical frame for musical territory. It shapes the vibration of milieus into harmony.

> We are not saying that the refrain is the origin of music or that music begins with it. It is not really known when music begins. The refrain is rather the means of preventing music, warding it off, or forgoing it. But music exists because the refrain also exists, because music takes up the refrain, lays hold of it as content in a form of expression because it forms a block with it in order to take it somewhere else (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 300).

Refrain gives music territory and brings together sights, sounds, rhythms, and material objects in organized-sounding totality. However, music is an escape from the refrain; music intensifies the refrain by creating new forms and shapes, new sounds. That, what is deterritorialized from the refrain, now is reterritorialized as music. Music is not only self-sufficient sonic territory marked by the circulation of the refrain, but also territory open to the outside, and it develops as "deterritorialization"—the territory of music embraces any field of activity that conforms to rhythmic recomposition—the social field, the organic and the natural world.

By moving, colouring, and sounding, rhythm establishes territories of artworks. Rhythm governs the body to the implacable movements of the universe itself and transmits force through every structure of performance or dance. Art and philosophy are rooted in chaos. They can both ride the

waves of a vibratory universe without directions, and they enlarge the universe by framing affects and concepts. "Art takes a bit of chaos in a frame in order to form a composed chaos that becomes sensory, or from which it extracts a chaoid sensation as variety" (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 206).

In shaping and framing artworks, two kinds of rhythms express themselves. Cadence-repetition, where conformity and the symmetry of lines and spaces take physical place and remain arithmetically static, is seen in spatial territorialization and the regular division of architecture; and rhythm-repetition, where the vibration of rhythm to be more oriented temporally, includes inequalities and different rhythmic events of music based on internal intensities and characterizes the rhythm of living's evolution. In "Difference and Repetition," Deleuze notes that studies on rhythm confirm a duality between arithmetic symmetry, which refers back to scale and is static and cubic, and geometric symmetry, based on proportion, appears in a living "evolution" as vital, positive, and active movements. With no frame made by rhythm, there can be no art: colours and sounds refrain artwork, and, in such a way, painting or composition becomes a centre of a milieu and separates from chaos. Rhythm's capacity of framing and separating from chaos relates to different situations, including a time of emergency. If it is possible to control and predict rhythmic manifestations, it is possible to localize chaotic activities. "A mistake in speed, rhythm, or harmony would be catastrophic because it would bring back the forces of chaos, destroying both creator and creation" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 311). Human life, art and science, sociality and nature function and change in fluid and interdependent conditions: milieu, rhythm, becoming expressive, and taking territory.

Conclusions

Philosophical approaches to rhythm and stability are diverse depending on the explored theoretical stances: for Husserl, the centre of stability is an intentional "I," rhythm is experienced by the lived body, and surroundings relate to intentions of subjectivity. For Deleuze, stability is formed by refrain and rhythm, establishing a centre and territory by separation from chaos. In contrast to Husserl, Deleuze & Guattari's characterization of rhythm is integrated with interpretations of art, society, nature, and philosophy and is rooted in nonhuman forces emphasizing the cosmic and natural dimensions of the philosophical environment to metaphysical vitalism than to phenomenology. Contrary to the phenomenological approach, coming from the "I-perspective," the postmodernity of Deleuze & Guattari excludes the dominant role of the subject and develops self-generated functions of rhythm.

In a situation of a pandemic disaster, both these philosophical approaches are valuable. Husserl's phenomenology focuses more on the inclusion of subjectivity in the formation of stability in the world. For Husserl, the world's stability is grounded in intentional activities. At the same time, Deleuze & Guattari's philosophy gives the reversed view: overcoming pandemic time is based on situations to be "in-between" milieus where the capacity of becoming other, expressiveness, and taking of territories maintain distance from chaotic forces. For Deleuze & Guattari, stability is established by separating chaos where human activities and forces of milieu (rhythm and refrain) frame directional spaces.

The difference between Husserl and Deleuze & Guattari is seen in various aspects: in using concepts and themes, in interpretations of human beings and life, in the way of thinking, and in creating different philosophical environments. Deleuze & Guattari do not accept a phenomenological environment where the subject is the centre of belonging territories but include the philosophy of rhythm in nonhuman forces of the cosmos that insinuate in different realms and various life forms. They cover human and animal life, art, the cosmos, and nature. The phenomenology of rhythm starts from rhythm as given in experience, relating to an internal constitution of humans and its intentions directed to the surrounding environment. The experience of rhythm characterizes the primordial faculty of the human: to be inside of the self and simultaneously percept an environment around themselves, making a relatively limited horizon of spatiotemporal situations.

However, such concepts from Deleuze & Guattari's philosophy as a centre of stability, territory, becoming other resonate with Husserl's approach to the self as an intentional centre, forming meaningful worlds, the openness of horizons. Correlations of these concepts maintain rhythmic structures, including humans, the world around them, and one's own world in different ways.

Both phenomenological and postmodern thinking open three comparative aspects for the development of philosophical interdisciplinarity: 1) the formation of rhythmic horizons and territories; 2) viewing territories in the context of fluxing space and time; 3) a transformative function of territories and an openness to new interpretations and the future. Rhythm frames boundaries of its belonging territory and transforms and decontextualizes it to create a new one and migrate to another territory. Flexible attention to processes governed by the current emergency shows how human intentions change in forming new typical meaningful horizons and how processes in the future are foreseen.

Rhythm is a fundamental component of being, and existence makes it possible to seek a standard explanation of sociality, human, philosophy, art, and nature, showing the organic connection between a person's internal constitution and outer environment. It is also proven in the pandemic situation, which changes the rhythm of life and determines communication and different processes of belonging to surroundings. For Husserl and Deleuze, reality is changeable. Their views, so different in the basic stances, justify a common sense that rhythm ensures the safety and strengthens the relations between the centre and peripheral, between similarly corresponding elements.

Bibliography

1. Deleuze Gilles (1994), *Difference and Repetition*, New York: Columbia University Press.
2. Deleuze Gilles, Guattari Félix (1987), *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London: University of Minnesota Press.
3. Gadamer Hans-Georg (1989), *Truth and Method*, (2nd ed.), London: Sheed & Ward.
4. Husserl Edmund (1964), *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
5. Husserl Edmund (1982), *Cartesian Meditations. An Introduction to Phenomenology*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
6. Ihde Don (1976), *Listening and Voice. A Phenomenology of Sound*, Athens: Ohio University Press.
7. Kivle Ineta (2021), "Book Review: Cheyne P., Hamilton A., Paddison M. (eds.), *Philosophy of Rhythm: Aesthetics, Music, Poetics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, ISBN 978-0-19-934778-0", *Horizon*, 10 (1), St. Petersburg State University, p. x.
8. Kivle Ineta (2020), "Choice to Be Happy: Rhythm of Flourishing in Aristotle's, The Nicomachean Ethics and Hanna Arendt's, The Human Condition", [in:] K. Boudouris (ed.), *The Possibility of Eudaimonia (Happiness and Human Flourishing) in the World Today*, Athens: Ionia Publications, pp. 139-148.
9. Kivle Ineta (2009), *Skaņas filosofija*, Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte.
10. Kivle Ineta (2018), "Auditory Phenomena and Human Life: Phenomenological Experience", [in:] S. Smith, J. S. Smith & D. Verducci (eds.), *Eco-Phenomenology: Life, Human Life, Post-Human Life in the Harmony of the Cosmos*, Springer International Publishing AG, pp. 367-373
11. Michon Pascal (2017), *Elements of Rhythmology: Antiquity*, Paris: Rhythmos.
12. Welton Donn (ed.) (1999), *The Essential Husserl. Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology*, USA: Indiana University Press.

61 (2/2021), pp. 95–112
DOI: 10.19205/61.21.6

The Polish Journal of Aesthetics

Jana Kukaine*

Visceral Resistance and The Vulnerability of Breathing

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic invites us to re-examine the relations between aesthetics and social, environmental, and bodily issues. This essay highlights these interconnections by focusing on the vulnerability of breathing from a visceral point of view. Merging theoretical accounts with investigations of selected artworks by Latvian artists Dace Džeriņa and Rasa Jansone, the aesthetic apprehension of breathing allows for the advancement of feminist politics for a liveable and breathable life and bodily flourishing.

Keywords

Visceral Feminism, Vulnerability, Corporeality, Breathing Aesthetics, Contemporary Art

…with every breath we take,
we expose our lungs to the outside world.

Michael Marder, 2016, 130

There is no outside.

Karim Sariahmed, 2020, 15.10

Breathing is a universal experience that is shared by both human and non-human beings. It is the essential precondition of life. So, the capacity to breathe can be viewed as vital and crucial. Recently, this simple truth has been foregrounded in an unprecedented and alarming way by the health crisis evoked by the outbreak of COVID-19. The pandemic that has reached

* Art Academy of Latvia
Email: jana.kukaine@lma.lv

so many people worldwide has posed new challenges and questions in such a short period. By taking the perspective of corporeal feminist aesthetics, this essay will examine the vulnerability of breathing as an issue of social injustice enacted by multiple cultural, economic, and political forces, gender, and the normative notion of fit femininity among them. For advancing feminist politics of a liveable and breathable life, this essay will tentatively foreground the notion of visceral feminism and breathing aesthetics that emerge from the notion of bodily flourishing and well-being.

This essay derives from the accounts of feminist social theory, notably, works of Judith Butler and Magdalena Górska, as well as the respiratory philosophy of Luce Irigaray, in order to apply the theoretical findings to the analysis of artworks by Latvian artists, Dace Džeriņa (Fig. 1) and Rasa Jansone (Fig. 2). The analysis will implement the principle of aesthetic apprehension, instead of a more commonly used "aesthetic appreciation"—feminist theorist Carolyn Korsmeyer has elaborated this methodological distinction to underline that art provides not only pleasure but also affords a "powerful means to convey difficult truths" (2011, 8). The two artworks to be examined in this essay allow us to articulate the inherent ambivalence of breathing and the entangled nature of its political and visceral dimensions; thus, it provides an example of the engagement of aesthetics with urgent social issues. Combining theoretical and artistic perspectives will detect vulnerability's bearing on our bodily life on a visceral level. It reaches out to our respiratory tract and lungs and affects the oxygen supply crucial for survival. Thus, vulnerability should be understood as embodied, material and affective. However, the body should not be viewed as a passive surface of political imprints nor a mere victim of social injustice. Instead, the body exhibits its capacity to revive by using the state of vulnerability to foreground visceral resistance. This capacity is foremost exemplified in the ability to breathe and, as the analysis of the artworks will demonstrate, can provide a resource for an embodied political agency.

A Breathable Life

While the issue of air quality and pollution had been extensively addressed by a variety of scholars from different disciplines, ecofeminism and new materialism among them, the disparities of breathing disclosed by the current pandemic have provided a new challenge for aesthetics to account for urgent environmental, bodily, and political issues. By aggravating the dynamics of "cruel inequalities" (Kindig 2020, 5.18), seclusion, separatism, and

discrimination, the health crisis of COVID-19 has also triggered a political crisis of care (Winant 2020, 8.7), especially of the care work that is usually performed by women and has reinforced traditional gender roles and stereotypical behavior. For months already, as a part of the strategy to fight the pandemic, the capacity to breathe effortlessly has been restricted in various ways, for example, by introducing the norm of wearing protective face masks and going into lockdowns. This restriction has compelled people to cope with the stationary aerial atmospheres of their living spaces and the diminished liveability of their immobile bodies. Also, it is estimated that the pandemic has increased domestic violence worldwide, thus exposing the vulnerability of those for whom the home is not a safe place. The safety of the workplace outside the home has likewise been called into question: many workers continue to face the risk that breathing might endanger their health or the health of their family members, and many of them lack the advantage of having health insurance or paid sick-leaves. The physical weight of breathlessness has also been felt by the healthcare professionals who endure a twelve-hour shift while wearing impermeable protective clothes when taking care of the sick in overcrowded hospitals. Finally, many COVID-19 patients were struggling with the most devastating feeling of suffocation when their lungs could not resist the destructive operations of the virus.

Breathing inequalities have resulted from the outbreak of the virus and the public policies carried out during the pandemic. They have affected different people in different ways and, by exposing their embodied and visceral vulnerabilities, have revealed the ambiguity of breath that, while being fundamental and inalienable, has become a matter of social stratification, advantages, or lack of them. Consequently, in a pandemic, if with every breath we take, we expose our lungs to the outside world, following philosopher Michael Marder (2016, 130), we do not do so only to embrace the multiple possibilities of life-affirming encounters the world can offer. A more careful reading of the statement detects a life-threatening perspective as well: with every breath, we enact our susceptibility to pain, discrimination and even defer our means for survival.

The air that flows and circulates in the lungs may demonstrate the continual material exchange between the body's interiority and the exteriority of the world. The intensity of these interactions cast doubts on the possibility of the separation of both. Material feminism scholars have already addressed such doubts; for example, Stacy Alaimo developed the term trans-corporeality. This term allows us to "travel through the entangled territories of

material and discursive, natural and cultural, biological and textual," and "acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors" (2010, 2-3). Governments, workplaces, and living arrangements that sustain bodily vulnerability should be considered among those "other actors." Breathing, therefore, is an eloquent example of trans-corporeality that allows for a visceral analysis of breathing as a political engagement. In this sense, there is no "outside." Namely, no political, social, or ideological organization is irrelevant to an embodiment, its affective corporeal patterns, and prospects for survival.

The theoretical significance of breathing has often been overlooked in Western philosophy, allegedly since Plato (Škof and Berndtson 2018, ix-xviii). Even when breathing did capture philosophers' attention, its importance has typically been articulated within frameworks of spirit, gods, and the soul; or by aligning breathing with will and imagination, thinking and consciousness, logos, mindfulness, and poetry (Škof and Berndtson 2018). One of the few philosophical accounts of breath in the Western tradition has been elaborated by Luce Irigaray, where she cautions against "the forgetting of air" (1999) and asks for the "cultivation of breath" (2002). In positioning breath within maternal ethics, as well as interrogating its relation to voice and speech (1996, 121-128), Irigaray renders breathing as a way of spiritual and cultural ascent. While exploring her views, I will instead attend to a materialist understanding of breath from the perspective of feminist politics that will present a visceral interpretation of Irigaray.

In unfolding the political dimension of breathing, this essay is also aligned with classic postcolonial and feminist perspectives that refuse to embrace the mind-body dualism of the earlier views and strive to understand breathing in corporeal terms. These authors exhibit a vivid interest in the political agency of breathing, while their accounts often oscillate between the metaphorical and literal (i.e., embodied and immediate) understanding of breathing, as, for example, in the movement "Black Lives Matter" that has responded to the last words uttered by the victims of police violence: "I can't breathe..."[1] Thus, racist bodily oppression is manifested as a lack of breath in a rather physiological sense. Likewise, the lived experience of breathing, as well as its robust, transgressive, and critical power for social change, has been captured in the notions of "combat breathing", a strategy to resist the violence of the colonial state, by Franz Fanon (1994

[1] The slogan originated in 2014 when Eric Garner died in a police chokehold. It is estimated that the phrase has been used by over 70 people (Baker *et al*. 2020).

[1965]); and "airless space," a term used to describe the conditions of poverty and isolation fostered by a neoliberal capitalist state, by Shulamith Firestone (1998). The relations of bodily vulnerability and its environments along with social and economic forces that affect air quality have been captured in Alaimo's term "the proletarian lung." Her inquiry proves that the human body is never "rigidly enclosed" and can be harmed and transformed by social systems and material substances (2010, 28-58). An intersectional feminist interrogation of breath in its corporeal contexts that allow us to consider oppressive social structures in a new materialist way has been carried out by a feminist scholar, Magdalena Górska (2016, 2018). She proposes that the question of the breathability of life ultimately leads to "researching the dynamics of geopolitical economic and (neo)colonialist power relations […] that materialize […] in matters such as whose lives are breathable and whose loss of breath is grievable" (Górska 2018, 251-254). To elucidate her argument, Górska had selected rather visceral examples of breathing: the "black lung disease" of coal miners, phone sex breath play performed by a young female student, and breathing in anxieties and panic attacks (2016, 24).

In Górska's work, the notion of a breathable life has been introduced via the writings of philosopher Sara Ahmed, who has suggested that the political struggle for a bearable life of marginalized groups (for example, queer) foremost is as a struggle to "have space to breathe" (Ahmed 2010, 120). Likewise, accounts of feminist politics of breathing are greatly indebted to Judith Butler (2004, 2009), who has examined the notions of liveability in response to recent outbreaks of violence, racism, and warfare. Butler proposes to apprehend life, its liveability, and entitlement to persistence and flourishing, from a perspective of a new bodily ontology that implies the rethinking of precariousness, vulnerability, injurability, interdependency, exposure, and bodily persistence, as well as desire, work, and the claims of language and social belonging. She underlines that the body is "always given over to others, to norms, to social and political organizations that have developed historically in order to maximize precariousness for some and minimize precariousness for others" (Butler 2009, 2-3). Femininity and motherhood can be regarded as such organizations whose impact on breathing will be analyzed shortly.

Fig. 1. Dace Džeriņa, *Liberation*, 2002 (video still). Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 2. Rasa Jansone, *Mother*, 2017 (performance). Courtesy of the artist.

Visceral Affects: Breath, Perspiration, and Flourishing

Feminist theoreticians have often evoked the notion of the visceral in a figurative sense. They have linked the visceral with the body's and affect's materiality. For example, the visceral is viewed in a study on the material geographies of food as "the realm of internally-felt sensations, mood and states of being, which are born from the sensory engagement with the material world" (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008, 462). This essay proposes an outline of visceral feminism, derived from its literal meaning, namely, the viscera (lungs being among them). Accordingly, since the inner organs and their proper functions are crucial for one's health and well-being, the visceral is the ultimate target of any political action. Social and political organizations do not exist "outside" one's body, nor do they touch it on the "surface." They permeate and affect the lived experience of every political subject. While this understanding transcends the scope of "internally-felt sensations" and "sensory engagement," it also questions the outside–inside binary, the private, and the political. However, an opposing view—unstratified exchange's messy entanglement and flux—may not be beneficial either. Therefore, the notion of viscerality allows us to preserve the view of the body as partially contained (its organs do not flow freely), partially inaccessible (we cannot see nor identify them), and partially autonomous (the organs in most cases function independently, despite our will, and even without our awareness). Such a view allows for critical investigations on how the body is given, shaped, and enacted by social, cultural, and political forces.

These forces can be both benevolent (nurturing and supportive) and malignant (aggravating one's corporeal vulnerability and intruding on the body's visceral commitment to survive). Although it might sound uncommon to think about a body's commitment (since we are used to attributing will only to rationality and consciousness), I argue, along with other material feminists,[2] that the body strives to ensure its persistence and flourishing. Thus, the body demonstrates agentic potential. Moreover, visceral feminism emphasizes that the body, especially its viscerality, is the first locus of one's political engagement. While we may discuss abstract political ideas and wonder what their slogans mean, it is impossible to be mistaken about, for example, one's hunger or, to get closer to this essay's topic, feeling of breath-

[2] See, for example, Alaimo and Hekman 2008 among others.

lessness. Thus, the affective dimension is viewed as a medium that exposes the subtle interconnections of social power structures and the body's (re)actions that might, for example, take the shape of surrender, outrage, or resistance.

To make my point clearer, let me now turn to the artistic findings of two contemporary artists from Latvia, Rasa Jansone and Dace Džeriņa. By recognizing and exposing corporeal vulnerability, which is both gendered and situated, these artworks acquire the power "to change the meaning and structure of vulnerability itself" (Butler 2004, 43) and can guide us to the visceral resistance of a breathing body. It should be noted that this kind of resistance does not ensure anything immediately, nor does it provide a solution to the inequalities of breathing to overcome injurability and interdependency completely. Instead, vulnerability and resistance are mutually constitutive. One presupposes the other and vice versa, enabling the body to become a "potentially effective mobilizing force" (Butler 2016, 14), enhancing its political agency.

Consequently, the framework of visceral feminism emerges from the interconnectedness of the body's viscerality and politics, corporeal vulnerability, and the prospect for survival. When used for interpreting art, it allows us to foreground a perspective of breathing aesthetics, in which breathing merges its physiological and social functions to attest to corporeal flourishing. This position is anchored in the interest that feminist aesthetics commonly takes in gender and everyday life and assumes that art is crucial for social change.

Dace Džeriņa (born in 1971) engages with video, installations, and scenography, while Rasa Jansone (born in 1973) is known chiefly as a painter, although she frequently employs installations and strategies of textual interventions. Two artworks will be examined for this essay: a video work by Džeriņa, "Liberation" (2002), and a performance by Rasa Jansone, "Mother" (2017). None of these works (as the years of production indicate) had been intended to be a commentary on the COVID-19 pandemic, though they exhibit a vivid interest in breathing. I consider this lack of intention a strength, not a shortcoming: the specific context and purposes of creating these works will ensure a non-reductive perspective and highlight unexpected encounters that will rethink the current health crisis, care, and breath.

Džeriņa's work "Liberation" consists of six video pieces, each approximately 2 minutes long, showing a woman's face in affective states like pain or fear, and during activities like dancing, having sex, sweating in a sauna, and doing physical exercise. The woman is presented on a neutral back-

ground that does not provide any situational context. The only sources of information are her facial expression as well as the physiological changes in her body: the tightening and relaxation of muscles, a slight movement of the pupils of the eyes, pulse patterns visible in her blood-vessels, and foremost, the changing rhythms of breathing and intensities of perspiration. While the simple function of perspiration is to cool the body and reduce blood pressure (Waitt 2014, 667), the word's etymology acknowledges its proximity to breathing since *perspīrātiōn* in Neo-Latin means "a breathing through."[3] Therefore, the process of sweating may be referred to as a type of respiration, perhaps a somewhat "vegetal" one, where "our whole bodies breathe through the pores in our skin" (Marder 2016, 131) resembling the breathing surface of a plant. Respiration, along with changes in heart rate and metabolism, is an agent of visceral affect that (re)acts upon its environment (the outside world) and discloses its inequalities and inherent structures of violence.

It seems accurate to point out the botanical roots of the word "flourishing" that parallels human and vegetal lives. The need to develop a new ecological economy that acknowledges the respect for life and the hospitality of the vegetal world has also been expanded by Luce Irigaray in the work co-authored with Michael Marder (2016). The vegetal metaphors used to talk about our well-being (both individual and communal) are neither contingent nor arbitrary. Instead, they highlight the mutual interdependence and material vulnerability of both human and nonhuman beings and reminds us that the oxygen human beings need for their survival is ensured by the "aerial placenta" (Irigaray 2016, 21), namely, the plants. Likewise, this metaphor can be compared with Alaimo's notion of trans-corporeality that might suggest that some of our inner organs are outside of us from a visceral point of view.

The female body in Džeriņa's work also transcends its corporeal borders through cathartic discharge, the unwinding or liberation of tension, as the work's title suggests. At this usage, the term liberation departs from its historical roots to acquire a more affective dimension. While in the case of dance, sex, and physical exertion, the awareness of liberation might be relatively immediate, the affective dynamics of fear and pain, and to a certain extent: being in a sauna, instead envisage a slow increase of intensity that becomes unbearable at some point. It is important to note that the videos do not have any sound, apart from an almost indiscernible humming back-

[3] WordReference.com English Dictionary, 'Perspiration', [online], https://www.wordreference.com/definition/perspiration [accessed: 10.12.2020].

ground. It somewhat resembles a monotonous noise produced by a machine, not a human body in an affective state. Possibly, the artist had decided to avoid the expressiveness of the female voice to prevent the viewers from developing a strong emotional response to it, encouraging them instead to focus on the subtle details of the corporeal transformations that otherwise would risk remaining unnoticed. It seems the artist would suggest that we are prone to overlook our bodily needs, capacities, and vulnerabilities. Therefore, attending to breathing patterns and perspiration would be a way to enhance one's bodily awareness. Close attention to the body's visceral responses will not only help overcome self-alienation but also allow us to view Džeriņa's work as a political enactment of a liveable and flourishing life, the strive to find a space to fulfill one's everyday bodily functions: to breathe and to sweat freely. This focus highlights social and cultural restrictions imposed on bodies, among them—fit and proper femininity's normative standard.

The woman's body in Džeriņa's work is marked with distinctly feminine features (the make-up, haircut, and clothing). The six circumstances she experiences, being in pain and fear, dancing, having sex, playing sports, and sweating in a sauna, can all be typically gender-charged. Due to sexual differences and the peculiarity of their cultural situatedness, women experience a particular kind of pain and fear that is intrinsic to the vulnerabilities of their gendered bodies. Likewise, the experience of sexual pleasure, physical exercise, and dance have a distinct gendered perspective,[4] and the very practice of attending a sauna is often based on the segregation of sexes, not to mention the historical association of the sauna and birth-giving rituals that existed in traditional Latvian culture, as well as elsewhere. Thus, Džeriņa's work locates the female body against social expectations: conventional hygienic codes, patterns of decency, and proper behavior that ought to constitute respectable femininity.

Women's bodily fluids are often considered less acceptable than those of men. They have become associated with disgust, pollution, contamination and have become considered abject.[5] It is not surprising to discover that women are pressured to maintain a sweat-free body with a matte skin surface that smells good (Waitt 2014, 671-673). Perspiration undermines the Western idea of tightly managed femininity, exemplified by a clean, smooth,

[4] Feminist theories and antropologies offer comprehensive research on these topics. See, among many others, Irigaray (1985), Martin (1987) and Young (2005).

[5] For feminist studies on bodily fluids, including analysis of views of Julia Kristeva and Mary Douglas, see Elizabeth Grosz (1994).

slim, contained, and soft body. This standard also presupposes a normative feminine character: one whose hunger, sexuality, desire, emotions, and affects are controlled, repressed, and denied to appear docile, modest, gentle, pleasing, well-mannered, and submissive. Similar regulations apply to female breathing. While it is encouraged in some cases (for example, in labor, choir singing, or phone sex for arousing the client [Górska 2016, 160-164]), frequently loud and expressive breathing is not considered feminine. It is peculiar to note that one of the typical female maladies, hysteria, was believed to be a form of breathing difficulty that led to fainting and *tussis nervosa*, a condition of the sudden expiration of air from the lungs (Grosz 1994, 40). Perhaps the history of wearing corsets has left its imprint on the body's memory as well. The scientific findings of sex differences in breathing suggest that respiratory function is influenced by the different phases of the menstrual cycle and common hormonal and metabolic conditions that might correlate with developing diseases like asthma, cystic fibrosis, lung cancer, *et cetera*. Due to anatomical differences, women are more prone to develop hypoxemia, an abnormally low amount of oxygen in the blood, during physical exercise (LoMauro and Aliverti, 2018). However, the diaphragmatic breathing that is considered the most efficient way to breathe is more common among men, while women most typically tend to perform a shallower version, the so-called chest breathing. The different breathing patterns are regulated not only anatomically and physiologically, but also socially since women in Western culture are expected to have a slim figure with a flat stomach.

In contrast, the rising and falling of breasts in "feminine breath" has often been made into an object of heterosexual fascination. These considerations allow us to conclude that breathing is a gendered practice. It aims to control and tame female bodies, keeping them in a disabled and dependent condition. Such control might be exerted not only by social structures, but also through self-surveillance and self-denial (Meagher 2003, 36; Waitt 2014, 674). As a result, in breathing, a woman fails to summon the full possibilities of her body, which is simultaneously experienced as a capacity and a burden, and the breathing itself seems to develop a pattern of "feminine hesitancy," to borrow the term from Iris Merion Young. Her accounts on socially constructed habits of feminine body comportment are classic in feminist philosophy (2005, 37). Therefore, the body and its visceral manifestations are regarded as the ultimate target and trophy of gender-based oppression and social organization. In Džeriņa's "Liberation," on the contrary, the woman is allowed to breathe, sweat, and discharge her emotional tension, and in doing

so, she successfully transgresses the limits of the docile, fit and controlled, femininity. Her body is not only subject to control but also reworks the norm and "expose realities to which we thought we were confined as open to transformation" (Butler 2004, 217). By transgressing the gendered scripts of physical performance, the artist exposes and enhances the bodily vulnerability of her protagonist, who is provided with a resistance strategy: her breathing treated as an agentic potentiality or a mobilizing force that exceeds the mere limits of her lungs or chest. Instead, it is breathing with one's skin, perhaps even breathing with a trans-corporeal body that renders it "unruly," even "unfeminine." By questioning the restrictive ideals of domesticated, controlled, tidy, and hygienic femininity, breath affirms not only the body's vulnerability but also its rights to be loud, excessive, and subversive, to accelerate or slow down one's breathing rhythms, to generate an affective-material discharge like bodily fluids and vapors. Thus, breathing reveals the emotional, affective, and a body's sexual power, grounded in its viscerality.

Indeed, the visceral view of the body in Dace Džeriņa's work allows us to perceive the body as partially contained—its corporeal experiences seem to be arranged in a particular way. It is partially inaccessible since we do not know the reasons for its affective states and discharges. Finally, it is partially autonomous—its corporeal processes submit to neither the viewer's nor the woman's control. This notion explains why the body is neither rigidly enclosed nor completely diffused or enacted by its environment. At the same time, it still provides enough evidence of the social forces that can be unjust and suffocating; by striving to breathe freely and overcoming corporeal hesitancy, the body endeavors to achieve what is promised in the work's title: a (visceral) liberation.

Thus, the work by Dace Džeriņa offers several meaningful perspectives that can be applied to the analysis of the current health crisis. Firstly, the discomforts, restrictions, and hardships of breathing (and other corporeal activities) indicate that the body and its essential functions respond to social and political processes viscerally. The diverse ways of interacting that unite the body and politics are also gendered. Therefore, the effects of the pandemic on women should be interrogated with more scrutiny. While there are already some accounts of how the pandemic has accelerated the rates of domestic violence, reinforced the traditional division of labor, and increased the amount of care work, more studies should be carried out to trace the gendered inequalities of breathing and their impact on female corporeal vulnerability.

Secondly, the visceral affect and resistance that Dace Džeriņa elaborates in her work can be used to describe the experience of COVID-19 time that is quite common: new patterns of social and political life with unprecedented restrictions, risks, and insecurities have brought about a failure to summon the full possibilities of the body, i.e., to move, to work and foremost to breathe. Paradoxically, the unexpected conditions might have also urged to focus on one's corporeal capabilities and have developed a more nuanced, alert, and intense bodily awareness. By taking away some of the corporeal benefits of the pre-Covid age, the pandemic has pointed to the bodily dimension of personal and collective survival. Moreover, the pandemic has finally foregrounded the viscerality of the body: its openness and trans-corporeality have made it impossible to shut oneself off from the unwelcome guest, the virus, nor can its corporeal effects be entirely explained or controlled. Therefore, it can be assumed that the pandemic has generated a visceral affect. While being anchored in our bodily functions and injurabilities, visceral affect can also pave the road to resistance and social critique that urges us to strive for corporeal flourishing.

Suffocation and Resistance

While Džeriņa's video serves to highlight life-affirming and politically mobilizing corporeal agency by presenting a breathing body, artist Rasa Jansone focuses on the conditions of breathlessness, oppression, and violence. Her performance, "Mother," was part of a project, "Femblock," organized by the Latvian Centre of Contemporary Art in 2017. The project consisted of 12 performances, each of them dedicated to a particular feminist movement or concept. The performances were photo-documented and published in a (note)book.[6] For the performance, Jansone reworked the term "mothering" and built its analysis on the feminist distinction between mothering and motherhood, where the latter indicates an institution that reproduces patriarchal power and control over women. Mothering, on the contrary, encapsulates a range of positive experiences and views maternal embodiment as a source of empowerment, agency, and social change (Rich 1976; Trebilcot 1983). In a photograph of the performance, Rasa Jansone (in the middle) and two artists from the project's group stand motionless

[6] Apart from Rasa Jansone, artists Ingrīda Pičukāne, Mētra Saberova, Vivianna Maria Stanislavska, Vika Eksta and social anthropologist Anna Žabicka also took part in the project.

against a completely dark background. Their figures appear earnest and sorrowful. Each of them wears a baby's diaper on their faces, precisely like protective face masks worn during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even though the performance does not feature a baby, conceptually, it explicitly references the holy Virgin Mary,[7] who embodies maternity's peaceful and sacred beauty in Western culture. As the superior mother (God's mother), the Virgin Mary has defined the standard of good motherhood. According to the artist[8], this standard has been continuously imposed upon women, even today. The purpose of the performance is not to deny the aesthetic allure of the iconic image of impossible motherhood but to reveal its unattainable demands and how they are used against women. Compared to the Virgin, no woman is good, sacred, and holy enough, and no sacrifice is too big or painful. An excellent excuse for questioning women's rights and justifying gender-based violence is found by positioning women as inferior and flawed. Recent debates about the abortion law in Poland or the hesitance to ratify the Istanbul Convention in Latvia and other countries are profound examples that show the political neglect of women's interests and the reluctance to alleviate their social and corporeal vulnerabilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the corporeal vulnerability of mothers in yet new ways. For example, restrictions from having a supportive person present at birth centers and hospitals have undermined the achievement of the long struggle to prevent the separation of women from their families at birth. Likewise, the demand to wear a face mask for the first stage of labor may intervene with patterns of breathing that are believed to be rather crucial for a successful course of delivery. While these restrictions are necessary to protect the health professionals, they may negatively affect the lived experience and the prospects of maternal flourishing in labor. Ultimately, the pandemic has also aggravated the social and cultural isolation of the mothers of small children since it is not safe anymore even to call a babysitter.

The diaper on the face of each woman is a soft, good-smelling, and seemingly harmless object. Diapers are believed to be an example of technological progress and are considered crucial to facilitate the daily care work of parenting. In addition, the diaper used in the performance is decorated with animal figures to create a more favorable impression. However, this token on the artists' faces of progress and optimism also represents the myths of

[7] The reference is strengthened by the fact that Madonna often appears in other works by Jansone.

[8] From a private conversation with Rasa Jansone [12.12.2020.].

motherhood, referred to by Jansone as "the sweet lies" that in reality resemble the familiar substances found in a used diaper. The diaper confronts the mother's face with its unbreathable depths; the diaper's content is violent and oppressive yet remains invisible from the outside. Notably, the closure of the nose and the mouth also indicates the inability to breathe and speak. Irigaray highlights this double connection when she states that "listening to the other […] is respecting his or her breath" (1996, 121). Irigaray claims that ordinary cultural and interpersonal exchange stifles breath, producing truths that are "breathless, suffocated and suffocating." These breathless truths deceive us by inviting us to breathe less in order to come nearer to "correct thinking," and Irigaray ironically concludes that "death would then be the guarantee of our nearness to truth."

There is little doubt that the feminist account of breathing is more eager to embrace life instead of terminating it. Therefore one of its apparent aims is to recognize and dismiss the "correct thinking." The performance "Mother" succeeds in unfolding the breathlessness of motherhood and renounces the social structures of authoritarian power that is reluctant to listen and respect women, wills to ignore their reproductive rights, does not recognize their specific needs, and consequently inhibits their breathing and flourishing. The suffocated and suffocating truths—the oppressive cultural, economic, and political hierarchies supported by neoliberal capitalism and right-wing policies that increase inequalities—can be counteracted by enhancing mothering as an embodied, emotional and affective experience that fosters resistance and allows women to speak of their political interests and well-being, in other words, to uphold a breathable truth.

For visceral feminism, the breathable truth that might be drawn from the maternal agency of nurturing new life ought to be redefined in terms of sharing, not giving. Whereas the latter suggests life is passed from one person to another, the principle of sharing indicates that life remains with the giver. This view opposes a more traditional understanding of motherhood as a selfless endeavor or sacred victimhood. Instead, it alleviates the unnecessary suffering of women that is often perceived as "natural" and "feminine" and expresses gratitude to the generosity of their bodies. The visceral dimension of sharing life is incredibly vivid in gestation via the transmission of oxygen to the fetus through maternal blood. This unique model of coexistence allows women to engender with their breath, invisibly and silently (Irigaray 2002, 80), which is also an enactment of one's corporeal agency. However, the moment of engendering does not end after giving birth. It continues to be reinforced via care work and affective labor for both the indi-

vidual baby and, more generally, the social and emotional well-being of the community. The breathlessness of mothers in Jansone's performance thus signals that maternal work is often neglected, undervalued, and considered to be self-obvious, a natural extension of femininity, which renders mothering into a condition of increased social and cultural vulnerability.

The principle of sharing breath does not limit itself to mothering only. Living through the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that such engendering is part of our everyday life which unfolds in the commonly shared space of a breath. Despite the regulations of social distancing, the spread of the virus provides enough evidence that one cannot stay outside and have only her air to breathe. The practices of sharing breath might also engender considerations of sharing social and corporeal vulnerabilities, hoping they will not be violated or neglected. We are prone to suffer not only from our breathlessness but also from the breathlessness of others, especially of the most vulnerable social groups. Thus, the pandemic incites rethinking the models of coexistence, mutual interdependency, and breathable transcorporeality not only on a social but visceral level.

Since exposing corporeal vulnerability means to change the political effect of vulnerability by turning it into resistance, the artworks examined in this essay offer two different perspectives to approach the vulnerability of women. By highlighting the gender-based restrictions of the body's visceral (re)actions and encouraging us to ensure some space to breathe, move and act freely, the work of Dace Džeriņa urges to develop corporeal self-awareness understood as a condition for political engagement and social critique. Rasa Jansone, from a different point of view, reveals the corporeal vulnerability of women when their life choices are judged against the standard of suffocating motherhood—an allegedly sacred, while institutionalized and authoritarian ideal. The diapers in her performance and the immobility of the artists' bodies parallel the restrictive regulations introduced because of COVID-19. The similarity of the diaper and the face mask is evocative: while both devices are intended to collect bodily discharges, in Jansone's work, its misplacement causes violence and suffocation. While Jansone has managed to locate the reasons for mothers' breathlessness, it is yet too early to assert which kind of "correct thinking" the pandemic has produced by suffocating truths and which voices are getting silenced or marginalized. Tentatively, however, it could be suggested that the strategies used in many countries to control the spread of the virus have fostered isolation, seclusion, precarity, increased state power, the control of citizens, and reduced political activism. The pandemic has entailed losses for various communities and

social groups, art workers being among them. These losses should be measured not only in economic terms but also in their aggravating impact on one's emotional and corporeal well-being. The similarity with the ideology of motherhood is revealing. In both cases, the rhetoric of suffering's inevitability is evoked, framing governmental failures and the victims of the pandemic (the poor, the unemployed, but also women and children) as "natural" and "unavoidable." Therefore, the commitment to breathe could be the most basic and mundane form of resistance to be performed during the pandemic. The body is not only the battleground of cruel inequalities, but also a resource for the affective and material agency that can be loud, excessive, or hardly discernible.

Research reported in this publication was supported by the project "Women Agency in Latvian Culture and Society", lzp-2020/1-0215.

Bibliography

1. Ahmed Sara (2010), *The Promise of Happiness*, Durham, London: Duke University Press.
2. Alaimo Stacy (2010), *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*, Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
3. Alaimo Stacy, Hekman Susan (eds.) (2008), *Material Feminisms*, Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
4. Baker Mike, Valentino-DeVries Jennifer, Fernandez Manny, LaForgia Michael (2020), "Three Words. 70 Cases. The Tragic History of 'I Can't Breathe", [online] https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/28/us/i-cant-breathe-police-arrest.html [accessed: 20.12.2020].
5. Butler Judith (2004), *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, London, New York: Verso.
6. Butler Judith (2009), *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, London, New York: Verso.
7. Butler Judith (2016), "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance", [in:] J. Butler, Z. Gambetti, L. Sabsay (eds.), *Vulnerability in Resistance*, Durham, London: Duke University Press, pp. 12-27.
8. Fanon Frantz (1994), *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. H. Chevalier, New York: Grove Press.
9. Firestone Shulamith (1998), *Airless Spaces*, New York: Semiotext(e).
10. Grosz Elizabeth (1994), *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
11. Górska Magdalena (2016), *Breathing Matters: Feminist Intersectional Politics of Vulnerability*, Ph.D. thesis, Linköping University.
12. Górska Magdalena (2018), "Feminist Politics of Breathing", [in:] L. Škof, P. Berndtson (eds.), *Atmospheres of Breathing*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, pp. 247-259.

13. Hayes-Conroy Alison, Hayes-Conroy Jessica (2008), "Taking Back Taste: Feminism, Food and Visceral Politics", *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol. 15, pp. 461-473.
14. Irigaray Luce (1985), *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. C. Burke, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
15. Irigaray Luce (1996), "A Breath that Touches in Words", [in:] eadem, *I Love to You: Sketch for a Felicity Within History*, trans. A. Martin, New York, London: Routledge, pp. 121-128.
16. Irigaray Luce (1999), *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. M. B. Mader, Austin: University of Texas Press.
17. Irigaray Luce (2002), "The Way of Breath", [in:] eadem, *Between East and West. From Singularity to Community*, trans. S. Pluhácek, New York: Columbia University Press.
18. Irigaray Luce, Marder Michael (2016), *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives*, New York: Columbia University Press.
19. Kindig Jessie (2020), "Introduction", [in:] J. Kindig *et al.* (eds.), *There Is No Outside, Covid-19 Dispatches*, London, New York: Verso, [online] https://www.versobooks.com/books/3620-there-is-no-outside [accessed: 16.12.2020].
20. Korsmeyer Carolyn (2011), *Savoring Disgust. The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics*, New York: Oxford University Press.
21. LoMauro Antonella, Aliverti Andrea (2018), "Sex Differences in Respiratory Function", *Breathe*, 14 (2), pp. 131-140.
22. Martin Emily (1987), *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
23. Meagher Michelle (2003), "Jenny Saville and a Feminist Aesthetics of Disgust", *Hypatia*, 18 (4), pp. 24-41.
24. Rich Adrienne (1976), *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution*, New York: Norton.
25. Sariahmed Karim (2020), "There is no Outside", [in:] J. Kindig *et al.* (eds.), *There Is No Outside, Covid-19 Dispatches*, London, New York: Verso, [online] https://www.versobooks.com/books/3620-there-is-no-outside [accessed: 16.12.2020].
26. Škof Lenart, Berndtson Petri (2018), "Introduction", [in] L. Škof, P. Berndtson (eds.), *Atmospheres of Breathing*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, pp. ix-xxvii.
27. Trebilcot Joyce (1983), *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, Totowa, N.J: Rowman & Allanheld.
28. Waitt Gordon (2014), "Bodies that sweat: the affective responses of young women in Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia", *Gender, Place & Culture*, 21 (6), pp. 666-682.
29. Winant Gabriel (2020), "Coronavirus and Chronopolitics", [in:] J. Kindig *et al.* (eds.), *There Is No Outside, Covid-19 Dispatches*, London, New York: Verso, [online] https://www.versobooks.com/books/3620-there-is-no-outside [accessed: 16.12.2020].
30. Young Iris Marion (2005), *On Female Body Experience. "Throwing like a girl" and other essays*, New York: Oxford University Press.

61 (2/2021), pp. 113–129
DOI: 10.19205/61.21.7
The Polish Journal of Aesthetics

Marta Maliszewska*

Street Art and the Crisis of Public Space During the Pandemic[1]

Abstract

This paper analyzes the negative impacts of the pandemic and related restrictions on public spaces, and the role of street art as one of the tools to counteract them. I claim that the current crises, epidemiological and socioeconomic, create another type of breakdown: the crisis of public space and the reaction to it. Street art is gaining significance as a voice of political dissent against the appropriation of public space.

Keywords

Street Art, Public Space, *List* [Letter], Subversiveness, Artivism

Introduction

Along with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, post-apocalyptical photographs of deserted metropolises started to circulate online. The abandoned streets strongly appealed to one's imagination, which set off many pandemic-related social anxieties. They looked like the setting of a nightmare. In fact, at the end of March 2020, I experienced the COVID-19 pandemic as such a nightmare, and as Slavoj Žižek notes in *The Appointment in Samara* (2020a), I was not the only one. It was scary, it made me sleepless, but I thought it was soon going to dissolve into thin air (which was un-

* University of Warsaw
Email: mw.maliszewska@student.uw.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-8879-9093

[1] I would like to thank Monika Favara-Kurkowski, Mateusz Salwa, Sebastian Winkler and especially Adam Andrzejewski and Adam Klewenhagen for helping me develop ideas for this paper. I also thank anonymous reviewers and editors of the PJA, who's comments have helped me improve my argumentation, and Agnieszka Ziemińska for the translation.

doubtedly wishful thinking. Still, such thinking was reinforced by the history of the SARS-CoV-1virus and its disappearance). At the time of writing and nearly one year later, my home country, Poland, was facing the third wave of COVID-19. Every day thousands of people were getting infected, and hundreds were dying. The nightmare became a reality, and it started to shape our personal and public lives.

This paper was written during the seemingly never-ending pandemic, in spite of any hope provided by vaccines. As such, the paper indeed overlooks some essential aspects of street art during the crisis, which would be evident from a distanced perspective. Nevertheless, I believe that there is value in analyses written as an immediate response since they allow us to observe surrounding reality more carefully and ground our claims about what we have experienced. Thus, I have decided to focus primarily on what I see: pandemic-related problems in Poland, especially when analyzing an example of the practices of street art. I refer to authors who comment mostly on neoliberal societies of the Global North. However, even in the EU, it is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic is managed differently in various countries. The difference is not caused primarily by divergent scientific reports but by distinct political values in various societies. Therefore, the nature of the phenomena described in this paper has to be seen as local phenomena that reflect global tendencies; the same holds for the nature of street art.[2] I analyze the negative impacts of the pandemic, related restrictions on public spaces, and street art's role as one of the tools to counteract the negative impacts and restrictions. I claim that the current crises, epidemiological and socioeconomic, have created another type of breakdown: a crisis of public space. In reaction to that, street art is gaining significance as a voice of political dissent against the appropriation of public space.

The first section, "The New Normal," discusses the methods of dealing with the pandemic by neoliberal societies of the Global North. I focus explicitly on how the chosen model of crisis management threatens the interests of marginalized groups not only today but also in a future post-pandemic

[2] Recently, I have seen a photo of a girl pinned to the ground by the London police during protests over Sarah Everard's murder. What hit me was the visual resemblance between this photo and scenes from protests against the anti-abortion restrictions in Poland. This aesthetic intuition shows how pandemic-related restrictions are used in different countries to justify violence against those who are fighting for their rights. However, as mentioned above, this parallel would have to be more nuanced and seen in a localized context. See: [online] https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/14/woman-pinned-ground-clapham-vigil-policing-disgraceful-sarah-everard [accessed: 04.04.2021].

reality. By drawing on the works of Grace Blakeley and Žižek, I try to show that more democratic solutions for the COVID-19 pandemic are possible. The second section, "Public Space," analyzes how the underprivileged can use public space to fight for their interests. I also discuss, referencing Margaret Kohn, how Capital devours public space. Both these features of public space—its democratic potential and its disappearance—are crucial in the context of the mechanisms presented in the first section, while the use of public space could play an essential role in creating a fairer "new normal." The following section, "Street Art," is devoted to street art theories, mostly Andrea Baldini's concept of street art that underlines street art's subversive potential. In the section "Street Art during the Pandemic," I claim that the subversive potential of street art can be used as a tool in the political struggle for justice that takes place in public space, which is even more endangered during the pandemic. In light of the current restrictions on gatherings, street art can be considered their equivalent, reminding us that there are still voices that need to be heard and that not everyone accepts the leading neoliberal narrative. In the last section, "*List* [Letter]," I present a work of pandemic street art performed in May 2020 in Warsaw, highlighting how street art can practically function as an ally to pro-democratic and pro-worker movements.

"The New Normal"

One of the major themes of many conversations, especially in the early days of the pandemic, was about the first thing we would do when we return to business as usual or when everything "goes back to normal." This question resulted from believing that we could go back to an unchanged, pre-pandemic reality (conceivably with an increased appreciation for everything previously taken for granted). However, as Žižek (2020a, 9) notes, what is waiting for us after dealing with the pandemic is a "new normal": "Our first reaction to the virus was to regard it as just a nightmare from which we would soon awaken. Now we know this will not happen, we will have to learn to live in a viral world, a new way of living will have to be painfully reconstructed." The look of this painfully recreated "new normal" depends not only on constantly changing reports from virologists but also on reactions to the increasingly visible breakdown of the current socioeconomic system.

The appearance of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the COVID-19 disease, is a biological fact. However, it is impossible to understand the dynamics of the pandemic's development by considering it in isolation from how capital-

ism works. Andrew Liu (2020, 33) writes in *"Chinese Virus," World Market*: "In recounting the story of the novel coronavirus, it becomes increasingly clear that its movements have thus far mimicked the pathways of the 21st-century global market." The current speed of spreading the illness would have been impossible without the mass movement of people and goods. Governments have introduced restrictions in such a way as to minimize their impact on the economy, which comes down to counting how many more lives can be sacrificed for the rich to get richer. As a result of growing unemployment, monopolists can afford to ignore even the basic restrictions created by governments.[3] Contrary to early assurances that "we are all in this together" and that the coronavirus is in itself "democratic," it turns out that the marginalized bear the burden of the pandemic's costs.[4]

The pandemic painfully exposes the rules of the capitalist system. As Blakeley (2020) notes in *The Corona Crash*, the pandemic does not change the logic of capitalism but rather intensifies specific worrying mechanisms previously seen in public life. According to her, the narrative of modern capitalism and its practice has been significantly disconnected, at least since the 2008 crisis, and the current crisis has only confirmed this: "Free market, competitive capitalism—if it ever actually existed—is dead" (Blakeley, 2020, 106). Competitive capitalism has been replaced by a planned economy of corporate welfare in which public subsidies support supranational institutions, market whales and wolves, granted not even to all businesses but the largest among them. Such "socialism for the rich, capitalism for the poor," together with the already existing monopolization of the biggest markets, results in even greater wealth inequality between the 1%, a small group of capitalists, and the rest, a subordinate majority, all while developing crises are increasingly affecting broader social groups. The political class has taken action in support of this mechanism. Such action leads to the subordination of democratic values to the power of Capital. Global corporations effectively bear no responsibility for the work conditions they offer or the ecological consequences of their actions and remain free from accountability.

Politicians worldwide voted for multimillion-dollar subsidies for businesses, while few countries have decided to condition them on regulatory policies, such as paying taxes in the country where they make profits, abid-

[3] See: [online] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-amazon-france-idUSKCN2261YQ [accessed: 20.12.2020].

[4] See: [online] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/933225/S0824_SARS-CoV-2_Transmission_routes_and_environments.pdf [accessed: 20.12.2020].

ing by workers' rights, or introducing pro-environmental practices. However, as Blakeley notes, these current conditions create an opportunity to introduce democratic control over Capital by conditioning subsidies on the factors mentioned earlier. If we have already agreed, as a society, that we live by *default* in a planned economy, not a free market one, the only question that remains to be posed is who should benefit from this planning by default. As we have seen so far, if we consent to the capitalist lobby's influence on these actions, the post-pandemic reality, given the economic crisis and growing power of monopolists, will indeed turn out to be post-apocalyptic. Žižek (2020b, 108) puts it in a nutshell in *Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World*, paraphrasing Rosa Luxemburg: "Communism or barbarism, as simple as that!"

The processes that shape modern capitalism by monopolizing money and power and at the same time limiting workers' rights are reflected not only in working conditions but also in other aspects of public life. One of them is the restriction of public space, which is vanishing as a place of political struggle. In the next section, I will analyze this and discuss some of the social risks it brings.

Public Space

The concept of public space may seem intuitive; however, it is not as evident as it may seem. According to what Kohn writes in *Brave New Neighborhoods* (2004), the distinctive factor of public space is that one may conduct political dispute within it. It is a space where the representatives of various social groups can meet and express their political interests more or less spectacularly. Sometimes the conflicts between differing visions of society take the form of manifestation and counter-manifestation. However, just as often, the mere presence of the representatives of certain groups may be a source of discomfort for others (Kohn gives the example of the middle-class being reluctant to share space with people experiencing homelessness). This understanding of public space does not incorporate all the places traditionally described as such. For a dispute to be possible in a specific space, it cannot be private property (since the owner can dictate the rules of using a particular space), but it also must be available to everyone, not just *de iure*, but *de facto*, and it has to create conditions for incidental contact between strangers. Only under these conditions do conflicts of interest become visible in a particular space, making it public.

Public space and all aspects of public debate could be understood in the context of Jacques Rancière's (2013) "distribution of the sensible" presented in *The Politics of Aesthetics*. He notes that the dominant discourse is based on the exclusion of voices of those presented as incapable of speaking for themselves. As such, marginalized groups do not have their representation and lack the power to fight for their interests. Everything that they try to say is presented as insufficient for recognition by the rest of society. Different institutions act to erase subversive voices; one is the rational voice, which presents every affective struggle as pointless. In the end, only those who possess enough capital and clout (financial or social) are taken seriously. The demands of other groups, especially those endangering the interests of Capital, are silenced. They will remain silenced as long as the underprivileged do not unite and threaten the existing power relations. That is why public space plays such an essential role in social struggle. Public space is relatively less controlled than other social institutions, and also, those who have nothing except their bodies can use it to produce their counter-discourse.

An excellent example of this is the social movement Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (The All-Poland Women's Strike). When thousands of people took to the streets in October 2020 (not once, not twice, but for a few months already, and this struggle continues) to protest a practically total abortion ban in Poland, they posed demands that no Polish politicians from almost any party could articulate. Mainstream media, not only on the pro-government side but also oppositional media, stuck to the conservative storytelling that the Polish political class has consolidated since the '90s. They could not, without hesitation, express the pro-choice demands formulated by Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet. Not to mention the protesters' motto, *wypierdalać* or "Get the fuck out," mirrored people's frustration following from the more severe restriction of what is already one of the strictest abortion laws in the EU. The street was one of the few places where peoples' demands could be expressed out loud.

Public space, understood this way becomes the place of forming communities unified by the struggle for their rights. It is also one of the few places where people from different social groups can meet each other, enabling unobvious alliances. Communities created in these conditions are not bound by hegemonic discourse—on the contrary, according to Chantal Mouffe's and Ernesto Laclau's book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), their democratic potential comes from revealing the existence of distinct interests. The mere presence of members of different social groups in a public space makes it one of the few places where the inevitability of social conflict is

exposed. Kohn (2004, 162) writes: "One purpose of public space is to overcome this stratification and provide an occasion for contact between people from different subcultures, residential enclaves, and social classes. As long as social space remains segregated, then it cannot foster a sense of solidarity." Democracy and solidarity can be advanced only when members of different social groups can meet and reveal antagonisms. Therefore, the existence of both is impossible without public space.

However, public space is systematically appropriated by Capital. As Kohn writes, one place after the other becomes "a grey area" where conflict and disputes are erased to ensure the feeling of familiarity and safety for the privileged users of these spaces, and above all, to not violate the status quo. Shopping centers are an example of such a space. They present themselves as modern marketplaces; however, unlike those, they are managed in such a way as to exclude certain types of activity (primarily broadly understood political activity, but also to minimize any non-consumptive activity) and people (primarily people experiencing homelessness). Baldini, in *Street Art, Decorum, and the Politics of Urban Aesthetics* (2020), analyzes another way of public space appropriation by showing how those in power use certain aesthetic concepts (like decorum) for the same purpose as analyzed by Kohn, that is to exclude types of people and activities. This process of aesthetic war creates a "Disneylanded" public space. It is "clean, safe, but fundamentally inauthentic" (Baldini, 2020). A community made in such conditions turns out to be a select group of consumers, united by lifestyle and privilege. Kohn (2004, 106) notes that contemporarily "private simulacra come to substitute for public space." Various projects, sending the message captured by the slogan "we are all in this together," built such a simulacrum of community during the pandemic. As part of one of these projects, hashtags such as #hope, #solidarity, #stayhome, or #AllOfUs were projected on Matterhorn mountain in the Alps. A seemingly inclusive message of transnational and transclass unity exposed its exclusive nature with a slogan that appeared on the mountain aimed at a select group of consumers and read: "Dream now—travel later."

Different strategies have been developed to resist the loss of public space (in Poland, especially in Warsaw, in the era of "wild re-privatization," such as grassroots cultural centers created in squats). In the next section, I discuss how street art can be understood as artistic expression and as a weapon in the struggle for public space. It is not essential to accept the etiology of public space and democracy crises that I have presented in the two previous sections above to agree with my argument about street art's role during the

pandemic, which I present in the following section. One can argue that street art plays a vital role in representing marginalized voices regardless of how the capitalist system works. However, my focus on the context of contemporary capitalism comes from the belief that the role of critical philosophy is to unveil mechanisms of power existing in our society, including erasing public space in favor of Capital's interests. The division between those who are heard and silenced is not accidental since different forms of discrimination are functional for dominant power relations. So, I have tried to capture the processes of marginalization to understand street art as a theater of this struggle.

Street Art

Street art has been extensively analyzed, and there are various theoretical approaches to defining what "street art" actually is. One of the most cited definitions was proposed by Nick Riggle in his article *Street Art: The Transfiguration of the Commonplaces* (2010), where he connects the essence of this type of art to it being used to create the street. In other words, a work of street art is a work that loses some of its aesthetic or interpretive value when "taken out of" the urban space in which it was created. However, due to my claim that the pandemic affects mainly the political properties of street art, I would like to cite a theory proposed in *Street Art: A Reply to Riggle* (2016) by Baldini, who focuses primarily on the political context when defining street art.

According to Baldini, a feature of street art is the subversiveness of its form: "Street artworks, including those who are not politically conscious, are subversive in a different and more profound sense: they challenge norms and conventions regulating acceptable uses of public space." (2016, 188). By claiming the right to grassroots expression in a public space, street art questions power and Capital's monopoly to shape narrative. This change concerns how space looks (a street art intervention changes what the place looks like) and how it is used and perceived. A passive viewer, a consumer in constant transit, becomes an active creator who fights for the right to occupy and shape public space.

A recurring question in the context of defining street art is its legality. I agree with Baldini's and Pamela Petrucci's thesis *from Knitting a Community Back Together* (2017) that street art does not have to be illegal to be subversive.[5] Questioning property rights is one of its subversive forms, but

[5] Baldini elaborates on the complicated relationship between street art and law in his book *A Philosophy Guide to Street Art and the Law* (2018).

not the only one. Baldini and Perucci argue that without breaking the existing law, or rather by exploiting its loopholes, street art can question the hegemonic discourse in the spirit of Rancière's "distribution of the sensible." Art can be used to create counter-representations and restore the voices of the silenced. Street art, as a type of such practice, can introduce erased perspective into the public space. Sondra Bacharach in *Finding Your Voice in the Streets* (2018) recalls a project, *Stop Telling Women to Smile* by Tatyana Fazlalizadeh, to show how street art can be used to give justice to those who are experiencing epistemic injustice, and by doing so, change the dominant discourse. Tony Chackal refers to the same project in *Of Materiality and Meaning* (2016). He distinguishes between a work's illicitness, understood similarly to what I have reconstructed, and its illegality: "When works are illegal, this is at first a nonaesthetic feature of the form or production process. When they are illicit, this is an aesthetic feature of the work's content: what it expresses, depicts, represents, or means. But these divisions are blurry and involve overlap rather than being strictly demarcating" (2016, 368). Even if illegality is not essential for a piece of art to be classified as street art, it can still contribute to its materiality and meaning.

In *Street Art and Consent* (2015), Bacharach points to another feature of street art, which seems especially important to its subversiveness. In her view, street art changes the perception of public space not only on the part of its creators but also its audience: street art "challenge[s] (and change[s]) the viewer's experience of his/her environment" (2015, 481). I would add, citing Joe Austin's *More to see than a canvas in a white cube*, that street art provides "a way of seeing something new: an-other visual order is possible, and so an-other city is possible, and so an-other life is possible as well" (2010, 44). Even if street art interventions do not remain in place for very long (due to their temporary nature or exposure to damage), they permanently leave a trace in the community. By shaping a new understanding of public space by its members, or rather a new understanding of their role as potential creators of that space, they also shape the identity of a particular community. By showing that the hegemonic narrative of power is just a way of colonizing public space and not the only way of creating it, street art symbolically gives back agency to its users.

The political nature of street art and its objection to hegemonic storytelling results not only from the type of content expressed in these works. Similar to the case of marginalized groups, its mere presence in public space exposes the existence of conflict. Street art highlights alternative narratives and ways of using public space while being one of the ways of participating

in a political dispute. The communal aspect of street art can be understood in the context of alliances discussed by Kohn—alliances between people who were previously strangers, for whom public space creates a place to meet. The power of such a community comes not from accepting the same opinions but from a unified call for hearing voices excluded from the neoliberal debate.

As I have mentioned initially, nearly all aspects of our lives are now affected by the pandemic.[6] This affect is no different with public space and street art. During the lockdown-related restrictions in public space, the importance of this kind of art as a means in social struggle has grown significantly. I argue in favor of this claim in the next section.

Street Art during the Pandemic

With the pandemic and introduction of lockdown measures in many countries, the vanishing of public spaces has intensified. The narrative of individual survival, a reflection of the earlier glorification of individual success in neoliberal narrative, has also been reflected in approaches to space. Communal space and community itself have been identified with the danger from which a private home protects. Like in the stories about closing town gates in fear of the coming plague, we have been convinced to barricade ourselves in private fortresses (which for some meant an escape to a private island, for others staying in their apartment, and for a significant number of people a choice between staying in a potentially epidemically dangerous hotel for people experiencing homelessness or a complete lack of shelter). In many places across the world, among them in Poland, politicians seem to agree that in the time of the pandemic, the function of public places should be reduced to transit and perhaps consumption (thus, ironically, they are to serve the same functions which are closely linked to spreading the virus).

Meanwhile, any other activity must be limited to activity in small groups, or even better, individual activity, in line with strict regulations. The police ensure compliance in many places, and therefore breaking pandemic restrictions becomes a severe felony against public order. Especially at the beginning of the pandemic, there have been numerous physical interventions of the government into city space, such as closing playgrounds, parks or removing benches. With more knowledge gained about COVID-19, virolo-

[6] It is still very important to emphasize, that they are often affected in very different ways: for some it is a lack of winter holidays in Switzerland, and for many children in Poland a lack of space to study during remote learning.

gists declared that contact in open spaces is relatively safe (Bulfone *et al.* 2020), and thus many countries have decided to open consumer spaces such as shopping centers. However, using public space remains under strict regulations. Two types of coercion, legal and physical, and the long-term nature of these solutions result in the fading of community created within a public space. Random interactions with strangers become impossible, and thus the dispute about the desired shape of society is silenced. Therefore, the COVID-19 crises are the epidemiological and economic crisis and the crisis of public space. I am not trying to question the seriousness of the threat the virus brings to human lives, far from it. Nor do I downplay the need for restrictions to limit the spread of the virus. However, as I have mentioned in the introduction, these restrictions are based not only on virologists' reports. An important factor at play (and one which causes the differences in measures taken in pandemically similar countries) are political values and governmental recognition of the interests of diverse groups in society. That is why induced restrictions concerning using public space must be discussed as remedies in the face of the pandemic and considered from a political perspective.

In light of the three crises mentioned earlier, one might think that the crisis of public space is not as important as the other two. However, as David Harvey (2008) notes in *The Right to the City*, both historical and contemporary urbanization processes must be considered as one form of capital accumulation. The development of capitalism is closely linked to what form public space takes. "Grey areas," which are substitutes for this space, do not fulfill the important (from a democratic perspective) function of creating space for dispute. The disappearance of public space erases conflict from social consciousness and serves to silence narratives against the dominant discourse. As I have mentioned before, it is especially significant for groups with limited access to neoliberal debate. Public space is the only place to express their interests and create communities and alliances. Its disappearance means erasing voices opposing the monopoly of power and Capital from social consciousness. This phenomenon is even more worrying today when as Balkeley notes, monopolies are gaining power, and only united resistance will shape the "new normal" according to democratic values.

In the light of the public space crisis, street art's political function understood in the spirit of Rancière, becomes more significant. The subversive nature of public space that Baldini writes about enables questioning the hegemonic discourse that gives power and Capital the right to shape public space. It is even more critical given that as a result of pandemic-

related restrictions and market changes which Blakeley discusses, this right becomes a monopoly, and as a result, public space understood as a place of conflict ceases to exist. The only way to save it is to ensure that the interests of marginalized groups remain represented on the streets, even when they are empty. They will not be represented through commercial advertisements or a spectacle of power played out, as an exception, during national holidays in a pandemic public space. They might, however, be represented by grassroots movements of micro-resistance in the form of street art activity. Even when the streets are empty, they remind us that it is not a result of unified acceptance of the dominant narrative. In place of the absent bodies, they symbolically mark the existence of a community that expresses their resistance by introducing alternative narratives into the public space. By claiming the right to public space, they claim it for those who protest on the streets despite the restrictions and those deprived of this right by force or fear: they struggle for the right to position democratic values above the interests of Capital. One example of such a claim is the street art performance *List*, which I discuss in the next section.

List [Letter]

In the context of the presented theories the performance *List* [Polish for "letter"] by Marta Czyż, Marianna Dobkowska, Magdalena Drągowska, Michał Frydrych, Karolina Grzywnowicz, Yulia Krivich, Julia Minasiewicz, Jan Możdżyński, Kuba Rudziński, Weronika Zalewska, and Paweł Żukowski, and its significance can be better understood. On May 6th, 2020, the artists walked through the center of Warsaw carrying a 14-meter-long and 2-meter-wide banner made to look like an envelope. According to the banner's address data, the senders of the letter were the citizens, and the recipient was the Polish Sejm.[7] Especially eye-catching was a large inscription reading "ŻYĆ NIE, UMIERAĆ" [TO NOT LIVE, TO DIE][8] and postal stamps with an image of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The banner references a work by Tadeusz Kantor, a Polish avant-garde artist who organized a similar happening in

[7] The lower house of the Polish parliament

[8] The slogan is a play on words of a Polish saying "Żyć nie umierać" literally "to live, to not die" which is translated as "Life could not be any better," "this is the life," "life's a bed of roses," "what more can you ask for?" or "it's heaven on earth," and even as something "to die for." The Polish idiom is used to describe an extremely good situation, which could not get any better (and so it would be a shame to die in this moment). Adding the comma between the negation (nie) and die (umierać) changes the meaning to: "to not live, to die."

1967. One can question whether performance art, in general, could be understood as street art. However, in the context of the previously discussed theories that primarily underline its subversiveness and immersion in public space, I believe it is legitimate to classify this particular case as street art. On the other hand, even referring to Riggles's classical definition, one can show that *List* drew its interpretative values from being placed on the street, which I analyze in the following paragraphs.

Since the end of Polish President Andrzej Duda's first term was approaching, the presidential election was supposed to occur on May 10th, 2020. Due to the worsening epidemiological situation, the ruling party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [Law and Justice] introduced and voted for a bill on conducting the election by mail. This proposal was criticized by lawyers, non-governmental organizations, the Polish Commissioner for Human Rights, and European institutions. Duda's rivals were also against the measure, pointing out, among other things, that due to the pandemic situation, campaigning has been impossible. However, according to polls at the time, the support for Duda (representing PiS) was diminishing, and a snap election increased his chances of winning. Despite the opposition's protest, the ruling party was preparing the infrastructure for postal voting, and it was only an internal conflict between PiS and their coalition parties in government that led to officially abandoning the idea on May 7th, 2020.

For a month, Polish citizens were living in uncertainty about the May 10th elections, surrounded by an atmosphere of chaos and absurdity. The possibility of conducting an election was seen as a health risk for all society, especially for mail carriers and other postal workers. Without detailed safety procedures, about 25 thousand mail carriers would be forced to deliver 30 million voting packages personally. The issue of delivering voting packages to those sick with the SARS-CoV-2 virus remained unsolved. The announcement of voting by mail led to protests from postal workers, criticism from representatives of labor unions, and a grassroots committee was threatening to strike. The social media profile "Pocztowcy czas na strajk" [Postal workers, it is time for a strike] posted: "It is time to mobilize! Postal voting will take place at the expense of our health and life! The government is wading into this craziness over our dead bodies! By working together, we can stop this!"[9]

[9] See: [online] https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,173952,25853786,listonosze-skrzykuja-sie-na-strajk-przed-wyborami-rzad-brnie.html [accessed: 20.12.2020].

When planning the happening, artists were conscientious about making sure it was in line with covid restrictions: they wore masks the whole time, the distance between them was 2,36m, and they had documents from Bęc Zmiana Foundation confirming that they are performing work duties commissioned by the foundation. Despite that, the police accompanied them throughout their march. At first, police officers did not record any violations, but when the artists reached Parliament, police tried to punish them with fines, which they refused to accept. Police also reported them to Sanitary Inspection, which fined two of the participants 10,000 PLN (approx. $2,700). The fines were revoked after the intervention of Adam Bodnar, the Commissioner for Human Rights.

The police intervention during the performance *List* illustrates how broad the matter of street art (il)legality is. The action was *de iure* legal, as proven by the revoking of fines, but police made it *de facto* illegal. In this case, the subversiveness of the work was based on acting strictly according to the pandemic regulations. It was subversive because it complied with the restrictions and worked against the government's intentions. In the spirit of "making use" of art practices, propagated by Stephen Wright in *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* (2013), this action exploited loopholes in the system of restrictions to expose its logic. On the one hand, it showed the absurdities: one may be at work, but one cannot protest; what if protesting is the artists' job? On the other, it meant that the performance could not be stopped using existing procedures. Despite that, the police decided to punish the artists by using pandemic restrictions as justification. We can recall here Chackal's claim *a rebus*: Street artworks can gain meaning from *legality* (2016, 369).

To interpret the aesthetic values of *List*, defined chiefly by its subversiveness, one cannot ignore the police intervention. Even if artists did not assume it (although we may guess that they were prepared for that), it still significantly contributed to the work's meaning. Different groups' contributions to an artwork over which the artist does not have any control is another feature of street art that creates its authenticity, as Adam Andrzejewski claims (2017, 175).[10] We can imagine the police would not intervene if *List* were to be performed in a museum or some other art institution (or this intervention would mean something different to the work's interpretation)—only when performed outside did it gain its subversive nature.

[10] Andrzejewski writes about these contributions as spontaneous. It may seem that it is not a proper adjective to describe police interventions, but as an eyewitness to a few of them during the Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet I believe that they are often not well-conceived.

The place of the police intervention in front of Parliament was also not random. Street art theorists (Chackal, 2016) and practitioners often emphasize the significance of location for street art practices. The more visible and dangerous the location of a localized artwork means that it is seen as more prestigious in the street art world. The case of *List* shows that these are often localizations of powerful institutions trying to exclude counter-narratives from their surroundings and take control over visibility.

Using their artistic skills, participants in the performance presented postal workers' demands in a public space. The desperate reaction of government officials to *List* shows that this type of visibility is a means in the struggle for the rights of marginalized groups. Paradoxically, by trying to suppress this form of protest, the officials ensured a larger audience, i.e., it resulted in the Streisand effect. The media started showing pictures of the banner, which was supposed to result in a fine of 20,000 PLN. These actions in the spirit of artivism assume that their aesthetic properties are equally important to the message they send. In this case, the context of the artistic avant-garde of Kantor's performance was an excuse to take on an essential social demand. The slogan "TO NOT LIVE, TO DIE" raised the issue that postal workers pointed out in their threat of striking. Faced with the danger of epidemiologically terrible work conditions experienced by many workers during the pandemic forced by employers to risk their health and life, postal workers gained unlikely allies: artists. This work illustrates the double meaning of street art in the face of a crisis of public space during the pandemic. It is fighting to reclaim public space once again by exposing the conflict that has been erased while exposing the mechanisms of state power that exploit pandemic-related restrictions to erase contrary discourses and appropriate public space.

By taking the protest to the street, the artists claimed public space as a space of conflict. Contrary to the narrative about "national unanimity," they reminded us that there is a significant crack in society regarding judging the government's actions. It soon turned out that *List* was a precursor to how a few months later, the pandemic-related restrictions would be used to crack down on any sign of disagreement in public space and become a symbol of the hundreds of summons from police stations that protesters in Poland are now receiving.

Conclusion

Public space from which the community has been pushed out stops being public. It becomes an empty place of power and Capital acting together. In such conditions, street art becomes a tool for reclaiming this space by exposing the mechanisms of its appropriation and introducing alternative narratives into it. The subversive nature of such activities makes public space a place to stand up for the right to the city, as Harvey (2008, 23) notes: "The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city." Both this right and a democratic community are much more endangered during the pandemic. By changing the city, street art is a form of micro-resistance that also changes us. The revolution predicted by Žižek and Blakeley thus has an essential ally in street art. After all, as Austin (2010, 44) writes: "A revolution that does not allow citizens to write on the city walls can be no revolution at all."

Bibliography

1. Andrzejewski Adam (2017), "Authenticity Manifested. Street Art and Artification", *Rivista di estetica*, 64, pp. 168-185.
2. Austin Joe (2010), "More to see than a canvas in a white cube. For an art in the streets", *City*, 14, pp. 33-47.
3. Bacharach Sondra (2015), "Street Art and Consent", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 55, pp. 481-495.
4. Bacharach Sondra (2018), "Finding Your Voice in the Streets. Street Art and Epistemic Injustice", *The Monist*, 101, pp. 31-43.
5. Baldini Andrea (2016), "Street Art: A Reply to Riggle", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 74.2, pp. 187-191.
6. Baldini Andrea, Petrucci Pamela (2017), "Knitting a Community Back Together. Post-Disaster Public Art as Citizenship Engagement", [in:] L. Iannelli, P. Musarò (eds.), *Territories of Political Participation. Public Art, Urban Design, and Performative Citizenship*, Milano: Mimesis International, pp. 115-132.
7. Baldini Andrea (2020), "Street Art, Decorum, and the Politics of Urban Aesthetics", *Contemporary Aesthetics*, 8, [online] https://contempaesthetics.org/2020/07/16/street-art-decorum-and-the-politics-of-urban-aesthetics/: [accessed: 03.04.2021].
8. Blakeley Grace (2020), *The Corona Crash. How the Pandemic Will Change Capitalism*, London, New York: Verso.
9. Bulfone Tommaso Celeste *et al.* (2020), *Outdoor Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and Other Respiratory Viruses, a Systematic Review*, [online] https://academic.oup.com/jid/advance-article/doi/10.1093/infdis/jiaa742/6009483 [accessed: 30.12.2020].

10. Chackal Tony (2016), "Of Materiality and Meaning. The Illegality Condition in Street Art", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 74, pp. 359-370.
11. Harvey David (2008), "The Right to the City", *New Left Review*, 53, pp. 23-40.
12. Kohn Margaret (2004), *Brave New Neighborhoods. The Privatization of Public Space*, London, New York: Routledge.
13. Laclau Ernesto, Mouffe Chantal (1985), *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London: Verso.
14. Liu Andrew (2020), *"Chinese Virus", World Market*, [in:] J. Kinding *et al.* (eds.), *There Is No Outside. COVID-19 Dispatches*, London, New York: Verso, pp. 20-54.
15. Rancière Jacques (2013), *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. G. Rockhill, London: Bloomsbury.
16. Riggle Nick (2010), "Street Art: The Transfiguration of the Commonplaces", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 68, pp. 243-257.
17. Wright Stephen (2013), *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum.
18. Žižek Slavoj (2020a), "The Appointment in Samara. A New Use for Some Old Jokes", *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, 14, pp. 1-17.
19. Žižek Slavoj (2020b), *Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World*, London, New York: OR Books.

61 (2/2021), pp. 131–143 | The Polish Journal
DOI: 10.19205/61.21.8 | of Aesthetics

Michele Sorice*, Simone Antonucci**

Drawing the Virus. The Representation of COVID-19 in Italian Comics

Abstract

Through the perspective of Cultural Semiotics, this article aims to show how Italian comic book creators have represented the tragic event of the coronavirus pandemic during the first lockdown (between March and May 2020) imposed by Giuseppe Conte's government. By analyzing the works produced during this timeframe, we attempt to identify the main ways the pandemic was depicted. We will focus on the representation of time and space, the double status of the virus (as an agent and condition), and creators' different textual strategies.

Keywords

Comics, Italy, COVID-19, Semiotics, Media, New Media, Culture

Introduction

The following article presents a semiotic and cultural analysis of different comics, webcomics, and animated videos published in Italy during the three-month quarantine (from March to May 2020) declared by the Italian government to fight the rise and spread of COVID-19. As a result of this, our primary goal is to shed light on the perception of the pandemic in Italian culture and show how cultures signify and define traumatic events through semiotic and aesthetic devices, including visual media. This objective has

* University of Bologna
Email: michele.sorice@studio.unibo.it

** University of Bologna
Email: simone.antonucci@studio.unibo.it

indeed required a multidisciplinary approach, as the cultural dominion of comic books and animations is inherently linked with new media. Moreover, the pandemic crisis has questioned the relationship between individuals and technology, media, and social interactions, making the cultural representation of this crisis not only a textual but a cultural and cross-medial issue.

As we will see in much more detail later, our analysis focused on three main areas of representation, which are to be considered reference categories to map how COVID-19 has been imagined thematically. The mentioned areas are the depiction of time, space, and the virus itself. Furthermore, this article will be dedicated to mediality, as it represents a transversal category with which all the others are articulated and interlinked.

Therefore, the following essay will be divided as follows: after a brief introduction, where we explain our case study and method, we present the analysis results, which consist of the identification and definition of the areas mentioned above. Finally, we draw some conclusions about the role of the mediascape in the construction of *cultural unities* (Eco 1976, 57) and how and why comics represented COVID-19 during the Italian pandemic crisis.

Why Comics?

We will deal with comics as a medium, with the most common publishing, especially with works posted on social networks such as Facebook and Instagram, including pictures and text. Although not actual comics, the latter are nevertheless the work of leading authors in the Italian comic books scene, such as the animated videos proposed by the artist Zerocalcare on the La7 TV channel on Diego Bianchi's show "Propaganda Live." Even though our work considers only a small portion of Italian culture, it can be placed in a broader context and a more strictly semiotic perspective: texts that use visual language prevalently.

Visual language has embodied one of the preferred codes to make sense of the pandemic. In the Italian context, for example, numerous emblematic images spread through media and new media: the picture of the virus taken using an electron microscope, often used by numerous cartoonists; posters on balconies, usually depicting a rainbow reading the slogan 'Everything will be fine'; photographs of doctors, nurses and health personnel exhausted by work shifts; the tragic succession of trucks full of Covid victims in Bergamo; but also images of institutional events, such as Pope Francis' Easter Mass in the empty St. Peter's Square.

The criterion with which we have built our corpus is that of socio-cultural relevance. It seems that Italian comics have been experiencing a moment of considerable expansion during the last few years. In this regard, Dallavalle (2020) conducted a meticulous data analysis about the state of health of this market, combining different sources such as the reports of AIE (Italian Publishers Association) and ISTAT (the national institute of statistics). The work showed that "[Italian] comics have been living a golden age for the last twenty years, at least as far as the media attention is concerned [our translation]" (Dallavalle 2020, 12) (Tab. 1).

Table 1: Yearly publications and comic book publications in the Italian market

Year	New Publication/Year	Comic Books	% of Comics in Total
2000	54 245	347	0.6%
2010	84 696	1 624	1.9%
Δ% (2000/2010)	+56.1%	+368%	+216.6%
2018	134 948	4 705	3.5%
Δ% (2010/2018)	+59.3%	+189.7%	+84.2%

Source: Informazioni Editoriali, July 31, 2019 (ie-online.it).

Therefore, the analyzed creators are significant figures in Italian media, so much so that their drawings and words play a significant role in the epistemic processes of production, reproduction, and interpretation of the reality in which the Italian audience lives. Among the most relevant authors, we may name: Zerocalcare, who is currently a best-selling author and has achieved fame through self-production; Leo Ortolani, creator of Rat-Man, one of the most influential comic characters in the Italian Comics scene; Marco Tonus, a graphic designer and cartoonist who has collaborated with numerous magazines and newspapers such as "l'Unità," "l'Internazionale," "il Vernacoliere" and "il Male"; and many other cartoonists such as Gipi, Davide Toffolo, Maicol&Mirco, Sio, and Grazia La Padula, who contributed to the collective project Come Vite distanti.

For context, the works quoted will be listed and briefly described in Table 2.

Table 2: Content of the quoted texts

	Author(s)	Publishing	Content
COme VIte Distanti	Various authors referring to ARF!, a Roman comic festival	A different artist drew 78 boards, constituting a single comic book— published daily on Facebook and the ARF! official site	The story's protagonist is a young man who can magically travel through different homes thanks to a magic red door
Various comic strips	Leo Ortolani	Facebook posts	The strips describe in a comical and often exaggerated way the life of the author during the quarantine
Rebibbia Quarantine	Zerocalcare (Michele Rech)	Short animated videos presented on TV and posted online	The focus of the videos is the author's neighborhood, Rebibbia, and the life of its people during quarantine
Pangolino	Marco Tonus et al.	Limited-edition book (1000 copies printed)	A parody of the famous 'Mickey Mouse' comic strip, in which the typical elements of the Disney magazine are revisited in a satirical way

Source: ours.

Select Theoretical and Methodological Note

The present study can be situated in the field of cultural semiotics. Therefore, our ultimate analysis is concerned with Italian culture itself, specifically, both diachronic and synchronic segments of Italian culture that we call the Italian "semiosphere" (*cf.* Lotman 1985). We believe, along with Lotman, that culture is a complex system of signs that needs to be taken into account holistically. We feel close to the perspective that views the semiotics of culture centered on texts and codes of signification (Lorusso 2009, 1.1): an observer needs to work from texts to understand cultural trends, perceiving texts as *cultural functions* that envision their functioning within a given

system. In addition to the Lotmanian theory of culture, we will refer to the so-called "generative semiotics," which can be traced back to Greimas's works (*cf.* Greimas 1982; 2002) and provides a well-stocked toolbox for the qualitative analysis of texts.

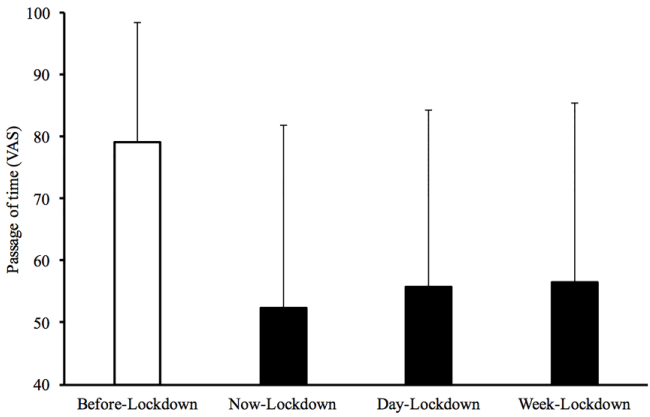
Research Results

The Representation of Time: a Model of Seriality between Iterative Development and Suspension

Whereas photos and audiovisual material convey a strong effect of instantaneity, the comic strip brings a different temporality representation. As stated by Daniele Barbieri in *Semiotica del fumetto*, the comic medium puts a certain amount of time on stage: strips "contain in their representation a certain amount of time [our translation]" (Barbieri 2017, 96), which would be the time needed to read the balloons, the diegetic spaces, and the topological distribution of the page.

Comics, therefore, allow to portrait a rather specific representation of time, and it can be interesting to understand how different authors have staged the perception of time during the sanitary emergency and, in particular, the lockdown period. In fact, according to a study carried out by a research team of the University of Clermont Auvergne (Volet, Gil, et al., 2020), the passage of time during this period was perceived by individuals in isolation in a different, generally slower way (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: The mean passage of time for the period before the lockdown and during the lockdown, i.e., the now, the day, and the week



Source: Volet, Gil et al., 2020.

In addition to diegetic reading time, however, we need to analyze the pacing of media development to find the relationship between the time perceived by individuals during the lockdown and comics' time as a medium. Therefore, we will analyze comic production and publication forms, as they reflect Italian people's practices.

The comics' seriality is pertinent to the perception of time in Italian society during the lockdown. Seriality is a common element of an endless number of media creations and consists of the recurrence of different elements (protagonist, places, *et cetera*) in each episode of the text in question. If we consider these works in their entirety, we can observe the presence of two different ways through which temporality is articulated: iterative (daily) and durative (referring to lockdown times). In "Come VIte Distanti," for example, we have on one hand almost all the panels following one another with the same iterative structure: Leo, the protagonist, enters and exits different houses through a magical threshold; nevertheless, on the other hand, a single, coherent, and therefore durative, narrative path is delineated throughout the whole story.

This kind of recursive or "spiral" (Barbieri 2017, 100) seriality, although very common in the comic world, could be considered as a codification of individuals' perceived temporality during the health emergency: the cartoons followed each other in the same temporal rhythm as the rhythm of the Italian readers, who were locked in, living the daily quarantine routine. At the same time, they experienced deep transformations and upheavals from a single cultural trauma that needed meaning and semiotic stability. We can notice how in Leo Ortolani's strips and in "COme VIte Distanti," each of the episodes, meaning each strip and each board respectively, was published daily on Facebook, approximately from the end of March to June.[1] Every day the fans of the collective project and Ortolani's followers were confronted with a very short appointment (the reading speed is minimal for both the strips and the single panel), usually published in the context of their Facebook feed (Fig. 2).

[1] From the 25th of March to the 8th of June (COmeVIteDistanti) and from the 6th of March to the 4th of May (Leo Ortolani).

Figure 2: A Leo Ortolani comic strip presented on a Facebook feed

Source: Facebook (Leo Ortolani's official page)

Another text we have taken into consideration is *Pangolino*. *Pangolino* is a parody of *Topolino*, an Italian serial comic strip *par excellence*. Here seriality is seen as parodic: with the reprise of various elements from the *Topolino* comic, such as advertisements, competitions, agony aunt letters, *et cetera*; the pandemic experience is seen as new normality. Using seriality (this time not actual but simulated) gives meaning to temporal length.

The Representation of Space: Places *and* Spaces *of the Pandemic*

In addition to changes in the perception of time, one of the main aspects of the pandemic was indeed the resemantization of spaces, as seen in Lorusso et al., 2020 (for example, in Lorusso's contribution "Il senso di casa" ["The meaning of home"] in which she reflects on the values that Italian homes acquired during the lockdown). In the analyzed text, we have identified a series of "places" and "spaces" symbolic of the pandemic.

However, with "spaces" and "places," we are not referring to any anthropological or sociological category but to a pair of analytical terms that help to clarify the meaning attributed to some areas that played an essential role during the pandemic.

By places, we mean the physical areas of the pandemic, the representations of those places that characterized the health emergency. In this category, we can see *the home*, *the supermarket*, *the balconies*, and *telecommunications* (which, despite representing virtual places, have been concretely 'inhabited' by Italians during this period). Place limits, thresholds, and social distances are represented there: some examples are queues, grandparents on video calls, or spaces of practice. While these environments in the pre-pandemic situation ordered very different frames, today they form a single pandemic script, for their content has been resemantized.

On the other side, by the term 'spaces,' we mean those areas representing mostly passions, states of mind, and internal, proprioceptive conditions, which testify to the psychophysical repercussions of the lockdown on individuals. For example, this type of representation is evident in Grazia La Padula's board from COmeVIteDistanti (Fig. 3). Although the pandemic's physical spaces are also represented in the panel, it is the inner space of the protagonist to be staged. La Padula uses specific graphic and stylistic choices to portray social alienation and temporal suspension, both states of mind felt by individuals during the lockdown.

Figure 3: An example of the "space of the pandemic" representing a proprioceptive and psychological state of being

Source: https://www.arfestival.it/covid/

The Visual Figurativization of the Virus

Focusing merely on the images of our corpus while leaving the verbal part of the comics out, the virus seemed to be visually represented in two different ways:

The virus is first represented as a figure from the natural world, which anthropomorphizes itself and becomes an authentic subject, with its proper narrative path: from a semiotic point of view, the virus is, therefore, an actor, thus playing both a structural and a stereotypical role in the storytelling.

The peculiarity of this representational model is the presence of an agency, a will. Its anthropomorphization makes it possible to identify the virus as an active agent in the world. It is frequent to see the humanized version of the virus in the corpus, which is the digital reconstruction of the vibrio on the electric microscope (Fig. 4).

Although not drawn as a figure from the natural world in the second method of depiction, the virus is represented through other characters, situations, and objects found in comic strips. The pandemic and the virus constitute the central theme based on which the stories are told, rather than actual actors. Therefore, the virus is just a condition, losing its role as a subject and its agency and ability to act voluntarily on things (Fig. 5).

Figure 4-5: Virus as an actor (left) and virus as a condition (right)

Source: Facebook (Leo Ortolani's official page);
Youtube.com (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCq9c2ed5cO7j9DOXtDvwbhA).

This double typology may be a clue to how the COVID-19 emergency has been perceived in the Italian semiosphere: on the one hand, the iatrogenic construction of the virus as an anti-subject to be fought, and on the other

hand, the virus as a condition to be overcome: in this second case the virus is not an adversary, but a state of being to be avoided (fought) through individual practices and political choices.

Social Media and Enunciative Strategies

Countless images online have contributed to constructing, although in different forms (memes, photographs, drawings, and others), the meaning of this period. During our analysis, we realized that it was impossible to work on a large part of the corpus without considering its more strictly media-related aspects.

In this regard, we have identified a close connection between the corpus and semiotic enunciation theories, which focus on the relationship between texts and their production.

It can be noted that many strips and comics were posted directly on the authors' Facebook and Instagram pages. Significantly, this kind of text is directly available on a platform that, in wide use, is linked to the private sphere of the users and contributes to the construction of the in-the-moment enunciation-subject, in a similar way to verbal language, as we can read in Violi:

> We write what we are doing at a certain time, where we are, the friends we are seeing in the particular moment when our "Facebook friends" will be reading us, as if we were telling them a story. Such posts by no means represent our permanent identity, but only a moment in our life, a snapshot soon to be replaced by other moments and images, as in a live, orally told story (Violi 2017, 11).

Readers thus have the feeling of being "face to face" with the artists' thanks to the implementation of an enunciative strategy: one where the author produces a subjectivization effect through the production of a text which is, on the contrary, traditionally linked to what Metz calls "impersonal enunciation" (Metz 1995). This link is even more evident when the characters are encyclopedically recognized as the authors themselves. For example, in the Italian audience, it is commonly known how Zerocalcare, the protagonist of Michele Rech's comics, represents the author's avatar, who depicts his everyday life within his neighborhood with his animations. Leo Ortolani's strips describe this game of enunciation very well if we consider that, in almost all the strips, the subject is Leo himself.

The cartoonists are therefore invested in the first person, not necessarily because they represent themselves in the drawings, but because they represent their proper world and their idiosyncratic way of experiencing the pan-

demic and the lockdown: social media blurs the boundaries between private and public life and between individual points of view and historical events. In other words, a strong effect of presence and subjectivity is produced on social media, which makes the enunciations attributable directly to the author itself.

All these enunciative strategies would be impossible without the contemporary media landscape, which has heavily contributed to forming the encyclopedic meaning of COVID. Comics, in other words, are not exempt from what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin call "hypermediacy" (Bolter; Grusin, 1999). This term identifies a double feature of new media. On the one hand it creates an illusion of immediacy, while on the other, new media mediates and re-mediates itself:

> Where immediacy suggests a unified visual space, contemporary hypermediacy offers a heterogeneous space, in which representation is conceived of not as a window on to the world, but rather as "windowed" itself-with windows that open on to other representations or other media (Bolter, Grusin 1999, 34).

Conclusions

The analysis above has allowed us to note comics' importance as a medium and their use on a social level. Comics have been introduced into Italian culture to interpret the pandemic condition. Additionally, comics have given the Italian audience the semiotic tools to create new meaning following the irruption of the senseless and the unexpected. Comics have helped people create and figure out their role in recent past events along with other media. This benefit is unduly true, especially if we consider that, according to semiotics, meaning is constructed through narrativity.

Meanwhile, fixating on a visual level, the pandemic's images have contributed to constructing an actual standard frame in our semiosphere. Those images have added some meaning to our world experience. This setting could be viewed via the pandemic's thematization, which was especially highlighted in the portion of the article where we have seen the virus portrayed as a condition.

Finally, in the culture section, we noted how the sense of the virus had been constructed from an individual and intimate perspective, thanks to both the comic strip's characteristics, which allow for a visual representation of states of being and emotions, and the use of social media, which convey a strong sense of singularity and subjectivity. The pandemic event has therefore not been characterized by a grand narrative but by several single perspectives.

We can conclude by showing that our study, although partial, can certainly be expanded in two directions. First, it motivates us to investigate more thoroughly the crossmediality and contaminations that comics continue to undergo with new and old media; on the other hand, it persuades us to consider comics as one of the many places in the semiosphere that we can reach out to understand how cultures stratify and shape their collective memory.[2]

In this regard, our work constitutes a part of broader research that aims to investigate from a semiotic perspective the codes and languages of comics and the relationship between this type of medium and the traumatic events in Italian culture. The semiotics of culture, which constitutes our referent discipline, does not simply consider texts as objects to be analyzed, but it also conceives them as cultural functions that help us understand ideologies and how a given society represents itself.

Bibliography

1. Barbieri Daniele (2017), *Semiotica del fumetto*, Roma: Carrocci editore.
2. Bolter Jay David, Grusin Richard (1999), *Remediation; Understanding New Media*, Cambridge: The MIT Press.
3. Dallavalle Sara (2020), "Alcuni dati sull'andamento dell'editoria fumettistica in Italia tra graphic novel e fumetto seriale", *Simultanea, A Journal of Italian Media and Pop Culture,* 1 (2).
4. Eco Umberto (1976), *Trattato di semiotica generale*, Milano: Bompiani.
5. Eco Umberto (1984), *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*, Milano: Einaudi.
6. Eugeni Ruggero (2015), *La condizione post-mediale*, Brescia: Editrice la Scuola, ebook.
7. Greimas Algirdas Julien, Courtés Joseph (1982), *Semiotica: dizionario ragionato della teoria del linguaggio*, Milano: Mondadori.
8. Lorusso Anna Maria (2010), *Semiotica della cultura*, Bari: Laterza (ebook).
9. Lorusso Anna Maria, Marrone Gianfranco, Jacoviello Stefano, (2020), *Diario semiotico sul Coronavirus, in E/C. Rivista dell'Associazione Italiana di Studi Semiotici,* www.ec-aiss.it.
10. Lotman Jurij (1985), *La semiosfera. L'asimmetria e il dialogo nelle strutture pensanti*, Venezia: Marsilio.
11. Metz Christian (1995), *L'enunciazione impersonale o il luogo del film*, Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane.

[2] An interesting research project about cultural memory in situations of conflict, post-conflict, violence and collective trauma is the TraMe centre in Bologna (Research centres — Philosophy and Communication Studies (unibo.it)). One of the centre's research areas is the relationship between mass media and memory, with research that analyzes the press, TV, the web and their impact on culture.

12. Violi Patrizia (2017), *Identità e memoria nell'epoca di Google*, [in:] Pezzini I., Del Marco V., *Nella rete di Google. Pratiche, strategie e dispositivi del motore di ricerca cha ha cambiato la nostra vita*, Milano: Franco Angeli.
13. Volet Gil *et al.* (2020), "Time and Covid-19 stress in the lockdown situation: Time free, «Dying» of boredom and sadness", *PLoS 1*, 15(8), e0236465.

About the Contributors

Simone Antonucci is a student of Semiotics at the University of Bologna, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in Communications with a thesis entitled *L'enunciazione e il suo soggetto. Due teorie a confronto* (Discussant: prof. Costantino Marmo). In October 2019 he participated as a speaker at the XLVII congress of AISS with a talk entitled "Strategie di gioco e simulacri dell' enunciazione nelle pratiche sportive". In October 2020 he co-presented the video-essay "Il virus disegnato: tipologie del COVID-19 nel fumetto italiano" for the XLVII congress of AISS.

Chiara Caiazzo, fellow researcher at the Italian Institute for Philosophical Studies in Naples and independent artist. She graduated from King's College London with a First Class Honors degree in Comparative Literature. She obtained a MA in Political Philosophy at the Pompeu Fabra University, where her thesis on Rancière was awarded the matrícula de honor. Her work focuses on emergency aesthetics, semiotics, and gender studies. She is fluent in Italian, English, French, Spanish, Latin, and Ancient Greek.

Alice Cortés, Ph.D. Freie Universität Berlin, has been a professor for 15 years and has published in Europe and South America. She is an award recipient, a researcher, and coordinator at Accademia San Pietro, Italy, and works at the doctorate program, Universidad Valladolid, Spain.

Matthew Crippen, Ph.D., holds a professorship and research post. He has a Columbia Univ. Press book and articles in *Synthese*, *Topoi*, *the Brit. J. of Aesth.*, *Trans. Charles Peirce Soc.*, *Front. Psychol.*, *Envir. Ethics*.

Lilli I. Förster (M.A.), Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main, Germany, just finished her master thesis on "Ludwig Wittgenstein and Leo Tolstoy. Two Concepts of Communication." Her research interests are aesthetics and philosophy of art of the 20th century, especially Ludwig Wittgenstein. Among

her recent publications is "Against the High Culture – On Leo Tolstoy's Aesthetics," in: *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, Vol. 12, 2020, pp. 49-65.

Dr **Tal Fitzpatrick** is a Melbourne based artist, craftivist and researcher with a PhD from the Victorian College of Arts and a Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honours from Griffith University.

Dr. Phil. **Ineta Kivle** (Web of Science ID: AAT-2655-2020; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6071-4131), is the Deputy Director of the Academic Library of the University of Latvia and Head of the Interdisciplinary Research Centre, and the Leading Researcher in the History of Ideas at the University of Latvia. She has developed an interdisciplinary course for a master's program on the concept of rhythm, number, sound, and colour. She has established an Interdisciplinary Research Centre at the Academic Library of the University of Latvia whose tasks are to improve interdisciplinary research methodology and create synergies between different disciplines. I. Kivle publishes the results of her research in 5–6 scientific publications per year on average. Doctoral thesis: *Sound, Speech, Voice, and Music in Phenomenological Perspective* (2008); author of two monographs in Latvian: *Philosophy of Sound* (2009); *Philosophy: Theoretical and Practical Study* (2011); Author of more than thirty scientific articles about 20th–21st-century philosophy, ancient philosophy, interdisciplinarity. Research interests: interdisciplinarity; philosophy of sound, rhythm, colour, and number.

Jana Kukaine, MA, is a doctoral student at the Art Academy of Latvia and a feminist art curator. She teaches feminist theory and aesthetics at the Art Academy of Latvia. She is the author of the monograph *Lovely Mothers. Women, Body, Subjectivity* (Riga: Neputns, 2016). Kukaine holds a bachelor's degree in Philosophy (University of Latvia) and a master's degree in Arts and Heritage (University of Maastricht, Netherlands). Her research interests include affect theory, new materialism, and post-socialist feminisms.

Dr **Alyce McGovern** is an Associate Professor of Criminology at UNSW Sydney. She is the author of *Craftivism and Yarn Bombing: A Criminological Exploration* (2019, Palgrave).

Marta Maliszewska, PhD student in philosophy at the Doctoral School of Humanities, University of Warsaw. She writes her thesis on war photography. She published in, among others, *The Polish Journal of Aesthetics*, *Pro-*

ceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics, *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej*, *Sztuka i filozofia*, *Edukacja filozoficzna*. ORCID: 0000-0002-8879-9093.

Michele Sorice graduated with honors in Semiotics of Culture at the University of Bologna (Master's degree course in Semiotics) with a thesis entitled "La funzione referenziale delle immagini nella cultura digitale" (Discussant: prof. Anna Maria Lorusso, Co-discussant: prof. Lucio Spaziante). In October 2020 he co-presented the video-essay "Il virus disegnato: tipologie del COVID-19 nel fumetto italiano" for the XLVII congress of AISS (the Italian Association of Semiotic Studies).