

## TOWARDS A NEW AESTHETICS: TECHNOLOGY, INTENSITY, HETEROGENEITY

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... if man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through beauty that man makes his way to Freedom.

Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man. In a Series of Letters*<sup>1</sup>

Following Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education* (1794-95), aesthetics came for a time to be seen as a political instrument, and identified as a means of improving and even perfecting society. In the last century, its public status began to be seen more negatively, as in its deconstruction by Paul de Man as *aesthetic ideology*, based upon progressivist notions of "technology"<sup>2</sup> and "systems of formalization."<sup>3</sup> Aesthetics lost some of its confidence and authority, and often found itself on the defensive as an academic discipline. A number of recent attempts have been made, however, to reassert its importance for the present. Recently claims for a new "aesthetic specificity" have been argued by John Joughin and Simon Malpas.<sup>4</sup> Other approaches, such as those of Vilém Flusser<sup>5</sup> and Friedrich Kittler,<sup>6</sup> have focused upon the importance of the link between modern communication technologies and artistic creation, and the impact of contemporary media and mass culture on the transformation of aesthetics. Such approaches proceed radically beyond such earlier preoccupations as the aesthetics of representation, romantic notions of irony and the fragment, and Adorno's negative aesthetics.

This thematic issue, on the "New Aesthetics," is the outcome of cooperation between the departments of English at Charles University in Prague and at the University of Central Lancashire in Preston under the British Academy Scheme of International Joint Activities. Seven contributors from the U.K., the U.S., Canada, Australia, Italy and the Czech Republic explore and assess aspects of the contemporary ferment in aesthetics, and its relation to and significance for contemporary society, culture and politics. While some articles deal with the legacy of the Enlightenment (Kant, Schiller, Baumgarten) within the context of avant-garde, modernist and poststructuralist

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man. In a Series of Letters*, trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 9.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (1955), ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 247-50.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Paul de Man, "Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 265, 271, 273, 280.

<sup>4</sup> John Joughin and Simon Malpas, "The New Aestheticism: an Introduction," in *The New Aestheticism*, ed. John Joughin and Simon Malpas (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 3: "Aesthetic specificity is not, however, entirely explicable, or graspable, in terms of another conceptual scheme or genre of discourse. The singularity of the work's 'art-ness' escapes and all that often remains is the critical discourse itself [...]. In other words, the most basic tenet we are trying to argue is the equi-primordially of the aesthetic – that [...] opens a space for an artistic and literary specificity that can radically transform its critical potential and position with regard to contemporary culture."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. especially *Writings*, ed. Andreas Ströhl, trans. Erik Eisel (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design* (1993), trans. Anthony Matthews (London: Reaktion Books, 1999); *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983) (London: Reaktion Books, 2000). Since 2005, the research on Flusser has been published in *Flusser Studies*: <http://www.flusserstudies.net>.

<sup>6</sup> See especially *Literature, Media, Information Systems: Essays* ed. and trans. John Johnston (Amsterdam: OPA; London and New York: Routledge, 1997); *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986), trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

aesthetics, others explore specific problems of contemporary aesthetics, such as its transformation by mass culture, its integration into the field of communication technologies, and the prevalence of heterogeneous modes of experience, interaction and production.

All contributions point out that the position of aesthetics in contemporary discourses on art and technology has been problematized to the utmost. It is difficult to imagine today an aesthetics capable of reasserting itself over the territory it once claimed in the realm of “primary, or ‘unconditioned,’ [...] aesthetic experience,” thus freeing itself from philosophical strategies and “narrative explanations” capable merely of constructing an intellectualized, “secondary” aesthetic experience.<sup>7</sup> As Louis Armand points out, perception is not a simple activity of the senses but

an entire ‘system of configurations’ at the limits of the perceptible and of the possible – between what Aristotle calls sense-perception (αἰσθησις) and the thing perceived (the αἰσθητόν) – a system which mimes the spectral, uncanny revenance of a cognition which is both already and not yet a *recognition*.<sup>8</sup>

Even more paradoxical is the reification of other important Enlightenment epistemological paradigms, such as the organic form, “a single, organic, significant plan” envisaged to produce “meaning through [a] coherent construction of experience.” Were this to become the ground for aesthetic appreciation, the assumed hierarchical and strictly teleological structure of the living organism would preclude the desired communication of experience – the “recovery of dialogic encounter, which is always horizontal”<sup>9</sup> – and favour the “already established [...], rooted [...], ‘arborescent’ patterns,” thus eliminating “the possibility of new [...] connections, uprooted [...], ‘rhizomatic’” structures.<sup>10</sup>

Another problem characteristic of recent attempts at redefining aesthetics and its role in contemporary society is the failure of ideological and philosophical dichotomies in the face of critiques stemming largely from poststructuralism and the altered conditions of experience brought about by the new media. Confronted with this situation, certain dualistic modes of thought – exemplified by Greenberg’s distinction between “avant-garde” and “kitsch,” Manovich’s contrast of the “structural heterogeneity” of aesthetic experience and the “homogenizing” power of information technologies,<sup>11</sup> and Lyotard’s opposition between “the intuitive, pre-conceptual synthesis of space and time associated with our *perceptions*” and “a primarily conceptual and calculated grasp of these” – have sought refuge in a dogmatic view of “the new technologies of communication and information” as mere destructive forces “destabilising the perceptual bases of our sense of space and time.”<sup>12</sup>

Apart from these symptoms of crisis in the field of aesthetic discourse, the papers collected in this issue treat the changes in contemporary aesthetics, resulting from its interaction with new media and the large-scale transformations of knowledge wrought in the wake of the media revolution, and offer some hope for its future. From a primarily philosophical and pedagogical project<sup>13</sup> designed to control eighteenth-century discourses of sensibility, emotionality, imagination or genius, aesthetics has been forced to transform itself into a “border-discipline in close contact with others, especially cultural studies,” one which “uncover[s] at a deeper level the connections between cultural processes and social and political practices.”<sup>14</sup> As Francesco Pastorelli suggests, this process “should lead to the reconsideration of aesthetic categories in terms of cultural practices.”<sup>15</sup>

More significantly, the contributions to this issue examine several ways in which recent and contemporary aesthetic theories have integrated themselves into the transformative processes of digital coding, virtual reality and a generalized “artificial intelligence:” by exploring human relations to art in terms of “events,” rather than “objects” or “experience,”<sup>16</sup> by merging the two principal categories of “object” and “image” and redefining them as the “phenomenality of an aesthetic unconscious,”<sup>17</sup> and by engaging with art as technique and praction in

<sup>7</sup> See Jeremy J. Kelly, “Aesthetic Experience and the Scope of Narrative Explanation,” this issue, 59.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Armand, “Cinema, or the Phantom Consciousness,” this issue, 74.

<sup>9</sup> Francesco Pastorelli, “Towards an Aesthetics of the Present,” this issue, 147.

<sup>10</sup> Michael David Székely, “Fullness-to-Explosion: The Mode of Musical Becoming,” this issue, 103.

<sup>11</sup> See Lisa Otty, “Avant-garde Aesthetics: Kitsch, Intensity and The Work of Art,” this issue, 47.

<sup>12</sup> Ashley Woodward, “New Technologies and Lyotard’s Aesthetics,” this issue, 20.

<sup>13</sup> See Armand, “Cinema, or the Phantom Consciousness,” 76, discussing the “particular ethico-political tenor,” which manifests itself in “the formal conjunction of aesthetics, phenomenality and the critique of reason.” Cf. Jacques Derrida, “Economimesis,” *Diacritics*, 11 (June 1981): 3, and de Man, “Aesthetic Formalization,” 264ff.

<sup>14</sup> Pastorelli, “Towards an Aesthetics of the Present,” 137.

<sup>15</sup> “Towards an Aesthetics of the Present,” 141.

<sup>16</sup> This theme is discussed in the contributions of Ashley Woodward, Lisa Otty and Michael Székely.

<sup>17</sup> See Armand, “Cinema, or the Phantom Consciousness,” 88. Armand also points out that “[t]he image is rendered perceptible not on the basis of what, within the aesthetic scheme, remains unrepresentable, but in the barely delineated figure of the imagined other, the phantom, to which it necessarily remains anchored in *reality*” (92).

Deleuzian terms of “sensation,” “intensity” and “deterritorialization.” Such approaches necessarily change our understanding of space and performance.<sup>18</sup> By exploring the *virtual* existence of art based on the decomposition of real bodies and their performances by digital technology creating “hybrid hyperbodies,” which hence no longer represent reality but acquire a sensory extension of the “digital scene,” a new mode of the aesthetic may be said to transform our experience (“habitual perception of human bodies”) and consequently to transform conventional approaches to performance and performativity.<sup>19</sup>

The first two contributions explore the ways in which philosophers, especially Jean-François Lyotard, and art theorists have responded to the emergence of new communication technologies. As Ashley Woodward points out, Lyotard’s doubts about “whether, and how, [the new communication] technologies can give rise to events,”<sup>20</sup> have not been confirmed by present-day developments in art or their critical reception. For her part, Lisa Otty shows that, in extolling the importance of the “occurrence” or “event” (based on the Heideggerian notion of *Ereignis*), Lyotard essentializes the “inexpressible” event as an originary moment of time and the origin of the work of art. This implies that he does not understand it as a virtuality, but as both a “sublime feeling” and a negative idea of “privation.”<sup>21</sup> This hardly goes beyond romantic notions of imagination<sup>22</sup> and does not yet demonstrate “the political potential of art, its power to transform experience.”<sup>23</sup> Events do not merely remind us of some hidden essence of the system (“something that the system operates to conceal, something that the system causes us to forget”<sup>24</sup>) but, as Otty points out – following Lyotard’s *Libidinal Economy* and Deleuze’s *Logic of Sense* – are acted on the surface.<sup>25</sup> However, Deleuze differs from Lyotard in defining events both as “originals,” “actualizations,” and as *repetitions* based on temporal differences, “counter-actualizations.”<sup>26</sup> The “new” and the “now” that Lyotard wishes to keep apart, in order to emphasize the creative and political potential of avant-garde art, combine in the *virtuality* of the event, which cannot be grasped in the spectacular regime of theatre, as Lyotard indicates, but, following Deleuze, only as a *process of acting*.<sup>27</sup> The disruption and transformation of the spectacle-as-analogue is also a prominent theme of the new aesthetics of digital media.<sup>28</sup>

A number of other essays in this issue explore the possibility of a new aesthetics in broader terms. For Jeremy Kelly, this aesthetics should no longer foster “a sensitivity to a ‘secondary’ type of aesthetic phenomenon, [...] an array of practices and attitudes among which we find the inner-workings of complex semantic and semiotic systems and our habitual reliance upon them.” Instead, it should rediscover “the primary, or ‘unconditioned,’ element of aesthetic experience.”<sup>29</sup> The aporia of direct experience returns here in the form of a dilemma that remains unresolved, since even the concept of unconditioned experience is the result of “formalization,”<sup>30</sup> while the notion of primordality remains ultimately inaccessible to a mode of thinking that is required to resort to such

<sup>18</sup> See especially the contributions of Michael Székely and Flori(a)n Liber.

<sup>19</sup> Flori(a)n Liber, “Démembrement du corps humain 2.1,” this issue, 120, 121, 129-32. “Le corps postdramatique se confond techniquement avec le corps du cyberdanseur de la scène numérique interfacée qui a comme référent ontologique l’hypercorps hybride des corporéisations numériques (ou le corps démembré). Le lieu de la performance virtuelle est le lieu de la scène numérique circonscrit à l’environnement interfacé” (120).

<sup>20</sup> Woodward, “New Technologies and Lyotard’s Aesthetics,” 35. In spite of this, Woodward argues “that it is possible to clearly discern a path in [Lyotard’s] writings which characterises new technological art as invoking an aesthetic of the sublime, and which positions it as a crucial form of experimentation in the postmodern condition” (15).

<sup>21</sup> See Jean-François Lyotard, “The Sublime and the Avant-garde,” in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. G. Bennington & R. Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 90.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), Book VI, ll. 533-39: “In such strength / Of usurpation, in such visitings / Of awful promise, when the light of sense / Goes out in flashes that have shown to us / The invisible world, doeth greatness make abode, / There harbours whether we be young or old, / Our destiny, our nature, and our home / Is with infinitude—” *The Prelude 1799 1805 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, Stephen Gill (New York and London, W.W. Norton & Co., 1979), 216.

<sup>23</sup> Otty, “Avant-garde Aesthetics,” 52.

<sup>24</sup> “Avant-garde Aesthetics,” 53.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 50, 53-55.

<sup>26</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (1969), ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 150.

<sup>27</sup> Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 150-51.

<sup>28</sup> See Liber, “Démembrement du corps humain 2.1,” 132: “Le spectateur incarne l’interprète, il devient œuvre publique, il commence sa ‘danse improvisée’ au cœur des territoires numériques. Autrement dit, si le corps du spectateur, situé dans le médium immersif de l’installation projection, subit une mutation d’énergie physique et psychique lors des mouvements spontanés (ou dirigés consciemment), il interagira avec la simulation d’une façon improvisée. Ainsi, en termes d’action réaction, on se crée une différence dans le système. Le corps habite ce médium, il entre en contact avec la simulation, il s’implique d’une manière active.”

<sup>29</sup> Kelly, “Aesthetic Experience and the Scope of Narrative Explanation,” 59.

<sup>30</sup> See de Man, “Aesthetic Formalization,” 262ff.

categories as “happiness,” “good,” or “summum bonum.”<sup>31</sup> Such an effort, in any case, would necessarily subsume the aesthetics once again under the essentialist, Platonic paradigm, which can also be said to underlie Habermas’s notion of the originary unity of attitudes<sup>32</sup> as a hypothetical central value. As Kelly points out, Habermas’s approach represents an historically “appealing view,” which “owes to the more homogeneous sensibility of an age in which these separate structures of rationality were unified and not yet the distinct provinces of experts.”<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, it should not be overlooked that this allegedly *historical* perspective derives from the *philosophical* theory of alienation which also generated Schiller’s dichotomy of the “naive” and the “sentimental.”<sup>34</sup> Even narrative history, reflecting “certain broad and deep cultural developments, such as the formation of religious institutions, economic and scientific developments and their social implications,” can be regarded as a philosophical or ideological construct, which, as Kelly comes to acknowledge, also determines “the nature of secondary aesthetic phenomena, and a good deal else besides.”<sup>35</sup> As a result, narrative explanation does not fundamentally differ from the philosophical explanation discussed above. The final appeal to a pluralism of principles of explanation and evaluation is therefore unconvincing.

Other ways of articulating aesthetic experience, are traced by Michael Székely. Discussing the “intense,” “fluid” “*musical space*” where music is not made but “becomes” an interactive, dehierarchized, “rhizomatic” “assemblage” – connected, disrupted and reconnected by both the performers and the listeners<sup>36</sup> – Székely follows Deleuze’s and Guattari’s approach to musical performance, deterritorialization and schizoid sensibility in *A Thousand Plateaus*,<sup>37</sup> as well as Christopher Small’s interpretation of music as “musicking,” an “activity” with “*quasi-biological* and *gestural* bases” uniting bodily rhythms and gestures in a bodily as well as intersubjective and social space.<sup>38</sup> As a “differential field of potential transformations of material systems” including “thresholds at which behaviour changes,” this space is not “actual” but “virtual.”<sup>39</sup> Though it is often seen as “affective,”<sup>40</sup> where “[t]he voice becomes an inhuman sound, a noise, and is no longer personal, subjective,”<sup>41</sup> musical space is also characterized by a specific mode of *signification* widely different from that typical of language. As Daniel W. Smith has pointed out, what “Deleuze calls a sign is neither a recognizable object nor even a particular quality of an object, but the limit of the faculty of sensibility.” This *differential* notion of sign as “the being of the sensible (*aistheteon*)”<sup>42</sup> precludes the use of structuralist language models while analyzing signification in music. As Jacques Attali puts it, “listening to music is to receive a message. Nevertheless, music cannot be equated with a language. Quite unlike the words of a language – which refer to a signified – music, though it has a precise operationality, never has a stable reference to a code of the linguistic type.”<sup>43</sup> This approach, among others, leads us to appreciate the “improvisational dimension” of music,

a rhizomatic moment at which connections are made between musics, subjects, and non-musical machines and at which a certain opening onto a ‘cosmic’ space of infinite possibility occurs: a moment of the musician-composer’s becoming-music,<sup>44</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Kelly, “Aesthetic Experience and the Scope of Narrative Explanation,” 67.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity versus Postmodernity,” in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Clive Cazeaux (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 272, and Kelly, “Aesthetic Experience and the Scope of Narrative Explanation,” 68: “a unity yet undifferentiated.”

<sup>33</sup> “Aesthetic Experience and the Scope of Narrative Explanation,” 68.

<sup>34</sup> Later on, Kelly acknowledges the similarity between Habermas’s and Schiller’s approaches (*ibid.*, 71).

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 73.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Székely, “Fullness-to-Explosion,” 97.

<sup>37</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

<sup>38</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 9. See Székely, “Fullness-to-Explosion,” 99.

<sup>39</sup> John Protevi, “The Geophilosophies of Deleuze and Guattari,” paper delivered at the Southeastern Division of the Association of American Geographers, November 2001, 2-3; quoted by Székely, “Fullness-to-Explosion,” 103.

<sup>40</sup> Székely, “Fullness-to-Explosion,” 103.

<sup>41</sup> Timothy S. Murphy, “What I Hear Is Thinking Too: The Deleuze Tribute Recordings,” in *Deleuze and Music*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 167; quoted by Székely, “Fullness-to-Explosion,” 103.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel W. Smith, “Deleuze’s Theory of Sensation: Overcoming the Kantian Duality,” in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed. Paul Patton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 34. Cf. the discussion of a different concept of “the thing perceived (the *αἰσθητόν*),” in Armand, “Cinema, or the Phantom Consciousness,” 74.

<sup>43</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 25; cf. Székely, “Fullness-to-Explosion,” 108.

<sup>44</sup> Jeremy Gilbert, “Becoming-Music: The Rhizomatic Moment of Improvisation,” in *Deleuze and Music*, 135; cf. Székely, “Fullness-to-Explosion,” 113.

which also means, as Székely suggests, “opening up to the musical space.”<sup>45</sup>

Flori(a)n Liber similarly examines spatial conceptions of signification but in terms of the event status of the performative body as technological prosthesis. In Liber’s use of digital video, the performative body is not simply encoded, mapped, transposed and thus captured – submitted to a form of technical memory that at once seizes and abolishes the performative event – rather the body “itself” becomes a zone of technicity. Consequently, Liber’s praxis tests the limits of an aesthetic theory of performance that rests upon the exclusion of any “machine-like technicity.” The “body” in this case is not the represented body (e.g. the figure of the dancer in Liber’s digital video “performance,” *Human Body Dismemberment*), but the transcoded body, the body inscribed in and by a metamorphic algorithm (“le code plastique et gestuel”).<sup>46</sup> It is a pro-grammatic apparatus, or what, in French, may be described as an *écriture au corps*: a body of writing and an *embodied* writing. And it is in accordance with a technics of writing, of inscription and circumscription, but equally of gesture, that Liber’s quasi-analytic “dismemberment” brings into question what Derrida has termed the “inherited, ossified, simplified opposition between technē and physis”<sup>47</sup> – that is to say, between technology and nature, the organic, the auto-mobile and self-sufficient.

In turn, this questioning implies a further examination of the opposition between the whole and the fragment, the living body and the dead, already rendered ambivalent in Plato’s treatment of the body as *sōma*. Echoing Artaud’s conception of a *corps sans organes* and Victor Tausk’s *machine à influencer*, Liber’s experiment in performative dismemberment deconstructs the human/non-human dichotomy and treats the “body” as a discursive, informatic topology which does not point towards a “post-” human condition but rather to a “prosthesis at the origin” of the human as such. In this way we are presented with what amounts to an attempt at an “enactment” of a critique. Liber’s algorithmic dismemberments – verging upon a type of quantum indeterminacy – situate in place of the functional body a body of probabilities, according to which “machinality (repetition, calculability, inorganic matter of the body) intervenes in a performative event,” as Derrida says, not however as “an accidental, extrinsic, and parasitical element,” or “pathological mutilating,” but rather as the constitutive materiality of the body as *dynamic system*. And if “to think both the machine and the performative event together remains a monstrosity to come, an impossible event,” this is because it represents a violation of a logic bound up with a certain intentionality, for which the possible is always and only a function of the calculable. In pursuing the implications of an *incalculability* (at the very foundation of digital computing), Liber suggests that this impossible event is, as Derrida argues, “therefore the only possible event.” Moreover, “it would be an event that, this time, no longer happens without the machine. Rather, it would happen by the machine.”<sup>48</sup>

Elegance of symmetry in the view that poses the intelligible against the merely sensible, and each against the *insensible*, remains – even in its most elaborate, “technological” forms – cognate with what Claude Lévi-Strauss described as analogical primitivism,<sup>49</sup> and what John Ruskin in 1856 termed the “pathetic fallacy:” the ascription of human aspirations and beliefs to the otherwise inanimate.<sup>50</sup> The philosophy of perception, and consequently aesthetics, has played a determinate role in fortifying this way of thinking, vested as it has often been in the intuitive, the unreflexive, and the metaphysical. Such traits have not only come to define a certain humanism, but also a logic according to which technicity remains the excluded other of the experiential realm. The paradox that this presents for aesthetics as a theory of art has not gone unnoticed, and yet the division between pure and applied art or between fine art and technics preserved itself into the twentieth century, according to which even the cinematic image has been subjected to a curious humanizing bias – most famously perhaps in Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”

In Louis Armand’s essay on Jean-Luc Godard, film is shown not only to problematize any such categories but indeed to question the ascription of consciousness to that which *excludes* the “purely mechanical”<sup>51</sup> (the anaesthetic), or to which all things otherwise mechanical and inanimate must be subject ‘in the image of man.’ This

<sup>45</sup> Székely, “Fullness-to-Explosion,” 114.

<sup>46</sup> Liber, “Démembrement du corps humain 2.1,” 117-18.

<sup>47</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Economimesis,” 4.

<sup>48</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2) (‘within such limits’),” trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, ed. Tom Cohen, Barbara Cohen, J. Hillis Miller and Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 279.

<sup>49</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968).

<sup>50</sup> John Ruskin, “Of the Pathetic Fallacy,” in *Modern Painters* (1856) (New York: Knopf, 1988), III.55: “It will appear also, on consideration of the matter, that this fallacy is of two principal kinds. Either [...] it is the fallacy of wilful fancy, which involves no real expectation that it will be believed; or else it is a fallacy caused by an excited state of the feelings, making us, for the time, more or less irrational [...]. The state of mind which attributes to it these characters of a living creature is one in which the reason is unhinged by grief. All violent feelings have the same effect. They produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I would generally characterize as the ‘Pathetic Fallacy.’”

<sup>51</sup> Armand, “Cinema, or the Phantom Consciousness,” 87.

'human exception' fails, however, if instead of ascribing consciousness based upon a conception of will, we ascribe a general, material characteristic to the notion of consciousness itself (only *exemplified*, for instance, in the phenomenon of perception), such that human agency – as Freud and others have already suggested – can be seen as contingent upon a broadly “technological” condition. In filmic terms, this would have to do with the admission of what André Bazin termed the “ontology of the image,” and to the “reflexive” operations of *découpage* – exemplified for Armand in Godard’s radicalizing of the shot-reverse-shot – wherein it is possible to identify not simply an *analogue* of what is called consciousness, but indeed its precise articulation.

Concluding the essays in this issue, Francesco Pastorelli draws on recent Italian theorists in formulating prerequisites for “an aesthetics of the present,”<sup>52</sup> in particular its necessary breach with “‘sensology’ [...], a kind of socialization of sense experiences” through the filter of mass media, turning these experiences “into the form of the ‘already felt,’”<sup>53</sup> and its reconstitution on the basis of authentic individuality and “meanings” produced “through an organic and coherent construction of experience.”<sup>54</sup> Linking the open, “dialogical” nature of this aesthetics to a scarcely developed and yet rhetorically familiar invocation of ‘organic’ construction, Pastorelli may need to demonstrate that he is not repeating the error of Bakhtin, who founded his notion of “chronotope” on the assumption of a contemporary biologist Ukhtomskii,<sup>55</sup> interpreting it as a “constitutive” and not “a regulative concept.”<sup>56</sup> M.H. Abrams has argued that such approaches return to a thinking *before* Kant, replacing his analogy between art and nature with an essentialist notion of organic process.<sup>57</sup> A related objection is that, while Pastorelli persuasively seeks to supplant the “anonymous collectivization of feeling and experience,”<sup>58</sup> his account of an aesthetics “structured as a form of the singular and unique experience of the subject,” which then, through “pluralistic interaction” provides for the emergence of “the object of collective experience, taking concrete forms in tradition and historical culture,”<sup>59</sup> might itself be criticized as paradoxically deterministic and implicitly authoritarian, privileging the invisible hand of the ‘organic’ over free individual agency.

The diversity of these papers is more than a demonstration of the fecundity of contemporary thought in aesthetics: it shows the discourses at the disposal of such inquiry at a high pitch of tension, as innovative praxis necessitates modification and supplementation in the language of theory, even of simple description, the conditions of postmodern culture problematize our norms of experience, and dialogue with the Enlightenment and its successor traditions obliges each contemporary writer to re-evaluate, for survival, exhaustion or transformation, the inherited repertoire of concepts in philosophical aesthetics.

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<sup>52</sup> Pastorelli, “Towards an Aesthetics of the Present,” 135.

<sup>53</sup> See Mario Perniola, *Contro la comunicazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2004), 6-9, and Pastorelli, “Towards an Aesthetics of the Present,” 139.

<sup>54</sup> “Towards an Aesthetics of the Present,” 147.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press), 84.

<sup>56</sup> “Kant warns us repeatedly that this concept of an organism as a natural purpose is merely a philosophy of as-if; that is, in his terms, not a ‘constitutive,’ but merely ‘a regulative concept for the reflective Judgement, to guide our investigation about objects of this kind by a distant analogy with our own causality according to purposes.’ [...] But to Goethe and to other aesthetic organologists it proved irresistible to make such a purely internal teleology a constitutive element in living nature, and then to go beyond Kant and identify completely the unconsciously purposeful process and product of ‘nature’ in the mind of genius with the unconsciously purposeful growth, and the complex interadaptation of means to ends, in a natural organism.” M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1960), 208.

<sup>57</sup> See Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 279, mentioning Goethe’s dialogue “Über Wahrheit und Wahrscheinlichkeit in der Kunstwerke” (On Truth and Probability in the Works of Art).

<sup>58</sup> Pastorelli, “Towards an Aesthetics of the Present,” 146.

<sup>59</sup> “Towards an Aesthetics of the Present,” 148.