

## LITERATURE AND THE OTHER ARTS: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

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Not so long ago, or even now, for the analysis of the relationship between works created in the artistic tradition flowing from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to Modernism, it would be feasible to consider the relationship between Literature and the other arts from an intersemiotic perspective. To this approach, often covered by the general designation “interart studies”, we owe a number of illuminating studies, as Claus Clüver’s analysis of the relationship between Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* and Anne Sexton’s homonymous poem (CLÜVER, 1989, p. 55-90). Nowadays, the denomination “Interart studies” is being challenged and the substitution of “intermedial” for “interart” has been proposed by a number of scholars. They object to the use of the latter label, owing to the problematic status of postmodern art, that is, the production roughly dating back to the 60’s in the last century. In this paper, I would like to offer some thoughts on certain underlying issues regarding the change in nomenclature. I will begin by illustrating the traditional type of research, for which the notion of interart studies has worked reasonably well, before moving on to present-day texts where it would prove controversial.

For interart studies, I will first focus on two instances of intersemiotic transposition, one moving from the Visual Arts to Literature, the other moving in the opposite direction. My first example, related to an intermedial connection between Literature and Architecture, concerns the role played by references to the Salisbury Cathedral in William Golding’s novel *The Spire*, whereas the second discusses the relation between Auguste Rodin’s sculpture *The Kiss* and an episode in Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, *Inferno*, Book V. The use of the interart approach for the analysis of the relationships between these pairs of works can hardly lead to controversy, since they are all traditional texts, clearly privileging the esthetic function.

The analysis of William Golding’s novel, a *Künstlerroman* with typical ekphrastic

texts, invites the consideration of its relation to the English cathedral. Dating back to the thirteenth century, in the style known as Early English Gothic, the building boasts the tallest spire in the United Kingdom. Its bold pointed shape immediately catches the eye and makes it a graphic illustration of the symbolism of the vertical dimension, as analyzed by scholars like Gaston Bachelard, A. J. Greimas, Gilbert Durant and Henri Lefebvre. Their work on spatial semiotics underlines the connotations of spirituality and phallic power embedded in verticality. Though seemingly distinct, these notions may be associated in our imaginary and clearly relate to the rhetorical effects in Golding's novel.

A few points about the vertical dimension are well worth remembering here. Durant, for instance, includes verticality among the diurnal symbols, through which the human spirit projects its longing to transcend the forces of time and death, represented by the contrary nocturnal symbols. Both diurnal and nocturnal symbols inhabit a deep structure of our consciousness, concerning certain moral and metaphysical attitudes. For Durant, as for Bachelard, the ascensional scheme of verticality is complemented by the visual archetype of clarity: the same spiritual operation presides at the movement of the eyes towards the light and the sky. To these we may contrast the opposing archetypes of darkness and the fall, included in the nocturnal regime. The two schemes correspond to human postural gestures: with the vertical dimension, of the diurnal scheme, is associated the effort to stand upright, liberating the hands. The nocturnal regime, symbolic of the fall, relates to the carnal impulses, to digestion, to the female genitals, the secret subterranean spaces of nutrition and maternal fecundity. Mixing up the notions of birth and death, the lower body sites are also associated with the grave. Male sexuality and the concept of the phallic, on the contrary, find their place among the diurnal, ascensional symbols, owing to a confusion between erection and the effort to raise the eyes towards the light.

This brief recapitulation of the ideological and sexual connotations underlying the category of verticality proves useful for the reading of Golding's novel, where it dots almost every page. The protagonist, Dean Jocelyn, is obsessed by the struggle to add an almost impossible spire to a cathedral, identified by critics as Saint Mary's in Salisbury. Recurrent allusions to the top of the cathedral—the spire—as opposed to its crypt, and

a lowly cottage occupied by Pangall, the caretaker of the cathedral, underline the use of the two contrary and complementary symbols, verticality/horizontality, rise/fall. They prove instrumental for the concretization of the novel, which prompts readers to engage in a reading both of the verbal and of the architectural texts. This agrees with the fact that the protagonist himself is all the time engaged in a slow, laborious exercise in spatial semiotics, which goes hand in hand, and may actually be identified, with the elaboration of the plot. In fact, Jocelyn's painful journey to self-knowledge underlies the whole story, which coincides with the bishop's gradual understanding of the phallic meaning implicit in the upward thrust of the spire. It may well be claimed that the protagonist's tragic fate is due to a kind of plastic "dyslexia"—an inability to "read" the visual work of art. As he insists on the almost impossible task of adding a spire to an edifice built on a marsh (the cathedral "built on faith"), Jocelyn at first is aware only of the spiritual symbolism of the vertical scheme. He deceptively tells himself that all he seeks by raising the spire is to celebrate God's greater glory. He thus ignores the two other emblematic readings of the movement upwards, the lust for power and for sexual fulfillment, which ultimately leads to his fall.

#### PHOTO

Saint Mary's Cathedral, Salisbury, England, ca. 1220-1265

The intersemiotic approach, proposed for the reading of *The Spire*, which moves from the Visual Arts to Literature, can also be resorted to if we take the opposite direction, from a poem to a piece of sculpture, for instance. As an example, I would like to mention the relation between Rodin's sculpture *The Kiss*, a representation of Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta's fatal kiss, and the corresponding episode in Dante's *Divina Commedia* where the couple interrupt their reading of the story of Lancelot and Guinevere to embark on their unhappy love affair. In the following lines, translated by Allen Mandelbaum, Francesca recalls the occasion of their first kiss:

05. 126 One day, to pass the time away, we read  
of Lancelot-how love had overcome him.

We were alone, and we suspected nothing.

05.129 And time and time again that reading led  
our eyes to meet, and made our faces pale,  
and yet one point alone defeated us.

05.132           When we had read how the desired smile  
was kissed by one who was so true a lover,  
this one, who never shall be parted from me,

05.135 while all his body trembled, kissed my mouth.

A Gallehault indeed, that book and he  
who wrote it, too; that day we read no more."

*(Inferno, V, 126-140)*

I do not mean to pore over the countless literary analyses of the episode. For my purposes, it will suffice to recall in the briefest terms their relation to the traditional cultural and ideological background of the poem, the Christian anathema of carnal passion, especially adulterous love, which keeps in hell Francesca, Paolo and the other pairs of lovers contemplated in Book V of Dante's *Inferno*. The poet's powerful rhetorical devices enhance the theme, and excite the reader's response.

In Rodin's marble sculpture *The Kiss* (1901-4), the title and the manuscript still hanging from the young man's hand make clear allusions to the text in *Inferno*. There are of course stylistic and rhetorical differences between the sculpture and the poem, explainable by the huge time lag and the different universes of discourse of the respective target audiences. Yet the blend of eroticism and idealism, rid from the notion of sin that haunts Dante's work, makes Rodin's piece one of the great images of sexual love, compatible with the emotional appeal of the episode in the poem. There is no denying, either, the sculpture's

exquisite craftsmanship, comparable to Dante's verbal art. All this clearly allows of an interart analysis of the two works, both marked by intense passion and by an esthetically satisfactory form.

## PHOTO

Auguste Rodin, *The Kiss*, 1901-1904

The traditional apparatus for interart analysis would be of little use, however, if we turned to an installation by Sarah Lucas, also entitled *The Kiss*. A feminist artist, Lucas became internationally known in the 1990's as one of the YBA (Young British Artists, a controversial group of conceptual artists based on the United Kingdom, including Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin and Cornelia Parker) and for her provocative creations, often marked by humour and by obscene visual puns. People would need some information to know that Lucas' installation is a reading of Rodin's work, and that a fairly intermedial chain can be traced, linking the contemporary creation to the marble sculpture and to the 14<sup>th</sup> century literary work, not to mention the numberless other creations inspired by Paolo and Francesca's story.

Sarah Lucas, *The Kiss*, 2003

## SARAH LUCAS' *THE KISS*

It may be granted that the three works share representations of human beings in close touch. In terms of medium or style, however, there is hardly anything in common between the installation and Rodin's sculpture or between Lucas's work and the literary episode which ultimately inspired it. With its sensuous curves, tracing the naked lovers' languid embrace, Rodin's sculpture seems to challenge the rigidity of the stone to celebrate the ecstasy of mutual passion. In Lucas' recreation, the lovers are replaced by empty hats hanging over a kind of thread ball, suggesting two heads connected to wiry bodies. The figures, which sit on inexpensive contemporary chairs, are tied to each other by a leather strap. Without discarding the sexual innuendo, the installation evokes an impersonal passionless penetration, between objects rather than people. The headless hats suggest a view of contemporary couples as empty individuals deprived of identity and feelings. They may be

tied to each other by the ruthless bond of the marital yoke, or by the oppression of woman in a still phallogocentric society— a reading supported by Sarah Lucas' feminist stance. It would also be possible to take the installation as an illustration of the contrast between ancient and recent views on art. Marble, the virtually eternal material used by Rodin, which has survived centuries of universal statuary, hints at the ideal of everlasting passion. In Lucas's *Kiss*, the stone was replaced by perishable materials, thread balls, leather straps, and hackneyed furniture— banal, discardable, serially manufactured objects. Besides challenging the ideal of love as eternal, blissful abandon, which underlies Rodin's statue, the installation hints at the abandonment of former ideals of beauty, contemplation, permanence and subjectivity, no longer deemed essential for the artistic object in postmodern times.

The difficulty to find intertextual equivalences between the three works points to the stumbling block of contemporary intersemiotic studies: finding a valid paradigm to cover both the art of the past and of the present. The problem underlies the familiar question, posed by a not inconsiderable number of people, when faced with works like Lucas's installation: "But is it art?"

This of course reminds us of the rupture prevalent since Modernism, and, even more, since the cultural revolution of the 1960's. The breach has been so radical that, as some critics claim, we have come to the end of the Era of Art, that is, of the long narrative started by Giorgio Vasari's *Life of painters* in 1550, the succession of styles — Renaissance, Baroque, Neo-Classicism, Romanticism, Impressionism— aiming at an ideal of visual representation. Critics keep reminding us of Marcel Duchamp's inaugural gesture in 1917, when he presented to the Society of Independent Artists the urinal he called *Fountain*. (In 2004, on the occasion of the presentation of the *Turner prize*, a group of over 500 specialists elected *Fountain* the most influential work of art ever created). -Since then, art can be seen as an extension of the question "what is art?" The question, shared by Dada, Pop, Fluxus, Minimalism and Conceptualism alike, has become constitutive of art practice. How could traditional concepts cover such dissimilar media as performance art, video art, figurative painting, abstract painting, photography, digital art? Or objects like those shown in the controversial exhibition of the Young British Artists named *Sensation*, which took place in 1997 at the London Royal Academy of Art and later toured to Berlin and New York?

The exhibition consisted of 110 works by 42 artists, from the collection of Charles Saatchi, including such diverse pieces as Damien Hurst's shark suspended in formaldehyde, titled *Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* and Tracey Emil's tent *Everyone I Have Ever Slept with from 1963-1995*.

The adverse reactions are well known. Around a quarter of the Royal Academy's eighty members warned that the exhibition was inflammatory. With part of the public, they complained about exhibits like the installations by Jake and Dinos Chapman, consisting of life-size fiberglass ~~child mannequins with noses replaced by penises~~ and mouths in the form of an anus. Equally offensive to some people was Ron Mueck's *Dead Dad* (a two thirds scale model of his naked dead father's body). The biggest media controversy was over Marcus Harvey's *Myra*, a portrait of the child murderer, Myra Hindley, made up of hundreds of copies of a child's handprint.

In New York the show at the Brooklyn Museum of Art was met with instant protest, centering on *The Holy Virgin Mary* by Chris Ofili: an African Madonna accessorized by clumps of elephant dung surrounded by small collaged images of female genitalia. From a distance, the images, taken from pornographic magazines, looked like the traditional cherubim. However, *Sensation* was extremely popular with the general public, attracting over 300,000 visitors.

## MARCUS HARVEY'S *MYRA*

Marcus Harvey, *Myra*, 1997

The controversy around the show underlines the fact that in the contemporary period the mere enunciation of the word "art" presents a challenge, owing to the increasing difficulty of conceptualizing this ever controversial notion. Nothing to wonder at that a number of theoreticians, Claus Clüver, Leo Hoek, and Eric Vos among others, have been substituting "Intermedial Studies" for "Interart Studies" (CLÜVER, 1997: p. 37-55). The new term gets around the difficulty of defining art. People may grudge creations in the *Sensation*

exhibition the status of art but they will hardly deny that the exhibits involve different media, so no objections could be raised against the phrase “intermedial studies” if applied to the relationship between Dante’s poem, Rodin’s sculpture and Lucas installation. In such cases, while the distinction between art and non art still plays any function, artworks, apart from considerations of quality, can be understood as cultural constructs, subject to change, whose reading depends on the subjectivity of the observer and on the passage of time. Such constructs are simply texts composed within a sign system, which the interpretive community allows or even forces us to read as “works of art”. The artist ends up depending on the judgement of the art world, groups or institutions socially authorized to validate their work— hence the immense power now wielded by the curator, the successor, *mutatis mutandis*, of the ancient maecenas. Hardly any artist is able to evade the national schemes of art galleries, biennials, art magazines and the like, all involving the most varied interests. The issue of power, never absent from the world of art, has thus been displaced from throne and altar to the art world.

This state of affairs does not lack critics. Ferreira Gullar lashes at the “esthetic commercial competition”, part of the “unruly vanguardist career” (2003, p. 125).-Looking back to the 2005 Venice Biennial, another critic, Jorge Coli, sneers at “an art which depends on a discourse by authorized institutions which, by a juggling act, may attribute to any object, or gesture, or, in fact, to nothing, the category of art.” (COLI, 2005).

However much their defenders may attribute to them relevant rhetorical functions— usually the denunciation of unsavoury aspects of contemporary culture— a large number of present-day creations has, as Arthur Danto mentions, turned from the “art de goût ” to the “art de degoût ”. In literature, it may suffice to recall examples of abject art, or the exploration of pain and violence, as in the Portuguese poet Alexandre O’Neill, or the Brazilian Glauco Mattoso. So also a São Paulo magazine directed by poets Tarso de Melo, Kleber Montovani and Fabiano Calixto is symptomatically named *Monturo (Ordure)*. For literature in English, the names of David Foster Wallace, Jon Silliman, and John Giorno jump to mind. In the visual arts, it is even easier to find examples of bizarre creations. To the ones in the *Sensation* exhibition, let me add Antoni Miraldi’s *Tastes and Tongues*, shown at the São Paulo Biennial in 2006. Miraldi’s installation consisted of a number of plastic “dishes” from different parts of the world. Among the international delicacies, there were dishes

with representations of feces. The two ends of the alimentary chain were thus brought together, as in as in images studied in Georges Bataille's *Histoire de L'œil*, in works by Andrés Serrano or in the miniature figures known as caganers ("crappers"), frequent in nativity scenes of Catalonia. There were also dishes with female breasts and bottoms— a visual pun on the literal and metaphorical meanings of the Portuguese verb "to eat".

In some happenings, traumatic performances often involving living bodies, contemporary art does not shy away from other shocking presentations. The Australia-based performer Stelarc uses machines working as extensions of his body. In one of his performances, he exhibited his own naked body, hanging in the air, suspended by huge hooks attached to his skin and tied to the ceiling of an art gallery.

All this points to a challenge of the category of the esthetic, anyway subject to constant redefinition. Cultural studies, still largely hegemonic, utterly reject traditional criteria -like ~~craftsmanship~~, internal organization, formal sophistication, relevance, poetic transcendence or beauty (in whatever sense of this tricky word). For some contemporary theoreticians the traditional view now has a merely historical import. As Hegel claimed back in 1817, in an endlessly repeated sentence, art is dead.

Some will reply that art is indeed dead, but by its own hands, in the suicide of the vanguards of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a break which radicalized the practice of several artists. In painting, Van Gogh (1853-1890) had already got rid of fidelity to the colours of represented objects, when Kasimir Malevich's 1918 white square on a white background signaled a kind of zero degree in painting, its end as an art of representation. Otherwise, Duchamp's ready-mades, particularly his famous 1917 *Fountain*, brought ordinary objects to the world of art. In the mid 1980's, paradoxically at the moment when neo-vanguard painting triumphantly emerged thanks to the stock market boom in the United States, Hans Belting devoted an entire book to the question *The End of the History of Art?* Ten years later, as if the question had already been answered affirmatively, Belting published an expanded edition of his book and withdrew the question mark from the title. Also in the 1990's, Berel Lang published a collection with several critics' responses to an essay titled "The end of art". This article had been signed by Arthur Danto, a contemporary critic and philosopher, the author of a trilogy composed of the suggestively titled volumes *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, *After the End of Art* and *The Abuse of Beauty*.

However, almost a century after Duchamp's inaugural gesture, it can hardly be said that painting and art are dead. What in fact died (or cooled down) was the craftsmanship paradigm, which underlies the long narrative launched in 1550 by Giorgio Vasari's *Life of Painters*. We now live in an age of total pluralism, marked by the absence of stylistic unity and of esthetic criteria. Artists can follow numberless paths. They can revisit the past, use it as an available repertoire for endless recreation, as in *Sull'orlo della sera*, by Mimmo Paladino. [On a single canvas, the oil](#) combines very different allusions to the art of the past (FRABRINI, 2002, p. 29 ss.) Taking the opposite course, artists can explore new art forms: video, holography, computational art, installations, performances, pop and op art, land art, sky art, minimalism, concrete and neo-concrete art, art povera, comportamental and processual art, bio art, conceptualism...

In *After the End of Art* Arthur Danto tackles the theme of the death of art. He endorses [Hans](#) Belting's proposal to replace it by the idea of the end of the "Age of Art". In *The Image before the Era of Art*, Belting -claims that from the end of the Roman Empire to about 1400 A.D, when the concept of art had not yet emerged in the social consciousness, the sacred images we now find in museums did not play an esthetic, but a religious role. The idea of art crystallizes in the Renaissance, when Vasari inaugurates [art](#) history, so in the future, the concept of art as we still know it may be merely historical, and the period between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century will perhaps be retroactively called "the age of art". This of course does not mean that the era of art abruptly started in 1400. Nor does it anticipate prophecies, reaffirming the death of art in the mid 1980's, when some radical theorists began to talk about the death of painting. However, the great master narratives which have supported traditional art undoubtedly no longer hold good [for postmodern creations](#). Refunctionalized and taken out of their context, artifacts indistinguishable from ordinary objects find their way to art galleries. Duchamp's ready-mades have been succeeded by Andy Warhol *Brillo Boxes* and countless similar works. In the same line, Fluxus art, which took shape in Europe, the United States and Japan during the 1950's, postulates the lack of differentiation between art and life. In 1965, George Maciunas, the leader of the movement, proposes the exclusion of almost all qualities traditionally associated with art: originality, relevance, inspiration, technique, complexity, permanence-... In music, John Cages seeks to erase the opposition between noise and

musical sound. Similarly, Yvonne Rainer, the choreographer of the *Judson Dance Group*, rejects spectacle, virtuosity, glamour, the star image, the effect of something magic, transforming.

With the emergence of conceptual art in the 1960's, not even the existence or permanence of a material object is deemed necessary: the object may be discardable, as in so many installations, or made up of ephemeral light points, instable fluxes and refluxes of energy, as in electronic art. In 1969, in *Art after Philosophy*, a basic text for conceptual art, Joseph Kosuth takes to the extreme limit the postulate of the dissolution of the object, claiming that "Art is the definition of art": art has become one with the philosophy of art. Thus the organizers of certain exhibitions, as the 1970 *Information Show* at the New York Museum of Modern Art, find it necessary ~~to~~ provide catalogues including bibliographies of theoretical texts on contemporary production.

Traditional criteria for selection and evaluation once done away with, situations unthinkable for traditional discourse proliferate. In the 2002 Biennial of the New York Whitney Museum for instance, ~~a performance by~~ the group *Praxis* offered choices from a menu of services which included hugs, footbaths, dollar bills, affixing band-aids accompanied by a kiss. Among the most popular "works", was a 1999 recording of the noises made by the Floyd hurricane outside the ninety ~~-nine~~ first floor of Tower 1 of *The World Trade Center*. Later on, the composer Karheinz Stockhausen proclaimed the terrorist attack to the *World Trade Center* on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 "the greatest work of art even seen". We have thus reached the point of conceptual laxity compatible with Joseph Beuys' radical posture. For the German artist (1921-1986), society makes up a vast block, where we are all artists. At which some critics, including Ferreira Gullar, acidly remark: "art became democratic, that is, nobody is an artist". (~~2003, p. 124~~).

However, the problem of distinguishing the artistic from the non-artistic object keeps on stubbornly imposing itself on theoreticians, among whom I would like to turn again to Danto. The North-American philosopher traces the blurring of the distinction between art and non-art to about 1917, when Duchamp offered his *Fountain* to the artworld. Danto tries to define art, ~~or at least to~~ pin down minimal conditions to tell apart the artistic from the non-artistic. In *The Abuse of Beauty* he talks of the artistic object as "embodied meaning", something that expresses a meaning in non-verbal ways. For an ~~object to be art~~ the critic

~~mentions three requisites: the existence of a semantic content, of a material object~~ embodying it and ~~a connection with the context.~~ Danto exemplifies these comments with a piece by Felix Gonzalez -Torres, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, ~~created in 1991 in memory of~~ the artist's ~~dead lover.~~ The work consists of two identical clocks- ~~showing~~ the same time. The clocks(~~the material object, the "body" which carries meaning~~), are ordinary timepieces, similar to those used in contemporary kitchens-~~or classrooms.~~ ~~They only call attention because they are presented as art and because of the title, which points to the artist's biography.~~ ~~In Danto's view,~~ *Perfect Lovers* is an original form of *vanitas*— a meditation on the brevity and ~~of love and life~~: such as different-clocks cannot be expected to stop running on the same tick, so also lovers can not hope to die in unison: one is doomed to precede the other in death.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* 1991

~~One~~ cannot fail to notice that, except for the fact that it emphasizes the possibility of any ordinary object becoming a work of art, Danto's argument ~~is hardly distinguishable from~~ the Russian Formalists' view of art. In his essay "Art as a semiotic fact" Jan Mukařowiský points to features equivalent to those stressed by the North-American philosopher. For the Czech theorist, the work of art consists of a material object, "the work thing" (Saussure's *signifiant*), embodying a meaning — the esthetic object— which is made up of shared elements (subjective states experienced by members of a community) subject to alterations due to changes in time and or space <sup>1</sup>.

In *After the End of Art*, Danto reconsiders the lack of distinction between ordinary objects and certain pieces of contemporary art. The philosopher barely-disguises a certain disenchantment , as he relates the question to a giant candy bar titled *We Got It!* presented

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<sup>1</sup>The work of art cannot be reduced to this "work-thing" (...) since this work-thing happens to change completely in appearance and internal structure through temporal or spatial shifts (...) The work-thing functions, then, only as an external symbol ( the *signifiant* according to Saussure's terminology) to which corresponds in the social consciousness a meaning ( sometimes called the "aesthetic object") consisting of what the subjective states of consciousness in the members of a certain collectivity have in common( Mukařowiský, 1977, p. 83 )

during the 1993 event *Culture in action* at the Art Institute of Chicago. [Commenting on this example of participatory aesthetics, which transforms the public into its own artist,](#) Danto starts from Joseph Beuys' claim, "everybody is an artist", to argue:

A candy bar that is a work of art need not be a especially good candy bar. It just has to be a candy bar produced with the intention that it be art (...) It is easy to see that "quality" has nothing to do with being art under Beuysian considerations (...) What [ the millions] thirst for (...) what we all thirst for, is meaning: the kind of meaning that religion was capable of providing, or philosophy, or, finally, art (...) That [*We Got It!*] should be a work of art and not a mere bar of chocolate is possible only after the end of art, enfranchised as such by certain powerful theories which emerged in the 1970's to the effect that anything can be a work of art and everyone is an artist. Its being "community based" art rather than the work of a single individual is the achievement of certain enfranchising political theories which held (...) that groups of individuals alleged to find no meaning in the art of museums should not be deprived of the meaning art might confer upon their lives (...) [People in the future] should be made to think of all those men and women, far from the art world, thinking of what gave meaning to their lives. The mere possibility of that more than justifies putting the work in the museum. (DANTO, 1997: p. 185-189).

Danto here emphasizes the political motivation behind the Beuysian stance. Going on with his [argument](#), he somewhat nostalgically writes: "we are forever exiled from the esthetic motherland". Like Umberto Eco, he holds that only as citation, and ironically, can we revisit the art of the past, and ends up by recalling [Hegel's reflexion](#) on comedy:

We are forever exiled from the aesthetic motherland (...) One can be part of the present art world and paint like Rembrandt only if (...) one does so from the perspective of mention rather than of use, and in the spirit of the joke. (...) The true heroes of the post-historical period are the artists who are masters of every style without having a painterly style at all (...) whose temperament is anticipated by Hegel in his discussion of comedy: "The keynote is good humour, assured and careless gaiety, (...) exuberance and the audacity of a fundamentally happy craziness"...it is not essential to comedy that it be funny, only that it be happy. It is wholly consistent that the kind of comedy in which the end of art consists can express itself on tragedy tragically, as Gerhard Richter does when he paints, in the appropriated blur of bad photographs, the violent deaths of the Baader-Meinhof<sup>2</sup> leaders,

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<sup>2</sup> The Red Army Faction or RAF (German Rote Armee Fraktion), also commonly known as the Baader-Meinhof Group, was one of postwar West Germany's most active and prominent militant left-wing groups. It described itself as a communist "urban guerrilla" group engaged in armed resistance, while it was described by the West German government as a terrorist gang. The RAF was formally founded in 1970 by Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, Horst Mahler, Irmgard Möller and others. Amidst widespread media controversy,

for the comedy is in the means, not the subject. (...) With all this happiness, it would be wonderful if this were a Golden Age of art, but probably the conditions of comedy are the guarantee of tragedy, if the latter means that our age is not a Golden Age. You cannot have everything. DANTO, (1997: p. 216-217).

Apart from these comments, where it is not difficult to pinpoint moot points (is contemporary art indeed “happy?”), Danto tries to keep his distance from explosive questions. Having granted that “this is not a golden age of art”, he shies away from other value judgments, which critics have mostly done after the famous 1872 Paris *Salon*’s blunder of refusing the first Impressionist paintings.

Not everybody, however, is as cautious or as ambiguous as Danto. Among the outspoken voices, we may remember that of Robert Hughes, one of the most famous art critics alive. The author of seminal texts about contemporary art, like *The Shock of the New* (1980, 1991), Hughes granted an interview to Marcelo Martins of the Brazilian magazine *Veja* in 2007 holding that “art is first of all made to delight the eyes and the spirit”— something which can hardly be said of many contemporary creations. Hughes also announces his retirement as a critic, giving his reasons for it:

The present, in art, is a kind of swampy ground, always subject to marketing (...) Artists are talked about, not because of their relevance, but because of the market value of their works (...)— as if one had to do with the millionaire budget of a film— or the audience rate of a program. (...) Biennials, triennials, whatever have you (...) are now important only for art dealers. Beneath the novelty façade, such events have become vulgar market-places (MARTINS, 2007, p. 11-14), my translation).

Hughes’ acid comments do not spare contemporary icons like Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp:

Even though he created relevant things at the beginning of the 1960’s, Warhol has the most ridiculously over estimated reputation in the XXth century. Duchamp’s influence on contemporary art was liberating, but also catastrophic (...) Without him there would not be the so called installations, these silly works in which the spectator is invited to go through tubs and other childish devices. Or needs to read directions to understand what the artist means<sup>3</sup>.

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the German president had considered pardoning RAF member Christian Klar, who filed a pardon application years ago, but on 7 May 2007 this was denied.

<sup>3</sup> Apesar de ter produzido coisas relevantes no início dos anos 60, Warhol tem a reputação mais ridiculamente superestimada do século XX. A influência de Duchamp sobre a arte contemporânea foi libertadora, mas também catastrófica. (...)

Still according to Hughes, the revolutionary character of contemporary art is no more than a fallacy, it can hardly be compared to the real daring of artists in the past: “-Damien Hirst, the most flattered present-day English artist and others of his generation “, use scandal as a marketing device. But a Renaissance artist like Piero della Francesca managed to be radical to an extent that ...[Hirst] never even came close to reaching”. Under such circumstances, Hughes concludes, “I prefer to concentrate on some artists whose work really matters to see my reviews being used to inflate others’ reputations” (MARTINS, 2007, p. 15, my translation):

In *Argumentação contra a Morte da Arte ( An Argument against the Death of Art)* Ferreira Gullar expresses similar views. He inveighs against what he calls “the liquidation of artistic genres, techniques, materials (...) the whole métier of the painter, the sculptor, the engraver”. He deplores the replacement of criticism by “prophetic, hermetic, apologetic texts, meant for initiates” (-2003, p. 123-4):

However, the poet/critic is enough of an optimist to believe that we are overcoming this plight. “The time is gone of the great fuss, of the show, ~~from whichin which~~ the real creators, incidentally, never participated” (...) The conditions are being created for the artist to concentrate once again on his job, on the complex problems of his art”.

At which I myself would like to ask if we are indeed ready to go back to the work of art, such as it is conceived of by people like Gullar, that is,

the outcome of formal sophisticating, of the deepening of plastic and painterly meanings, of reflection and research (...) something resulting from the transmutation of the material into the spiritual, of the vulgar into the poetic (...) the creation of a unique, imaginary universe, (...) created by labor, by the mastering of media, the gradual accumulation of lived experience transmuted into technical experience <sup>4</sup>.

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[S]em ele não haveria as chamadas instalações, essas obras tolas em que o espectador é convidado a passar por túneis e outros recursos infantis. “Ou precisa ler uma bula para entender o que o artista quis dizer” (Martins, 2007: p. 14, my translation).

<sup>4</sup> Ferreira Gullar’s notion of art comes out several times as “algo que decorre da transmutação do material em espiritual, do vulgar em poético... resulta da criação de um universo imaginário, próprio, que não se cria por milagre. Cria-se com o trabalho, com o domínio dos meios de expressão, a acumulação gradativa da experiência vivida que se transforma em experiência técnica (...) para que o artista consiga transformar elementos materiais (...) em algo impregnado de significação, deve ele entregar-se a um trabalho difícil e exigente, que consiste em insuflar espírito na matéria, (...) Esse exercício encontra sentido (...) nos obstáculos que se interpõe à necessidade do artista de deflagrar, no seio da banalidade, o maravilhoso, o poético, o dramático, o inesperado, enfim, esse acontecimento que chamamos de obra de arte. O artista não é um

Surely a return to such ideals would not lead to results identical to the art of the past, for the new artworks will unavoidably have been influenced by the passage of time. But Gullar believes we have already reached a turning point. Literature, he thinks, has not followed the path signaled by *Finnegans Wake*; it has escaped the self-destruction implicit in the Joycean work, which has enabled the emergence of novelists like William Faulkner, Angel Asturias, Garcia Marques, Jorge Luis Borges, Clarice Lispector, Guimarães Rosa and so many others. As regards poetry, another poet critic, Paulo Henriques Britto similarly hopes “we are still degutting experimentations, but we are beginning to overcome the age of the vanguard”.

In the wake of these issues Ferreira Gullar asks: “are we waiting for a new art, more adjusted to the new times”? And adds: “Is this new art going to be born or has it already been born? Can’t it, in fact, be the cinema?” Taking Gullar’s cue, I recall a comment by Graham Greene in an introduction to a history of English drama. Greene remarked that great drama has to be popular — as Shakespearean and Greek plays were. We can say the same of the cinema now, in some respects an heir to dramatic art, often resulting from mutual fertilization between the so called popular and high culture. As an example, I would like to recall Zack Snyder’s film *300*. It relates cartoons and familiar epic cinematography to the historical episode of the Spartan resistance to the Persian invasion at Thermopylae in 480 B.C., when Leonidas, King of Sparta, for three days, with only three hundred men, kept at bay the seemingly invincible army led by Xerxes. The feat cost the lives of all three hundred, but allowed the other Greek city-states to organize the resistance and later defeat the invaders. The improbable victory became emblematic of Greek democratic ideals and of all fights for liberty.

If being intermedial, mixed media, or transmedial is a typical feature of postmodern production, *300* certainly qualifies as an example. The film is

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produtor de objetos, não compete com a indústria. O que lhe interessa é a qualidade e não a quantidade. Cada obra de arte é um ser diferenciado, que retira dessa diferença a sua razão de ser. Essa diferença é a expressão do próprio trabalho do artista, da permanente elaboração dos elementos materiais e espirituais que constituem a substância da obra”. ( My translation. FERREIRA GULLAR, 2000, p. 24-25)

an adaptation of Frank Miller's cartoon novel *300* (1998), in turn a recreation of *The Lion of Sparta*, a 1963 film which Miller watched as a boy, and which also inspired another homonymous comic book adaptation. They all narrate the heroic events at Thermopylae.

In his transposition of *300*, the novel, to the homonymous film, director Zack Snyder incorporates an amalgam of traits borrowed from Miller: the film has figures with blocky hands and feet as in the cartoon character Kirby, and, in many of the more distant camera shots, silhouettes are pared down to their barest, cartoony essentials. There are also similarities to Miller's most recent work in the film *Sin City*, particularly the frequent use of mood-conveying silhouettes, and the masses of electrified, frazzled hair splayed across panels. In fact, Snyder creates a straightforward action comic with some distinct super heroic elements intact. Characters do look like superheroes, "broad and big" like "the flamboyant fantasies they are", as Miller once said about similar figures in his novel. Again as in cartoons, exaggeration is a feature of the film (even in the sound track), with an hyper-reality well fitted to the representation of the epic and the mythic.

Photos of Frank Miller's cartoon novel, *300*, 1998

Zack Snyder's film, *300*, 2006

If craftsmanship, as Hughes and Gullar hold, is essential for art, *300* is certainly exemplary. There is craftsmanship all over. Chris Watts, the Visual Effect Supervisor over a department of 17 specialists, and other 500 artists working in graphics facilities around the world, created a three-dimensional version of Miller's world. Watts dealt with the logistics of 1300 effects shots and the limitations of shooting an epic on a soundstage, for, with a couple of minor exceptions, the entire film was shot indoors, in a Canadian studio near Montreal, against a bare blue screen. In the battle scenes, if there had to be characters walking from far away right up to the camera, they couldn't actually be put far enough away — there wasn't enough stage. Elements had to be shot, delayed in time and the back space was filled with digital people. There were digitally created characters, digital water,

digital blood. Lighting problems had also to be faced. Cinematographer Larry Fong devised an efficient method of combining overhead and key lighting that made for faster, more efficient shooting — it allowed the perspective to change by simply reversing the lighting. There were apparent flaws: unavoidable superficiality in character portrayal, lack of accuracy in the representation of Greek and Spartan culture and the occasional use of overly modern language, sometimes including slang. Nevertheless, cinematographic narrative and style were perfectly integrated. Whatever overall reception the film may have ~~got~~ (it was booed in Berlin in February 2007) it is interesting, full of changing perspectives, carefully choreographed fights and movements, and notable effects of acceleration or slowing down in key scenes. In short, Snyder grants liveliness and epic pulse to a cartoon. He brings an emblematic moment of human history to the most diversified audiences, including many people who, otherwise, would hardly know of it. In its best moments, the film also incorporates qualities once thought essential to traditional art: beauty, sophisticated craftsmanship, and the potential to suggest spiritual values. Do such films herald an art which somehow recaptures ancient values? A provocative thought. What cannot be denied, however, is that contemporary art, no matter which form it takes, certainly has a function to play in the troubled consciousness of our times. Rather than whining about what we miss, we should be grateful for what we get. In no other way can we expect to become contemporaries of our own times.

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Much of contemporary literature comes from Western authors; however, the term is not synonymous with English or American literature, and this literary period can apply to written works from anywhere in the world. In fact, globalization opened the door to include contemporary works written by many literary figures in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Genres included in this literary period span a variety of writing forms in addition to novels and poetry. On the other hand, I don't think there will ever be total agreement on what should be included in a particular movement, no matter how much time has passed. And that's particularly true these days when there are so many people writing books that reach the public. Mor. November 23, 2013. @irontoenail - We haven't gone past it though. Recent papers in History of Modern and Contemporary architecture; Visual Arts; History, Poetry, Literature. Papers. People. SPACE International Conference 2020 on Architecture and Literature will be held in London on 25-26 September 2020. We hope that the Conference will be an ideal platform to discuss the recent advances and research results in the intersection of architecture and literature. The Conference aims to explore the interrelations between writing and building. The image of the "other" city: Learning from Las Vegas, or on the Necessity of an American Grand Tour -- Las Vegas "the other" city par excellence even in the multifaceted American urban landscape " had never been a case more. Learn vocabulary, terms and more with flashcards, games and other study tools. - the district near a border - an area of overlap between two things - reinforces the concept of splitting culture and people, causing wars, etc - embraces orientalism and the other. the other. - people categorized as different, or not accepted - concept in orientalism - self-created concept that can happen to really any type of group, but is commonly represented in race. Persepolis.