

The Art of Non-Figurative Forms and the Aesthetics of Figurative Forms: Transcending Imitation, Systems, Structures and Texts

MACARIO OFILADA

“El verbo de los poetas, como el de los santos, no requiere descifrarse por gramática para mover las almas. Su esencia es el milagro musical.”

R. del Valle Inclán, *La lámpara maravillosa*, II.

“La parole n'est qu'un bruit et les livres ne sont que du papier.”

P. Claudel, *Tête d'or*, First Part.

With the dawn of photography in the nineteenth century, the function of art as imitation (art imitates reality), especially in the reproduction of landscapes and in the execution of portraits of persons, whether living or dead, was put into crisis. At last, art as *mimesis* or as pure conformity simply had to give in to the superior imitation technology of photography. Photography, among other things, placed art into a crisis situation wherein art had to redefine itself. In doing so, art was challenged to discover or rediscover its profound *raison d'être*.¹

¹ Photography, despite its strong mimetic base, has developed into a legitimate art form going beyond its commemorative or documentary limitations with the manipulation of light, selection of angles and other technologies. These implications cannot be discussed in the present essay as it is beyond the scope of our reflections. Nevertheless, it would be an interesting point to reflect on in a separate work.

All along art did not know itself. It was shallow because it was merely figurative. It was merely a mirror. It was trying too hard to be a mirror instead of being a crystal through which light passes into many hues and shades. Art, before photography and particularly the visual arts, only knew itself superficially as imitation, as reproduction and as commemoration or immortalization. This was also true in the performative arts since dances, plays and operas were commemorative, imitative of events, of rituals, of figures recognizable in history, understood as the narrative of what happened wherein form equals figure. This was the extreme realism or objectivity of art. The subjective need for expression did not help at all for it became the venue for imitation, for mere commemoration and reproduction in the classical period and paradigm. As such, art has been reduced to work, to exploitable labor instead of being emancipatory not only for the artist or for the artwork (given that work in itself should be emancipatory for it is above all, psychological release) but for art in itself in its quest for transcendence.

Art, Reading, Tracing and Freedom of Form from the Figurative: Transcendentalization and Creativity

Art had to rediscover its poetic or creative character. Art had to rediscover the power of assimilated experience in the artist, who has been reduced to a copier especially when it came to portraits or narratives that followed a strict line of events as they empirically or chronologically happened. Art had to rediscover its origins: in the creative power of the artist that took the form and transformed it beyond the limits of the figure as it appeared in nature or as it immediately conformed itself with the natural world. Once again, let us cite the following lapidary words of Heidegger: "The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other. Nevertheless, neither is the sole support of the other. In themselves and in their interrelations artist and work *are* each of them by virtue of a third thing which is prior to both, namely that which also gives artist and work of art their names – art."²

² M. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in A. Hofstadter trans. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. (New York-Grand Rapids: Harper & Row, 1975), 17.

Philosophy alone can read and trace the path towards the origin from the present-day dominance of *aesthetics* or the domination of the figurative in forms towards the principle of creativity in *art* which alone opens itself up as mystagogy.³ Philosophy is the vocation of art; art is the call to philosophy to go beyond the simple factual knowledge into wisdom into knowledge that breaks all the figures of the empirical facts into the sublimation of the assimilated into life and into the creative process that takes place within life.

Philosophy is not just the Owl of Minerva that takes its flight at dusk (Hegel). It is above all the Rooster of the Gods that announces the new dawn while flapping its wings even though it cannot take flight. Its flight is not in the air nor by its wings but by its call, from the finitude of its whereabouts, which can be heard as light pierces through the darkness of the earth's slumber.

Philosophy commences being the Owl of Minerva and matures into the Rooster of the Gods. Philosophy begins in the reading that takes place at sunset after reality has already been constituted and culminates in the new dawn that announces creativity. This does not mean that philosophy reverses time or reverses the day nor does it merely look back helplessly like the romanticists. It simply means that philosophy is its own time within the shared milieu of man.

Reading is the primordial aesthetical act. Reading perceives the fullness of space and time in what is "written," in as much as the circumstance presents itself as text. *Tracing* is the work of art which is only possible if one reads, if one empties the space occupied by the text or inspiration in order to fill in the gap by creativity. Tracing is going beyond the tyranny of the text, the tyranny of perpetual interpretation. Tracing is going beyond the text. It is going back to life by means of creation, by means of cultivation of the self and the production of new texts from life instead of man, finding himself in the text because beyond the text

³ My point of departure for the present introductory essay can be found in my book: *Experience, Reality and Beauty: From the Aesthetics of Ontology to the Mystagogy of Art in Metaphysics*. (Manila: University of Santo Tomás Publishing House, 2002).

there is nothing. Tracing is an act of transcendence, wherein man overcomes the text, goes back to life and within life creatively produces the text(s) and is not just merely a product of the text.⁴

Space and time⁵, which is intentionally⁶ directed to man as circumstance, are basically empty. The aesthetic act of reading perceives this emptiness in terms of forms, i.e., in terms of textuality, understood as the intentional availability of a presence, perceived aesthetically as present eventually to be emptied out through reading that culminates in the creativity of art. This emptying out does not signify absence in the most profound sense, but rather it is the transcendentalization of the presence in the sublime, which is participation in the act of creation by means of art.

This transcendentalization is executed or effectively takes place in the creative process of art, wherein man takes part (participates) in the whole of the Act of the Creator, who alone creates *ex nihilo*. Participation is only creation *post nihilum* and exclusively within the framework of appropriation and improvement or cultivation (culture) of the primordial form, present in the transcendental aesthetics of space and time.

However, even in the transcendental realm of art the figurativeness of the aesthetics has long been dominant or has not been filtered enough such that mimetic function of aesthetics has become

⁴ In this sense, structuralism and deconstruction cannot be considered "artistic" since it reduces man to structures, to the text even obliterating man from the scene. Foucault's statement that "man is in the process of perishing as the being of language continues to shine ever brighter upon our horizon" (*The Order of Things*. New York: Random House, 1973, 386) affirms the disappearance of man in favor of structures, in favor of texts instead of man generating texts by overcoming his own textuality. The following reflections of R. Rorty have proved to be helpful in developing this particular point: "Method, Social Science and Social Hope" Idem., *Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays 1972-1980)*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 191-210.

⁵ Admittedly, I am taking into consideration Kant's transcendental aesthetics without strictly adhering myself to the kantian treatment of space and time.

⁶ Here we make use of the phenomenological (husserlian) notion of intentionality wherein everything is significantly directed towards the conscience or the knowing subject or person within an eidetic process after epoché or the bracketing of the great prejudice or presupposition of exclusively or entirely objective objectivity.

classically the dominant canon of art dismissing the more poetic or non-mimetic forms. The process of transcendentalization is in itself a distantiation from nature as mimetic referent to the extent that mimesis becomes sublimated by poiesis. This is especially true in the classical period and during the renaissance wherein portraits, commemorative statues, commemorative plays or theatrical works of empirical and chronological historical value, etc.

In the visual arts, especially in the classical sense, the form is in effect figurative wherein space and time become decipherable figures, i.e., figures that are decipherable from the criteriological yardstick of nature or objective reality. Even epic poems (praising the heroic adventures of someone) or vocal music (especially in the expression of feelings) are prone to this. It is only when poetry disregards meter and figure and sensible images and when music ceases to be dominated by vocal lyrics (always in a particular idiom) and even strict melodic lines and traditional harmonies can poetry and music acquire a transcendental form detached and beyond (in the metaphysical sense) from the classical trend to identify the form with figures.

Only then (by transcending the identification of the form with figures) can aesthetics be elevated into art in the case of the various disciplines that make up the arts. This is the only way that the arts truly become art. It is not merely the overcoming of canons. Superficially, it is the overcoming of classical mimetic canons. However, in all actuality, it is the overcoming, the transcending of the aesthetic, especially in the dominant model of form=figure, into a "figure-less form" wherein what really matters is not subjective expression on the part of the artist or objective pedagogy (or art as a "visuability" to tautological pointing out to the external world-referent) but the very participation in itself. In other words, what truly constitutes art is taking part, wherein the mediation of experience, overcoming all polarities between subjectivity-objectivity or artist-art work is truly overcome (in the metaphysical sense) beyond the dominance of being (ontology), given that the question of being is the question of form that actualizes matter becoming concrete in the world as figures.

This spells freedom from the burden of ontological polysemy – which brings about the vicious hermeneutical circle – and it is the ushering in with the metaphysical union of participation.

Philosophy, Art and Aesthetics: From the Mediation of Experience Beyond Criticism

A work of art is of aesthetic value if it communicates a sensation of attraction and this attraction, even though objectively is ugly or grotesque, is effectively identified as beauty. A work of art is of artistic value if it communicates the participation of the artist through the medium in the divine act of creation. This communication can only take place as the mediation of the experience wherein the real (substantive) in itself becomes reality (quality) through experience and reality (substantive) in its supreme analogate⁷ becomes real (quality) through experience. Experience is above all mediation in the concrete.

An aesthetic response to a work is nothing more than *meditation*, which is communion with the real that becomes reality and the reality that becomes real in experience through form, which becomes experientially concrete in the medium. This is the level of the critic. On the other hand, an artistic response is only possible as *contemplation* or direct communion with the real that becomes reality and the reality and reality becomes real in the ascesis of directness, the sobriety of naturalness and the supernatural call of creative participation.

Aesthetic meditation is the work of the critic who can only be a mystic if he elevates *criticism* as the path *towards participative creation* wherein criticism gives way to a clearer mediation. Artistic contemplation is automatically *mystagogy* or communication, initiation, accompaniment towards and within the mediation even in its darkest nights. Accompaniment may entail repeating the whole process of initiation on the already initiated in his walk of solidarity with the neophyte or uninitiated.

⁷ I have especially taken into the account the use of analogy in philosophical and theological language. Cf. for example: R. F. Luciani Rivero, *El misterio de la diferencia. Un estudio tipológico de la analogía como estructura originaria de la realidad en Tomás de Aquino, Erich Przywara y Hans Urs von Balthasar y su uso en teología trinitaria*. (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2002); S. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology. Models of God in Religious Language*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982). D. Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. (New York-London: Crossroad, 1981).

Philosophy must develop itself as contemplation in the terms expounded above. As such, philosophy must enter into the realm of the uncertain, in freedom from the slavery to forms which in concreteness is being chained to the dominance of the figure (as the determinant of the form). "The value of philosophy – writes Bertrand Russell – is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very uncertainty. The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the co-operation or consent of his deliberate reason. To such a man the world tends to become definite, finite, obvious; common objects rouse no questions, and unfamiliar possibilities are contemptuously rejected. As soon as we begin to philosophize, on the contrary, we find... that even the most everyday things lead to problems to which only very incomplete answers can be given. Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of customs. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never traveled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect."⁸

Philosophy's entrance into the uncertain, in the name of contemplation, is in effect entrance into the dynamics of the Mystery in itself. This act goes beyond all epistemological and critical aspects as expounded by Russell. In effect, it is entering into mysticism. "Mysticism is wisdom of knowledge that is found through love; it is loving knowledge."⁹ Loving knowledge is nothing more than wisdom. Thus, the discovery through love becomes love of wisdom (*filosofia* or *philosophia*). If I may add, the uncertainty does not become mere absence of certainty or its negation. It becomes the almost infinite horizon wherein discovery through love develops

⁸ B. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*. (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 156-157.

⁹ W. Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love. Mysticism and Religion*. (San Francisco-Cambridge: Harper & Row Publishers, 1982), 20.

and ultimately takes place. Within this very same horizon, there must be a change in our lives.¹⁰ There must be a conversion.

In this light, it takes courage to do philosophy: the courage to be free from figures and forms (or of the ontological identification of both), the freedom to be creative. Freedom is only possible as creativity. Creativity is expressed only in freedom. All these necessarily presuppose and demand courage.¹¹

Creativity can only mean emancipation from the tyranny of the system and structure, from the oppression of the supremacy of aesthetics, from the reduction of everything to mimesis which brings about the endless cycle of interpretation, of slavery to language and interpretation. Emancipation could only mean the liberating production of new texts by creation, which presupposes the transcendence over the system and structure, by discovering the possibilities beyond the text by emptying the same text by reading instead of imprisoning oneself in the intricacies of the text without finding what is beyond the text.

¹⁰ The reading of a philosophical text, just like the admiration of a work of art, should produce a change in our lives. The American philosopher H. Putnam makes the following confession on his readings of Wittgenstein and Dewey: "When Wittgenstein, as I read him, deconstructs pet philosophical categories, or when Dewey challenges us to ask how far we are really living our democratic faith, the effect can be to change both our lives and the way we see our lives; and that is the role of philosophical reflection at its best.", H. Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy*. (Cambridge, Ma.-London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 200.

¹¹ The following reflection is present in my own reflections on this regard: "Certainly nonbeing is not a concept like others. It is the negation of every concept; but as such it is an inescapable content of thought and, as the history of thought has shown, the most important one after being-itself.

If one is asked how nonbeing is related to being-itself, one can only answer metaphorically: being 'embraces' itself and nonbeing. Being has nonbeing 'within' itself as that which is eternally present and eternally overcome in the process of the divine life. The ground of everything that is not a dead identity without movement and becoming; it is living creativity. Creatively it affirms itself, eternally conquering its own nonbeing. As such it is the pattern of the self-affirmation of every finite being and the source of the courage to be.

Courage is usually described as the power of the mind to overcome fear. The meaning of fear seemed too obvious to deserve inquiry. But in the last decades depth psychology in cooperation with Existentialist philosophy has led to a sharp distinction between fear and anxiety and to more precise definitions of each of these concepts...". P. Tillich, *The Courage to Be*. (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1952), 34-35.

Only in art can philosophy refresh its thirst and refill its already empty springs with the climax of analytic and postmodern thought and trends which have already made themselves present in art and literary criticism.

Art views all forms as empty after reading. Art seeks to fill the void knowing that it can only do so not *ex nihilo* but *post nihilum*, the afterness of nothing as the invitation to create new texts to fill the void with meaning so that others may read and leave the space empty once again in the infinite creative circle that is the infinite aspiration of the finite, struggling against the bondage of the hermeneutical circle which has reduced man to structures or to being a product of texts instead of the texts being the products of man. This downplays and even annuls man's creative powers all in the name of structure and system, which advocates the supremacy of perception (aesthetics) given that everything that is perceived forms part of a structure and system of appreciation and is a product of the same structure and system.

Figures, Forms and Mimesis: Challenge to Creativity

Portraits and other commemorative pieces (sculpture, biographies, histories, biographical poems and plays, etc.) are perfect examples of figurative forms wherein the exact copy or reproduction dictated the norm of art. Distortion, inexactitude, errors were all frowned upon. It paved the way for the appreciation of the form, especially as the finished product in as much as it is comprehensible and intelligible, above the effort, the task, the creative process, the art behind the production of the work. Figurative forms and works of art exemplify the classical era, the classical cult to aesthetics or the appreciation of the forms, especially as a finished and intelligible product, over the artistic means which involved struggle, tension and creative efforts. *The end or result justified the means!* This end corresponds to what the admirer or critic perceived, captured, easily, interpreted, understood and assimilated. It was the supremacy of the finished form, which was the cause of the idolatry of classical aesthetics. The end, given this kind of idolatry, was the object of the admirer's commentaries and the critic's evaluation. The standard or criteria was the object or objective reality and expressed in terms of imitation, which more often than not has been flexibly revised in terms of intelligibility, comprehensibi-

lity, applicability in the realm of praxis. The success of the artist was hinged on his ability to copy instead of create, to capture instead of setting free and setting himself free from the restrictions of mimesis or imitation, to be formed in place of giving form and life to new horizons. Mimesis has expanded from mere copying the form and representing it to making the form understandable, hence facilitating the phenomenological and hermeneutical process.¹² Mimesis is representation as *imitation*, even to the extent of expanding imitation into legibility.¹³ Imitation, thus, is capability

¹² Cf. R. Palmer, *Hermeneutics. Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969); J. Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. J. Weinsheimer trans. (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1994); C. Macann, *Four Phenomenological Philosophers. Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty*. (London-New York: Routledge 1993).

¹³ In his interesting philosophical study to determine the range of the artistic by first using the Wittgensteinian linguistic method of family resemblance, Professor P. Kivy parts from the representational notion of the disciplines that claim to be art. I find it appropriate to transcribe here some important paragraphs from his seminal work: "That representation was the principle on which the first modern definitions of art were based is not surprising. It was a principle venerable with age and with the authority of classical antiquity – in particular, Plato and Aristotle. And the art world had no apparent counterexamples, except for pure instrumental music, which was at midcentury still a minor art, if an art at all, in the eyes of philosophers, literary theorists, and the general public.

Thus the confluence of the modern system of the arts and the autonomous discipline of aesthetics as a recognized department of philosophy laid upon philosophers the task of giving a real definition of art and produced the first modern examples of such a definition in a plethora of mimetic accounts.

Given the classical texts and the apparent nature of the case, it did not seem difficult to encompass all of the literary and dramatic arts as well as of the visual arts under the umbrella of mimesis or representation. Of what Kristeller characterizes as "all the five major arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry," only music and architecture would have been problematic. Architecture is, of course, a very special case, being both a fine and a useful art. But certainly there were attempts to make it out to be representational, at least in two ways: first, in the rather straightforward claim that its gross, manifest features were indeed representational, columns as trees and that sort of thing; second, in the far more sophisticated Pythagorean claim of Renaissance theorists that architectural proportions represent harmonic proportions of the universe, as was also claimed for the proportions of the division of the musical octave. In any case, it is my impression that architecture was not at the center of the enterprise, and I will have nothing more to say about it. It is the other problematic, music, that, I think, plays the pivotal role, and I will have a good deal to say about that.

of being imitated in some way. This presupposes legibility given that reading is the first act reproducing.

The Narrativity of Art Forms Within Modernism

The twentieth century, with its two world wars, atomic and nuclear ages, cold wars, gulf war and increasing tensions of the West with the Arab world, brought about new currents or schools. It was an era of increasing lack of meaning and intelligibility. The sense of meaning was put into crisis. Life, given that it lacks meaning, was difficult to represent. Or perhaps there was meaning, but it transcended our human grasp and all the human methods of capturing, assimilating and representing it. The new art trends somehow reflected this situation: cubism, expressionism, impressionism, orphism, dada, surrealism, kinetic art, minimalism, etc. In the realm of the visual arts we have the likes of Monet, Picasso, Miro, Cézanne, Pissaro, etc.¹⁴ In the field of music we can find the geniuses of Debussy, Stravinsky, Bartok, Rachmaninoff, Glass, Poulenc, Satie, Villalobos, Bloch, Chávez, Webern, Xenakis, etc.¹⁵

Why music? Noel Carroll has argued that what has motivated and driven new "definitions" of art in the twentieth century has been "the theoretical task of coming to terms with virtually continuous revolutions in artistic practice..." The "task has been to provide the theoretical means for establishing that the mutations issued from avant-garde practice belong to the family of art." In other words, "one might say that a great deal of modern philosophy of art is an attempt to come to a philosophical understanding of the productions of the avant-garde", *Philosophies of Arts. An Essay in Differences*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5-6.

¹⁴ The present essay is not penned from the viewpoint of the history of art, but rather from philosophy not only about art, but parting from art and developing it as an art. For more authoritative overviews, see: C. Harrison, *Modernism. Movements in Modern Art*. (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1997); Several Authors, *Concepts of Modern Art. From Fauvism to Postmodernism*. 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Ludson, 1995). Also; N. Lynton, *The Story of Modern Art*. 2nd ed. (London: Phaidon, 1996). From a more global perspective, from the summit of romanticism and realism to the breakdown of the dominance of the forms until the twentieth century, this work is recommendable: H. Honour & J.Fleming, *A World History of Art*. 4th ed. (London: Phaidon, 1995), 598-827.

¹⁵ In this light, it is worthwhile to take into consideration the following words of the great American composer A. Copland: "To feel no need of involvement in the musical expression of one's own day is to shut oneself off from one of the most exciting experiences the art of music can provide. Contemporary

These new movements, doubtless, possess a potent narrative ability still unexplored in its totality. Their narrative power stems not from their criteriological conformity¹⁶ nor from the forms that they present, but from their somewhat lack of form, since form is understood in terms of not only of *mimesis* or conformity, but also in terms of intelligibility, direct narrativity and even simplicity.

The new art trends pose a challenge. They demand a different narrative assumption. The stories they told were not facile, easily graspable and staged. In the case of the visual arts, the new movements brought about more extraordinary plays of color, line and movement. In the case of the literary arts, language reached a new height after overcoming the barrier of ineffability; language did not speak, but only stated or expressed. It was no longer the slave of the tyranny of words nor of the conventionalisms of sense, grammar and syntax. It was no longer the dominance of images and their configurations, but rather the appearance of symbols, of

music speaks to us as no other music can. It is the older music – the music of Buxtehude and Cherubini – that should seem distant and foreign to us, not that of Milhaud and William Schuman. But isn't music universal? What, you may ask, does the living composer say that will not be found in somewhat analogous terms in an earlier music? All depends on the angle of vision: what we see produces wider extremes of tension and release, a more vivid optimism, a grayer pessimism, climaxes of abandonment and explosive hysteria, coloristic variety-subtleties of light and dark, a relaxed sense of fun sometimes spilling over into the grotesque, crowded textures, open-spaced vistas, "Painful" longing, dazzling brilliance. Various shades and gradations of these moods have their counterpart in older music, no doubt, but no sensitive listener would ever confuse the two. We usually recognize the period a composition belongs in as an essential part of its physiognomy. It is the uniqueness of any authentic art expression that makes even approximate duplication in any other period inconceivable. That is why the music lover who neglects contemporary music deprives himself of the enjoyment of an otherwise unobtainable aesthetic experience.", *What To Listen for in Music*. (New York: Mentor Books, 1999).

For excellent biographical sketches taking into account the historical background and artistic contexts, see: H. Schonberg, *The Lives of The Great Composers*. 3rd ed. (New York-London: W.W. Norton, 1997).

¹⁶ See: A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*. (New York: Dover Books, 1946); Idem., *Logical Positivism* (New York: Free Press, 1959); J. Dancy, *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1985); A. Goodman, *Epistemology and Cognition*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986); K. Popper, *Objective Knowledge*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); W. Quine, *Word and Object*. (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

the presence of what is superficially perceived to be absent – thus revealing the transcendence of the symbolic of standing in place of the other, revealing the transcendence of this same other (thus constituting it as the *Other*). The melodic line and the plot were clearly being sacrificed in order to favor other elements in music and drama. Dance was no longer regulated by the rigid patterns and succession lines of choreography and their story line, but was sublimated into the very freedom of movement and the conquering of space not to fill it but to move in it and remain present in the process. Poetry was rediscovered and repackaged as not just one of the literary arts or as one of the muses, but the very spirit of art. Poetry, not as an independent art form or genre but in terms of its nature and canons distinguishing it from prose, became the very norm of all artistic activity. Poetry was rediscovered as *poiesis*, originative creativity. It is not merely primordial creativity, given that the primordial is simply the beginning as the source or fountainhead. The originative is what flows from what is originary, or the same source re-encountered at the end of the enriching journey, wherein the origin is made richer by the very process, by the journey itself. *With poiesis there has been a shift from aesthetic centeredness to artistic centeredness.* It is primarily a shift in terms of the centeredness of forms. Said shift is necessarily metaphysical in nature. Forms in terms of intelligibility and immediate perceptibility tend to be unilateral in their aesthetic opening. This is true of the classical tradition with its figurative forms. A deeper form of art would mean less figurative forms, even to the point of abandoning the figurative in forms. Art in its purest and primordial sense, though figures may abound, does not submit itself to the equation between form and figure.

The perceptible (and eventually intelligible)¹⁷ form, the canon for classical aesthetics – not only as the modern theory of beauty, but above all the classical theory of perception and appreciation – was giving way to the non-figurative. The results were truly extraordinary! They inaugurated a new era in art history. It was not simply the replacement of the classical with the so-called modern, contemporary or postmodern. It was in effect a discovery or redis-

¹⁷ To be perceptible or aesthetically open to appreciation is to be interpretable and intelligible. This is the norm of classical aesthetics.

covery of the primordial meaning of creativity brought about by the crisis of art as imitation or art as simply mimesis, which brought about the identification of art with aesthetics, given that whatever is perceived to be pleasurable imitated nature (along the classical lines) and was "judged" or "justified" as art.

Art was then merely theodiceal. It demanded aesthetic justification (according to the epistemological lines of conformity which in its technical form is imitation) in terms of conformity with God, the Creator of Nature notwithstanding the forces of evil that distorted the beauty and harmony of creation, again viewed in terms of conformity with the mind of the Creator.

This theodiceal approach of art was nothing more than an apology for Natural Theology.

Presence and Beyond Theodicies: The Rediscovery of the Real Presence and Enthusiasm

Art must not be theodiceal in this sense. It must not justify itself in terms of its conformity. Art need not be justified. It is in itself justification of man, in his finitude and culpability, as creator. In the same vein, Theodicy is not an apologetics for Natural Theology. The so-called postclassical poetic era provided the appropriate venue and epoch for this transformation. It was in this era that the "real presence," as expounded by Steiner's rather theological appreciation of art, was really perceived.¹⁸ Presence is its own justification and should not be an apologetics for what is perceived to be absent.

This "real presence" is above all in the artist, the creator, the participant in the creative process. This "real presence" is to be interpreted as the overcoming of mimesis. It is "enthusiasm" (from "entheosiasmos") or being full of the gods. It is the presence of the gods in man. It is man becoming like God in terms of creativity. It is man becoming God by participation through creativity. The artworks are merely texts, testimonies and lessons, mystagogical

¹⁸ G. Steiner, *Real Presences*. (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 3-4. Here Steiner proposes to build a Natural Theology from works of art. This is not our intention in our reflections.

remnants of the real art, which is the very participation in God, i.e., which is the very enthusiasm of man himself.

Enthusiasm goes beyond the apologetics of Natural Theology. It is mystagogy in its very fulfillment. It is participation that surpasses the demonstrative nature of Natural Theology. In enthusiasm, the very act of participation is justification of finitude in the quest for taking part in the Infinite. It is not demonstration. Neither is it just justification (in terms of apologetics). It is justice in itself, the justice of being finite given the grace of participating in the Infinite.

Mimesis as *representation* was giving way to poetics as *re-presentation*.¹⁹ The creative process, in effect, became the canon and referent replacing the attractiveness of the beautiful (instead of the beautiful in itself in the creative act) of aesthetics. The narrative assumptions were founded not on the finished product, but in the process, in creativity in itself in action. The forms, in the figurative sense, were "dethroned" from their central places and occupied the "x" spot. They were not totally eliminated but their dethronement or decentralization opened the way for plurality and polysemy, which in turn opened the floodgates for non-dogmatic (non-classical and non-canonical) approaches to interpretation. These non-dogmatic approaches to interpretation spell the end of the infinite process of interpretation and of the human slavery, given man's reduction to language and structures and differed/different meanings that go on to infinity or *ad absurdum*, to the hermeneutical process.

Only non-dogmatism opens the door to the mystery and hence we enter into the realm of the mystery. This is the very essence of mystagogy.

Dogmatism eliminates the mystery by eliminating reality and life to language and linguistic formulations and its systems (langue).

¹⁹ I have taken into consideration the meaningful and suggestive reflections of K. Harries, "Beauty, Language, and Re-presentation: Notes Toward a Critique of Aesthetics-With Special Reference to Architecture" in Several Authors, *Transformations in Personhood and Culture after Theory. The Languages of History, Aesthetics and Ethics*. (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1994), 61-77.

Man should be (is) the beginning, end and center of hermeneutics!

Man is not a product of the text nor of the hermeneutics or phenomenology of the texts. All intentionality inevitably goes back, leads to man.

The extreme "realist" mimesis of classicism has been thought to be humanist, while it is not. It reduces man to the system, to the structure; man is reduced to being a product of nature instead of a cultivator of culture within nature.

By creatively freeing man from the stricture of the structure and the rigidity of the system in the absolute dominance of mimesis, man once more becomes the mystery; man once more creates new mysteries instead of losing his being a mystery within the framework of the system and structure, within the unending obsession to decipher him by identifying him with prefigured figures and prototypes.

Polysemy gave rise to the ontological science of semiotics and exaggerated the power of the text and subsequently of deconstruction's intertextuality²⁰. Thus, the trend of eclecticism or the lack of artistic commitment has grown and has become dominant with the pretense of offering a wide potpourri of choices or offers, but sacrificing principles or the back bone that is necessary for the artistic commitment, since intertextuality and eclecticism signifies the slavery of form and its submission to the figurative.

This emphasis on creativity, notwithstanding the emphasis on the irrational, is without a doubt the greatest lesson of modernism and perhaps also of "postmodernism," in spite of its inherent ambiguity and lack of meaning, which revealed the fragility of the proud and self-sufficient claims of the modern era's age of enlightenment²¹ with its epistemology of conformity wherein the form is

²⁰ I have especially taken into account this masterful survey: J. Culler, *On Deconstruction. Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). Likewise: W. V. Harris ed., *Beyond Structuralism. The Speculations of Theory and the Experience of Reading*. (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1996).

²¹ For background discussions, consult for example: Cfr. for example: J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. (Manchester: Man-

identified with the figure and this identification becomes the only canonical norm allowed thus drowning out dialogue and plurality in the name of dialectics and polysemy.

The Ambiguity of Postmodernity and the Alternative of a Transcendence in terms of Metaphysics

Personally, I find "postmodernism" a very vague term and whenever I can I will avoid it. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that there is a period of overcoming of mimesis and its absolute supremacy wherein ontology gives in to metaphysics, wherein aesthetics becomes transcendental in art where the sublime is defined in terms of participation.

Postmodernism fragmentation of forms and of systems could be a call to rediscover the mystery, that we are only fragments vis-à-vis the mystery. Postmodernism could be the liberating occasion from the totalitarian pretensions of enlightenment which reduces everything to the structure and system (to the point of obliterating man the creator) and which preaches the unending and unceasing task of interpretation, presupposing a primordial form of writing (which is deconstruction's appropriation of structuralism) and thus there is a ceaseless deferment and difference of meaning. Not because of the highlighting of the mystery, but because interpretation has become a vicious circle given that language has taken the place of man and that there is nothing beyond the text as product of language despite deconstruction's vociferous resistance to logocentrism. Deconstruction as a postmodern or poststructuralist "movement" (for lack of a better word) wishes to do away with dogmatism, with all pretensions to centralism especially within the realm of language and yet it remains a prisoner of language by affirming, with strong echoes of structuralism, that there is nothing beyond the text.

chester University Press, 1992); H. Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture*. (London: Pluto Press, 1985); S. Connor, *Postmodernist Culture*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); C. Norris, *The Truth About Postmodernism*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); T. Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader*. (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993); D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); R. Appignanesi & C. Garratt, *Introducing Postmodernism*. (New York: Totem Books, 1996).

Man cannot be entrapped within the text. He is the creator of texts. He has to be freed from the text from which he emerges in nature.

Man must be rescued. Man must be emancipated. Art alone can point the way. The way is towards the mystery from which creativity surges.

The era of art may bear resemblance to postmodernism. It is, from a superficial viewpoint, a "post" or something that is posterior to a dominant period with its trends. It would be better to view this era of art, this period of the rediscovery of art in creativity as a metaphysical period. Instead of "post" (or aftermath) it is a "meta" (a transcendence).

Instead of chronological posteriorities, innovations and rediscoveries should be marked by transcendence. The term "metamodernism" sounds superfluous. We are not after the aftermath of modernism (postmodernism) nor its transcendence (metamodernism). Every "present age" is modern. It creates modes and norms, hence it is modern. Yet only in the non-figurative essence of art can there be genuine perennialism going beyond the conventional dogmatism of classicism (viewed as the canonical and orthodoxy) and the rivalries of non-classical schools and heterodoxal tendencies.

The key is participation, the desire to take part and not mimesis (from the extremity of objectivism) nor of the absolute desire to express (from the extremity of subjectivism).

In participation alone, given its metaphysical or transcendental nature, can the *raison d'être* of art be rediscovered amidst the classical dominance of aesthetics. Beauty is not in the figure as form (or form as figure) but in the form emancipated from the figure and therefore, free from the constraint and criteriology of mimesis and the limitations of the text as the only true world and the system as the sole context of being. □