

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BLANK MEANING.

THE EDWARD HOPPER PAINTINGS

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The core issue of this communication is the follows: does the work of art reside in the specific domain of an *existential*, which has not yet been considered in the series of *existentials* (temporality, space, otherness, etc) by philosophers and psychoanalysts that recognise the importance of the phenomenological model for the investigation? This question will go unanswered in this text since it requires further investigation. The phenomenological thought and *Daseinsanalyse* supports my work, which basis itself on the hypothesis that a work of art creates in the individual a new time, bearer of a blank meaning and a feeling of discontinuity.

If the consciousness is *the conscience of something* and if facticity is indispensable to that *of*, the real world (external) resides in the conjecture of its constant constitution by the internal world. Is it possible to breach this conjecture of constitution (and of continuity) without it being within a pathological framework where the reality of the empirical I, and this conjecture of constitution is altered and disturbed?

The discontinuity of the Consciousness

The phenomenology that arises from the Husserlian imperative “returning to things themselves” (*Zurück zu den Sachen selbst*) involves the essence in the existence, considering that it is not possible to understand the individual and the world except from its facticity. This relationship between the individual that knows and what he knows occurs at a level prior to the cognitive act, since there are co-implications, interactions, dialect influences between the individual and the world. The Heideggerian expression *In-der-Welt-Sein* collates the way the relationship between man and the world comes about in pre-predicative experience, for the individual that inhabits the world establishes *in it* bonds that are not casual, but ones of circularity and dialect.

It is of our interest the possibility of *the conscience of* being methodologically placed in brackets so as to concentrate on the “discontinuity” which the work of art proposes. The work stimulates the alteration in the relationship between the intentional operations of the temporal objectivity creating an excess of time (new time), which adds to my time of living (the subjectivity of my experiences) the experience of discontinuity. The *conscience of* is interrupted. If the slowing down of the temporal plot is the foundation for the loss that expresses itself in facticity of suffering, of the anguish and the suicidal tendency, the work of art favours a reinforcement of the consciousness of being there (*Dasein*) as transcendental I, as a creator of meanings that result from the specificity of the work of art. Art is a form of knowledge that relates in a complex manner a historic (the involving world – *Umwelt*) and the subjective representation of the world (the world of life – *Lebenswelt*).

All work of art, besides all the various functions that can be regarded as objective, is bearer of a blank meaning. I refer to blank meaning that that cannot be objectified or foreseen, for it can only be attributed by each individual in his/her respective field of subjectivity. The thing also exists in and by this interpretation. The individual restores the world of phenomenon with a reality that is not the-thing-itself (*Ding-an-sich*), but a reality transmitted by the interpretation. The true world (*die wahre Welt*) and world of appearances (*die scheinbare Welt*) is transformed in a process of interpretation of the things. Based on this presumption a justification can be found in the crossing of the phenomenology and the hermeneutic. According to Gadamer's definition of the hermeneutic circle, both the interpreter and that is being interpreted are in a circuit of mutual influence. The blank meaning of the thing is the meaning despite the execution of all the functions still allows the individual to constitute his/her own meaning, which is neither the meaning of the true-world of the metaphysics nor that of the functional world of the empirics. Since the being is a fiction, the individual is both represented and represents, the individual creates and is created, and it is in this quality that he/she interferes in the spirit of time (*Zeitgeist*) and in an unique and subjective time.

The Edward Hopper Example

The human presence in Edward Hopper's canvases (1882-1967) reveals a certain distancing from the reality of the exterior. Much as been said about the loneliness of Hopper's characters and places; perhaps more than loneliness, the painter is interested in moments free of noise; free of the agitation of daily life, which express an enigmatic, introspective and ruminant environment far more than loneliness. The characters seem to want to take refuge in the consoling night in neutral and passing through places, like bars, diners, hotel rooms, train carriages, roads and petrol stations.

Admirable and detailed texts have been written about Hopper's artistic creations, and do not intend to shed any further light on his creative world. I am, however, interested in showing how in his work the *thing* is integrated in a historical and a cultural time (*Zeitgeist*), but it simultaneously is transformed while stirring up *Dasein* in its creative possibility, interpreter of the blank meaning. The experience of blank meaning is the freedom territory of *Dasein*; it is that territory which cannot be objectified or foreseen, for it is ascribed by each individual based on his/her own subjective interpretation and constitution. The scenes and scenarios are easily connoted with codes of a typical American context contributing to a description of signs, symbols, and a way of life of that context and environment. However, what I intend to highlight is the way Hopper's work creates opportunities for the observer's sentiments to manifest themselves, through light, colour, the objects, the themes and the pictorial staging. Hopper's paintings permit the spectator to slow down his/her power of conscience (constituent) and let himself/herself go to personal landscapes like when one travels alone on a train.

The mind is multiple and there are many distinct personalities that co-exist (fight) in the different developmental stages. Before the *thing* that shows the painting, the *Dasein* allows a meaning to arise. The *window* that appears in a painting is not merely a window that can be described through words; it evokes a blank meaning that dynamically filled by *Dasein/viewer* resorting to his/her places of memory and desire, to intimate and recurrent time.



Automat, 1927



A Woman in the Sun, 1961



Chair Car, 1965



Compartment C, Car 193, 1938

The representation thought is built upon the interaction with the world, with the multiplicity of doing and with language. Reflection, more than being a mirror of the thing, it determines the way it is approached, and thus making it appear. The expression “this means that” gives each way of approaching a quality of inaugurating a sense (a truth?) that is intended to be universal. Beyond the true or false of logic, good and the evil of ethics, it is the beauty of the aesthetics that lasts. What is important for Deleuze is that the forms of sensation allow for possibilities of experience, is that sensation is not dominated by representation and by the Kantian reflexive judgement, is that the desire asserts itself as being the force of creation. The Deleuzian logic is more one of occurrence and meaning than one of proposition and identity. Deleuze advocates logic of creation that deals with the relationships between the thought process and life: thought in relation to what is problematic and complex regarding what happens to us. Work of art is the support of these occurrences, these differences.

The artistic aesthetic entrusted to the contemplative condition of existence seems not to operate in reality. However, art and the artistic experience are the guarantee to safeguard from the means of preservation that that is most sacred for the human being: the desire (the need, the void) and freedom. Desire and being, desire and existence are united and operate in art as the expression of redundancy of the *doing the thing* as a possible way of resisting (surviving).

A New Time

An artistic creation is an event, an occurrence (*ein Ereignis*), a silence that needs to be filled, a feeling that needs to be discovered that should have manifested itself in everyday

life, celebrating it as the priority condition of existence. The work of art affects each individual that encounters it differently, that is the way the individual discovers himself in the horizon. This is the *pathos* of the work of art, its blank meaning, the unpredictable and imponderable meaning that one carries with him/her. The work of art is bearer of an internal structure, composed by order and unstable rest that supports a transcendent content that does not sacrifice feelings, passion, thoughts in name of an ideal truth and an analytic conscience that ignores the individual's condition of being a needy being (a desiring being).

The moment it is separated from its author the artistic creation commences its destiny: the unknown world of the blank meaning, the field of effects that depends on the relationship of the individual with the creation, not in the sense of the blank page where the analytical subjectivity reigns, but as the matter of transformation and consolation. But are all creations consoling? The affirmation of life is not necessarily consoling and so are not the audacious movements (artistic, for example) necessarily consoling either. Beauty does not only oppose itself to pain, suffering, boredom; it unbalances, disturbs, stirs a tumult; it transports *eros* and *thanatos*. It is precisely because of this that I dare state that beauty consoles in its own way, because it is an experience of freedom.

In these times where the individual role is so emphatic and proclaims the need to fulfil his /her particularities, we witness a camouflaged process of massification, uniformity, and homogeneity of the desires and of the needs. The experimented sensations are similar, which contradicts the "experience of sensation". The portrait of the Nietzschean man as one that is domesticated, a gregarious animal, a docile being, sickly, uncritical, willing to submit himself to the crowds, to the ideological, religious and moral mystifications... is somewhat befitting to the contemporary individual. Is it still possible to murmur to the individual, each individual, in such a way that the answer that comes from within it is not a mere stereotyped one from a society that falsely proclaims singularity?

For Boécio, the philosopher's consolation resides in the penetration of the great philosophical problems; the consolation of the aesthetic experience resides in the intimate relationship that the individual establishes with himself, by turning away from a representative or judicative consciousness. The aesthetic consolation is intimately related to the blank meaning of a work of art and with the creation of a new time, which will become decrepit in the inevitable time dynamics.

I am inclined to saying yes to the core issue that served as a guide text, that is, that a work of art resides in the specific domain of an *existential*, which has not yet been considered in a series of *existentials*. Despite the configuration of that existential, there is still need for more investigation.

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