

# Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts



Quarterly Academic Periodical,  
Volume 8, Issue 3, July 2021  
URL: <https://www.athensjournals.gr/ajha>  
Email: [journals@atiner.gr](mailto:journals@atiner.gr)  
e-ISSN: 2241-7915 DOI: 10.30958/ajha



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# Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts

*Published by the Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER)*

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- Dr. Stephen Andrew Arbury, Head, [Arts & Culture Unit](#), ATINER, Professor of Art History & Director of the RU Art Museum, Radford University, USA.

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The Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts  
ISSN NUMBER: 2241-7702 - DOI: 10.30958/ajha  
Volume 8, Issue 3, July 2021  
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The current issue is the third of the eighth volume of the *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts (AJHA)*, published by the [\*Arts, Humanities and Education Division\*](#) of ATINER.

Gregory T. Papanikos  
President  
ATINER



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### *A World Association of Academics and Researchers*

#### **12<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Visual and Performing Arts** **7-10 June 2021, Athens, Greece**

The [Arts & Culture Unit](#) of ATINER is organizing its **12<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Visual and Performing Arts, 7-10 June 2021, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the [Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts](#). The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers of visual and performing arts, and other related disciplines. You may participate as stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair of a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (<https://www.atiner.gr/2021/FORM-ART.doc>).

#### **Academic Members Responsible for the Conference**

- **Dr. Stephen Andrew Arbury**, Head, [Arts & Culture Unit](#), ATINER and Professor of Art History, Radford University, USA.
- 

#### **Important Dates**

- Abstract Submission: **DEADLINE CLOSED**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **10 May 2021**

#### **Social and Educational Program**

The Social Program Emphasizes the Educational Aspect of the Academic Meetings of Atiner.

- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
- Mycenae Visit
- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
- Delphi Visit
- Ancient Corinth and Cape Sounion

#### **Conference Fees**

Conference fees vary from 400€ to 2000€  
Details can be found at: <https://www.atiner.gr/2021fees>



## **Athens Institute for Education and Research**

### ***A World Association of Academics and Researchers***

#### **7<sup>th</sup> Annual International Symposium on Religion & Theology** **23-26 May 2022, Athens, Greece**

The [Humanities & Education Division](https://www.atiner.gr/2022/FORM-REL.doc) of ATINER is organizing its **7<sup>th</sup> Annual International Symposium on Religion & Theology, 23-26 May 2022, Athens, Greece**. The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers of Religion, Theology and other related disciplines. You may participate as stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair of a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (<https://www.atiner.gr/2022/FORM-REL.doc>).

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- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **25 April 2022**

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More information can be found here: <https://www.atiner.gr/social-program>

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## ***Li Pittori Parlano con l'Opere: Visualizing Poetry in Practice in Early Modern Italian Art***

*By James Hutson\**

*The relative sophistication of artists in the early modern era is contested, especially with regards to their educational backgrounds. On one hand, Dempsey-esque intellectual history is vested in touting the structured, literary curricula in art-educational institutions; while on the other, a complete rejection of the “artist-philosopher” as historical fiction seeks to undermine this hegemonic construct. This study argues that the lack of early formal education in the cases of artist like Annibale Carracci and Nicolas Poussin, who, unlike Peter Paul Rubens, did not have a firm foundation in the classics and languages that would allow them to engage directly with source material, would later be supplemented through their relationships with literary figures in the circles of Torquato Tasso, Giambattista Marino, and the Accademia dei Gelati. In addition to such relationships, informal exchanges, gatherings, and supplemental materials like Giovanni Paolo Gallucci’s *Della Simmetria* could be called upon when treating poetic subjects. With intimate knowledge of vernacular poetry, literati themselves participating in lectures and studio visits, and, finally, quick reference guides for subject matter, these artists were able to produce works that spoke to both poetic and artistic theory of the day, as one naturally informed the other.*

### **Introduction**

“Poets paint with words, painters speak with their works.”<sup>1</sup> This aphorism of Annibale Carracci (1560-1609) followed a superb rendering of the *Laocoön* in charcoal, expertly rendered from memory. The virtuoso display and acerbic quip was aimed at his brother Agostino Carracci (1557-1602), who had rebuked his failure to engage in a discussion on ancient statuary.<sup>2</sup> In the anecdote here, recorded by the academic biographer Giovan Pietro Bellori (1613-1696), we find a theme that runs throughout his *Lives*: artists can base their styles on theory or

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Sections of this paper were presented as “*Li pittori parlano con l'opere: Poetry and Practice in the Academic Tradition*,” *College Art Association* (Washington, D.C., 2016). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are the author’s.

1. Giovan Pietro Bellori, *Le Vite de Pittori, Scultori e Architetti Moderni* (Rome, 1672), (eds.) Evelina Borea and Giovanni Previtali (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), 31; Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, (trans.) Wohl and Wohl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 77.

2. Bellori, *Le Vite de Pittori, Scultori e Architetti Moderni*, 31.

practice, while a tempering of one with the other is ideal.<sup>3</sup> The learned, academic artist is held up as a model to be emulated in institutions like the Accademia di San Luca, where Bellori would deliver his lecture that would serve as the theoretical basis for evaluating artists in the seventeenth-century and beyond.<sup>4</sup> Recent scholarship, however, has demonstrated that, outside of Florence, formal academies were not the primary means by which artists gained an education.<sup>5</sup> Instead, they provided supplemental training, shoring up deficiencies that persisted after traditional apprenticeships. While the Roman, Bolognese and French academies struggled to find their place in the changing artistic landscape of early modernity, artists bolstered their new image as intellectuals through associations with a variety of literary and scholarly personalities. The relationships not only assisted in the development of poetic *concetti* and subjects for *istorie*, they also introduced to artists new circles through which to develop contacts and receive patronage. But exactly what was the nature of this exchange, and how well were artists prepared to engage with their so-called “sister” discipline?

The relative sophistication of artists in the early modern era is contested, especially with regards to their educational backgrounds. On one hand, Dempsey-esque intellectual history is vested in touting the structured, literary curricula in art-educational institutions; while on the other, a complete rejection of the “painter-philosopher” trope as historical fiction seeks to undermine this hegemonic construct.<sup>6</sup> After all, Carlo Cesare Malvasia (1616-1693) recorded that the grammar school education of Annibale and Agostino Carracci was cut short.

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3. The foil for Annibale can be found in Caravaggio's biography where Bellori admonishes the artist for his reliance on nature without considering the Idea to purify corrupted form. Bellori, 201-216.

4. Bellori, “Idea della Bellezza,” *Le Vite de Pittori, Scultori e Architetti Moderni*, 3-13.

5. See Peter Lukehart (Ed.), *The Accademia Seminars: The Accademia di San Luca in Rome, c.1590-1635*. CASAVA Seminar Papers 2 (New Haven, London: National Gallery of Art – Studies in the History of Art, 2009); Peter Lukehart, “The ‘Accademia dei Scultori’ in Late Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Rome,” in Anthony Colantuono and Steven F. Ostrow (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Roman Baroque Sculpture* (University Park, Pennsylvania : The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 17-23; Marianne Pade, *On Renaissance Academies: Proceedings of the International Conference “From the Roman Academy to the Danish Academy in Rome -Dall’Accademia Romana all’Accademia di Danimarca a Roma”*: *The Danish Academy in Rome, 11-13 October 2006* (Roma, 2011), 34-51; Carl Goldstein, *Teaching Art: Academies and Schools from Vasari to Albers* (New York, 1996); Anne Sutherland Harris, “Annibale's Legacy: Proposals for Giovanni Angelo Canini and Antonio Carracci,” *Master Drawings* 43, no. 4 (2005), 453; Patrizia Cavazzini, *Painting as Business in Early Seventeenth-Century Rome* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 2008).

6. See Charles Dempsey, “Some Observations on the Education of Artists in Sixteenth-Century Florence and Bologna,” *Art Bulletin* 62 (1980): 552-569; Carl Goldstein, *Visual Fact over Verbal Fiction: A Study of the Carracci and the Criticism, Theory and Practice of Art in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Their cousin Ludovico Carracci (1555-1619), we are told, had them withdrawn to pursue painting when they “spent all their time covering the margins of their books and the walls outside with scribbled drawings” rather than engaging with the material.<sup>7</sup> Even Bellori admits to the humble beginnings of the brothers, who were raised by their father, a tailor, “respectably in his poverty.”<sup>8</sup> At the end of his biographies, reflecting that of Annibale, Bellori notes how even though Nicolas Poussin’s (1594-1665) father had him study letters, the boy also chose instead to “decorate books and the school with his drawings.”<sup>9</sup> The anecdotes scarcely foretell the academic ideal these artists would come to embody.

These anecdotes call into question the literary sophistication of the artists under discussion. Is then the narrative woven by Bellori and later biographers mere fiction in their attempt to trace the classical tradition directly from Raphael (1483-1520) to his inheritors in the Carracci and, finally, Poussin? How can we reconcile the arguments that *literati* were merely justifying their taste with an anachronistic theory after the fact; exactly how were these Carraccesque artists engaging with poets and poetic theory, and, lastly, how did they apply it to the art-theoretical trends of their day? This paper will argue that the lack of early formal education in the cases of Annibale and Poussin did not provide them with a firm foundation in the classics and languages. This deficiency, however, would later be supplemented through their relationships with literary figures in the circles of Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) and Giambattista Marino (1569-1625). In addition to such relationships, informal exchanges and gatherings, as well as supplemental materials could be referenced when treating poetic subjects, such as Giovanni Paolo Gallucci’s (1538-1621) physiognomic guide for artists.<sup>10</sup> With intimate knowledge of vernacular poetry, *literati* themselves participating in lectures and studio visits, and, finally, with quick reference guides for subject matter, these artists were able to produce works that spoke to both poetic and artistic theory of the day, as one naturally informed the other.

### Grammar Education and Artists

Central to the argument of the use of literary sources by artists are the academies founded to further their education. The perception and framing of artists and their academies in the early modern era has paralleled the rise of related studies, as well as the shifting critical relationship of the period to those

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7. Anne Summerscale (Ed.) *Malvasia’s Life of the Carracci* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 86.

8. Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, 72.

9. Bellori, 309.

10. Giovanni Paolo Gallucci, *Della Simmetria dei Corpi Humani, Libri Quattro* (Venice, 1591) (Reprinted, Venice: Roberto Meietti, 1594).

before and after. Early studies devoted to the era in question tended to frame it antithetically to the preceding: the style of the late sixteenth century was erudite, literary-minded and artificial; thus the new 'anti-mannerist' style was grounded in life study, turning back to the practical matters of the workshop (*bottega*). Such was the estimation of Walter Friedlaender where he noted that it was the reliance on purely theoretical concepts that gave rise to the phenomenon of "Mannerism," which was practiced by the more literary-minded artists of the late-sixteenth century, such as Federico Zuccaro (1542-1609). Consequently, the originators of the anti-mannerist style, Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio (1571-1610), lacked a theoretical side: "They did not theorize nearly as much as the *maniera* people..."<sup>11</sup> This position would be reversed in the 1970s and 80s as the developments of the era were seen to have formed the groundwork for the academic tradition that would fully crystallize in the French Academy with a rigorous curriculum that demanded equal mastery of craft and the theoretical principles underpinning the visual arts.<sup>12</sup> More recent studies have sought a more nuanced understanding of the artist's education, considering not solely theory or practice, but individual experiences without period generalization.<sup>13</sup>

Practitioners of the visual arts, both in the workshop and academy, needed a working knowledge of the subject matter and themes they would be called upon to create. In order to engage with the source material, suitable language skills were required for the profession throughout the period. How artists gained these skills and the depth of their knowledge- both in languages and literary works- varied greatly. As such, we are unable to speak of a typical educational track for artists, but through numerous case studies we are able to assess the general level of education the average artist received. Dempsey noted in his treatment of the early training and education of artists of the period that many completed at least the fundamentals of grammar school prior their apprenticeships with a master.<sup>14</sup> These aspiring artists would then enter the profession able to at minimum read and write in the vernacular and, in some cases, Latin. Upon the completion of apprenticeship, young artists could continue their education in art academies, such as those in Bologna and Rome, which would provide additional training in the fundamentals of grammar and rhetoric to prepare them for discourse on

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11. Walter Friedlaender, *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting* (New York, 1965), 53.

12. Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present* (New York: De Capo Press, 1973); Dempsey, "Some Observations on the Education of Artists in Sixteenth-Century Florence and Bologna," 552-569.

13. Lukehart (Ed.), *The Accademia Seminars: The Accademia di San Luca in Rome, c.1590-1635*; Colantuono and Ostrow (Eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Roman Baroque Sculpture*; Pade, *On Renaissance Academies*; Goldstein, *Teaching Art: Academies and Schools from Vasari to Albers*.

14. Dempsey, "Some Observations on the Education of Artists in Sixteenth-Century Florence and Bologna," 552-569.

theoretical inquiries, as well as the more practical aspects of the profession. However, the level of literary and theoretical understanding differed markedly by artist given their individual circumstances. As noted, Malvasia relates how Annibale and Agostino were sketching in the margins of their grammar texts instead of seriously participating in lessons (the trope was standard in artists' biographies since Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) and foretold their natural inclinations towards the visual arts).<sup>15</sup> Taking note, Ludovico petitioned to have them withdrawn to pursue their careers as painters. At that point, Annibale, Malvasia suggests, had only learned the fundamentals of reading and writing in Latin.<sup>16</sup> Colantuono related a similar trend with their pupils: Guido Reni (1575-1642), for instance, briefly studied unsuccessfully at the *scuola di grammatica*.<sup>17</sup> By this time, the scope of education had expanded. It is important to note that by 1587, the goals of Latin teachers in the *scuola* included both Latin grammar and ancient literature, thus the terms became interchangeable with "grammatica."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, students would be familiarized with the classics, as well as how to read them.

Individuals who attended such schools were not originally intending to be artists. Many of the artists who attended Latin school did so in hopes of pursuing lucrative careers in letters, law or even in the clergy. In many instances, their talents and/or desire to become artists often interfered with their schooling, and thus the length of their attendance at school, and their consequent level of proficiency in Latin were variable. Grendler confirms this when he differentiates the goals of the Latin school from that of the vernacular: the former prepared students to go on to university and careers in civil service, while the latter covered professional skills, such as reading, writing, use of the *abbaco*, and bookkeeping.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, the visual arts were a unique profession that benefitted from both; engagement with advanced literary subjects was a prerequisite to their success, and they were business owners that also had to manage workshops, correspond with clients, and keep account ledgers. Yet, how much these future artists learned during their often brief time at grammar school is open to debate. Though Agostino had an excellent grasp of Latin and a mastery of eloquent prose himself, Annibale resisted the classification as a necessity for artists. Regardless, the importance of having a literary education was well-

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15. Summerscale (Ed.), Malvasia's Life of the Carracci, 86.

16. An understanding of the vernacular would have been taught at home by their parents. Summerscale (Ed.), 88.

17. Anthony Colantuono, Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen: The Politics and Rhetoric of Painting in Seventeenth-Century Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11.

18. Grendler notes that some teachers used the terms as such: *i fondamenti dell'umanità o della grammatica*. Paul Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 47.

19. Grendler, 409.

established prior to these artists. Vasari, for instance, relates the growing importance of Latin for artists in many of his artist biographies.<sup>20</sup>

### Art and Literary Academies

Though precisely how proficient these artists had become before leaving the *grammatica* is open to debate, that the experience would be seminal to the curriculum created to shore up such deficiencies is evident. Established in 1582 upon Annibale and Agostino's return from studying in Venice and Rome, the Accademia degli Incamminati differed markedly from that found in the comparatively stable Florentine Duchy. Certainly the advances made by the Florentine Accademia del Disegno in systematizing art education helped shape this new curriculum taught by the Carracci.<sup>21</sup> However, without the stability provided through state support, the experiences of the brothers were shared by many who would come to study there. Feigenbaum relates that many arrived not as youth without apprenticeships or training under other masters, but instead as adults, often with substantial training. We can point to several examples that came to the Carracci at an age where they should have already set up their own studio as a master, such as Lucio Massari (1569-1633) who was twenty-four, Pietro Faccini (1562-1602) was twenty-six, and both Francesco Albani (1578-1660) and Guido Reni were in their late teens. Therefore, Feigenbaum notes, artists were commonly twenty or older when they arrived to study where previously others of the same age would have been practicing as journeymen or setting up their own studios.<sup>22</sup> The situation is confirmed in drawings of activities in the academy where we see students of various ages sketching alongside one another, while the masters paint on easels nearby.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the sequence of study at the academy, outlined in Agostino's funeral oration, was purposely flexible, while still providing the tripartite division similar to that seen in Florence. This began with extensive training in life drawing, followed by an introduction to mathematical principles, and, ultimately, the narratives that would identify specific subjects to include in a particular *istoria*.<sup>24</sup> Understanding the

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20. Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più Eccellenti Pittori Scultori e Architettori: Nelle Redazioni del 1550 e 1568*. (ed.) Paola Barocchi (Firenze : Sansoni, 1966), 4: 179; 4: 290; 5: 443; 6: 143; 6: 322.

21. Karen Edis-Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State: The Discipline of Disegno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

22. Feigenbaum, "Practice in the Carracci Academy," in Lukehart (ed.), *The Accademia Seminars*, 89.

23. See School of the Carracci (Attributed), *Artists Drawing a Clothed Male Model* (c. 1590), Red chalk on paper. Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

24. Summerscale (Ed.), *Malvasia's Life of the Carracci*, 212.



interdisciplinary needs of their pupils, regular drawing lessons and competitions were accompanied by discussions and guest lectures on literature and theory. Feigenbaum singles out Lanzoni, who demonstrated anatomical dissections, as well as other artists who were brought in twice-monthly to judge drawing competitions. Ulisse Aldrovandi, the Bolognese naturalist, frequented the pupils' studios, as did the humanist Achille Bocchi.<sup>25</sup> Participants were drawn from a variety of organizations revolving around the University of Bologna: anatomists, humanists, naturalists, and, significantly, scholars and poets would alternately offer instruction and engage with both pupils of the Carracci and other established artists in attendance.

Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach helped define the Bolognese academy. The variety of disciplines called upon to supplement instruction at the Carracci Academy attest to the importance given to training beyond the workshop, and even visual arts themselves. In fact, even more influential than other artistic academies in the area, Robertson notes, were a number of literary ones, such as the Accademia dei Gelati, of which Agostino was a member.<sup>26</sup> It should be remembered that the riposte from Annibale recorded by Bellori was wounding "in more ways than one, for he composed verses and prided himself greatly on the title of poet."<sup>27</sup> Established in 1588 by Melchiorre Zoppio (ca.1544–1634), the Gelati were dedicated at the outset to poetry and synthesizing a new literary manner.<sup>28</sup> This so-called 'Seicentismo' sought to create novel lyrical conceits from the late style of Tasso.<sup>29</sup> Their precedings would have been of great interest to Agostino and the Carracci, but their involvement in such an organization was not unique; likewise, the perceived importance of associating with poets was not a new dictum. Since the fifteenth century, and initial endeavors to have the visual arts included among the liberal, artists were required to befriend scholars and poets. Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) had recommended in his *Della Pittura* of 1435 that: "the studious painter to make himself familiar with poets, orators and other men of letters, for he will not only obtain excellent ornaments from such learned minds, but he will also be assisted in those very inventions which in painting may gain him the greatest possible praise."<sup>30</sup> The solution was no less valid a century and a half later. Yet, the relationship between poetry and the visual arts for the Carracci would go beyond merely bolstering their reputations; a central tenet of the curriculum was how poetic theory could assist in the construction of conceits (*concetti*), or rhetorical

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25. Feigenbaum, "Practice in the Carracci Academy," 91-92.

26. Clare Robertson, *The Invention of Annibale Carracci* (Silvana, 2008), 73.

27. Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, (trans.) Wohl, 77.

28. See The Database of Italian Academies.

29. Colantuono, Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen, 10.

30. Cecil Grayson (Ed.), *Leon Battista Alberti on Painting and Sculpture: The Latin Texts of 'De Pictura' and 'De Statua'* (London: Phaidon Press, 1972), 97.

devices in structuring works of art. Given that the goal of painting is one of persuasion like oration, both used rhetoric, such as enthymematic arguments. The course of study would then center on the development and refinement of conceits as in literature, and other poetic devices that were now given visual form. The *conchetto* would serve as an ornament to the primary subject, embellishing or enlivening it through clever iconographic additions or juxtapositions.<sup>31</sup> The process of giving visual form to these framing devices paralleled, but also drew heavily from literature and poetry; often the very subjects on which these *invenzione* would be appended were derived from the same source that also provided the theoretical tool to select ideal subjects.<sup>32</sup> In the case of the Carracci and their followers, the method and subject can be found in the highly acclaimed epic poet Torquato Tasso in his *Gerusalemme liberata* of 1581 and *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* of 1587 and the highly influential *Discorsi del poema eroico* a year before his death in 1594. Through the circle of the Gelati, Tassian literary themes and strategies for the imitation of ideal models would become synonymous with Carraccismo. As Colantuono has argued, in the second half of the seventeenth century, the manner of the Carracci came to be seen as analogous to the poetics of Tasso's *Gerusalemme*.<sup>33</sup> Since the Carracci pioneered the portrayal of his literary themes, and the idealized, Zeuxinian method that came to be associated with Carraccesque painting was seen as illustrative of the Tassian epic literary style, later treatments would elide the two as artists would turn to the Carracci precedents for both subject and style.

### Poetic Theory and the Arts

The artists who matriculated in the Carracci Academy would prove to have internalized the literary precepts in their lessons. In his treatment of the pictorial stylistics of the Carracci followers, Colantuono clarifies this relationship, noting that not only were the artists the first to illustrate scenes from Tasso's epic, they adopted the Zeuxinian practice demanded by the poet in his theoretical writings.<sup>34</sup> Malvasia, for instance, relates that when visiting the studio of Albani,

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31. Poussin would later define *conchetto* as comprising one of four elements of pictorial *maniera magnifica*, Colantuono relates. Anthony Colantuono, "Lorenzo Lippi, Torquato Tasso and Seventeenth-Century Pictorial Stylistics," in M. Rossi and F. Gioffredi Superbi (eds.), *L'Arme e gli Amori. Ariosto, Tasso and Guarini in Late Renaissance Florence II* (Firenze: Olschki, 2004), 402; Bellori, *Le Vite*, 478-481.

32. Giovanna Perini, "Ut Pictura Poesis: l'Accademia dei Gelati e le Arti Figurative," in D. S. Chambers and Francois Quiviger (eds.), *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century*. (London: The Warburg Institute 1995), 113-126.

33. Colantuono, "Lorenzo Lippi," 415.

34. Colantuono, Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen, 10.

the artist had worn out copies of Tasso that those present would read aloud to him, imprinting the stories from the First Crusade, as “noble ideas on his mind.”<sup>35</sup> More specifically, Malvasia relates how different conceits could be applied to painting: “Speculating and reflecting on these passages, he knew how to extract from them thoughts, never before imagined by anyone else, which, no less than delighting, instructed even the most learned among us.”<sup>36</sup> The practice was certainly derived from their exposure to the Carracci Academy, whose members knew the poem by heart. Both Bellori and Malvasia, for instance, relate Annibale’s intimate knowledge of the epic in an anecdote when standing before Romano’s *Battle of Constantine*, for he “burst out and began to recite the first lines of Tasso, ‘I sing of pious arms and the captain,’ and finding the description of this battle, he demonstrated that painting had its own poem and hero’.”<sup>37</sup> The same biographers confirm that Agostino would be the first to illustrate the epic with nine engravings, while Annibale would follow the poet’s descriptions in his many mythological works and when designing the Farnese Gallery.<sup>38</sup> Following their example, several in the Carracci circle would also illustrate individual scenes based on the epic, including: Ludovico, Domenichino, Guercino, Lanfranco, Albani, Agostino, and, finally, Poussin. Robertson, Colantuono, Unglaub, and others have recently investigated what scenes and in what manner each were treated, which I will not recite here.<sup>39</sup> Suffice it to say, the overwhelming preference of these artists was, unexpectedly, not to illustrate the epic battle scenes from the First Crusade. Instead almost all chose lyrical interludes celebrating the tribulations of love centering on the characters of Erminia, Armida and Rinaldo. Such scenes illustrate not only the preference for lyrical subject matter, but also how their adornment was indebted to the poetics of Tasso.<sup>40</sup> Domenichino (1581-1641), for instance, includes many *concetti* in several works to embellish Tasso’s narratives, such as the *Rinaldo and Armida* of around 1620. Along with the principle subjects, Domenichino includes his own inventions such as the Cupid, kissing doves, and a sleeping Cupid. Each element, Colantuono notes, comments on the narrative unfolding as the Christian knight is bewitched, but foreshadows the reversal in fortune for Armida as she will, in turn, fall in love.<sup>41</sup> As well, Annibale’s *Rinaldo and Armida*, painted around 1601 for Odoardo

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35. Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice* (ed.) Adriana Arfelli (Bologna, 1961), 2: 234, 254.

36. Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 156.

37. Summerscale (Ed.), *Malvasia’s Life of the Carracci*, 286; Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (trans.) Wohl, 96-97.

38. Summerscale (Ed.), 164; Bellori, 123.

39. Robertson, *The Invention of Annibale Carracci*; Colantuono, *Guido Reni’s Abduction of Helen*; Jonathan Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting: Pictorial Narrative and the Legacy of Tasso* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

40. Colantuono, *Guido Reni’s Abduction of Helen*, 64.

41. Colantuono, “Lorenzo Lippi,” 404.

Farnese, demonstrates the lyrical embellishments for which Tasso would be criticized and, consequently, for which he would issue the *Apologia* of 1585.<sup>42</sup> This unusual digression in subject has been related to the poet himself, inspiring artists approaches to appropriation of natural forms where all elements must be appended to the subject to ensure that the ideal is captured. The decree would be reiterated in the two *Discorsi* published in the last decade of his life. Aligning the goals of the poet and painter, who each must, above all, select and assemble disparate beauties, Tasso calls upon the Zeuxinian metaphor: "Still, by considering the good in various particular goodnesses, we form the idea of the good, just as Zeuxis formed the idea of the beautiful when he wished to paint Helen in Croton... And since I have to show the idea of the most excellent kind of poem, the heroic, I must not only offer one poem, even the most beautiful, as example, but, collecting the beauties and perfections of many, I must explain how the most perfect and most beautiful can be fashioned."<sup>43</sup> Thus elements from different genres must be considered, even for the ideal epic poem or painting. Published a year before the founding of their academy, the epic illustrating these assertions was well-known to the Carracci; however, knowledge of the later theoretical additions, begun as early as 1561, and how to apply them, were filtered through Bolognese literary academies.

As noted, these literary academies were more influential for the Carracci than their artistic counterparts, especially the Accademia dei Gelati. The academy was dedicated to the writing and criticism of love poetry, and the analysis of the lyrical works by Tasso. Though Tasso was himself not a member, a number of his close friends were, such as Cardinal Scipione Gonzaga (1542-1593), who he had traveled to Bologna in 1588, the year of the academy's founding. Although Quiviger has argued that Agostino's membership was limited, he would engrave the title page for the *Recreationi* published by the Gelati in 1590; around the same time, he would also paint a double-portrait of Zoppio and his wife. Given his membership, even if not able to participate fully, Agostino would have had access to first-rank members. Moreover, the literary academy can be tied more directly to the Carracci, for as Malvasia specifically notes the Aldrovandi, as well as Zoppio, founder of the Gelati, regularly attended the Carracci Academy. At such meetings, these men of letters would certainly have discussed the construction of poetic conceits and lectured on Tasso, while, Giordani points out, Gelati members even published poems dedicated to artists in their circle. For instance, in his *Rime* of 1615, Zoppio lauded a portrait painted by Albani and compared him to Apelles.<sup>44</sup> The famed Bolognese poet Cesare Rinaldi (1559-1636) also praised a

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42. Torquato Tasso, *Apologia* del S. Torquato Tasso in *Difesa della sua Gierusalemme Liberata* (Ferrara, 1585).

43. Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* (trans.) Cavalchini and Samuel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 6-7.

44. Melchiorre Zoppio, *Rime dei Gelati*, (Bologna, 1615), 54.

portrait of a woman painted by the Agostino and included a sonnet entitled *Pittura e posia suore e compagne*.<sup>45</sup> Also, Girolamo Giacobbi (1567-1629) edited an anthology of poems praising Guido Reni entitled *Lodi al Signor Guido Reni raccolte dall'Imperfetto Accademico Confuso*.<sup>46</sup> With close ties to the Carracci Academy and Reni, Albani and Domenichino, Giacobbi was a member of the Accademia dei Gelati. Contributing to the anthology was none other than Malvasia, himself a member.<sup>47</sup>

Though the Carracci's membership with the Gelati has been debated, the relationship with poets in the academy is demonstrable. Roberto Zapperi, for instance, argues that Carracci involvement is related quite late in the preface of the history of the Accademia dei Gelati in 1671 (published in 1672), listing Agostino as a member. Furthermore, only three painters are listed as active between 1588 and 1671.<sup>48</sup> Perini counters that this should not be considered definitive since various members of the Gelati (Zoppio among them) were present as speakers at the Carracci Academy, documented by Benetto Morello in 1602 at Agostino's funeral (and reprinted by Malvasia and Bellori).<sup>49</sup> In the same reference we find these poets named as official members of the Bolognese academy, and Agostino as a member of their literary academy.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Perini adds, Ludovico had extensive correspondence with literati; Albani was notably a great reader of poetry; Annibale cites Tasso by heart; Domenichino, who delights in music like Guido Reni, and was semi-illiterate still enjoys friendship with famed literary figures like Rinaldi.<sup>51</sup> Along with first generation members of this organization, we find the famous poet, Cesare Rinaldi providing the lens through which the Carracci would view Tasso. Rinaldi was the Bolognese poet most closely associated with the fledgling art academy and was close friends with artists like Domenico degli Ambrogi (1600-1678), Gianluigi

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45. Charles Dempsey, "Guido Reni in the Eyes of His Contemporaries," in *Guido Reni, 1575-1642* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Bologna: Nuova Alfa editoriale, 1988), 101-118.

46. Girolamo Giacobbi, *Lodi Al Signor Guido Reni Raccolte dall'Imperfetto Accad. Conf.* (Bologna: Nicolò Tebaldini, 1632).

47. Valerio Zani, *Memoire, Imprese, e Ritratto de' Signori Accademici Gelati...* (Bologna, 1672), 131-134.

48. Roberto Zapperi, *Annibale Carracci: Ritratto di Artista da Giovane* (Torino, 1989), 31.

49. Perini, "Ut Pictura Poesis: l'Accademia dei Gelati e le Arti Figurative," 118.

50. Benedetto Morello, *Il Funerale d'Agostino Carraccio Fatta in Bologna sua Patria da gl'Incaminati Accademici del Disegno* (Bologna, 1603); Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (trans.) Wohl, 126-133; Summerscale (Ed.), *Malvasia's Life of the Carracci*, 198-210.

51. "l'Albani gran lettore di poemi, Annibale che cita Tasso a memoria, Domenichino che si diletta di musica come il divino Guido che, pur semi-illetterato, gode dell'amicizia di letterati illustri quali il Rinaldi?" Perini, "Ut pictura poesis: l'Accademia dei Gelati e le arti figurative," 115.

Valesio (ca.1583–1633) and Ludovico Carracci. He was also very close to members of the Gelati, publishing his first volume of Tassian-inspired poetry the same year as the academy's founding. Influencing the next generation, Rinaldi and the Bolognese poets would even inspire Giambattista Marino prior to his visit in 1601-2. Therefore, even if the Carracci were unable to access the *Discorsi* at the time these were taking shape, Rinaldi and the Gelati would have been excellent resources.

More than acting as a cipher for Tassian poetics, the connections made through the Gelati would ensure the propagation of the Carracci's own precepts. While in Rome, Agostino and Annibale expanded their literary circle to include the cardinals Farnese and Aldobrandini, and the papal secretary Monsignor Battista Agucchi (1570-1632), who would write a programme for an *Erminia and the Shepherds* commissioned from Ludovico in 1602.<sup>52</sup> The collaboration echoed a trend in the era whereby paintings would be based on instructions provided by rhetoricians or poets.<sup>53</sup> Agucchi was Bolognese and could have known the Carracci from his time in Bologna; he was also a member of the Accademia dei Gelati and "participated in the obsession with Tasso's poetics that affected all of the members of that academy."<sup>54</sup> Like his counterparts, he would be invested in integrating Tasso's approach to stylistic formation and integration into other art forms, namely the visual. In his overlooked *Trattato della pittura* of 1615, co-authored by the Carracci pupil Domenichino, we find the premise set forth that the model for eclectic appropriation adopted by poets is also applicable to the visual arts. Supporting his analogy, Agucchi cites Aristotle's *Poetics*:

Aristotle considered that one must necessarily agree that poetry imitates the quality of people as either better than he is in his own time, worse, or the same. This is proven with the example of painting since Polygnotus imitated that which was best, Pausias the worst, and Dionysius the same. And there is no doubt that among the ancients, many others did not use the styles themselves since Apelles, Zeuxises, Timaretes, Parrhasius, and several others imitated the best aspects of their subjects.<sup>55</sup>

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52. Colantuono, *Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen*, 11; Clovis Whitfield, "A Programme for Erminia and the Shepherds by G.B. Agucchi," *Storia dell'Arte* 19 (1973): 223.

53. Colantuono, *Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen*, 11; Clare Robertson, "Annibale Caro as Iconographer," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 45 (1982): 160-181; Julian Kliemann, "Il Pensiero di Paolo Giovio nelle Pitture Eseguite sulle sue Invenzione," in Paolo Giovio (ed.), *Il Rinascimento e la Memoria, atti del Convegno*, Como 3-5 Giugno 1983 (Como: Società a Villa Gallia, 1985), 197-223.

54. Colantuono, *Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen*, 174; Zani, *Memoire, imprese e ritratti de' Signori Accademici Gelati...*, 184-189.

55. "Considerando Aristotile, che necessariamente si dovevanodalla Poesia imitare persone di qualità, ò migliori di quelle del suo tempo, ò peggiori, ò simiglianti: lo provò con l'esempio della Pittura; perche Polignoto imitò i migliori, Pausone i peggiori, e Dionisio i simiglianti. E non è dubbio, che frà gli antiche, altri molti non usassero gli stili medesimi: poiche gli Apelli, i Zeusi, i Timanti, i Parrasii, & altri diversi imitarono i



The eclectic approach to the ennoblement of natural forms found resonance with both art forms. Tasso had already appropriated the Zeuxinian stratagem for selecting the best models in his *Discorsi* (1594), arguing that in order to conceptualize *l'Idea del bello*, the poet must take from the perfections of many different poems, as Zeuxis had many beautiful women.<sup>56</sup> As he writes, "Among beautiful things let him choose the most beautiful, among great things the greatest, among marvels the most marvelous; and in the most marvelous let him still try to increase the novelty and grandeur."<sup>57</sup> Agucchi argued that Annibale had developed his late classical manner in a similar way, leading to his understanding of *l'Idea della bellezza*.<sup>58</sup> The style and method of appropriation would become the model for artists of the next generation.

Perhaps more than any other, Nicolas Poussin is the seicentesque artist who most closely followed Agucchi's pronouncements and whose work most successfully embodied the adage *ut pictura poesis*. Early in his career, he would be introduced to these ideas by no less than court poet to Marie de' Medici, Giambattista Marino. The Neapolitan poet, Ackerman relates, had been Maggiordomo to Cardinal Aldobrandini at the same time as Agucchi, ensuring they would have had contact with similar interests.<sup>59</sup> Like Agucchi, Malvasia records that Marino commissioned works from the Carracci, such as the *Salmacis* by Ludovico of 1607.<sup>60</sup> Highly influenced by his predecessor Tasso, Marino's *L'Adone* of 1623 would further develop lyrical conceits to enliven his romantic digressions. Their connection went beyond professional admiration, though, for late in his life while living in Naples, Tasso had extended contact with the young poet and encouraged his talents. The significance of Tassian poetic strategies for pictorial narrative would be as important for Poussin as his mentor.<sup>61</sup> It is worth noting that of the significant contacts Poussin had throughout his life, only Marino is highlighted by all of his biographers, including Bellori, Passeri, and Félibien. Marino's three *Sacred Discourses* of 1614 set forth his art theoretical beliefs, though inconsistently. Ackerman noted that: "Marino is usually not very consistent in his philosophical borrowings; he was bored with the disciplined concepts of any system, and interested only in material for his flighty conceits."<sup>62</sup> In the second part of *La Pittura*, he elaborates on the theme of *ut pictura poesis*:

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migliori." Agucchi, "Trattato della Pittura," in Denis Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory* (Praeger, 1971), 256-257.

56. Tasso, *Discorsi del Poema Eroico*, 145.

57. Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* (trans.) Cavalchini and Samuel, 53.

58. Mahon, *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory*, 250-252.

59. Gerald Ackerman, "Gian Battista Marino's Contribution to Seicento Art Theory," *The Art Bulletin* 43, no. 4 (1961), 327.

60. Summerscale (Ed.), *Malvasia's Life of the Carracci*, 310.

61. Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting*, 4.

62. Gerald Ackerman, "Gian Battista Marino's Contribution to Seicento Art Theory," *The Art Bulletin* 43, no. 4 (1961), 331.

"Many are the relationships, and great are the analogies, as believe all the sages, between canvas and paper, between colors and ink, between brush and pen."<sup>63</sup> He delineates the art into two parts: *Disegno* and *Colorito*. He further divides Zuccaro's definition of *Disegno* into two parts roughly corresponding to the notions of *disegno interno* and *esterno*. He does introduce an original intercessor in *Disegno pratico*, stating: "whose office is to put into operation conceits or seen objects, takes ordinarily three ways to work in earthly painters. One way is to make up the thing in one's mind, which is to say, doing it from practice, or indeed, from fantasy. The second is to discipline oneself exactly to the rules of perspective..."<sup>64</sup> The less abstract vocabulary is remade closer to the workshop tradition of the Renaissance and, importantly, comprehensible to non-specialists. Through his contact with his friend and mentor, Poussin would have developed an understanding of classical mimesis and appropriation. This is nowhere more evident than in the artist's own theoretical excursions, the twelve short paragraphs known as the *Osservazioni*, published at the end of his biography by Bellori.<sup>65</sup> Significantly, the source most often excerpted for these aphorisms was Tasso's *Discorsi*.

The aphorisms in the *Osservazioni sopra la Pittura*, Bellori tells, were assembled for Poussin's own treatise on art in the 1640s.<sup>66</sup> The short paragraphs are fashioned entirely of phrases and entire sentences taken verbatim from earlier authors without citations. While the notations seem random, Colantuono has pointed out that these were written in a particular aphoristic style that imitated that of Leonardo's *Trattato della pittura*, which were made up of short paragraphs that were also each separate and individually titled.<sup>67</sup> Poussin, Unglaub points out, had access to his treatise as it was in the possession of his patron, Cassiano dal Pozzo, at the time being prepared for publication.<sup>68</sup> As Colantuono and Unglaub have rightly surmised, the careful selections from Tasso were purposeful and deliberate. Poussin would truncate many definitions to make them universal principles, such as his *Diffinizione della Pittura* and *Come l'arte avanzi la natura*. When defining painting, Poussin selects the definition provided by Tasso, which stressed choosing the proper subject as the most important aspect of the field: "Painting is none other than the imitation of human actions,

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63. Ackerman, "Gian Battista Marino's Contribution to Seicento Art Theory," 331.

64. Ackerman, 332.

65. Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (trans.) Wohl, 338-339.

66. Blunt, "Poussin's Notes on Painting," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1, no. 4 (1938): 344-351.

67. Anthony Colantuono, "Poussin's *Osservazioni Sopra la Pittura*: Notes or Aphorisms?" *Studi Secenteschi* 16 (2000), 286.

68. Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics of Tasso*, 10.

which properly constitute imitable actions.”<sup>69</sup> Aligning the two disciplines goals, Poussin merely replaces *poesia* with *pittura* as he reiterates the definition of Tasso that would be followed by Bellori. Unglaub has related that by truncating Tasso, Poussin distills his idea to a universal principle.<sup>70</sup> These sentiments are echoed in the longest aphorism *Della Idea della bellezza*, where he expounds on the preparatory process necessary for artists to undertake in order to guarantee beauty in their works, similar to the recommendations Tasso sets forth for the heroic poet: “to choose matter fit to receive the most excellent form which the poet’s art seeks to introduce into it.”<sup>71</sup> The process conforms both to the Zeuxinian model of Tasso, followed by the Carracci, as well as the definition of art and importance placed on the intellectual faculty responsible for selecting the most beautiful, but also “good” forms.<sup>72</sup> More important for the issue at hand, however, is not the alignment with Tassian poetics, but rather from where the excerpt derives.

Blunt first noted that the passage is lifted from the 1591 Italian translation of Albrecht Dürer’s (1471-1528) treatise *Della simmetria dei corpi humani libri Quattro* by the astronomer Giovanni Paolo Gallucci.<sup>73</sup> The treatise consists of the original four books published by Dürer along with an additional Preface, short biography of the artist, and *Libro Quinto*. While the Preface seeks to emphasize the affinities between painting and poetry, elaborating on how their goals are aligned in attempting to know the passions of the soul through evocative description, Poussin’s excerpt derives from the last chapter in the final book where the translator’s own original contribution can be found. Here Gallucci expands on Ficino’s doctrine in the *Convivio*, reiterating:

What thing consists of the beauty of the body? A certain liveliness of action, and a certain grace, that shines in the same beautiful thing for the influence of its own idea. This splendor does not descend into matter if the material is not properly prepared...now this preparation of the body that lives consists in three things: order, mode, and species; the significant order being the intervals of the parts, the quantity the mode, the species of lines, and colors.<sup>74</sup>

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69. Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (trans.) Wohl and Wohl, 478.

70. Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics of Tasso*, 14.

71. Bellori, *Le Vite de Pittori, Scultori e Architetti Moderni*, 461-462; Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (trans.) Wohl and Wohl, 339.

72. Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics of Tasso*, 14.

73. Gallucci, *Della Simmetria dei Corpi Humani, Libri Quattro*; Anthony Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin* (London: Pallas Athene, 1967), 364.

74. “Che cosa è finalmente la bellezza del corpo? Una certa vivacità di azione, & una certa gratia, che risplende nella istessa cosa bella per l’influsso della sua idea. Questo fulgore non discende in quello, fin che la materia non sia preparata più, che sia possibile, ora questa preparatione del corpo, che vive consiste in tre cose, nell’ordine, nel modo, &

The citation here naturally admonishes those artists who do not seek to improve upon nature and the models that they use to represent their subjects. The preceding chapters clarify that one would begin with a live model, but filter the final appearance through descriptions of poets and an understanding of the epic and ideal. The practical application of these theoretical precepts was echoed by Poussin in another *Observation* entitled 'Of the Bounding of Lines of Drawing and Color. 'As he wrote, "A painting will appear elegant when its extreme elements join the nearest by means of indeterminate ones in such a fashion that they do not flow into one another too feebly nor yet with harshness of line and colors; and this leads one to speak of the harmony of discord of colors and of their bounding lines."<sup>75</sup> Naturally, the artist would draw on this practical manual in order to articulate his own views.

In his selection of the final theoretical justification for the book, Poussin validates the usefulness of the preceding reference material for artists. In the previous 57 chapters, Gallucci outlines the range of temperaments, emotions and body types that artists must familiarize themselves with in order to master their craft. As a practical reference guide, we can imagine how this would supplement artists' educations. For instance, should Poussin receive a commission for a *Tancred and Erminia* (a popular subject in the Carracci circle), he could turn to the corresponding description of each character, supported by descriptions of the figures themselves by poets like Tasso. In the chapter *On the Beauty of Human Bodies, Especially Women*, Gallucci begins by stating, "Even though the painter is obliged to imitate nature, he, nevertheless, strains himself in attempting to surpass it by choosing only the most beautiful parts... The wise painter should make a diligent effort to understand and consider what is written about beauty here and then take into account the general consensus of his time."<sup>76</sup> The description is followed by examples provided from poets, ancient and modern. Following Petrarch, Aristotle and Homer, excerpts from Ariosto and Tasso provide a literary model for artists to follow. In describing the idea of beauty in the figure of Armida, Tasso writes:

Never did Argos, Cyprus, Delos see  
form of such fair deportment and address.

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nella specie, l'ordine significa l'intervalli delle parti, il modo la quantita, la specie le linee, & i colori." Gallucci, *Della Simmetria dei Corpi Humani Libri Quattro*, 143

75. *Determini del Disegno, e del Colore*. Blunt, *Nicholas Poussin*, 362. "La pittura a sarà elegante quando gli ultimi termini con li primi per via delli mezz, saranno cogiunti in maniera che non concorrino troppo fiaccamente, ò con asprezza di linee, e di colori, e qui si può parlare dell'amicita, e nimicitia de' colori, e de'loro termini." Bellori, *Le Vite de Pittori, Scultori e Architetti Moderni*, 460.

76. James Hutson, *Gallucci's Commentary on Dürer's 'Four Books on Human Proportion': Renaissance Proportion Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020), 121-122.

Like gold her hair one moment gleams, lovely  
 through veils, then unveiled glitters from each tress.  
 So, when the sky is clearing, glad and free,  
 now through a radiant cloud the sun shines less,  
 now bursts that cloud and spreads its piercing ray  
 more brightly and redoubles all the day<sup>77</sup>

As per usual, following examples of each type of figure painters would be called upon to represent described by poets, Gallucci then directs the reader to the appropriate one of the *Four Books* where Dürer would outline the mathematical armature on which to hang the *affetti*. Each of the descriptions of the ten sets of proportions is accompanied with three woodcut illustrations representing the figures from the front, side, and back, along with the associated fixed measurements. Instructions on how to use the leading lines of perspective to find and apply the fixed points on a human model are then explained. Then, parts of the body are discussed with instructions on how to draw the desired subject, and, finally, each book ends with a table of the proportions. With the measurements provided by Dürer, Gallucci appends physiognomic studies along with quick axiomatic reference for appropriate musculature and complexion, as well as attitude, facial features, hair, beard, and eye color, and even facial lines. The artist would be reassured of the prescription's legitimacy as it was supported with the authority of poets and ancient authors (Tasso, for instance, is read alongside Homer, Virgil and Seneca).

The summary of classical sources in manuals, such as Gallucci's, also acted as a sort of crib notes that would assist artists in engaging scholars in conversations. This aids in explaining how, even without a rigorous classical education, so many of Poussin's biographers and patrons marveled at the extent of his literary knowledge early in his career right after moving to Rome. I should clarify here that I am not suggesting that artists (especially in the Carracci circle) did not read the epics of their day and engage directly with the vernacular material. On the contrary, there is little disagreement on the importance of the Tassian legacy for the artists discussed here; multiple sources corroborate the relationships and direct engagement with poetic material like his romantic epic. But where the major poetic trends of the day provided *Carraccisti* with a depth of knowledge, the lacking breadth, provided by a traditional classical education, had to be supplemented, especially with regards to the more obscure and ancient sources.

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77. Torquato Tasso, *The Liberation of Jerusalem* (trans.) Max Wickert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4: 29–31; Hutson, *Gallucci's Commentary on Dürer's 'Four Books on Human Proportion,'* 124.

## Conclusion

To conclude, I should like to reiterate my assertion that the relationship between artists and *litterati* was more complex than the occasional collaboration or cribbed leitmotif; innovative pictorial methods were assembled from the various encounters between the two groups, as in the case of the Gelati and Carracci. Moving from illustrating individual scenes or passages in epics, like the *Gerusalemme* and *l'Adone*, Carraccesque artists internalized Tassian and Marinesque strategies of idealized imitation to apply on sundry projects unrelated to the original subject matter. The intertwining of poetic and artistic theory and historiography is demonstrable beyond their related goals: the narrative woven by biographers like Bellori reveals close associations between all three parties- artists, poets and academics, and biographers. Tasso would play a significant role in the nascent curriculum of the Carracci academy, inspiring not only illustrations of his literary epic, but their very working process; Marino would guide the young Poussin to do the same, encouraging his move to Rome with the poet; Bellori used the work of both Tasso and Marino as an inspiration for his theoretical-evaluative tool, the Idea, chronicled the importance of each to artists, and even wrote his own *canzone* in their modes. The result of the relationships fostered between these circles would be the creation of new rhetorical visual strategies, thus validating the oft-repeated Albertian appeal and Horatian adage: *ut pictura poesis*. Through their close associations with poets and literary figures of their day, artists were able to shore up any deficiencies left from their unfinished earlier grammar school educations, while the understanding of how to apply these poetic strategies to the visual arts would be further reinforced through treatises and manuals of the day. The reality that comes into focus of early modern artists is neither one of an artist-philosopher nor workshop grunt, but instead a savvy practitioner navigating the shifting expectations of various groups required for their professional success.

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## Jean Piaget's Genetic Epistemology as a Theory of Knowledge Based on Epigenesis

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*This article aims to highlight Jean Piaget's theory of knowledge and situate it in this context since its beginnings in Ancient Greece where, in Plato, we already find this seminal idea: knowledge is acquired in successive and upward moments (dialektikê), starting from an opinion on the sensible world (doxa) towards the épistêmê of the intelligible world, the world of Ideas or concepts. Piaget's Theory of Knowledge, we believe, was determined by four moments: 1) his research as a malacologist under the guidance of Godet and Raymond, 2) the acquaintance with Kant's philosophy at age of 21, 3) his internship at the Binet/Simon laboratory, 4) his studies on the Limnaea stagnalis. His core idea: it is possible for human beings to attain the necessary and universal knowledge due to the exchange processes of their organisms with the environment, which give rise to the epigenetic ontogenesis of their specific organic mental structures, framed for the specific act of knowing. Epigenetic ontogenesis begins with the infans first actions in the world, from the very moment of birth. Around two years of age, these actions will be represented and organized in groups linked to empirical experience, until the brain be able to perform the operations of the Abelian Group. The physiological development ends here, and the logico-mathematical knowledge becomes possible.*

### Introduction

The title of this article may be a surprise to many, since Jean Piaget has always been recognized as a gifted psychologist (but not a biologist). In reality, however, Piaget was a biologist/zoologist who dedicated himself to epistemology. Apart from his interest in biology/zoology, Piaget has always been interested in the education of human beings, as well as with the construction of Genetic Epistemology. Piaget expressed his interest in education at the beginning of his career and subsequently dedicated to it about 400 out of the 20,000 pages he wrote on epigenetic/ontogenetic evolution of rationality (which makes possible scientific knowledge), through which Piaget aimed to create a *tertium* between Darwin and Lamarck.<sup>1</sup>

In this work we aim to demonstrate that Jean Piaget achieved his youth dream (1918) by creating a Theory of Knowledge based on Biology and, in

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1. Z. Ramozzi-Chiarottino, G. Franck-Cunha, J.-J. Freire and A. A. Ferraz, *Jean Piaget's Unrecognized Epigenetic Ontogenesis of the Logical-Mathematical Thought* (Athens: Atiner's Conference Paper Series, 2017).

addition, show that it is inserted in the History of Philosophy which arose in Ancient Greece and has reached our days. A classical Theory of Knowledge and at the same time an absolutely contemporary one insofar as Biology is "par excellence" the theme of Knowledge in our century.

## Methodology

The Method of this article consisted in: a) identifying a gnosiology that seeks the origin and nature of the human faculty of knowing in Jean Piaget's work; and b) positioning it in its due place in Western Philosophy's history.

## Prolegomena

Let us begin this article by returning to a classic question posed at the dawn of Philosophy: "Is it possible for humans to attain Knowledge (*épistêmê*)? If so, does Knowledge come to us through the senses in contact with experience, or is it the prerogative of pure Reason?"

The philosophic thinking of Parmenides of Elea and Heraclitus of Ephesus are the icons of the answer to that question in the History of Ideas. The former asserted: "*Being Is, no-Being does not exist*", therefore "*Being*" has always existed; it will be eternal and not subject to transformation, for if it had started on a day or should come to end on day or should undergo changes, it could only be transformed into "*Non-Being*", but "*Non-Being*" does not exist. Heraclitus, for believing only in the information coming from the senses, stated: "*Nothing ever is, but everything is becoming.*" The opposition between knowledge that is pure reason, or pure logic (before logic was first created by Aristotle), and the knowledge that comes to us through the senses is very clear, as Heraclitus put it: *No man ever steps in the same river twice*. The opposition between rational enquiry and the immediate impressions of senses is clear, a dilemma that persists even today, albeit with different wording.<sup>2</sup>

Parmenides and Heraclitus thought has survived only, as is known, in their *Fragments*, with all the difficulties of their reconstruction. We only have a few fragments of Parmenides, and it was precisely the interest in his logic which led us to the study of Philosophy at the age of 16; decades later I was given a great gift – a versions of Parmenides Fragments (1997).<sup>3</sup> Here are some examples of the reflections of Parmenides: B3 – (...) "*For thinking and being are the same.*" (Descartes reached the same conclusion 2000 years later, as the unquestionable knowledge of Reason: "*Je pense, je suis*"). Let us continue with Parmenides in fragment B4 –

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2. G. G. Granger, *La Vérification* (Paris, Odile Jacob, 1992).

3. J. Trindade dos Santos, *Fragments do Poema de Parmênides* (Lisboa: Gulbekian, 1997).

"Look as the things afar that by the thinking become present" (words that will be repeated by Immanuel Kant when explaining imagination as a *a priori* form of sensibility) – (...) B6 – *It is absolutely necessary that the Being, speaking and thinking exist, nothingness does not exist this is what I bid you to ponder. Keep a distance from this way of inquiry and also from the one upon which mortals, who know nothing, wander (...) and in whose eyes being and non-being are the same (...)*

Plato overcame this dichotomy by showing us that knowledge is achieved through *Dialogue*, whose upward dialectic movement derives from the sensitive multiplicity from our empirical experience toward the intelligible world, of the Ideas or concepts as intelligible unities.

Curiously and unexpectedly, in Plato's Dialogues<sup>4</sup> we can find Piaget's seminal idea: knowledge is acquired in successive and upward moments (*dialektikê*), starting from an opinion about the sensible world (*doxa*) towards the *épistêmê* of the Ideas World. The visible world is a matter of opinion and it is nothing more than an image (*éikôn*) of the intelligible world, an imitation of eternal essences. Plato in his mythical and poetic language described a reality demonstrated two thousand or so years later by Jean Piaget. He states that the human faculty of knowledge evolves in a dialectical process, passing from the simple ability to act in the sensitive multiplicity of the empirical world to achieve scientific knowledge made up of concepts as intelligible unities. That accomplishment will be possible only after dialectical evolution of Reason itself as Plato describes. According to Piaget knowledge and Reason evolve indefinitely. Some will say that Plato's Eternal Truths, Essences or Ideas, as indicated by the expression itself, are immutable. Nevertheless, Plato's *Dialogues* allow the understanding of dialectical inquiry will never completely attain the essences. The dream of attaining absolute knowledge always eludes us, as Ideas will never show their real splendor to anyone... Thus, in mythical language, Plato discloses to us his conception of knowledge: for him too, knowledge will evolve indefinitely.

On the other hand, Dialectics overcomes the dichotomy between the senses and Reason, even if all knowledge begins with experience an starter of reminiscences of the World of Ideas, the place and time where the souls lived before their reincarnation. Socrates states in *Menon*: "*ah! How I miss the world of Ideas!*" For he had contemplated them better than anyone else, and precisely for that reason his soul once incarnated in this World chose to be a philosopher. Thus, only through Reason can one reach the intelligible world and the *épistêmê*, as already mentioned. Nevertheless, this upward movement will emerge in the epigenetic Piagetian ontogenesis of mental structures towards the acquisition of logical - mathematical knowledge, which can always evolve without ever reaching an end.

Many centuries later...

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4. Plato, *Dialogues* (trans.) Émile Chambry (Paris: Garnier- Flammarion, 1969).

For Descartes, the founder of modern Rationalism, *Je pense, je suis* is the foundation of his entire philosophy, as the first unquestionable knowledge attained by Reason, which never passed through the senses.<sup>5</sup> [It is well known that he removed the word "therefore", "*donc*", so that his statement would not be confused with the conclusion of a medieval syllogism.] This statement stems from "the enquiry of mind (*esprit*)" through which the philosopher attains the truth without relying on metaphysics or religion. In his view the senses perceives the sensible world, but this information only becomes Knowledge after "being processed" by *esprits animaux*, by the brain (in his original texts that is exactly the word he uses: *cerebro*, brain). *Thought* and *res extensa* or body, are for him "*two modes of the same substance*", (*cogitatio & extension sumi etiam possunt pro modis substantiae*);<sup>6</sup> however, both concepts had been understood in the philosophical debate since the 18<sup>th</sup> century such as "body" and "soul", a dualism that contradicts his own claims. On page 41 of the same volume VIII, one can read in a Descartes text, translated by us: "*everything we perceive through our senses concerns the strict union the soul keeps with the body*". A careful reading of Descartes original texts in Latin and Old French displays the misunderstanding of a *Cartesian dualism*. Jean Piaget<sup>7</sup> thus writes: Some think that it was precisely the creation of Analytical Geometry that determined in Descartes' Philosophy the permanent issue of the relations between understanding and the *res extensa*, "*both inseparable and fundamentally different concurrently*". Piaget demonstrates the concurrent evolution of *body* and *Reason*, "*both inseparable and fundamentally different*," by explaining the epigenetic ontogenesis of mathematical logical thinking in his Genetic Epistemology.

Descartes was contradicted by David Hume's skepticism. The dichotomy initiated by Parmenides and Heraclitus reappears. In addition to placing sensitive experience as the only source of knowledge, Hume, the father of Modern Empiricism, deconstructs the logical link or the physical necessity of the causal relations accepted in his time.

Let us remember that Hume's statements are subsequent to the discoveries and inventions of Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler and Newton. Scientists were interested in explaining the physical world, but their metaphysical convictions loomed above everything and coincide with their discoveries. Kepler concludes his works with a prayer: "*I give Thee thanks, O Lord, for letting me know a small part of the Universe Thou hast created.*"<sup>8</sup>

Immanuel Kant, says Cassirer, came to disrupt this harmony by denying Metaphysics the place it occupied until then asking himself: "*Is Metaphysics*

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5. C. Adam and P. Tannery, *Oeuvres de Descartes* (Paris: Vrin, 1969/1996), 30-32.

6. Ibid, 31.

7. J. Piaget, *Sagesse et Illusions de la Philosophie* (Paris, 1965b).

8. Apud W. Heisenberg, *La Nature dans la Physique Contemporaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 82-97.

possible?" And within what limits? What was an indisputable foundation of truth until then becomes a disputable one and analyzed with critical arguments. According to Kant, this is about a revolution in the dominion of knowledge, as analogous to the Copernican revolution in Astronomy. Kant does not address himself the question whether *knowledge is possible* since Mathematics and Physics, for him, are already necessary and universal knowledge; nevertheless, he investigates *how* they are possible.

Cassirer states that with Kant Logics and dialectics are no longer a simple *organon* of the knowledge of reality, but also encompasses them in all their fullness and wholeness:

"Thus, the orbit of philosophical thought seemed to be complete for the first time after having achieved its goal, the identity between reality and Reason. "Such was the point he believed he had reached in "Hegel's Science of Logic" (Wissenschaft der Logik, 1812). What Hegel condemned in Kant's logic and the ones that preceded it was their inability to overcome the purely "formal" point of view, which made them adhere to mere abstraction and reflection. According to Hegel, paving this way does not enable us to leave the circle of subjectivism. It is necessary for the spirit to breathe life into the "skeleton" of logic, to give it nerves and "muscles". This is precisely what the dialectical method promises, and what only this method is able to deliver."<sup>9</sup>

### Jean Piaget's Theory of Knowledge

Jean Piaget's Genetic Epistemology fulfilled Hegel's aspirations, as Cassirer understood them, and through a dialectical method, by explaining the epigenetic ontogenesis of specific organic mental structures for the act of knowing, for the first time in the history of ideas, *breathed life in the skeleton of Logic giving it nerves and muscles*, thus creating the Theory of Knowledge he envisioned since his youth.<sup>10</sup>

Piaget's Theory of Knowledge, in our view, can only be understood if we bear in mind the four moments of his life which determined it:

- 1) First, he started his career as a zoologist when he was still a youngster under the guidance of malacologist Paul Godet and then under the orientation of logician Arnold Reymond. Piaget states<sup>11</sup> that studying under A. Reymond made it possible for him to understand the link of the

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9. E. Cassirer, *El Problema del Conocimiento, de la Muerte de Hegel a Nuestros Dias* (Mexico, Buenos Aires: Fondo Del Cultura, 1948), 10-11.

10. G. Cellerier, *Piaget* (Paris: P.U.F., 1973), 6; Piaget, *Recherche* (Lausanne: La Concorde, 1918).

11. Piaget, "Les Modèles Abstraits sont-ils Opposés aux Interprétations Psycho-physiologiques dans l'Explication en Psychologie?" *Revue Suisse de Psychologie pure et appliquée* XIX, no. 1 (1960) : 59.



biological forms to the logical structures in such a perspective that there was no more conflict between them, but instead a close union between organic forms and those of intelligence, i.e., the logical and mathematical thinking. Furthermore, upon studying biometrics Piaget arrives at the conclusion that a qualitative biology remains verbal and that the problem of forms and structures in biology need logical and mathematical models for a true explanation. Afterwards he will proceed to the University.

- 2) The acquaintance of Piaget with Immanuel Kant's Philosophy at age 21, and the idea of explaining it in the light of Biology as he tells us in an autobiographical text.<sup>12</sup> Piaget states that he makes three discoveries that modify his naïve biologism: *"the first discovery is that if we start with Le Dantec, on the duality of functions, named assimilation and imitation by him; whereas I would say assimilation and accommodation. Knowledge is not merely imitation as he believed in his empiricism, but, in fact, an assimilation to the structures of the subject and the organism. It was gently moving from Le Dantec on to an evolutionary Kantianism."*

In transposing Kant's theory into Biology, Piaget will answer that Mathematics and Physics are attainable for humans due to the epigenetic ontogenesis of the logical mathematical thinking. This ontogenesis, we shall see, consists of a constant process of assimilation and accommodation of the organism and is built in the event of disturbances and requests from the environment, to which it adapts and then becomes unbalanced again due to the capacity of the brain to perceive new stimuli and so expand its world. Initially, these stimuli are present in the environment only, but they are also within the scope of abstract and formal representations of this empirical world.

The explanation of this ontogenesis will constitute his Theory of Knowledge based on Biology, envisioned since Piaget's early years as mentioned previously.

Kant tells us that *"all knowledge begins with experience, but it does not derive from it,"*<sup>13</sup> because, according to him, experience is structured and explained by the categories of Understanding (*Verstand*) that correspond to those *a priori* of Pure Reason (*Vernunft*) and thanks to which, even it is made possible. Understanding connects directly with experience, and Pure Reason is constituted by mental units of the multiple parts, the concepts as formal possibilities of all attainable knowledge. Thus, according to Kant, knowledge would not exist without *a priori* categories of Reason and the imaginative capacity of humans, (*Einbildungskraft*)<sup>14</sup> responsible for the *"necessary unity of a phenomena-based synthesis"* in consciousness. In his view, knowledge is an elaboration of an active thought of the matter of intuition, according to *a priori* principles, i. e., the application of these principles to

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12. Ibid, 58-59.

13. I. Kant, *Critique de la Raison Pure* (Paris: PUF, 1781/1950), 31.

14. R. Eisler, *Kant-Lexikon* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994), 524.



sensitive data, which results in their subordination to the forms of consciousness “which knows”, that is, incorporating the result of all intuition and, let us say, of perception, in a unified and systematic set – knowledge. “*The requirement that proves itself to be the proper principle of Reason in its logical use is to find, for the conditioned knowledge of understanding, the unconditioned that must lead to unity.*”<sup>15</sup> That would be the condition of all attainable knowledge.

For Piaget, knowledge begins with an action which has is nevertheless a consequence of an endogenous process, whose primary source is the brain, and therefore it does not derive from it. For Kant, Reason is abstract, whereas in Piaget’s view, it is organic.

Piaget also believes in *a priori* as a condition of all attainable knowledge, but not previously chronologically given; in fact, fully constructed step by step. His conviction that every moment of epigenetic evolution is necessary for the construction of the one that succeeds it, that is, every moment is *a priori condition* of the next moment. According to Piaget the framing of the epistemic subject, dialectically built (organism and environment) is richer than Kant’s epistemic subject, since the very beginning.<sup>16</sup>

- 3) The third decisive moment in Piaget’s life for the construction of his Theory of Knowledge was his internship at Binet and Simon’s Laboratory. Then and there he discovered a *logic* underlying children’s actions: inclusion, addition, multiplication of classes, fitting of transitive asymmetric relations etc., whose model was Couturat’s classical logic he had studied at a very young age. This logic, he realizes, foreshadowed a Logic of Classes and Relations and it was not a matter of abstractions or chimeras, “*I saw them being constructed.*”<sup>17</sup> A second fundamental finding was that the logic underlying a child’s behavior evolves. Would this logical enrichment come from experience or would it just be a development of inherited possibilities? Or both?

At the beginning of his internship, Piaget believed that language unveiled the very logic of thought. However, he later observed that this logic is present -even if not in evident way- in human actions, organizing them and making discoveries possible. Piaget then had the idea of studying children’s behavior from the day of their birth. So he started to observe his first daughter Jacqueline born 1925, and then carried on with the other two children: Lucienne and Laurent. For more than 10 years of observation he collected data to make his hypotheses more precise. Then he realized that in all kinds of behavior, both in

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15. Ibid, 888.

16. Piaget, *Sagesse et Illusions de la Philosophie*, 1965b, 82.

17. Piaget, “*Les Modèles Abstraits sont-ils Opposés aux Interprétations Psycho-physiologiques dans l’Explication en Psychologie?*” 1960, 60.

the one that seeks an immediate goal and as in any type of game, children's actions are not structured randomly. They obey true logical systems that determine their behavior without their being aware of them, similarly there are laws ruling our endocrine system without our being aware of them at the level of consciousness.

- 4) The fourth decisive moment for the construction of Piaget's Theory of Knowledge was the research conducted with the *Limnaea Stagnalis*, from 1927 to 1965, (80,000 individuals), published in the 1929 and 1965a Reports. So that research took place in parallel with his observations of his children's behavior. Why did this work that referred to phylogenesis occur to him at the moment he was busy with ontogenesis? His life story does not give us a clue, however, we have a hypothesis: in 1926, the Viennese biologist and zoologist, Paul Kammerer, who conducted extensive research with the midwife toad with the intent to demonstrate the *inheritance of acquired traits*, one of Lamarck's fundamental ideas, had been accused of fraud and degraded by the neo-Darwinian "scientific community." Outraged by the accusation and being sure of his honesty, Kammerer commits suicide. Would Piaget not want to pay tribute to the biologist, and as he a zoologist, in order to restore his image by conducting research similar to his own with the *Limnaea Stagnalis* and confirming his findings? The fact of the matter is that Piaget conducted an investigation which started in 1927 and lasted 37 years, with all the refinements of the scientific method. Because the waters of the small pond of Lago in which he conducted it had dried up, he had to interrupt it before detailing his ultimate evidence.<sup>18</sup>

This research is especially significant because it was carried out at the same time that Piaget was studying the behavior of his children. Hence the idea of ontogenetic epigenesis that, according to himself, would repeat phylogenetic epigenesis, explained in detail in his work *Adaptation vitale et Psychologie de l'intelligence*.<sup>19</sup>

This experiment of *Jordillon* that lasted 37 years is totally ignored by almost all Piaget's scholars worldwide. Notwithstanding, it was thanks to *Jordillon's* experiment that Piaget was able to create his Theory of Knowledge. This theory

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18. Piaget, "Les Races Lacustres de la *Limnaea Stagnalis*" - Recherches sur les Rapports de l'adaptation héréditaire avec le milieu," *Bulletin Biologique de la France et de la Belgique* 63, no. 3 (1929): 424-455; Piaget, "Notes sur des *Limnea Stagnalis* L. var. lacustris Stud: Elevées dans une Mare du Plateau Vaudois," *Revue Suisse de Zoologie* 72, no. 38 (1965a): 769-787.

19. Piaget, *Adaptation Vitale et Psychologie de l'intelligence. Sélection Organique et Phénocopie* (Paris: Hermann, 1974).

shows the intertwining of the zoologist/biologist with the philosopher. It was the exhaustive observation of many generations of the *Limnaea* that allowed the Piaget-philosopher to capture the relationship between phylogenesis and ontogenesis of the living organism. It was this experience that showed to the epistemologist, the analogy between the construction of a mollusk's organism and that of the human organism and Reason. It was this experience that explained the contradiction between epigenesis and chance and so that, made possible the creation of a *tertium* between Lamarck and Darwin.

It is absolutely necessary to state that in this article we will not be discussing the concept of epigenesis at the present moment, past or future. Here we will simply adopt Waddington's concept, as understood by Piaget.

The final data of this research conducted with the *limnaea stagnalis*, from 1927 to 1965 with 80,000 individuals, was published in the 1965 Report. The first of which had come to light in 1929 and already told the accomplishment of a youth dream, to verify the existence of *random mutations*, an idea that seemed to contradict everything that he himself had observed since the age of 8 with the malacologist Paul Godet and more, to verify the possibility of the transmission of the acquired characters, an issue that had fascinated him since very early on, as he tells on page 454 of the 1929 Report.

Fifteen years after the beginning of this research, Piaget is already sure that there is an epigenesis in the sense of Aristotle - the creator of the concept - as *a continuation of a genesis beyond birth*.<sup>20</sup>

Two years after the final report of his long and prodigious research, Piaget publishes *Biologie et Connaissance*,<sup>21</sup> a work in which he exposes an ontogenetic epigenesis of necessary and universal knowledge, inspired by everything that was observed for 37 years among the *Limnaea Stagnalis*, now he presents the Principle of epigenetic development as a condition for the acquisition of Knowledge by the human being.

Some could ask how the leap from the epigenesis observed in the context of snails in the Swiss lakes to the Theory of Knowledge took place. Certainly this understanding can only arise from becoming aware of the meaning of Piaget's research with *Limnaea Stagnallis*, in his own words:<sup>22</sup>

"Everyone knows that the *Lymnaea Stagnalis* are bred in the Swiss Great Lakes and in Scandinavia, and that they are a lacustris variety, whose globular shape seems to be linked to water turbulence. In places exposed to waves and on a rocky terrain, every wave causes the animal to adhere to the ground; hence during its growth there

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20. Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* (trans.) Arthur Platt (London: Clarendon, 1910), 24.

21. Piaget, *Biologie et Connaissance*. Essai sur les Relations entre les Régulations Organiques et les Processus Cognitifs (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).

22. Piaget, "Les Races Lacustres de la "*Limnaea Stagnalis*" - Recherches sur les Rapports de l'adaptation héréditaire avec le milieu," 1929.

is an increase in the opening of its shell and an effort on the animal muscle, which tends to make its spiral smaller, i. e., it contracts.”

In 1929, Piaget had confirmed such statement with a statistical analysis of these variations due to water turbulence, in nature itself, through the environmental changes in the course of the *limnaea*'s growth.

Piaget states:<sup>23</sup>

“We especially sought to demonstrate that the globular shapes found in the most exposed places of the Neuchâtel and Boden Lakes corresponded to a contracted breed which lived long in aquariums and we named them breed V. A less contracted breed (IV) lives in the same lakes and also in the Lemman Lake, besides breeds III, II, and I with greater elongations and that are found in calm waters.”

“This fact raises an interesting question as to whether breed V is constituted independently of any influence of the environment, according to the interpretation of classic “mutationists”, (the ones who carried on the work of De Vries) about 30 or 40 years ago, why does it not take place elsewhere? (except in turbulent waters?) Nothing would prevent them from keeping their contraction in calm waters where I had transported them. He had collected *Limnaea* from various places in the Swiss lakes and transported them to an aquarium where they lived for generations).”

Since he started to make his catalogues, says he, he has never observed anything other than the maintenance of the contracted spiral. It was at that time that Guyènot told him, says Piaget:<sup>24</sup>

“It is not out of the question that mutations for the “contracted” (*limnaea*) to appear in various places at random, unrelated to the environment, but for unknown reasons such as oxygen insufficiency, or a harmful effect of the humic acid, they are removed from the calm waters and do not prevail except in the great lakes and more precisely in turbulent waters.”

“A first point to examine is the relationship between the individuals that were reared in the pond in Jordillon and those that were reared in aquariums. Let us remember that in the latter, the individuals reared in the aquarium, breed V, came from a scattered population around the Port of Hauterive (Lake Neuchâtel).

Thus, he verified the essential fact that the population bred in the Jordillon and multiplied there for 15 years had not lost any of the contractions as those of its predecessors in aquariums. In contrast, they presented a sharper contraction, in-between the preceding one and that of the parent population living in the lake (...) If the Jordillon population is a little more contracted than that of Lake Hauterive, it is naturally because in that parent station there is a certain phenotypic contraction due to the waves, which could be added to the genotypic contraction, whereas the calm waters of the Jordillon ignore that factor.

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23. Ibid, 769.

24. Ibid, 770.

(...)

The genotype is simply what is common to all phenotypes of the same breed, and if we know that there is a breed V, it follows that in "pure" lineages and in identical conditions (aquariums of the same shapes and dimensions) it differs from breed I to IV.

(...)

After the Jordillon experiment it seems to us, therefore, even more difficult than before to explain (these facts) without resorting to the influence of the environment as breed V is produced only in turbulent places of the Great Lakes since it also could live anywhere. (...)"

At the same time that Piaget demonstrates - over the course of 37 years - the influence of the environment in the *Limnaea stagnalis* organism and describes its epigenesis entirely in accordance with what Waddington (1957)<sup>25</sup> says, it makes the very concept of chance untenable. According to him:<sup>26</sup>

"This tells us that the problem data raised by our *Limnaea* are as follows:

- 1) The phenotypic contraction is easily accounted for in nature by a kinetogenesis on the basis of the agitation versus substrate complex.
- 2) In lacustrine stations where this phenotypic contraction is maximum and only in them do we find a genotype (breed V) oriented in the same direction.
- 3) This hereditary modification could take place anywhere since nothing prevents a contracted form from living in calm waters, but nowhere did we find such event. From the probabilistic point of view, could we then admit that the appearance of contracted genotypes occurs by chance only at the points where a maximum phenotypic contraction results from water agitation by kinetogenesis or is there a causal link between these phenotypic and genotypic contractions?

Here is a special case of countless situations in which an initially non-hereditary variation then seems to settle. However, what is interesting about this special case is that it all seems to happen in a merely mechanical domain as that of animal movements in the course of its growth, and the repercussions of this motricity on the shape of the animal; the apparent effect of the environment on the hereditary form simply impacts the most.

In our 1929 article we were hoping for the advent of a theoretical position that could constitute a "tertium" among the ideas of Lamarck, who explained it all by means of the environment, but not verifying it experimentally, and the classical mutationism of which he only had notions about random atomistic variations unrelated to the

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25. C. H. Waddington, *The Strategy of the Genes* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1957).

26. Piaget, "Les Races Lacustres de la "*Limnaea stagnalis*" - Recherches sur les Rapports de l'adaptation héréditaire avec le milieu," 1929, 771-778.

environment and their selection subsequent to the event, due to the death or survival of the organisms bearing such variations. Now it seems that we are in the process of reaching a compromising position today (1965) due to population genetics and Waddington's impacting work (1957). Situating our problem in such perspectives may prove to be interesting.

(...)

The genomes are systems with different forms of balances, imbalances and rebalancing of unfavorable mutations (cf. classical experiment by Dobzhansky and Spasski).

(...)

Above all, as Waddington insisted, selection does not occur in the genes directly, but rather exclusively in phenotypes as an interaction between the genome and the environment. From such a point of view, selection is a choice of the most "capable of responding to the environment."

(...)

Selection, therefore, constitutes a modification of genetic equilibrium proceeding in a manner comparable to those in which the action of an external factor on the organism was previously conceived, but substituting the simple causal action for a probabilistic action on the proportions of a multi-unit. In other words, the character that is joined or removed is no longer conceived as an expression of a disjunction or an absolute withdrawal, but as a result of a change of proportions in an organized system. That is why we do not speak of a new mutation anymore, but of a new rebalancing that modifies the genetic system in its entirety. (In fact, it is necessary to reverse the possible emergence or discovery of new genes since their number varies according to groups)."

Piaget summarizes his goal in his lasting research as follows:<sup>27</sup>

"The aim of this transposition experiment was to show that the contracted genotype of the *Limnaea stagnalis*, which were constituted only in the most exposed places to the waves of the Neuchâtel and Constance Lakes, could survive in calm waters and preserve their contraction "character". Thus, the following hypothesis falls apart: that such genotypes of breed V could appear anywhere at random, but they would be eliminated in the "marais" or in the small lagoons for several reasons excluding their survival in such environments."

Piaget states that, "*without referring to the acquired characters in the Lamarckian sense (transmission already in the first generation and without giving much value to endogenous reorganization),<sup>28</sup> or the recent studies (1960) of the action of the RNA on the DNA,*" sought to interpret the phenomena he observed with breed V, which

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27. Ibid, 779.

28. Piaget, *Biologie et Connaissance. Essai sur les Relations entre les Régulations Organiques et les Processus Cognitifs*, 1967, 128-131.



advocate in favor of the existence of hereditary variations that followed the phenotypes which resulted from the influence of the environment; and that later on the same breed may well live in calm waters preserving their characters, as a *phenocopy* (phénocopie) (or copy of the phenotype by the genotype). We must now clarify that we shall be discussing the term *phenocopy* later on, which is not entirely in accordance with Piaget's explanations, for all through the explanations he provides us, he states that it is not exactly a "copy" of the phenotype. He must have used this term for lack of a more suitable one within the French language. We shall propose a neologism that could express perfectly well, in English, what Piaget meant concerning the phenotype and its relationship to the genotype: *pheno-endogenous requirements*, instead of phenocopy, i.e., endogenous requirements of the phenotype. Immediately after using that word which indicates a concept, Piaget continues the report, explaining that:<sup>29</sup>

"(...) if the environment engenders a common phenotype, there is no reason for endogenous reconstruction, on the contrary; if the exogenous variation is the source of a more or less profound imbalance, it can affect the regulatory genes corresponding to the modified regions of the organism. There is, then, a repercussion of the imbalance thus created, indicating through a feedback the existence of a disturbance in the syntheses commanded by the genome (...) In this specific case where the phenotype has disturbed the balance of the internal environment; it is the latter that will constitute the selection instruments: there will then be an "organic selection" in Baldwin's sense and it is then normal for the endogenous variation to end up resembling the phenotype, since it was forced by internal selections to mold itself in the framework modified by the phenotype. In most cases, phenotypes are closely linked to behavior, and in the case of plants, to so-called reactive variations, the transition from exogenous to endogenous thus appears to constitute a general process that occurs in all domains of life."

Here a reference to his research with alpine cypresses which, due to having their seeds transplanted from low altitudes to high altitudes, had the length and width of their leaves changed in the generations following the initially altered phenotype.

In these two cases observed by Piaget, he understands that the phenotypic variation shows a result that reveals not only a threat to the environment, but also a process in which the organism tends to "*expand its environment and increase its powers; and in both cases, the final genotype achieves a balance the phenotype only sought.*"<sup>30</sup>

In this same work of 1974, Piaget upon narrating his research already published in the Report we mentioned above on the *Limnaea*, along with the

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29. Piaget, *Adaptation Vitale et Psychologie de l'Intelligence. Sélection Organique et Phénocopie*, 1974, 44-45.

30. *Ibid*, 37.

research he had already conducted with humans until 1965, and reported in: *The Origin of Intelligence in Children*,<sup>31</sup> *The Construction of Reality in the Child*,<sup>32</sup> *The formation of the Symbol in the child*,<sup>33</sup> (in addition to another twenty or thirty studies with children that followed until the publication of the Report transcribed here), he comments:<sup>34</sup>

"So, how can we not be surprised with the convergence between this biological law that seems general and the work of the forms, even the higher forms of intelligence, whose new constructions rest on information taken not from objects as such, but from actions or the coordination of actions that the subject exerts over objects, which is not the same thing at all, as we will insist later on (...)."

So the elaboration of such operating structures on this cognitive terrain has its onset with actions that are internalized as operations, but performed by mental structures with their capacity to represent, and it is preceded by trials and errors of an empirical nature, as if these corresponded to the initial phenotypic responses and to the operations as the functioning of specific organic mental structures for the act of knowing, such as endogenous, genotypic responses.

In the case of a purely biological, "phenocopy", it is then about a change in the phenotype that can lead to a modification in the genome, which could be explained for genome's reorganization in response to the inputs of the phenotype. As far as intelligence is concerned, the term "endogenous" must be understood as a set of organic structures that are formed from within child operations in the environment.

Let us synthesize this process that Piaget and Waddington,<sup>35</sup> will call Ontogenetic Epigenesis. This process begins with the empirical experience, with the actions of a human being upon the environment aimed to understand the world. Knowledge of the physical world begins with the establishment of relations between material objects, never at random, but always displaying the logic described by Piaget when he studied the children of the Binet & Simon Laboratory, and who were later observed again in several parts of the world by his research assistants, including the members of our Laboratory at USP (University of São Paulo). All these observable logical relations can be called *phenotypic* and remain unconscious up to 5-6 years of age, so that becoming conscious and verbalized, but still limited to actions with material objects.

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31. Piaget, *La Naissance de l'Intelligence chez l'Enfant* (Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1936).

32. Piaget, *La Construction du Réel chez l'Enfant* (Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1937).

33. Piaget, *La Formation du Symbole chez l'Enfant* (Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1945).

34. Piaget, *Adaptation Vitale et Psychologie de l'Intelligence. Sélection Organique et Phénocopie*, 1974, 39.

35. Waddington, *The Strategy of the Genes*, 1957; Waddington, *Towards a Theoretical Biology* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 1968); Waddington, *The Evolution of an Evolutionist* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 1975).



The paramount fact is that these logical relationships are insensibly passed into children's consciousness and on to their speech in a way that they're introjected and represented by the *image-making faculty*, so that *humans* can *think* about them. Piaget understands this movement as an "*abstraction reflechissante*" (that means something that is reflected as an image at a higher level than that of actions that will allow for the rise of deduction). Once aware of these logical relationships, it can be said that children reached the concrete-operational stage, that is, they already know how to operate even if only on objects. This stage will be demonstrated by the formal model of *groupings* that will precede the coming of human Reason into the structure of the *Abelian Group*. This stage is explained by the formal model of the INRC Group, in Piaget's theory.

What is the relevance of this coming to the so defined "operational stage", in Piaget's Theory? This new capacity means that new organic mental structures specific to the act of knowing have been completed in the organism, and will also determine progress in *adaptation*. This new equilibrium level is transient because it simultaneously means brain progress that increases the capacity of the individual to perceive new stimuli in the environment, and new relations to be established therein, in a dialectic process: organism vs. environment, which will cause new imbalances and rebalances. The endogenous, organic construction of mental structures here constitutes the genotype which we referred to in the purely organic *phenocopy*, since the phenotypic information of the logic underlying the actions in empirical experience passes through reflexive abstractions causing the evolution of the functioning of the mental structures, consisting in the establishment of logical relations, performed in empirical experience, but that shall evolve into logical and mathematical relations independent of material objects, according to Jean Piaget. Thus we could observe Maria Gabriella, age 9, verbalizing the following reasoning: (...) "*if there is only 'yes' and 'no', if I say no to 'no' I'm saying yes.*" (...) the "*double negation*" occurred to Gabriella spontaneously, it is as if we were watching live the moment of arrival at abstract thinking.

The fact that the relations of Classical Logic appear to underlie the behavior of all human beings, since not even a single case among children living in a society has falsified such observation, leads Piaget to hypothesize that the very functioning of the brain occurs according to Classical Logic. In his own words, Piaget says:<sup>36</sup>

"In conclusion, the mental activities whose progressive structuring prepares the logical structures thus cover the entire development field (or ontogenetic evolution), which means that logic has its roots situated in a much deeper level than commonly imagined. In pursuing them, we are forced to go back so far that we may ask ourselves whether the integrations proper to the nervous mechanisms are not already

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36. Piaget, "Les Activités Mentales en Rapport avec les Expressions Symboliques Logique et Mathématiques," *Synthese* 9, no. 2 (1954): 144-145.

an outline of logical fittings." (...) This leads us to assume that the evolutionary process, which we have referred to, is isomorphic to an organic evolution."

The originality of Piaget's hypothesis<sup>37</sup> is to assume the Classical Logic as an expression of organic brain functioning. Classical Logic, for since Aristotle who created Logic by observing the arguments of those who discussed in the public Square, up to George Boole<sup>38</sup> it was understood as a set of *laws of thought*. Subsequently, Logic will be understood, in general, just as a *language*.

Piaget adds that when looking at contemporary cybernetic models, related to brain activity, appeal to equilibrium processes using the mathematical structures of *network* and *groups*, there are indications (or would it be an illusion?) that the evolutionary process of Reason or logical mathematical intelligence in ontogenesis is concurrent with the organic evolution of specific mental structures for the act of knowing.

In fact, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have had important articles on this subject that justly address the Piagetian theory.<sup>39</sup>

In Piaget's article *Biologie et Connaissance*,<sup>40</sup> a summary of the book with the same title he was writing and later published in 1967, Piaget says a great many interesting things about his fundamental concern that, for example, when aiming to compare knowledge mechanisms to those of life, he finds that the former ones prolong and use the organic self-regulations from which they derive. Piaget shows us that if his multiple analyses lead him to highlight the continuity that links organic life and cognitive mechanisms, they must also show that they are differentiated and specialized organs of physiological regulations in their interactions with the environment, that is, when prolonging organic structures have special functions, even if they are still biological, until reaching the level of logical and mathematical production, the result of brain functioning, which is organic, but capable of generating purely abstract knowledge; for Piaget physiology ends where logical - mathematical relations begins.

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37. Piaget, "Logique Formelle et Psychologie Génétique," In *Les Modèles et la Formalization du Comportement*. Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1967, 277; Piaget, "Le Problème Neurologique de l'Interiorisation des Actions en Opérations Réversibles," 1949.

38. Apud C. Mangione and S. Bozzi, *Storia della Logica. Da Boole ai Nostri Giorni* (Roma: Garzanti Editore, 1993).

39. Such as: 1) E. E. Aksoy, M. Schoeler and F. Wörgötter, "Testing Piaget's Ideas on Robots: Assimilation and Accommodation using the Semantics of Actions," in *Development and Learning and Epigenetic Robotics (ICDL-Epirob), Joint IEEE International Conferences 2014*, 107-108; 2) S. T. Parker, J. Langer and C. Milbrath (Eds.), *Biology and Knowledge Revisited: From Neurogenesis to Psychogenesis* (Psychology Press, 2014); 3) S. Campanella, "Understanding Bio-Cognitive Change: Jean Piaget and the Path to Epigenetic Innovation," *Journal Paradigm* 1 (2019): 7-22.

40. Piaget, "Biologie et Connaissance," *Diogenes*, no. 54 (1966): 4.

In this article, exactly between the end of his research with the *Limnaea Stagnalis* and the preparation of his theory of knowledge exposed in *Biologie et Connaissance*, Piaget seeks to fill a certain gap that could exist between the study of “phenocopy” in phylogenesis and ontogenesis. Actually, what is the link that would link his research with the *Limnaea Stagnalis* and children, the human offspring? Right, he reveals to us the isomorphisms between phylogenesis and ontogenesis, but how can we explain the emergence of the conscious logical and mathematical functioning in humans?

The text that prepares us for the book *Biologie et Connaissance* shows us this link.

Piaget says that starting from Ethology’s elementary data, animal knowledge is of the “savoir faire” order, or of the useful and practical *know-how*; instinct essentially consists of nourishment, protection against the enemy and reproduction, added to the different modes of social organization in the sense of survival of the species and the individual. Perceptual or sensorimotor types of learning do not emerge from a functional framework and the same is true of a large part of practical or sensorimotor intelligence.

Mammals, we know, distance themselves a little bit from other animals and have their environment expanded by the act of playing and even by actions that can no longer be interpreted as part of the instinct, as demonstrations of “gratitude” towards caregivers. We have notable cases observed with these animals: the cow that licks for more than half an hour its caregiver who, by assisting her in giving birth, saved her life and that of her calf. Our pet Poupée, who whenever someone in the family he belonged felt ill, spent the day at the foot of his bed. The kitten Milly which, when watching her owner on the lap top, imitated him by tapping his paws on the keyboard ... We know the scientific experiments with chimpanzees in which they created new tools in order to reach food, etc., but all this shows us an extension of the environment, which had already been observed among snails or *Limnaea Stagnallis*.

Human beings expand their environment much more rapidly, but their cognitive processes therein involved go through the *expansion of their universe*, such as discoveries of other lands, maritime discovery, other continents, and exploration of the universe. What do Physics and Chemistry do other than build knowledge that always goes in this direction of expanding our environment, our universe? It can be said that knowing is expanding the world of the subject who acts, always on the basis of their possibilities, programmed at first but then undergoes changes in function of exchanges with the environment and transmission of new knowledge to their descendants.

Piaget proposes as the very cause of knowledge, suitable for both phylogenesis and ontogenesis and the link between both of them: knowing the world around us and thus expand it more and more.

Where does the difference between knowledge in the other animals and the human whose achievements are unmatched begin? Piaget replies: In *éclatement*

*de l'instinct*,<sup>41</sup> that is the *out break of instinct*; in the almost complete disappearance, among anthropoids and human beings of a totally organic form to knowing that now extends into new forms of regulation that when overcoming the previous one, do not take their place, but instead preserve it by dividing its components in two complementary directions.

With the outbreak of the instinct, the hereditary programming of the form of knowing disappears and is replaced by cognitive, flexible and built self-regulations.

The fact that knowledge based on ontogenesis begins at such an early moment made the theoreticians of logical-mathematical knowledge not even think of looking for its origin in biological functioning, "*at least, not before the relationship between the logic of the models was shown by Mc Culloch & Pitts*<sup>42</sup> and the logic of neurons," says Piaget.<sup>43</sup>

Piaget states in addition:

"There is no exaggeration or metaphor in saying that the nervous reaction ensures the continuous transition between physiological assimilation in the broad sense and cognitive assimilation in the sensory-motor form. At all levels, logic inference is thus at the center of cognitive processes long before the development of general and stable operating structures."<sup>44</sup>

## How did Piaget himself try to demonstrate his Biological Theory of Knowledge?

Piaget and Grize<sup>45</sup> thought that if it was possible to formally prove that there is an intermediate form of thinking to reason between non-logical thinking and human logical thinking; this would be the *demonstration* of Epigenetic Ontogenesis. It would not be "proved" through actions (with observational facts), but through formal logic.

Afterwards they demonstrated the existence of an *intermediate moment* between those sufficiently known moments in the ontogenesis of logical-mathematical thinking: 1<sup>st</sup>) that of a total absence of logic in the individual's consciousness, (from birth and continuing in the first years of life, in which a logic underlying the actions is gradually being outlined, but not at the level of

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41. Ibid, 23; Piaget, *Biologie et Connaissance. Essai sur les Relations entre les Régulations Organiques et les Processus Cognitifs*, 1967, 410.

42. W. Mc Culloch and W. Pitts, "A Logical Calculus of the Ideas Immanent in Neurons Activity," *Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics* 7 (1943): 115-133.

43. Piaget, "Biologie et Connaissance," 1966, 25; Piaget, *Biologie et Connaissance. Essai sur les Relations entre les Régulations Organiques et les Processus Cognitifs*, 1967, 256-257.

44. Ibid, 256.

45. Piaget and J. B. Grize, *Essai de Logique Opératoire*, 2nd Edition (Paris: Dunod, 1972).

consciousness); 2<sup>nd</sup>) that of the ability to understand abstract relationships that correspond to the structure of the Abelian group in mathematics.

The great merit of Piaget's Theory of Knowledge was to discover the existence of an intermediate moment between the ones above mentioned, previously unknown to both mathematicians and epistemologists in general, not to mention those dedicated to biological knowledge, including neurologists.

The ability hitherto not perceived by scholars, for the child to be aware of a logic carried out with objects in a concrete world and which corresponds to that an imperfect Group, underlying its actions and its discourse, is necessarily a precursor of the Abelian Group; the logical relationships made aware by the human newborn are, as show by Piaget, in this stage, of its evolution, still always linked to the concrete world, that is, to its actions. Hence the name given to intermediate moment that he discovered and that would constitute the very possibilities of the human brain, from the Period of Concrete Logic, expressed in the model he called *Groupement*, (*Grouping*) almost a *Abelian Group*, ("*Groupe*"), but not yet, it lacks some abstract relationships in the process of being acquired in the next moment and not by all human beings...

*Grouping* is then an incomplete mathematical structure that reveals and formalizes the reasoning of the average 7/10 year old children. The laws expressed in the model designated as *Grouping* are: composition, reversibility, associativity, and identical operation (which includes tautologies). Epigenetic ontogenesis will lead human beings to the possibilities of reasoning expressed in the model named the INRC Group (Identity relations, N Inversion, Reciprocity, and Correlative operations). These would be the essential possibilities of propositional operations, thus allowing the subject to think through hypotheses, verifying or falsifying them. That moment, states Piaget, when human beings become capable of thinking according to all the possibilities of the *Abelian Group* would signal the end of the physiological construction of the human brain.<sup>46</sup> This construction would be ready and the reasoning thereof would no longer be only a result of an organic functioning, but *an abstract consequence, result of this very functioning*.<sup>47</sup> Thus, henceforth, human beings would be able to create new things and understand complex systems in the different areas of Mathematical Logic, Philosophy etc.

Here Piaget finds equivalent to a purely organic phenocopy, a cognitive phenocopy in which the operations determined by the functioning of mental structures imitate, copy, initially phenotype behaviors, requested by the pressure of the environment. Piaget explains that in phenocopy whose true meaning would be *pheno-endogenous requirements*, the actions with the objects or the facts of

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46. Ramozzi-Chiarottino, *Modèle et Structure chez Piaget* (Genève: Archives Jean Piaget: S.I.V., 1972). 41.

47. Piaget, "Essai sur la Nécessité," *Archives de Psychologie* XLV (1977). Université de Genève, 245.

the environment, affect the endogenous processes with repercussions on those that are under construction causing them to evolve

Cognitive phenocopy begins with the construction of mental structures while there is a direct relationship between the human subject that strives to know and the physical environment. However, at some point in the dialectical process, by virtue of which the construction of Reason takes place, the exchange between the organism and the environment is no longer restricted to physical objects as such, but involves *concepts*. These *concepts* already correspond to the abstract product of brain functioning; they derive from reasoning, from the ability to develop relationships and establish logical relations, both products of organic functioning, and generated by it. Whether it is about biological or cognitive phenocopies, or reflective abstraction, as previously explained, says Piaget, we find the same mechanism again; a rebalancing by endogenous reconstruction and then its overcoming but with preservation (an *aufhebung*), thanks to a reorganization with new combinations, but whose elements are harvested from the previous system.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

It is possible for human beings to achieve the necessary and universal Knowledge, thanks to the exchanges that their organism develops with the environment that give rise to the epigenetic ontogenesis of their specific organic *mental structures* for the act of knowing.

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48. Piaget, "La Logistique Axiomatique ou "Pure", la Logistique Opératoire ou Psychologique et les Réalités Auxquelles elles Correspondent," *Methodos: Rivista Trimestrale di Metodologia e di Analisi del Linguaggio* 4, no. 13 (1952): 72-84.



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## Seven Unknown Drawings by Luigi Manini

By Luís Manuel Sêrro\*

*Luigi Manini, set designer at the Nacional Theatre of S. Carlos lived in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was characterized, in the field of aesthetics, by the transition from romanticism to naturalism. This article aims to analyze seven unknown drawings by Luigi Manini, as an expression and illustration of this artistic period. For this, we analyse the three major periods of art exhibition by Hegel in his work Aesthetics. Integrated in this analysis the evolution of artistic expression, with more emphasis, is illustrated the study of ornamentation, its nature, its importance in stylistic participation and, along its journey, the variation between the expression plane and the content plane that the ornament, as a sign, suffered. To conclude this journey, romanticism, used ornamentation as an evocative element of cultural styles and cultures, consistent with the essence of romanticism: a sublime expression. But in its final phase, romanticism evolved into naturalism that manifests, not the differentiated architectural element, but its collective nature. Urbanism is a social response of Architecture. The ornament loses, at this time, its symbolic value, but maintains its expression plan that was developed with an appreciation of its plastic value. It's the ornate by the ornate that keeps, still, more time in Belle Époque; in Art Nouveau and Art Deco, to disappear completely in Modernism. These drawings, from an affirmation phase of Luigi Manini's, are integrated at this time, and their analysis will be concluded from the historical conclusion of this article.*

### Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present some unknown drawings by Luigi Manini, as an illustration of the time in which he lived, and through his analysis understand the end of the period of predominance of decorative art.

This predominance of decorative art is mostly achieved through ornamental representation and for that it is necessary to understand the concept of the ornament, not enunciating its history or analysing each time in detail, but to briefly expose the evolution of its nature throughout the great artistic periods so that we can frame these inedited drawings.

This evolution of the ornament concept is framed in the different periods of art history that Hegel formulated in his work "Aesthetics", and is essentially composed of three periods:

- The symbolic art that covers artistic styles from prehistory to Greek civilization.

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- Classical art, which refers to the period of Greek and Roman civilizations.
- Romantic art that begins with Byzantine art, extends to the Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and ends in romanticism.

The period that follows does not belong to this Hegelian systematization of art, but results from the natural evolution of romanticism, is the period of naturalism that preceded Modernism.

In his philosophy of history Hegel argues that man is only fulfilled in the state where he attains his full freedom. It is the beginning and the philosophical foundation of socialism whose architectural expression is realized, not in the individual building, but in urbanism.

In a first phase, romanticism leads to Naturalism, but this already without the symbolic value of the sublime, represents the natural in a phenomenological context, whose consummation is modernism in the crystallization of its structure.

Because Luigi Manini lived in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he represented in his work the periods referred above through ornament. It is therefore necessary to understand Luigi Manini's education, his path as a scenographer and his contribution to architecture in Portugal.

Once again, this article does not intend to write the story of Luigi Manini, but only evokes the most decisive moments of his work to better frame these drawings that historically appear for the first time.

As a conclusion, the analysis of these unknown drawings, illustrate the period of "end of century" in decline that will completely cancel out in its last period creating a void that materializes in an opportunity that allows the new artist evolution of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Heglian Division of Art History Periods

Art, according to Hegel, is an external determination of the ideal, which is in itself, a determination of an idea. The idea is the absolute.

*"The spirit that, separating itself from nature, opposes it, is not the absolute spirit, but the finite spirit that receives the truth from the absolute spirit where nature is ideally situated (...) the absolute spirit that is the union of himself with nature."*<sup>1</sup>

It is from this reciprocal union between the idea and its determination that results the complete unity that is the truth and the truth is the art.

But this sensitive determination, has a concrete physical appearance is the plane of expression of the symbol.

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1. G. W. F. Hegel, *Estética* (Lisboa: Guimarães Editores, 1993), 183.

The idea as universal, where the concept resides as the substance of the ideal, is considered as the content plane, that is, the symbolic part of the symbol.

The Hegelian division of periods in art history is an analysis between these two planes of the symbol.

## Symbolic Art

In symbolic art, the determination of the idea does not yet present an appearance that manifests its substance. The expression plan does not yet fully express its content plan.

*"We have symbolic art in the first place. In it, the idea still seeks its true artistic expression, still undetermined and abstract, it does not have the elements of its external manifestation, it finds itself in the face of nature and the events that are extrinsic to it."*<sup>2</sup>

In this state, the expression plane searches the represented symbol for the content plane that is inappropriate for it. It is the case of the representation of the human body with the head of animals or the use of elements from the natural world, fauna or flora, to which they attribute symbolic values.

When the human figure itself appears, it has a static representation. It is its concept, not its image that the interior seeks to express from the outside.

*"(...) It follows that, instead of perceiving the difference that exists between the two, the artistic consciousness postulates, a priori, their immediate identity (...) this starting point is the symbolism itself, unconscious and primitive whose figurations are given for what they are: simple symbols."*<sup>3</sup>

It is therefore, the separation between meaning and its sensitive expression becomes conscious, recognized by the conscience as inadequate, because they are juxtaposed instead of constituting an intrinsic unity.

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2. Ibid, 173.

3. Ibid, 181.



**Figure 1.** Temple of Amun-Re Built by him at Kawa in Nubia

Source: <https://egypt-museum.com>.



**Figure 2.** Detail in Persepolis, Iran

Source: [www.civitatis.com/pt](http://www.civitatis.com/pt).

## Classic Art

In classical art the expression plane completely expresses the content plane, the Symbol acquires a total unity that is represented in the form that is most appropriate to it.

*"It is in ideal that that union is realized, this content and form that characterizes classical art. It thus satisfies, due to this adequate representation, the requirements of true art, of art according to its concept."*<sup>4</sup>

But this total unity of the spirit with its determination, is not completely free because, in objectifying itself, the spirit differs from itself, and seeks in its external image the natural.

*"That is, an interiority, which even in its external manifestation is only expressed in itself."*<sup>5</sup>

Since nature is a determination of the idea "the absolute", classical art seeks in the representation of natural forms the expression of this absolute.

The human body thus animated with life and spirituality becomes the intermediate determination between the macro and the microcosm as the universal standard of the natural and Divine world. It is understandable,

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4. Ibid, 241.

5. Ibid, 243.

therefore, that the human representation had a greater importance in Greco Roman art.



**Figure 3.** Frieze Relief of Pergamon Altar

Source: <https://guiaberlim.com/museu-pergamon.html>.

## Romantic Art

In romantic art, the content plane completely overlaps the expression plane of the Symbol whose function is to induce meaning.

*"In the romantic phase, the spirit knows that its truth does not consist in immersing itself in what is corporeal and that, on the contrary, it only acquires awareness of its truth when it withdraws from what is outside to return to itself, as it no longer finds elements of an adequate existence (...) however, to settle in the infinite, the spirit must rise in the sense of the absolute above the formal and finite personality. In other words: the spiritual must be represented as full of substantiality and in its bosom as a subject endowed with a knowledge and a desire that only sees in itself."*<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the representation of the natural is no longer the adequate expression of the spiritual substance, but its evocation through the plane of expression where the representation of the natural becomes instruments of a subjectivity that itself returns from the sensitive world.

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6. Ibid, 292.

In this phase the beautiful is the identification between the meaning and the idea, that is why in Romanesque, Gothic or Baroque art, its subjectivity according to its concept is suggested by the form. What is beautiful is the spirit, not the form that suggests it as a sensitive expression.



**Figure 4.** Detail of San Bruno in Cartuja Monastery, Granada

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/>



**Figure 5.** Ceiling of Saint Ignatius Church, Italy

Source: <https://buscandoitalia.com/>

## Romanticism

The Romantic movement, known as romanticism, is the logical epilogue of romantic art. Hegel will not deal with its subsequent phases, but art in its course, evolves coherently with the philosophical school that originated it.

In romanticism, the symbolic value reaches its highest point in the induction of the sublime. The sublime is the *limitless*, the infinite power of predication, the uncontrollable power of generation. That is why figuration is only a possibility to induce this feeling of the absolute. The symbol has never reached such magnitude nor will it ever reach it.

This feeling of the sublime is spatially induced by the mathematical sublime

*"infini du monde sensible, dans l'évaluation intellectuelle pure des grandeurs, est entièrement compris sous un concept, quand bien même il ne peut jamais être entièrement pensé, dans l'évaluation mathématique, par des concepts numériques."*<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 6.** *Painting of Monk by the Sea by Caspar Friedrich*

Source: <https://www.arte.tv/sites/en/webproductions>.

As power by the dynamic sublime

*"la force est un pouvoir qui est supérieur à de grands obstacles. Cette force est dite puissance quand elle manifeste sa supériorité même vis-à-vis de la résistance émanant de ce qui possède soi-même une force. La nature, dans le jugement esthétique qui la considère comme une force ne possédant pas de puissance sur nous, est dynamiquement sublime."*<sup>8</sup>

And in time the sublime is introduced by Hegel in the philosophy of history.

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7. I. Kant, *Critique de la Faculté de Juger* (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1995), 237.

8. Ibid, 242.





**Figure 7.** *Painting of Philipp Jakob Loutherbourg*

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Philipp\\_Jakob\\_Loutherbourg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Philipp_Jakob_Loutherbourg).

## Naturalism

It was stated that in romanticism the symbol has reached its greatest magnitude that will be achieved no more. From now on, only its annulation is viable. The continuity of art proceeds through a deep cleavage caused by the loss of the meaning of the symbol that is the essence of Modernism. But the ornament still maintains, for some time, its plan of expression for a period that was called Naturalism.

This period occupies the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and consists essentially of representing what is sensitive and, therefore, experiencing and expressing it. One feels what is, what is seen, not what is not there.

*"(...) In the poetics of naturalism, its destructive aspects must be highlighted. Its essential character consists in the claim to reach reality immediately (...) which reduces reality to a mere private fact without meaning."*<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the representation of the natural means that natural world itself and the elements of its representation therefore become mere decoration.

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9. M. Perniola, *A Estética do Século XX* (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1998), 16.





**Figure 8.** *Painting of Harvesting – Harvesters by Silva Porto*

Source: [https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficheiro:Porto\\_colheita\\_ceifeiras-1.jpg](https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficheiro:Porto_colheita_ceifeiras-1.jpg).

## Modernism

In romantic art, the symbol reached its highest value and the inadequacy between the level of expression and the level of content reached its greatest extent. Art thus acquires an allegorical dimension.

*"(...) in the allegory the movement to the symbol is manifested; that is, we have a finite character that alludes to infinity without realizing it."*<sup>10</sup>

The culmination of the expression of the absolute through art has defined a limit that does not allow evolution.

The period that followed was one of complete rupture.

In modernism, the content plane becomes null in relation to the expression plane, which therefore becomes also the content plane.

The sensitive object realizes in itself.

*"In fact, it is implicit in the concept of form the reference of something objective and stable that very well seems to fit the essence of the work of art: in the face of the continuous and*

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10. F. Vercellone, *A Estética do Século XIX* (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 2000), 23.

*unstoppable passage of time, the appeal to form manifests the drive for the overcoming of the ephemeral and obsolete character, and perishable to live."*<sup>11</sup>

Thus, phenomenology in its aesthetic manifestation that dominates throughout the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century.



**Figure 9.** *Barcelona Pavilion by Mies Van der Rohe*

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/pauljw/5255085015/lightbox/>.

## Ornament

If nature is a determination of the idea "The absolute" the man in his epistemological and analytical action, seeks to reproduce in his objectivity, the laws of that determination. Art thus becomes a sensitive allegory of the absolute.

It is, therefore, understandable that the man searches in the natural world, the necessary elements for the creation of this allegory and with them to affirm a stylistic grammar. But this allegory is materialized in the constructed object which, as such, has a structure and the structure needs an order.

The word ornament, is the past participle of the verb "*ornare*", which means to establish an order.

In the aesthetic form, this order is materialized in the object through the composition of its elements.

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11. Perniola, *A Estética do Século XX*, 1998, 49.

The word "*ornatus*" or ornament suggests that this materialization can be achieved in two ways: - or through the essential elements of the way the colour dimension texture of the elements etc. It is the abstract ornament.

Or through the representation of the natural whose form vivifies. It is the figurative ornament.

The Latin word "*ornatus*", originating in the Proto Indo European "*ar*" means to fit or organize.

Let us therefore analyze the figuration of the ornament throughout the history of the great artistic periods.

### The Ornament on Symbolic Art

It was stated that in symbolic art the symbol's expression plan is not yet adequate to its content plan. Its sensitive form is not yet consistent with the meaning it intends to manifest. In this period of art the figurative ornament has two characteristics:

-Or they are pure, abstract geometric forms that create rhythms in their repetition, or they are rigid representations of the natural world enclosed in an inflexible geometry because the meaning of the representation of fauna or flora is not yet completely adapted to its shape.



**Figure 10.** *Stairs of Access to Apadana, Persepolis, Iran*

Source: <http://classicalarthistory.weebly.com/ancient-near-eastern.html>.

### The Ornament in Classical Art

In classical art, the expression plane and the content plane are completely suitable between each other so the natural finds its expression vivified.

The ornament therefore expresses this vivification in the adjectival of form and in the emphatic geometry of its representation. However, the natural world is phenomenal, and as such ephemeral. Their knowledge acquires the designation of "*opinion*", but the true knowledge refers only to the absolute that is not determined by space and time.

Only the number in quality and quantity is not predicated in space and time and therefore the highest degree of knowledge is the number, which in its appearance manifests itself as a figurative number, in the form of pure, archetypal geometric figures, "*per -fect*".



**Figure 11.** *Erechtheion in Athens*

Source: <https://guiadolouvre.com/arte-grega-ate-o-periodo-romano/>.

Its use as an ornament therefore significantly reveals the eternal. However, the action of predication is materialized in the drawing of the Greek line, framed in its unlimited linear movement; it is the infinite manifested in its action of abstract predication.





**Figure 12.** *Greek Doric Capital*

Source: <http://44arquitetura.com.br/2018/08/ordens-classicas-arquitetura/>.



**Figure 13.** *Greek Corinthian Capital*

Source: <https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordemcor%C3%ADntia>

### The Ornament in Romantic Art

In Romantic art, the content plane is overvalued in relation to the expression plane. The meaning thus assumes supremacy in the representation of the object. It should only induce, not manifest, that meaning.

Such inadequacy is the cause of a determining feature of Romantic art: strength.

In the Romanesque, the Gothic, and the Baroque, everything is tension and movement, even in the interregnum of the Renaissance with the calm stability of its compositional elements, the force is manifested in the annullment of its continent plan or in the orientation of the route. Coherently, the ornament reveals this strength not only in the treatment of the natural element but also in the expression of the line.

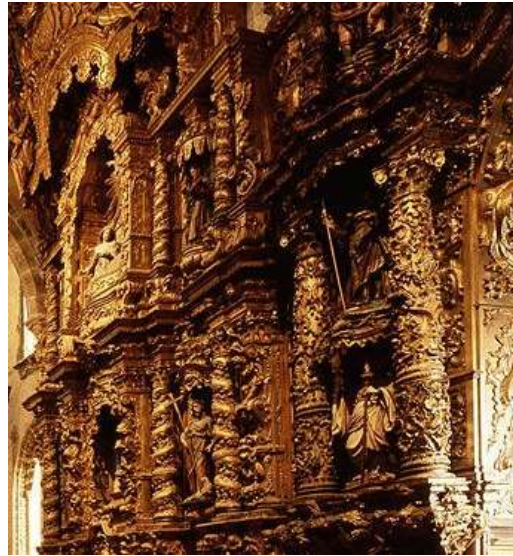
The Greek line has an infinite movement, but it is a regular and uniform marked motion, but the northern or baroque line has, besides an infinite movement, an extreme tension.

The ornament as an object must induce this tension and this meaning through a plastic expression in such a violent way that the object loses its material representation to acquire an abstract form.



**Figure 14.** Detail of Bravães Church, Portugal

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vitor107/8463664532>.



**Figure 15.** Detail of San Francisco Church, Porto, Portugal

Source: <https://euroveloportugal.com/pt/poi/igreja-de-sao-francisco-2>.

### The Ornament in Romanticism

It was stated that the essence of romanticism is to induce the feeling of the sublime that only through ornament is possible. The ornament, therefore, does not intend to be the copy of a certain style or the intention of a late revival, but it has an evocative function of a time or a culture and thus induces in the subject the referred feeling of the sublime,

The ornament thus becomes the primordial element of art and it is through it that the feeling of infinity is concentrated in a single object such as "*quantum intensive*" Romanticism is therefore inseparable from the ornament, and its importance has reached such a magnitude that it will never be achieved. From now on, only its annulation is viable.



**Figure 16.** *Atrium of Bussaco Palace*

Source: <https://nona.blogs.sapo.pt/porterras-de-portugal-atrrio-interior-34261>.



**Figure 17.** *Main Entrance of Peleş Castel*

Source:

<https://www.360meridianos.com/dica/castelo-de-peles-sinaia-romenia>.

## The Ornament in Naturalism

Naturalism consists of the aesthetic representation of the sensitive world, placing the subject as the ultimate end of the experience of living. That is why the symbol loses its meaning and just keeps its expression plan.

*"However, Naturalism through the door of Romanticism, would always look for a way out in a materialistic system that could compensate for an interviewed and lost theism."<sup>12</sup>*

The ornament in coherence with this time also loses its meaning. It still represents, figuratively, the natural, but no longer symbolic. It is the ornament for the exclusively decorative ornament that is still prolonged by the *Art Nouveau* and *Art Deco* until disappearing completely in Modernism.

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12. J. A. França, *O romantismo em Portugal* (Lisboa: Lisboa Livro Horizonte, 1999), 510.



**Figure 18.** Main Room of Alentejo House, Lisbon

Source: <https://tasaver.pt/top-5-lisboa>.

## The Ornament in Modernism

In modernism the plane of expression is the plane of content. The meaning is thus annulated by the sensitive form that contains it. The figurative ornament is extinguished, leaving only a subsidiary of art, the abstract ornament.

*"Nowadays it is considered a brutality to paint the noble mahogany wood or rosewood in green. And Acer wood is also beginning to be accepted."<sup>13</sup>*

The colour of the morphological nature of the materials, or the dimension of the elements that make up an object, constitute this abstract ornament. Artistic expression is intrinsic to man, as an aesthetic expression of his existential anguish, and for this reason art will continue its journey as long as man exists under the earth.

*"(...) Being considered the great promoter of the new smooth and unadorned style no longer mattered. The truth is that its former and current lack of ornamentation (since the Paris shame) was just an ornament."<sup>14</sup>*

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13. A. Loos, *Ornamento e Crime* (Cotovia, 2006), 195.

14. *Ibid*, 278.





**Figure 19.** *Barcelona Pavillion Designed By Mies Van der Rohe*

Source: <https://tasaver.pt/top-5-lisboa/>.

In summary for our analysis we only refer to the figurative ornament until Naturalism and which in a broader view we now expose:

- In symbolic art, the ornament's expression plan **expresses** its content plan even though inadequately
- In classical art the plane of expression of the ornament as a symbol **manifest's** this meaning
- In romantic art the plan of expression of the ornament as a symbol **induces** the meaning of the absolute
- In romanticism as the final stage of Romantic art, the plane of expression of the ornament as a symbol **evokes** meaning in its maximum potency
- In naturalism the ornament loses its meaning and the plane of expression **represents** the natural an experience of the subject. It is the ornament for the ornament
- In modernism the figurative ornament **disappears** and only the abstract ornament remains.

### Luigi Manini Life and Work

Luigi Manini Born in Crema in northern Italy in 1848. At the age of 13, he entered the "Real Academia de Ibelli Arti de Milano", where he concluded in 1862 the course of ornament.

From 1863 to 1873 he attended the classes of Professor Ferdinando Cassino and worked in several buildings in the Crema area. In 1873 he enters as a scenographer at the Alla Scala theater in Milan under the coordination of Carlo

Ferrario where he performs scenarios for various works and develops his aptitude as a scenographer.



**Figure 20.** Ornament Drawings Design by Luigi Manini in Ferdinando Cassino School

Source: Cimorelli 2007.



**Figure 21.** Detail of San Francisco Church, Porto, Portugal

Source: Cimorelli 2007.

In 1879 Luigi Manini was hired as a scenographer for the National Theater of São Carlos where he executed the scenarios of several operas and participated in the painting and decoration of various public events, such as the decoration of two ephemeral pavilions for the inauguration of the railways, or in 1885 and Kermesse encouraged by Queen Dona Maria Pia.

But it was with the scenarios of the Portuguese operas "*Dona Branca*", "*Irene*" and "*Serrana*" that Manini was able to fully manifest his talent as a scenographer.

*"However, Luigi Manini's scenographic path has always been a tributary of the school of Ferrario, characterized by the search for a sentimental polychrome oriented towards the perception and valorization of the interior reality of the scene, mysterious, indistinct, profound and suggestive that lends itself more to evocation, to illusion, and to the fable of narration, characteristics that will apply a dilettante gift of freedom and greater creativity in the field of architecture."*<sup>15</sup>

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15. D. Pereira and G. Luckhurst, "Serrana," in *Quinta da Regaleira Luigi Manini*. Cultursintra, 2006, 41.



**Figure 22.** Scenario Painted By Luigi Manini to "Dona Branca" Show

Source: Cimorelli 2007.

It was in the late 80s that Luigi Manini made his foray into the field of architecture with the invitation to design the new Hotel do Bussaco (Coimbra, Portugal). From 1889 he still received several orders for the execution of decorative paintings from several houses of high bourgeoisie that had chosen Sintra and Cascais for his vacation time. Among others, the paintings of the main staircase of the Chalet Biester stand out.

In 1890 he paints the ceiling of the noble staircase in Foz palace and in 1894 he designs the expansion project for the Sasseti house. Finally in 1898 Carvalho Monteiro commissioned the project for his house and farm at *Quinta da Regaleira* but in 1908 the attack on King D. Carlos precipitated the end of the Monarchy in Portugal that occurred in 1910. In 1911, the works at *Quinta da Regaleira* ended and in 1912 disgusted with the Republic, Manini returned to Italy where he died in 1936.

### The Drawings of Luigi Manini

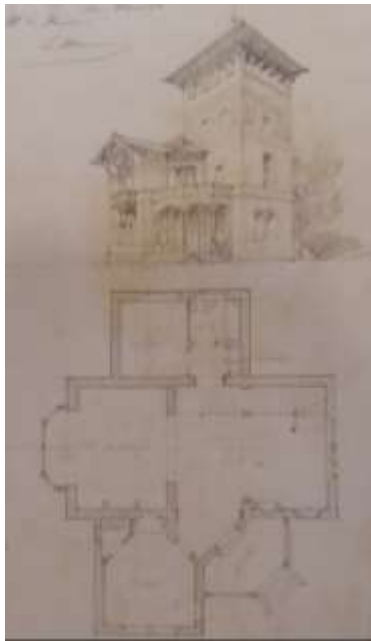
Luigi Manini had his aesthetic formation consistent with the time in which he lived, inherited the tradition of the expression of romanticism and experienced its dissolution in the phase of Naturalism. These two epochs are the primacy of the ornament as an essential element of artistic expression and, for this reason, Luigi Manini's training focused almost exclusively on the study and design of the ornament in its different styles and cultures. As scenographer, he became part of the romanticism movement, by representing the sublime in the total work of art, which was configured in the spectacles of opera.

However, his foray into architecture reveals this scenographic option, neglecting the design of the plan excluding sections and elevations in the definition of the building, but graphically overestimating the perspectives in the descriptive representation of architecture.

The reference that Ramalho Ortigão made to the central tower of Jerónimos by Cinatti and Rambois could be applied to the work of Manini

*"the cenographic composition with the theatrical simplicity of a mutation of scene, at the end of season at the stage of San Carlos."<sup>16</sup>*

The work drawings with their ornamental and technical definitions would only be detailed drawings for production instruction.



**Figure 23.** *Project to Vila da Feira*  
Design by Luigi Manini

Source: Cimorelli 2007.



**Figure 24.** *Quinta da Regaleira Dining Room*, Design by Luigi Manini

Source: Pereira and Luckhurst 2006.

The drawings that are now shown for the first time, belong to this second category of detailing drawings. It is not known why or to where they were executed. The perspective drawings of the architecture are illustrative for the decision making of the promoter clients, however the work drawings are objective, and have the concrete purpose of being executed.

These are detailed drawings on a 1/10 scale with great virtuosity that make you guess, that this is a phase of affirmation in the area of architecture. Indeed, if we compare these drawings with the drawings of Bussaco and Regaleira, we are confronted with the difference they have.

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16. R. Ortigão, *O Culto da arte em Portugal* (Esfera do Caos, 2006), 116.

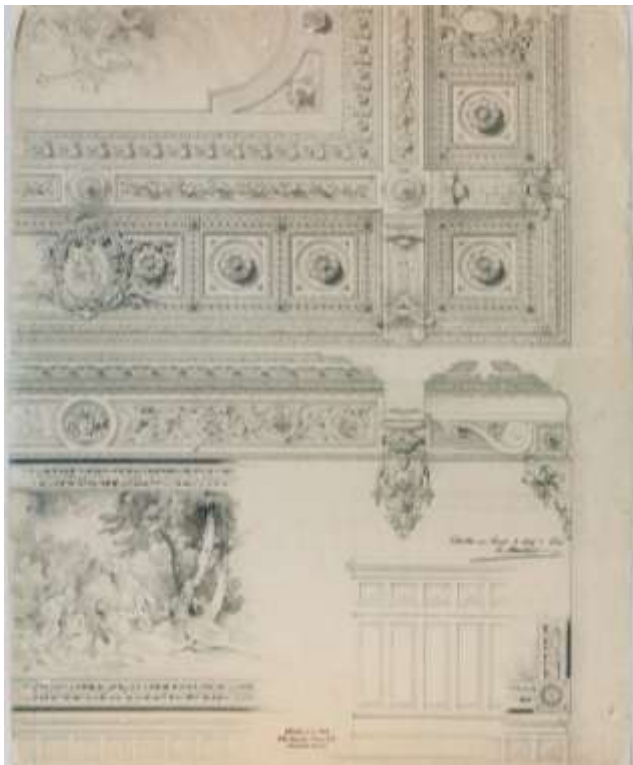
The drawings of Bussaco and Regaleira, are drawings of firm lines that express the refined knowledge of the stylistic grammar that they represent, but they are technical drawings.

These unheard drawings surprise us by the virtuosity of their line by the treatment of the light dark by the notion of relief and texture and by the plastic intensity of the drawing completed in the representation of the paintings to be executed in the spaces attributed to it, completing the drawing with a sensitive atmosphere that transcends the simple trace.

These drawings have, due to their composition, the autonomy of a painting, and that autonomy gives them a scenic and unprecedented nature in the remaining work that Luigi Manini dedicates to architecture. These drawings were executed with the decorative intention of buildings already constructed and for unknown reasons were not executed.

These drawings are organized in two large groups: those belonging to romanticism because the ornament has an evocative value of the sublime and those belonging to Naturalism because the meaningless ornament has only a decorative function.

### **The Unknown Drawings of Romantic Expression**



**Figure 25.** *Drawing by Luigi Manini Detail of the Great Hall*

*Source:* author.

This design evokes the style of the Renaissance, transitioning to the Baroque. Here the ornament does not intend to faithfully reproduce the Renaissance ornamentation, it suggests it only in the geometry of the squared frames that frame the ceiling.

The corbels with the lion's head and the central medallions already have a naturalistic expression, and the mural painting is evocative of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The wooden panelling (possibly in walnut) already has a taste like the finish of the century.

The design does not show, but possibly all the stucco ornamentation should be painted by pretending the same wood used in the panelling.

One feels in the correction of the line, in the expression of the dark light and in the shading used, a virtuosity of the drawing that creates an atmosphere in which the function of space is guessed. This, like the caption in the drawing says, is intended for a large reception room.



**Figure 26.** *Drawing by Luigi Manini Detail of the Drawing Room*

Source: author.



In this design the ornament evokes the French style Rocaille Baroque.

Here, too, the ornament is evocative, as the ornamental design does not intend to copy the genuine French ornament. However, it induces the presence of that past time in the subject as if it were a historical document.

In fact, the paintings on the door and on the central medallion are manifestly naturalistic and the female portrait in the corner of the ceiling has a 19<sup>th</sup> century costume, which demonstrates the honesty of not intending to make a *pastiche*.

It is a free and naturalistic interpretation of the Rocaille ornament

Here, too, the virtuosity of the line, the treatment of light and dark, the definition of a specific environment, gives it the autonomy of a finished work.

Here, too, this atmosphere allows us to guess the purpose of this space, which should be used in the Drawing room or in a large reception hall.



**Figure 27.** Drawing by Luigi Manini Detail of Empire Room

Source: author.

This design represents a decoration in the late Empire style manifested in, the stove, and the medallions overlaying the door.

Here, too, the ornament is evocative of a past time with the veracity of not trying to reproduce it through a copy.

In fact the painting of the ceiling with little angels supported by clouds holding garlands of flowers already reveals a naturalistic option from the end of the century.

As in the previous drawings, its graphic level of great mastery creates an atmosphere that takes us to a possible office or dispatch room.

### **Unknown Drawings of Naturalism**



**Figure 28.** *Drawing by Luigi Manini Detail of Side Room to the Great Hall*

*Source:* author.

In this design, the ornament no longer has an evocative symbolic value.

Here or ornate it is represented without any meaning other than its decorative function. Its stylistic eclecticism creates a grammar that no longer pretends to be executed in the present time.



It is the taste of the end of the century in which the primacy of the ornament already predicts its annulation. However, it is still the time of elegant life.

The paintings of the angels on the ceiling, or the swing girl, reveal a lightness of spirit that is ephemeral.

The ornament lost its meaning and was fatal. This decorative exuberance is ephemeral and an individuality of the ornament for the ornament, although it remains for some time, but its end will be relentless.

Here too, the atmosphere of the drawing reveals the fate of this space, a passage room that possibly belongs to a succession of rooms. In fact, the title of the drawing is explained as "side room to the great hall", once again the virtuosity of the stroke, the shading of the ornament, the graphic treatment and the composition of the drawing, giving it the same individual capacity that individualizes any context.



**Figure 29.** Drawing by Luigi Manini Detail of Dining Room

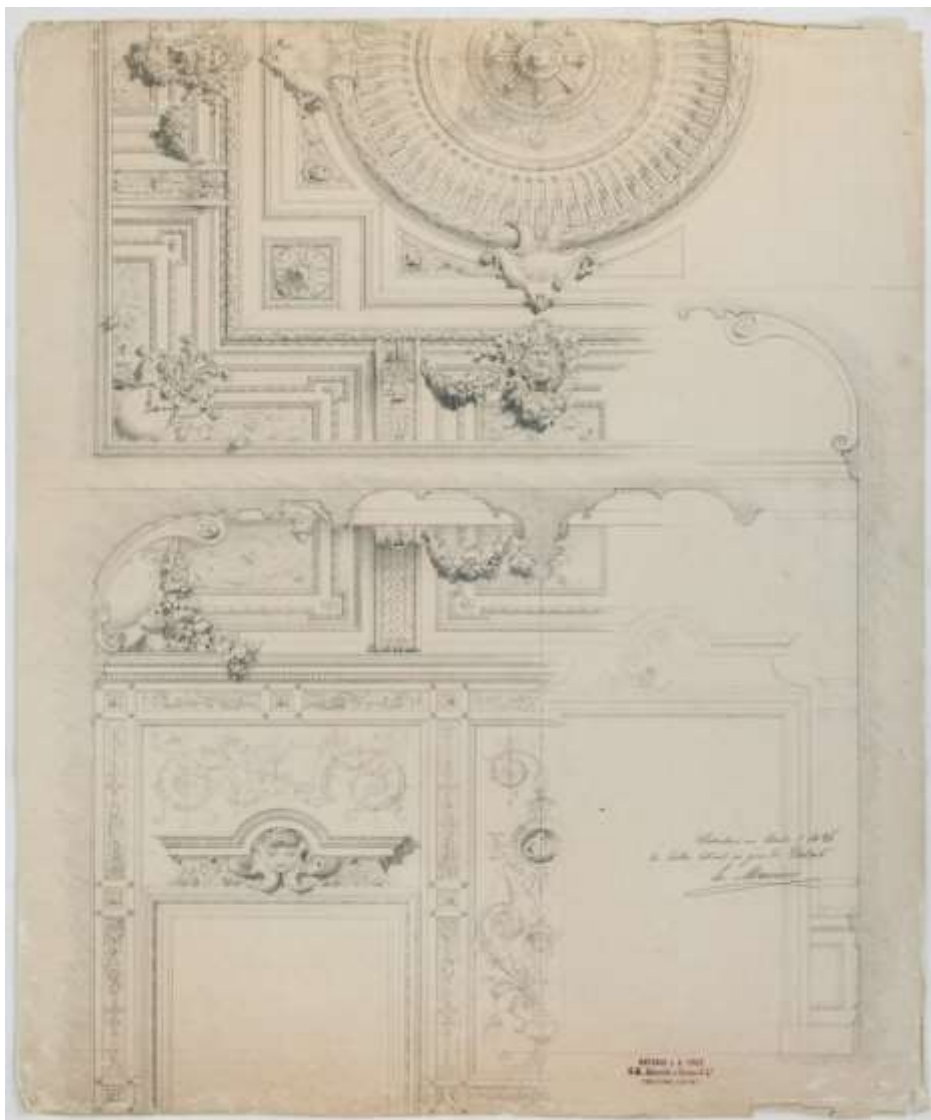
Source: author.

In this design, the ornament lives on its own, and its only function is to be decorative, the female sculpture on the ceiling and ceiling are only ornamental and the wall and ceiling paintings of a naturalist character evoke only the function of the space where they are inserted, accentuated by the tall wooden panelling.

As the caption indicates it is a dining room.

Also in this drawing an atmosphere that individualizes it appears as the common denominator of these drawings.

However, in the representation of the flora and fauna of the paintings, there is a mastery of a stroke that reaches its highest degree in the work of Luigi Manini.



**Figure 30.** Drawing by Luigi Manini Detail of Side Room to the Great Hall

Source: author.

This drawing is also part of the set of drawings with naturalistic expression, but differs from the others in that there is no representation of the human or animal figure.

It is just a stylized floral game in which the ornament merges with the painting, in an abstract geometric representation that already reveals the last phase of naturalism. Here too, the drawing has an atmosphere that makes it autonomous, and it also has a graphic virtuosity that is transversal to all these drawings.



**Figure 31.** Drawing by Luigi Manini Detail of the Dressing Room

Source: author.

This last drawing is already from a later stage to the previous ones because it is a drawing to instruct the work, which was executed. This drawing is done in pen on canvas without the virtuosity of the antecedents. It is a bourgeois house in the square of *Marquês de Pombal* where today the institute of Camões (Lisbon) is installed, so the design will have an approximate date to the construction, which is a transitional building from the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is a space next to the bedroom with the designation of dressing room and intended for the housewife's *toilette*, and for this reason its ornamentation is in eclectic French taste. Here, too, the ornament lives on its own only with the function of a decorative abundance typical of wealthy houses.

### Conclusions

Throughout this article, the evolution of the concept of ornament framed in the selected great artistic periods is exposed in a comprehensive analysis, the first three being enunciated by Hegel and the last two analyzed by the author according to the natural evolution of the previous periods. Luigi Manini's training in Italy and his work as a set designer and architect are also analyzed.

These analyses (of the concept of ornament and the work of Luigi Manini) are not intended to be a historical description, but only to justify the end of a cycle of "symbolic" art in order to be able to frame the drawings presented. Thus the drawings in figures 25, 26 and 27 are drawings that are framed in the romantic movement because the ornament is evocative of the times they express, but the drawings in figures 28, 29, 30 and 31 are drawings that evoke the Naturalism period in which the aesthetic representation of the world is sensitive and the ornament must represent the subject's sensitive experience.

However, all these drawings are technical drawings of instruction to the production which unifies the two aspects of Luigi Manini's work: The scenography; and architecture as a physical support for this scenic representation.

But above all, these drawings are illustrative of that end of cycle that will never be evoked again in the future journey of humanity.

The existential anguish of Man will propel him to a dimension of the Sublime, and with it the reappearance of the symbolic value of the sign, certainly with a different expression plan, but which will reject the objectivity of resolving itself.

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## Seeing Blackness through Black Expressive Culture: A Reading of Zanele Muholi's *Somnyama Ngonyama* – *Hail the Dark Lioness*

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*This article examines visual and textual representation of blackness in contemporary black expressive culture. Its primary objective is to discern what blackness means and looks like when seen from the point of view of contemporary black expressive culture. To assess this, I first, briefly, analyze and interpret blackness. Second, I interrogate how contemporary black practitioners critique European ideas of blackness and mirror the complex multidimensionality of black subjecthood by conducting a formal analysis of two pieces of South African artist Zanele Muholi's *Somnyama Ngonyama* – *Hail the Dark Lioness* series. Third, I explore the relationship between visual and textual imagery and their involvement in discourses on race. My intention is to reveal the role text and images play and have played in shaping the concept, perception, and representation of blackness; the visual effect they have had on the black imagination; and the heavy responsibility placed on black writers and artists not only to correct these images but to create images for the collective more often than for themselves.*

### Introduction

Anti-black visual and textual rhetoric is an example of the many mechanisms that colonial states used to rationalize anti-blackness. According to David Dabydeen, these were “ways to think and speak about the Black presence.”<sup>1</sup> Not only did these rhetorics shape European attitudes about blackness, they also forced black people like Sarah Baartman to participate in their own victimization.<sup>2</sup> This article examines how these rhetorics, set in motion centuries ago, continue to affect black people. More importantly, it shows how black expressive culture<sup>3</sup> is developing an alternative visual and textual language through which blackness can be reconceptualized. To do so it focuses on South African artist Zanele Muholi's *Somnyama Ngonyama* – *Hail the Dark Lioness* series. Muholi's usage of

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1. Cited by Pumla Gqola, *What is Slavery to Me? Postcolonial/Slave Memory in Post-apartheid South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010), 3.

2. Jim Crow Museum, *The New Jim Crow Museum* (Jim Crow Museum, April 29, 2013).

3. Paul Gilroy uses the term “black expressive culture” to refer to black music. I here extend the concept to black artistic practice in general. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

“race as medium”<sup>4</sup> to investigate the impact of racial myths on contemporary black existence and on black people’s everyday lived experience. The paper also examines why blackness when imaged and imagined through multimodal visual artifacts can provide multidimensional blacknesses.

### What is Blackness?

From its inception, the conceptualization of blackness as signifier of a collective, racial category was instrumental in shaping the construct of race and blackness in both white and black imagination. By constructing racial difference based on color, being “black” meant the opposite of what was associated with being white. Although these racial markers were based on fictional scientific claims, as there is no such thing as a “black” or a “white” gene, the act of endowing bodies with qualities of color legitimized the notion that certain bodies are more meaningful than others.<sup>5</sup> This comparative color line positioned whiteness as a racially superior identity and relegated bodies identified as black to the status of non-citizenship. Black studies theorist Christine Sharpe writes that this means being in a no-space that the state is not bound to respect.<sup>6</sup>

In apartheid South Africa, being “black” meant being subjected to rules set by whites who arrogated themselves the right to decide on the lives of blacks. The state institutionalized race-based grouping by implementing laws of racial marking and segregation, such as the Pass Laws, the Separate Amenities Act, Bantu Education, and the Group Areas Act, intended to spatially separate black and white and enable the policing and surveillance of blacks. By denying blacks the right to equal citizenship, the state’s sustained racial myths in turn radicalized black subjects, spaces, and experiences.<sup>7</sup>

One of the myths entertained by the white South African state was the use of the word “black” to describe black people, implying that being black is to “look black,” thus having a darker skin tone. The problem with this definition is its exclusion of biracial and mixed-race people who do not appear black in the state’s usage of the term but identify as black. However, biracial and mixed-race people have not always had the right or desire to claim a black identity. Under apartheid, they were assigned to a separate, racially constructed identity called “colored.” Coloredness, writes Mohamed Adhikari, was exactly meant to differentiate a

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4. W. T. J. Mitchell describes the term “race as medium” as the production of expressive culture seen through the lens of race. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Seeing Through Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

5. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 46.

6. Christine Sharpe, *In the Wake of Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 6.

7. Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality and Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 2.



“person of mixed racial ancestry [from] one who is black.”<sup>8</sup> Both the white government and the colored community, he continues, emphasized the proximity of Coloreds to the white genealogy as justification of their racial superiority over Africans and, thus, to gain certain privileges over Africans. According to apartheid racial classification, “African” signified “black African” rather than an all-encompassing term referencing a shared political and continental identity.<sup>9</sup> These racial hierarchies still persist in post-apartheid South Africa. Grant Farred observes that “[w]hereas ‘full blackness,’ or Africanness has translated into full citizenship of and belonging to the postapartheid state, colouredness has retained its historic ambivalence.”<sup>10</sup>

Rejecting the claim that blackness is a matter of pigmentation, political activist and founder of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, Steve Biko, asserts that “being black” is the reflection of a “mental attitude.” An essential component of this “attitude” is the commitment to fight against all forces that seek to use blackness as marker of a “subservient being.”<sup>11</sup> Like numerous other black political movements that sought to liberate black people regardless of geography, ethnicity, or cultural identity, the Black Consciousness Movement, founded in the mid-1960s, was deeply rooted in black solidarity. The success of this movement, as that of the others, depended on blacks recognizing that a collective black identity is the only viable strategy to defeat white domination. Blackness thus became a political symbol of black kinship. In his path-breaking book *I Write What I Like*, Biko describes this as one of the critical objectives of his movement:

It wants to ensure a singularity of purpose in the minds of black people and to make possible total involvement of the masses in a struggle essentially theirs.<sup>12</sup>

We can ascertain from Biko’s interpretation of black collective identity that blackness is a combination of two things: a shared lived experience of white oppression and a shared commitment to the dismantling of this domination. Blacks who rejected these ideals were seen as sell-outs and ostracized by the collective. But, are these binary positions sufficient representation of blackness? Should a shared political interest be the only way to imagine blackness? Is a

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8. Mohamed Adhikari, *Burdened by Race: Coloured Identity in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2013), ix.

9. Michele Ruiters, “Collaboration, Assimilation and Contestation: Emerging Constructions of Coloured Identity, in Post-apartheid South Africa,” in Mohamed Adhikari (ed.), *Burdened by Race: Coloured Identity in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2013), 107.

10. Grant Farred, “Where does the Rainbow Nation End? Colouredness and Citizenship in Post-apartheid South Africa,” *New Centennial Review* 1, no. 1 (2001): 182, 183.

11. Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2004), 52.

12. *Ibid*, 33.

collective identity always necessary? Biko's ideas on blackness and collective identity are still drawn on by black South Africans in the post-apartheid present. However, conditions have changed since the apartheid era. Michele Ruiters, for example, points out that since 1994 "identities are in the process of being reconstructed, particularly in opposition to their apartheid-era incarnations, presenting themselves, among other things, as not racist, not divisive and not isolated."<sup>13</sup>

If European ideas of blackness erased black subjectivity, then the black movement's urgency to liberate the collective from the annihilation of black subjectivities has performed a second erasure. By erasure I refer to what poet Mary Ruefle describes as "the creation of a new text by disappearing the old text that surrounds it."<sup>14</sup> Though inherited from the West, blackness is still perceived as a collective identity within black communities.<sup>15</sup> This has affected blackness in the following ways: first, it has delayed the process of reconstructing blackness into a multidimensional identity; second, it has invisibilized the black self; and, third, it has denied the black self the right to redefine its own identity in relation to blackness. In her essay "Invisibility of Blackness: Visual Responses of Kerry James Marshall," Jesse L. Whitehead equates invisibility to a form of erasure: invisibility is to be "a) unable to be seen and b) treated as if unable to be seen; ignored."<sup>16</sup> To illustrate how collectivism performs erasure, I refer to a quote by bell hooks in which she describes the relationship of the black collective identity with the "self."

It is dependent for its very being on the lives and experiences of everyone, the self not as signifier of one "I" but the coming together of many "I"s, the self as embodying collective reality past and present, family and community.<sup>17</sup>

Hooks shows that in relation to the black self, most often the pronoun "I" does not signify an individual identity but a collective "we." I am interested in analyzing discourses that attach blackness to the collective we and the inability of the black self to divorce itself from this collective. It is for this reason, I argue, that discourses on black singularity have remained undeveloped and limited to the fixity of "traditional affiliation."<sup>18</sup> In the following I suggest that undoing

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13. Ruiters, "Collaboration, Assimilation and Contestation," 104, 105.

14. Mary Ruefle, *On Erasure* (Gwarlingo, 2012).

15. In my wider work I understand blackness to be gendered, diverse, and differentiated by class and ethnicity.

16. Jessie L. Whitehead, "Invisibility of Blackness: Visual Responses of Kerry James Marshall," *Art Education* 62, no. 2 (2009): 33.

17. bell hooks, "On Self-Recovery," in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: Southern End Press, 1989), 30–31.

18. Michel Foucault defined traditional affiliation as cultural practices that determine the moral standards of society. In his study they are the valorization of

blackness's fixity depends on how "difference" is understood: not just as black and white racial marker but as an indicator of the differences that exist within black communities and amongst black selves, such as those based on ethnicity, gender, and geo-politics. I also make visible how the concept of "blackness" is differentiated by each of these factors if we take their *intersectionalities* into account. Within black feminist discourse, the term "intersectionality" was developed in particular by Kimberle Crenshaw<sup>19</sup> as a theoretical framework to address how black women are "multiply-burdened" by race and gender discrimination.<sup>20</sup> Though this is not the study's primary argument, I draw on intersectionality to examine the multidimensionality of blackness.

Apart from color being the first difference, the second is behavior. I am interested in how blacks' encounter with whiteness has affected black people. For instance, in post-apartheid South Africa, blacks who have "white" or "model C" accents and "act white" as a result of being in contact with white educational and employment institutions are categorized as "coconuts." To be a "coconut" is to be considered "black on the outside" but "white on the inside."<sup>21</sup> Coconuts' proximity to whiteness is interpreted as a rejection of their black identity, and in turn has raised suspicions about their relationship with whites. Not only are they not "black enough" but they are also considered "agents of whiteness."<sup>22</sup>

If being a "coconut" is a product of an encounter with whiteness, whether through imposed assimilation or choice, then the term "coconut" makes visible a nostalgia for a pre-colonial blackness that has remained unaffected or untransformed by its interaction with other racial groups and, in doing so, preserved monolithic definitions of blackness. Most importantly, the division of blackness into two categories, Western whiteness and black collective ideas of blackness, has produced dualistic identities. Du Bois describes the experience of this double identity as a being a state of double consciousness. Living in this space of duality, he writes, is a sense of "always looking at oneself through the eyes of another."<sup>23</sup> British sociologist Paul Gilroy (1993) observes that the practice of separating individuals into ethnic and cultural groups, with race being the

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marriage and marital obligations, favoring the family, regulating concubinage, and condemning adultery. Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3, (trans.), Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 41.

19. Other scholars who have contributed to discourses of intersectionality include Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks and Audre Lorde.

20. Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989), 140.

21. Panashe Chigumadzi, *Why I Call Myself a 'Coconut' to Claim my Place in Post-apartheid South Africa* (The Guardian, 2015).

22. Ibid.

23. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A.C. McClurn, 1903), 3.

overarching link, is a repetition of another form of racism developed by the West during the Enlightenment in response to the arrival of blacks in the metropole.

The political objective of ethnic racism<sup>24</sup> was to produce an ethnic absolutism and cultural racism that would maintain the purity of whiteness: an immutable identity, despite its encounter with blackness, and vice versa.<sup>25</sup> However, it was based on an inaccurate representation of the impact of transatlantic slavery and colonialism on black identity: blacks who entered the global North were stripped of their diverse cultural identities and forced to accept such conceptualized by the global North. This necessitated blacks living in the African diaspora to construct a new black identity. This situation was further complicated by the fact that the Middle Passage is likely to have been a system of cultural exchange, as Gilroy suggests. He argues that the movement of blacks between continents and across borders produced multicultural identities that transformed both white and black identities.<sup>26</sup> For instance, applying this analysis to a more recent period, the entry of blacks into British society in the 1950s challenged and transformed the concept of Englishness and England. The African diasporic experience, as illustrated by Gilroy, thus requires that we reexamine the relationship between blackness and black culture.

If, as Mieke Bal argues, concepts “travel between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographical dispersed academic spaces,” then blackness as a concept can take on multiple identities.<sup>27</sup> Michelle Wright, in *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*, describes this kind of blackness as “phenomenological blackness,” a blackness “imagined through individual perceptions in various ways depending on the context.”<sup>28</sup> Phenomenological blackness insists that blackness be contextualized. One way to do this, Wright argues, is to explore blackness’s encounter with time and space, which means to consider “when is blackness” in conjunction with “where is blackness.” What distinguishes phenomenological blackness from historical manifestations of blackness is that it operates what Wright terms as “epiphenomenal time” or the “now” denoting a “current moment.” It is not concerned with blackness before and after but with blackness “during” a specific spacetime. By doing so, we will be able to distinguish and

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24. British sociologist Paul Gilroy observes that the practice of separating individuals into ethnic and cultural groups, with race being the overarching link, is a repetition of another form of racism developed in the Enlightenment by the West in response to the arrival of blacks in the metropole.

25. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 10.

26. Ibid, 11.

27. Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 24.

28. Michelle Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 4.

account for specific moments and events of individual contemporary black existences from others.

Phenomenological blackness's primary objective is to undo the fixity of racial stereotypes affiliated with blackness such as uniform 'black' phenotype, but more importantly, collective identity. Wright's study asks, does collective identity matter? Is it the only lens through which to see blackness? Is it enough? Homi Bhabha observes that an "important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness."<sup>29</sup> Fixity, he continues, as the "sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition."<sup>30</sup>

For Wright, the first step towards reinventing blackness is to get rid of the notion that all blacks think, behave, and act exactly alike at all times.<sup>31</sup> Instead, she proposes that blackness should be seen as a singular experience influenced by factors such as time, geography, and culture. The second step is to correct the historical practice of narrating blackness through the monolithic point of view of the black man by centering narratives of diversely gendered bodies that have been erased historically. Emancipating blackness means recognizing the differences that exist within the black community. It means recognizing that blackness does not transcend geography, ethnicity, and cultural identity but is in fact defined and diversified by these very differences. The third step is to liberate the black self from the constraints of a collective black identity, in order to give the self the freedom to "fashion a new sense of self" outside of the collective.<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault describes this act of self-actualization as the "cultivation of the self," which means "taking care of oneself."<sup>33</sup> In this context, taking care of the self is interpreted as the right to govern one's own identity. I want to make a link between Foucault's concept of cultivating the self and Wright's phenomenological blackness. I am interested in how Foucault and Wright's theories on singularity can provide an alternative lens through which black identity can be reimagined.

This introduction contextualizes blackness. It questions its origin and argues why the definition of blackness created in the West cannot be accepted as reflecting reality as it is only a narrow representation of black society. I propose that this definition can be unfixed by imagining blackness through the various black selves that exist within the black community. The paper now processed to a brief discussion of how visual culture operates when seen through black

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29. Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," *Screen* 24, no. 6 (1983): 18–36.

30. *Ibid*, 18.

31. Wright, *Physics of Blackness*, 13.

32. Toni Cade Bambara, "On the Issue of Roles," in *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (New York: Penguin Books, 1970), 108.

33. Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 43.

expressive culture. I then explore how visual and textual representations of blackness seen through the black self can free blackness from this monolithic definition. In my analysis of two photographs from artist Zanele Muholi's series *Somnyama Ngonyama – Hail the Dark Lioness*, I show how black practitioners are challenging racial stereotypes associated with blackness and raising consciousness about the effect of these stereotypes on black life. I conclude the article with a discussion on the dialogues between text and visual representation.

### Blackness Seen through Black Expressive Culture

As pointed out in the introduction, the emancipation of blackness remains unfinished. However, by contesting weak definitions of blackness from the eighteenth and nineteenth century, we can begin to make space for new definitions. But first we must abandon the theoretical frameworks used to fix this blackness and replace them with new ones, such as Wright's phenomenological blackness. In this section I explore what happens when "race as medium" is employed by black creative practitioners. If the former is clouded by racism, what informs the latter?

In his essay "A Mental Tyranny is Keeping Black Writers from Greatness," in which he draws a comparison between the expectations placed upon white and black expressive culture, Ben Okri makes the following observation:

The black and African writer is expected to write about certain things, and if they don't they are seen as irrelevant. This gives their literature weight, but dooms it with monotony. Who wants to constantly read a literature of suffering, of heaviness? Those living through it certainly don't; the success of much lighter fare among the reading public in Africa proves this point. Maybe it is those in the west, whose lives are untouched by such suffering, who find occasional spice and flirtation with such a literature. But this tyranny of subject may well lead to distortion and limitation.<sup>34</sup>

Okri's assertion is a reminder that, regardless of post-colonial and decolonial discourses, advocacy is required for black creative practitioners to rid themselves of colonial prejudices and take charge of visual and textual representations of black societies, to avoid receiving "information, even about themselves, second hand." Black creative practitioners have been unable to distance themselves from Western audiences' desire for visual and textual narratives in which blackness is a signifier of a universal collective identity without a history (past) or future. Achille Mbembe posits that, in the colonial world, African societies and people of

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34. Ben Okri, *A Mental Tyranny is Keeping Black Writers from Greatness* (The Guardian, 2014).

African origin were seen as stationary and “resistant to change.”<sup>35</sup> This perpetuates the myth that no progress has been made because of, and beyond, white hegemonies that began with slavery.<sup>36</sup> In other words, while black creative practitioners may no longer be tasked with reiterating racial stereotypes affiliated with blackness, such as a uniform “black” phenotype, they are encouraged to create images fixated on the resilience of black societies, thereby fixing blackness to yet another singular narrative.

Njabulo Ndebele’s 1994 investigation of South African literature and culture makes a compelling argument about how black creative practitioners can avoid reproducing images that reduce blackness to a “single, simple, formation.”<sup>37</sup> For him, this can be achieved by imagining black society beyond the white gaze. Contemporary visual representation of blackness, he posits, must move away from “abstraction” and reflect “concrete situations.”<sup>38</sup> He insists that this can be accomplished by “rediscovering the ordinary.” The ordinary for him implies a thoughtful analysis of black people’s everyday lived experiences, their “inner dialogues with the self” as well as social public dialogues. By doing so, he argues, black expressive culture will start developing “much more complex and richer” visual variations of blackness.<sup>39</sup> He thus calls for blacknesses that are not only differentiated by time and geography but also by generation, gender, race, culture, and ethnicity.

Art historian Nicole Fleetwood argues that, given the historicity of blackness, black creative practitioners need to be mindful of the “affective power”<sup>40</sup> of visual representations of blackness as they can determine how blackness is valued and consumed by black and non-black audiences. She urges black practitioners to change and challenge visual discourses on blackness. This would, in turn, push audiences to re-evaluate their own preconceptions about blackness. Although the weight placed on black expressive culture to “alter [the] history and system of racial inequality” can be burdensome, Fleetwood and art critic Michele Wallace believe that black practitioners must be held accountable for inadequacies and the failure to think critically and analytically about their visualization of black existence. In answer to the question, “how can black creativity become critical of itself?” they argue that we, first, need do away with seeing black as being a problem in the visual field and, second, need to break away from seeing black creative production solely in terms of an ability to produce “negative/positive

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35. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2015), 4.

36. Ibid, 8.

37. Njabulo Ndebele, *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 51.

38. Ndebele describes abstraction as a type of imagery that “devalues or ignore the interiority” of black society. Ibid, 42, 48.

39. Ibid, 42, 52.

40. Fleetwood defines affective power as the power to affect how blackness is seen in the black and white imagination. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 6.



images" of blackness. Instead, we need to allow the expression of "various perspectives."<sup>41</sup> Third, we need acknowledge the variation of black creative practitioners by centering the contribution of marginalized communities, such as black women and queer practitioners.

Seeing through race, in this regard, is not only to be critical of anti-black visual cultural representations but to decolonize black expressive cultures' perception of blackness. In the words of Franz Fanon, decolonization is truly the creation of a new (hu)man. A crucial part of this process is liberating ourselves from the narratives that the colonizers fabricated about the colonized.<sup>42</sup> In my view, seeing blackness through the black self rather than the black collectivity is one of many strategies that black practitioners can utilize to create space for new, impermanent, and more flexible and diverse versions of blackness.

### Seeing through Race

In this examination of black expressive culture's visual and textual representation of blackness, I am interested in how these images have influenced and continue to influence, the reception, perception, and consumption of blackness. Critical in this is whether and how they explore "phenomenological blackness." Before I can address these issues adequately, I need to sketch blackness's fraught relation with visuality. With this I aim to show how visual representations of blackness were mobilized to determine "what is racialised as black: subjects, matter, space experience."<sup>43</sup> The term "visual" refers to visual apparatuses such as television, film, paintings, photographic images, and literature, intended to replicate "everyday life" human experience.<sup>44</sup> My investigation reflects on the questions posed by African and American literary scholar Wahneema Lubiano who — in her critique of visual culture's "inauthentic" representations of black life, race relations, gender, and class as "real" — urges us to consider "what happens when these 'representations' are accepted as 'real.' What happens to the construct of 'Blackness' in the public discourse?"<sup>45</sup>

The function of modern visual culture, as theorized by Nicholas Mirzoeff, is to "picture or visualise existence."<sup>46</sup> Mirzoeff's definition is geared towards the

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41. Michele Wallace, *Invisible Blues: From Pop to Theory* (London: Verso, 2016), 218.

42. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (trans.), Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 2.

43. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 2.

44. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "What is Visual Culture?" In Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 3.

45. Lubiano, cited by Wright, *Physics of Blackness*, 4.

46. Mirzoeff, "What is Visual Culture," 6.

shift in European modernist creative practice from creating images that seek to replace the world towards a focus on the “visual and its effects,”<sup>47</sup> a shift that occurred in particular in response to the invention of the camera. It is worth noting that, historically, visual culture is a “discourse of the West about the West,” whose ideologies of visual representation, when exported to the global South through colonization, imposed a universal concept of visual cultural practice, while relegating global South artistic practice to the status of primitivism.<sup>48</sup> This practice of visualizing existence through various visual apparatuses as “real” or, as Lubiano puts it, as “the real thing” still remains a core component of visual cultural practice.

What is the “reality” of race as such and in what way does it affect how race is manifested in visual culture? What is perceived as “race,” notes W. T. J. Mitchell, is not objective reality but an encounter of fantasy and reality.<sup>49</sup> To illustrate how the two can be made to work together, Mitchell cites Jacques Lacan’s triad of psychological and semiotic registers — the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real<sup>50</sup> — as lens through which to critically analyze race representation. Yet Mitchell adds a fourth term: “Reality.” Race, he argues, is reality constructed out of the Symbolic and the Imaginary.<sup>51</sup> This corroborates visual culture’s involvement in the production, circulation, and sustenance of racial myths. Derived from the Greek term *mythos*, a myth is a story or narrative created from a set of beliefs, historical events, or ideas, which is then passed down from one generation to next. However, because myths, unlike science, are untestable, questions can be raised about their validity. Mitchell attributes the conflation of myths with reality and their longevity to the fact that myths are “built with bodies of myths as well as myths about bodies” which are then “constituted as reality that cannot be erased by fiat.” For this reason, he continues, they remain powerful stories that have endured over many generations because they are subject to endless reinterpretation and reenactment for new historical situations.<sup>52</sup> The repetition of racial myths about blackness, inherited from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as “real” through visual cultural representations, has ensured that these ideas continue to permeate representations of contemporary black existence.

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47. The focus on the visual comprised artists experimenting with a “wide range of complex ideas and modes of representation ranging from over-arching beliefs in progress to theories of the rise of abstract paint or the modern novel.” Ibid, 4.

48. Ibid, 10.

49. W. T. J. Mitchell, *Seeing Through Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 4.

50. Drawing on Lacan, Mitchell defines the Symbolic as the “realm of law, language and negation or prohibition,” the Imaginary the “domain of images, fantasy, and visual experience,” whereas the Real is “the unrepresentable territory of trauma.” Ibid, 16.

51. Ibid, 16.

52. Ibid, 20, 22.

Before I discuss what these images look like, I want to address the notion of “representation” and the processes involved in doing the work of representation. Representation, as theorized by Stuart Hall, exists in two shapes. The first is concerned with how to “re-present” things, meaning, mediums, or linguistic codes used to present a “thing.”<sup>53</sup> The second is the meaning that a “thing” procures from this re-presentation and is an indicator of how we feel and think about it.<sup>54</sup> But these thoughts and feelings need to be contextualized as they do not exist in a vacuum. We must consider what informs them, thus whether they are shaped by myths, cultural or religious beliefs, or prejudices, and why seeing through this lens can produce what W. E. B. Du Bois calls the “second sight.” He equates seeing through the “second sight” to seeing through a veil, screen, or any apparatus purposefully designed to distort our perception.

In the essay “Black Women are Standing in a Crooked Room,” political scientist Melissa Harris-Perry compares mass media reproduction of racial stereotypes and caricatures<sup>55</sup> associated with black American women to standing in a “crooked room.” Developed post-World War II by cognitive psychologists when researching an individual’s ability to locate themselves in space, the crooked room was designed to assess whether participants would be able to differentiate between a distorted and an upright room. Participants were placed in a crooked chair in a crooked room and asked to align themselves vertically. The purpose of the study was to assess what they perceived to be the “up right” and whether they could successfully align themselves to the room. Black women, Harris-Perry argues, are like these participants, located in a crooked room in which they are forced to see themselves through the eyes of others and subjected to how others see them. Those who retaliate against these images struggle to figure out which way is up.<sup>56</sup> What Harris-Perry’s argument points to in the context of visual culture is that the vision of its practitioners is impaired by racial myths that determine, or contort, how blackness is seen and not seen. Ultimately, the myths determine how we see, what we see, and what we do not see. To quote art historian Iris Rogoff, the racial myths determine “whose fantasies of what are fed by which visual images.”<sup>57</sup>

Mitchell characterizes visual practice influenced by racial rhetoric as the “visual language of race.” He considers it a consequence of seeing through race. It

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53. Linguistic codes mean the use of signs and images to stand for or represent things.

54. Stuart Hall, “Introduction,” in Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 9.

55. With “caricature,” Harris-Perry refers to the stereotypes of the mama, jezebel, the angry black woman and the sapphire. Melissa Harris-Perry, *Black Women are Standing in a Crooked Room* (Jezebel, 2012).

56. Ibid.

57. Iris Rogoff, “Studying Visual Culture,” in Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 16.

is therefore essential that we review the relationship between representation and race: race, he cautions, is “not merely a content to be mediated, an object to be represented visually or verbally, or a thing to be depicted in a likeness or image, but the trace itself, a medium and an iconic form — not simply to be seen, but itself a framework of seeing through or (as Wittgenstein would put it) seeing as.”<sup>58</sup> When we reconceptualize race as a medium, says Mitchell, we are capacitated to consider how the concept of race<sup>59</sup> was used as an excuse, alibi, or explanation for racism.<sup>60</sup>

What happens when race as medium is employed by black creative practitioners? If the former is clouded by racism, what will inform the latter? I would argue that black creative practitioners are drawing on Wright’s phenomenological blackness as a lens through which to see and image blackness. My analysis of a selected case study will show how they are achieving this. It also shows why seeing blackness through phenomenological blackness, rather than the collectivity, has allowed them to image blackness from “various perspectives.”

### **Race as a Medium in Zanele Muholi’s *Somnyama Nognyama* – *Hail the Dark Lioness***

As theorized by Hall, representation involves the use of language to construct meaning. Hall’s use of the word “language” is not limited to written text; it can signify images, sound, electronically produced images, musical notes, and even objects. In other words, it is any medium that can stand for or represent a concept, idea, or feeling.<sup>61</sup> In the same vein, my use of the term “black expressive culture” is not limited to, and does not seek to privilege, visual images over other modes of representation; rather it is a formal analysis of the visual<sup>62</sup> and textual. This section now turns to explore how each of these mediums separately or jointly contributed to discourses on blackness and how blackness is seen, or not seen. It also assesses whether there are any distinct differences or similarities between the two, and whether they complement or supplement each other. I use Zanele Muholi’s artworks as a basis to discuss this.

In his essay “What is Visual Culture?,” Mirzoeff reminds us that, historically, nineteenth-century Western civilization privileged the spoken word and textual over the visual representation. For creative practitioners, the emergence of the

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58. Mitchell, *Seeing through Race*, 13.

59. Citing Kwane Anthony Appiah, Mitchell reminds us that “the truth is that there are no races.” Ibid, 14.

60. Ibid, 19.

61. Hall, “Introduction,” 1.

62. With “visual” I refer to paintings, photographs, drawings, sculptures, video installations, and performance art.

“visual” provided alternative modes to picture the world, other than in linguistic terms. But what is the difference between the “word-as-text” and the “world-as-a-picture”? According to Mitchell’s “picture theory,” the difference lies in the

realisation that *spectatorship* (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practice of observation, surveillance and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interoperation etc. ...) and that “visual experience” or “visual literacy” might not be fully explicable in the mode of textuality.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, the ability to “read” and interpret visual images does not necessarily mean one is equipped to “read” the written text. For Mitchell, reading the written requires a different form of linguistic literacy, one that is attuned to how text conjures up sight.<sup>64</sup>

Zanele Muholi’s *Babhekile II* and *HeVi*, from the series *Somnyama Ngonyama – Hail the Dark Lioness* (2016), serve as perfect examples for their<sup>65</sup> use of image and text. Muholi is a South African artist and queer visual activist, well known for their use of portrait photography to commemorate and celebrate the lives of Southern African “black lesbian, bisexual and transgender humans.”<sup>66</sup> This consciousness-raising work — like that by many other black artists who use visual culture to represent the social and political lived experiences of black people — makes visible the discrimination, inequality, and injustices black people face. The series, Muholi reprises portraiture to tackle the “perpetual violence on black bodies in the mainstream media and the politics of exclusion.”<sup>67</sup> By inserting their own self into their work, Muholi is able to assume multiple identities: author, subject, and object. The self-portraits are personalized by a selection of props, each intended to represent their personal experience with racial profiling and black life across spacetimes. These props also act as visible cultural signifiers of blackness or black ethnicities. What they signify is pointed to by Muholi’s strategically crafted titles.

Central to this body of work is the notion of blackness. Muholi examines the “cultural borders”<sup>68</sup> established through skin, particularly “black” or dark. They<sup>69</sup> do so by darkening<sup>70</sup> their skin color. This gesture, the artist explains, is an

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63. T. J. W. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 16, emphasis in original.

64. Ibid, 6.

65. Muholi prefers to use the plural pronouns their/they/them instead of she/her.

66. *Financial Times*, Zanele Muholi: ‘I’m a Visual Activist’ (Financial Times, 2018).

67. Ibid.

68. Cali Coetzee, *Written under the Skin: Blood and Intergenerational Memory in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University press, 2019), 9.

69. Muholi prefers to be referred to by the plural pronoun.

70. Muholi does not psychically darken her skin. Their skin is blackened by the photography post-production processes that heighten the contrast within the images.

attempt to “reclaim” blackness, an identity they feel is “continuously performed by the privileged other.”<sup>71</sup> The tradition of blackening the skin to signify blackness can be traced back to white American minstrel shows originating in the mid-1800s.<sup>72</sup> These shows were predominantly owned and staged by white performers who darkened their skin with black cork to portray what white America at the time perceived to be “real” caricatures of “black plantation life in the South.”<sup>73</sup> In his book *Black Manhattan*, civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson observes,

minstrelsy was, on the whole, a caricature of Negro life, and it fixed a stage tradition which has not yet been entirely broken. It fixed the tradition of the Negro as only an irresponsible, happy-go-lucky, wide grinning, loud laughing, shuffling, banjo playing, singing, dancing sort of being.<sup>74</sup>

Covered in blackface and with exaggerated bright red lips, performers dressed in “baggy clothes and floppy shoes to achieve a comic effect and to maximize the contrast” between themselves and the “well-dressed ‘straight’ characters in the show.”<sup>75</sup> Psychologist Chanbani Manganyi identified as “one of the legacies of [the] colonialism of Africa ... the development of [a] dichotomy relating to the body, namely, the ‘bad’ and ‘good’ body.” Dividing the body into two racially defined categories enabled the colonial state to project the white man’s body as the “standard, the norm of beauty, of accomplishments” and the black body as “inferior and unwholesome.”<sup>76</sup> Within the context of American society, the characterization of African Americans, using practices such as blackface, as a visual extension of the state’s anti-black rhetoric, founded during slavery and legitimized by the Jim Crow segregation laws, is yet an example of how these narratives infiltrated every space of American society. The popularity of blackface, as the only and authentic representation of African-American life, is a reflection of what happens when, as mentioned earlier by Lubiano, anti-black narratives depicted through various visual apparatuses are accepted as the “real thing.”

While Muholi’s blackening of their skin can, at first glance, be interpreted as the reproduction of these anti-black tropes, it does the contrary. It draws our attention to how skin was and still is the primary medium through which the body is racialized. The use by black creative practitioners of the medium of the

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71. Stevenson, 2012–2018, *Zanele Muholi: Somnyama Ngonyama* (Stevenson, n.d.).

72. Henry Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface: A Sourcebook on Early Black Musical Shows* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2014), 7.

73. Ibid, 13.

74. James Weldon Johnson, cited by Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*, 20.

75. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*, vii.

76. Chanbani Manganyi, *Being-Black-in-the-World* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1973), 28.

blackface is not new. Henry Sampson observes that “many white and black performers used burnt-cork makeup during the early 1900s.”<sup>77</sup> However, their use is unlike that by Muholi whose images consist of various props intended to reflect the multi-dimensional black identities that exist within black communities. African American actor George Walker claims that black performers who participated in minstrel shows were expected to mimic anti-black stereotypes staged by their white counterparts:

All that was expected of a colored performer was singing and dancing and a little story-telling, but as for acting, no one credited a black person with the ability to act. Blackfaced white comedians used to make themselves look as ridiculous as they could when portraying a “darky” character. In their make-up they always had tremendously big red lips, and their costumes were frightfully exaggerated. The one fatal result of this to the colored performers was that they imitated the white performers in their make-up as “darkies.” Nothing seemed more absurd than to see a colored man making himself ridiculous in order to portray himself.<sup>78</sup>

In *Babhekile II* (see Figure 1), which loosely translated from isiZulu means “they are watching,” Muholi explores blackness’s historical relationship with surveillance. In the photograph, the artist looks over their shoulder as if to suggest that they are looking at themselves in a mirror.<sup>79</sup> However, the title and their gaze suggest otherwise: they indicate that Muholi is being watched and is aware of it. It is not clear who is watching. But if the work is seen through race, Muholi’s pose and gaze illustrate the effect that constant surveillance can have on an individual’s behavior.

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77. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*, 1371.

78. George Walker, cited by Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*, 1371.

79. Simon Abrahams, *Over-the-Shoulder Poses* (EveryPainter Paints Himself, 2011).





**Figure 1.** Zanele Muholi, *Babhekile II*, Oslo, 2015, Silver Gelatin Print, Image 50 x 37.7cm

Source: Stevenson Gallery.

The prop included in the image suggests a specific type of surveillance. Covering their hair, sits a small travel bag. The title reminds us that this is no ordinary bag. It is symbolic, a metaphorical representation of black experience with racialized spaces. To be more specific, it interrogates the consequences of travelling while black. During apartheid, spatial divisions were enforced by the Pass Laws enacted in 1952 by which black South Africans at all times had to carry a passbook or “dompas” (literally a “dumb pass”), restricting and surveilling their movements. It contained a “person’s name, fingerprints, photograph, personal details of employment, permission from the government to be in a particular part of the country, qualifications to work or seek work in the area, and an employer’s reports on worker performance and behaviour.”<sup>80</sup> In the United States, Victor Hugo Green published *The Negro Motorist Green-Book* in 1936 in response to segregation laws forbidding African Americans from occupying spaces designated as white. It served as a travel guide for African Americans who were not familiar with the black-owned hotels and businesses in the states they travelled to. In the introduction, Green writes that the book intends to give the

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80. Bianca du Plessis, *Carrying Apartheid’s Book* (IOL, 2015).

"Motorist and Tourist a guide not only for the Hotels and Tourist Homes in all of the large cities, but [also for] other classifications [taverns, restaurants beauty shops, barber shop, petrol stations] that will be found useful wherever he may be."<sup>81</sup> Sampson describes black minstrel performers' encounter with white Americans' spatial racial prejudices:

In many cities, hotel accommodations were not available so the performers had to find room and board in the private homes of the local black citizens.<sup>82</sup>

Not only did Green's guide help black performers find these alternative spaces, but it provided them safe spaces that were free from racial prejudice. In her essay "Why People of Color Need Spaces without White People," Kelsey Blackwell explains why these spaces are necessary:

People of color need their own spaces. Black people need their own spaces. We need places in which we can gather and be free from the mainstream stereotypes and marginalization that permeate every other societal space we occupy. We need spaces where we can be our authentic selves without white people's judgment and insecurity muzzling that expression. We need spaces where we can simply be — where we can get off the treadmill of making white people comfortable and finally realize just how tired we are.<sup>83</sup>

Although South Africa and America have both done away with segregational laws, their long-lasting effects are still visible. In South Africa, apartheid architecture continues to separate rich whites from predominantly poor black population. The segregation that remains in America's present-day society is illustrated in the 2019 documentary *Traveling While Black*, directed by Roger Ross Williams. It draws links between the Jim Crow laws and police brutality. In *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates writes a letter to his black son about white America's racism. Reflecting on the deaths from police brutality of Eric Garner, Renisha McBride, and Tamir Rice, he writes:

And you know now, if you did not before, that the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body. It does not matter if the destruction is the result of an unfortunate overreaction.<sup>84</sup>

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81. Victor Hugo Green, *The Negro Motorist Green-Book* (New York: Victor H. Green, 1936), 1.

82. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface*, 31.

83. Kelsey Blackwell, "Why People of Color need Spaces without White People," *The Arrow* (August 9, 2018).

84. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2019), 9.

Similar to Coates, Muholi's *Babhekile II* is a visual reminder of how racial profiling operates and, even more importantly, continues to permeate contemporary black life, and by doing so hindering black social mobility.

Muholi's *HeVi* (see Figure 2), which is slang for "heavy," supports Patricia Hill Collins' assertion that anti-blackness is intersectional, or a form of "intersectional paradigms." For Collins, "oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type"; rather, oppressions "work together in producing injustice."<sup>85</sup> In *HeVi*, Muholi wears an Afro wig. Similar to black skin, black hair was and still is subjected to anti-black prejudice that privileges straightened black hair<sup>86</sup> over "untidy"<sup>87</sup> hair. Black hair also became a signifier used by some to identify blacks whose skin did not "look" sufficiently black to allow an easy racial identification. In cases where the fairness of the skin did not allow a clear racial classification of an individual, the apartheid government devised the "pencil test" to separate colored and black bodies from white ones. The pencil test, writes Amanda Uren,

decreed that if an individual could hold a pencil in their hair when they shook their head, they could not be classified as White.<sup>88</sup>

The primary objective of the test was to address a significant fear within white communities: the infiltration of white society by non-white bodies "passing as white." In recent years there has been a resurgence of a natural hair movement, supported by tutorials on YouTube on natural hair and scholarship on the dangers of chemical relaxers, encouraging black women to embrace their natural hair and stop straightening it. The movement gained in popularity in the 1960s and 1970s through activism by groups such as the Black Panther Party and the civil rights and black consciousness movements. The Afro became a symbol of political resistance. In an interview on natural hair in 1968, Kathleen Cleaver of the Black Panther Party explained:

The reason for it, you might say, is a new awareness among black people that their own natural appearance, their physical appearance, is beautiful. It is pleasing to them ... For so many, many years we were told only white people were beautiful. Only straight hair, light eyes, light skin was beautiful, and so black women would try everything they could to straighten their hair and lighten their skin to look as much like white women ... But this has changed because black people are aware, ... and

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85. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Routledge, 2000), 9.

86. Straightened black hair, also called "good hair" in the United States, mimicked European straight hair. Its proximity to Western hair is seen by some blacks as prettier or better.

87. SBS News, South African School Told to Halt 'Racist' Hair Policy (SBS News, 2016).

88. Amanda Uren, *1950–1990: Signs of Apartheid* (Mashable, 2015).

white people are aware of it too because [they] now want natural wigs ... They want wigs like this [points to her natural hair].<sup>89</sup>



**Figure 2.** Zanele Muholi, *HeVi*, Oslo, 2016, Silver Gelatin Print, Image and Paper Size: 100 x 75.5cm

Source: Stevenson Gallery.

In 2016, black girls at the Pretoria High School for Girls led a protest against their teachers who described black hair as “untidy.” An unnamed pupil told Panyaza Lesufi, the Member of the Executive Council in Gauteng for education, that “I have a natural Afro, but a teacher told me I need to comb my hair because it looks like a bird’s nest.”<sup>90</sup> Muholi’s *HeVi* is a recognition of how black hair too is burdened by anti-blackness.

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89. Educational Video Group, *Kathleen Cleaver: Interview on Natural Hair* (Greenwood, IN: Educational Video Group, 1968), 2 mins.

90. Karabo Ngoepe, *Black Girls in Tears at Pretoria School Hair Protest* (News24, 2016).

## The Complex Relation between Text and Visual Representation

Images, according to Mitchell, are signifiers, and what they signify can be determined by a formal analysis of their content. Captions, however, operate differently, as they represent a “mental image conjured by a verbal signifier.”<sup>91</sup> Muholi’s work is an example of this complex relationship between image and text. Since images are “prior to [the] word in the model of language,” it is likely that viewers of Muholi’s images will first attempt to interpret the images before trying to decipher the word-image relationship.<sup>92</sup> What differentiates words from the image is the way in which they signify an object or thing: in Muholi’s case, the words point to issues pertaining to blackness and surveillance. However, Mitchell insists that the relationship does not end there but that there is a “third element”: language’s representation of the spoken word and the ideas held in the mind. This means that when we “read” Muholi’s work, we are “reading” the image as a picture, a mental/metaphorical idea and as a spoken word. What distinguishes each of these elements is their function: each is dependent on the way in which it makes meaning.<sup>93</sup>

Both Mitchell and Mirzoeff agree that the image can never erase or replace textual representation or claim to be an equivalent of it. When the two do intersect, visual experiences make reading and understanding linguistic discourse more “comprehensive, quicker and more effective.”<sup>94</sup> The paradox of visual cultural analysis, however, is that it relies on language for meaning, but that “language is a limited and incomplete means of description and cannot fully explain or replace the work of art.”<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, because artworks are not fixed to singular meaning, they remain ambiguous. Meaning, argues Hall, can “only be shared through our common access to language.”<sup>96</sup> When readers/viewers do not share a common language, a sign or symbol inserted or represented in an artwork can take on multiple meanings and might be interpreted differently from one context to another. Mirzoeff thus posits that the “visual image is not stable but changes its relationship to external reality.”<sup>97</sup> This ambiguity is reflected in Muholi’s photographs: visual images representing the “intersectional paradigms” of race, a byproduct of anti-black stereotypes that have come to be accepted as “real.” By doing so Muholi interrogates visual culture’s concept of “reality” or what it deems to be “real.” In addition, the words “babhekile” and “hevi” compel

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91. Mitchell, *Seeing through Race*, 7.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid, 8.

94. Mirzoeff, “What is Visual Culture,” 7.

95. Alan Simpson, “Language, Literature and Art,” *Journal of Aesthetics Education* 22, no. 2 (Summer 1988), 48.

96. Hall, “Introduction,” 1.

97. Mirzoeff, “What is Visual Culture,” 7.

us to consider how words, like images, are unstable. These words, for instance, like most words, have multiple meanings depending on their context.

Mitchell claims the difference between the visual and the verbal has two facets:

one grounded in the senses (seeing versus hearing), the other in the nature of signs and meaning (words as arbitrary, conventional symbols, as distinct from images as representations by virtue of likeness or similitude).<sup>98</sup>

Muholi's works is a reminder of how and why images are created and understood differently to text. The reason is that images were historically and continue to be reliant on visual objects whereas textual representations are dependent on a careful selection of words to construct an image, or narrative. Importantly, because a text does not provide a visible image (visual objects we can see), the reader is required to see images through another form of sight: through the imagination. This is why, in Mitchell's opinion, textual representations are superior to visual ones: the "images we see while listening to the radio"<sup>99</sup> are better, more vivid, dynamic, and vital."<sup>100</sup>

I, however, am not interested in whether the one is superior to the other. What I am interested in is the separate and joint contribution of both mediums to the articulation of phenomenological blackness. I am also interested in how Muholi practices what Mirzoeff theorizes as postmodernist visual and textual practice to destabilize and rewrite modernist<sup>101</sup> ideologies, in order to visualize the "genealogy, definition and function of postmodern everyday life." To ensure class, gender, sexual, and racialized identities are correctly represented, Mirzoeff describes this new method of representation as a "visualisation of things that are not in themselves visual." For the European modernist creative practitioner, the visualisation of existence meant prioritizing the "visual and its effects." These "effects" can be described as artists' experimentation with a "wide-range of complex ideas and modes of representation ranging from over-arching beliefs in progress to theories of the rise of abstract painting or the modern novel" in an attempt to distance itself from "imitating objects."<sup>102</sup> Muholi's work is an accurate visual representation of visual culture's original function, and how postmodernist artists are experimenting with other forms of representation.

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98. Mitchell, *Seeing through Race*, 4.

99. For Mitchell, sound or audio is another form of textual representation.

100. Mitchell, *Seeing through Race*, 6.

101. Okwui Enwezor reminds us that modernism cannot be divorced from its historical ideas of Europeaness that justified global imperialism. Okwui Enwezor, "Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation," in Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor (eds.), *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 2.

102. Mirzoeff, "What is Visual Culture," 5, 6, 4.

What we can ascertain from Muholi's work is how complex the interrelationships between images and text are. Yet they also complement and extend each other. More importantly, the artist's work illustrates how both medium's production of "cathartic, coded and advanced" representations of black existence can help deepen our understanding of blackness.<sup>103</sup>

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103. Wallace, *Invisible Blues*, 216.



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