

Dario Cecchi

## Catharsis reconsidered: Gadamer and Jauss at the benchmark of a poetical category

### Abstract

*Catharsis is considered according to the interpretations of two contemporary thinkers: H.G. Gadamer and H.R. Jauss. According to Aristotle, it is the “purification” (katharsis) of “pity” (eleos) and “fear” (phobos). Gadamer is unsatisfied with the translations of the words eleos and phobos: for they describe the real involvement to the tragical representation. The spectator discovers the fragility of the human existential condition through the tragical fate of the hero. Jauss emphasizes how the audience find a standpoint from which events can be judged. Catharsis is a sort of reflective detachment. The interpretation of the story foreshadows the reconfiguration of our ethical values. Recognizing oneself through the identification with the other or exploring the distance between the other and oneself: they are different ways of understanding catharsis, integrable with each other as far as they are elements of an identification concerning all forms of storytelling.*

### Keywords

*Identification processes, Catharsis, Digital media*

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dario.cecchi@uniroma1.it (Università “La Sapienza”)

### 1. *Introductory remarks\**

Our age is undergoing a transformation in the forms of identification, which characterize the relationship of the public to their social models. At the same time, the influence of this phenomenon in the everyday experience is growing. Every age has its icons and idols, its divos and divas or its vedettes, depending on the fashion of the age and the paradigms used. In all of these cases, at any rate, one develops an attachment with figures who in principle do not belong to real life. Identification is often taken as an umbrella concept to summarize all sort of emotional tie to the heroes and heroines of the global village, the cultural industry and, today, the digital “iconosphere” (Vercellone 2017). But the concept of identification is also the object of recurrent debates, misunderstandings and criticisms. While introducing cinema as a new art inside the realm of the aesthetic experience, George H. Mead reaffirms the importance of the processes of identification for the accomplishment of an aesthetic experience. The relationship of the identification to the aesthetic is easily grasped when one considers an art like cinema, which is at the same time narrative and visual time. Mead also expresses his unease with the risk of misunderstanding the real nature of this psychological drive. Do spectators project their own desires and aspirations, their hopes and their fears, onto the screen, where actors and actresses embody them? Is the screen a proxy or a surrogate of the spectator’s cognitive and affective life? And consequently, is identification illusion and daydream, or is it rooted in the spectator’s real experience?

Mead, whose investigation of the aesthetic develops at the crosspoint of philosophy (in particular pragmatism), sociology and psychology, is unable to give an ultimate and clear answer to the aforementioned questions. However, he refers to Aristotle’s theory of catharsis, which he considers as a possible reply to the theories which consider identification only as a degraded way of elaborating our emotional life (Mead 1926: 392). The theory of catharsis is one of the most famous and influential theories throughout the whole philosophy of art. It defines the elaboration of the feelings one has in front of the stories narrating the accidents and mistakes of characters who are usually, at least in Aristotle’s times, mythological or historical figures. *Katharsis* literally

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means in Greek “purification”. Though being formulated by ancient philosophers – namely, Aristotle and others before him – the theory of catharsis, with its interest in the affective aspects of narratives, foreruns the emphasis put by modern philosophers on the aesthetic of art, that is, its sensible side<sup>1</sup>.

In the probably best known formulation, Aristotle (*Poet.* 1449b 24-28) states that catharsis occurs on the occasion of a tragic story, purifying the passions of “fear” (*phobos*) and “pity” (*eleos*). I will not consider Aristotle’s theory, but its consequences in modern aesthetics. I will consider in particular two contemporary interpretations of catharsis: that of Hans Georg Gadamer and that of Hans Robert Jauss. I think in particular of the sections and passages devoted to catharsis, respectively in Gadamer’s *Truth and method* (2004; or. ed. 1960) and Jauss’ *Kleine Apologie der ästhetischen Erfahrung* (1972). Nor will I consider that Aristotle refers to catharsis also in other loci of his work, beside his *Poetics*. By the way, Gadamer mentions Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* in a crucial passage of his argument (Gadamer 2004: 126), whilst Jauss focuses only on *Poetics*. Furthermore, the relationship of catharsis to processes of narrative identification is more strongly stated by Jauss than Gadamer. Nonetheless, this connection is crucial for both thinkers.

Let me make just one remark about Aristotle’s characterization of fear and pity. Surprisingly enough, Aristotle seems to consider pity as a passion which needs to be purified: this statement deserves further clarifications as far as one may consider pity as positive feeling, which needs no purification. The interpretations of catharsis respectively given by Gadamer and Jauss could be also considered as two ways of tackling the issue. I do not aim at proposing an integration of Gadamer’s theory of catharsis with Jauss’ one. They remain incompatible, despite the convergence on some issues. They share for instance the idea that identification is not just a psychological drive, but corresponds to an ethical disposition put on display by the narration. I do not either assume that one of them is closer to Aristotle’s mind. Gadamer is indeed more inclined to formulate his theory as a proper interpretation of Aristotle’s thought (Kwok-Kui 2006; Tate 2008), whilst Jauss appropriates Aristotle’s argument inside his own reflection upon catharsis. I believe that the two

<sup>1</sup> Pietro Montani (2020: 27-35) recently formulated an original theory of catharsis, with regard to the use of digital technologies. He argues in particular that the “cathartic effect” is the “simultaneous empowerment of opposing emotional streams” (Montani 2020: 30, my trans.).

theories are alternative, but can coexist as far as they shed light on different aspects of the cathartic process, together with its effects on our experience.

## 2. Two modern interpretations of catharsis. 1: Gadamer

As far as the concept of catharsis is concerned, I would propose the following distinction between Gadamer and Jauss: catharsis is for Gadamer the purification *of* the passions of fear and pity, whilst for Jauss it is the purification *from* those passions. I will come to Jauss in the next paragraph. Let us now focus on Gadamer<sup>2</sup>. The statement that catharsis is a purification of pity and fear means that these passions are elaborated, and eventually transformed, throughout a process by which the spectator or the reader is involved by the narrative experience. After this experience, spectators and readers are newly empowered to feel fearful, merciful or pitiful feelings, and act consequently. Catharsis reestablishes their *ethos*: it thus plays an indirect moral role. Gadamer is even unsatisfied with the ordinary translations of the Greek words *eleos* and *phobos*, usually rendered as ‘pity’ and ‘fear’. According to Gadamer, these translations refer only to a subjective experience lived innerly. *Eleos* and *phobos* engage however the body as well as the mind: as a consequence, they must be described as concretely bodily experiences. It is what Gadamer tries to do in *Truth and method*, when he proposes to reconsider the sense of these two Greek words. He suggests that we should think of *phobos* as a real “cold shudder” (*Kälteschauer*); *eleos* should be instead translated as “misery” (*Jammer*: Gadamer 2004: 126). *Jammer* is a word hard to translate: the English edition of *Truth and method* brings trace of this difficulty. Let us see the following passage: “The German word ‘Jammer’ (misery) is a good equivalent [of *eleos*] because it too refers not merely to an inner state but to its manifestation” (Gadamer 2004: 126). In the English edition, “misery” stays in a subaltern position with regard to the German word *Jammer*, as if the former could only approximatively translate the latter. Gianni Vattimo, editor of the Italian edition, translates *Jammer* with *strazio*. It is a good translation as far as it evokes a bodily reaction, and designates also an immediate involvement in the pain of the other.

<sup>2</sup> The actuality of Gadamer’s thought on art for the current debate in aesthetics has been recently reaffirmed by Elena Romagnoli 2023.



More generally, according to Gadamer, the tragic designates not only a narrative or an artistic category broadly speaking, but also an existential category. He argues indeed that

The tragic is a fundamental phenomenon, a structure of meaning that does not exist only in tragedy, the tragic work of art in the narrower sense, but also in other artistic genres, especially epic. Indeed, it is not even a specifically artistic phenomenon, for it is also found in life. (Gadamer 2004: 125)

It is the fact that life may be tragic, more precisely that life can be interpreted according to a tragic frame of reference, that allows the creation of tragic works of art and narratives. Through a tragic work of art, one comes to grasp the innerly tragic meaning of life (Gentili, Marino 2013). Accordingly, the tragic passions – pity and fear, or “misery” and “cold shudder” as suggested by Gadamer – should not be considered as abstract feelings, affecting a detached reader or beholder only mentally. These feelings could catch us in real life. It seems that the public started crying during the first representation of Aeschylus’ tragedy *The Persians*, as the actor who played the role of the ghost of the Persian king Darius explains why his son Xerxes’s navy was defeated by the Athenians and their allies. The memory of that crucial event in the history of the Greek *polis* was so close for the public, that they could not bear the grief revived by its representation without crying – and they cried for the defeat of their enemy and invader, instead of exulting for their own victory! As far as the tragic and its emotional background are first of all real and not just fictional, it is impossible for Gadamer to consider catharsis as an eradication of the passions which move human beings in their lives. Catharsis does not just engender a sort of pleasure mixed with grief, enjoyed by virtue of a condition of full detachment. Catharsis rather brings the spectator of the tragedy to assume a disposition of “pensiveness”. Catharsis is indeed accompanied by a sort of revelation of a “metaphysical order of being that is true for all”. Furthermore, Gadamer adds that to “see that ‘this is how it is’ is a kind of self-knowledge for the spectator”. In other words, by the revelation of the tragic structure of life, the spectators discover their own fragility in front of the uncertainties of the world. Spectators acknowledge that the “disproportionate, terrible immensity of the consequences that flow from a guilty deed” concern not only the fate of the hero on the stage, but the very fact of being humans. For this reason, the tragic experience “has the character of a genuine communion” (Gadamer 2004: 128).

The hermeneutic reconstruction of the aesthetic promoted by Gadamer repeatedly claims for a trait of collective engagement, which reveals the meaning of being in the world. Play and festival are two examples of pre-artistic aesthetic experiences in which for instance the roles of actor and spectator coincide. The emergence of art in its various forms breaks this unity, but only for the sake of being engaged in a world common to all.

I think that Gadamer is shortening the argumentation, in order to avoid a possible difficulty of his account of catharsis. If the passions carrying the experience of a tragic representation or narration are the same as the tragic passions making sense of our lives, then pensiveness is an unsatisfactory definition of the disposition we assume through the tragic experience. The very idea of pensiveness still keeps a reference to the existence of a distance between reality and ourselves: it suggests the possibility of still differing the passage to action. On the very contrary, as far as there is continuity between the tragic sense of life and the affective effect of tragedy, the cathartic purification of pity and fear should reestablish these passions as actual *drives of action*. As a consequence, there should be no difference between tragic pensiveness and ethical disposition. However, this coincidence would be problematic: for tragedy displays its genuine ethical force inasmuch it enjoys the difference between being involved into the other's affairs and considering reality "how it is", on the occasion of single stories taken as exemplary cases of the tragic meaning of life. We are not affected by the fate of fictional characters and mythical figures in the same way as we were affected by the adversities and misfortunes of the person we love in real life. And when we believe in the possibility of crossing the line between real life and myth, we run the risk of falling into illusions which could prove to be extremely dangerous for our individual and collective lives. Charismatic leaders, such as dictators, autocrats and the others, often present themselves to the people as heroes and godlike figures who deserve the people's deepest affection, by virtue of the sense of a tragical fate, which they show with the words and deeds. They are thus able to ask all sort of sacrifice, so distorting the perception of reality of their audience.

### 3. *Two modern interpretations of catharsis. 2: Jauss*

Jauss recovers of the concept of catharsis within his reflection upon aesthetic experience (Conforti 1992; De Sensi 2004; Gentili 1990; Mattei 1988).

This recovery explicitly deals with an issue unconsidered by Gadamer: the necessity of a distance for the accomplishment of the cathartic effect. Even before undertaking the investigation of the meaning of the aesthetic experience, Jauss had already manifested his disagreement with Gadamer concerning the status of the literary interpretation (Jauss 1967). Jauss doubtlessly considers Gadamer as a revival of the hermeneutic studies, recognizing first of all their philosophical import. Jauss himself was not a philosopher: he was a literary critic and historian of literature. However, he thought that literary hermeneutics needs to reconsider the primacy of reading for the sake of a critical interpretation of the text. And reading is primarily an aesthetic experience, by which the readers enjoy the text, grasping its meaning compared to their own experience of the world. As we shall see, this general assessment might be shared by Gadamer; nonetheless, the latter contextualizes this way of connecting literary hermeneutics and the experience of the world within the boundaries of an involvement with a tradition made of common values, rules, and symbols.

For Jauss, the convergence of aesthetic pleasure and literary interpretation is necessary because the act of interpreting a text is limited neither to the understanding of the meaning of the text, nor to its collocation within a certain tradition. Interpretation contemplates the way(s) a text is able to expand or change the horizons of knowledgeability of the world of the readers. Extending this observation to non-literary works, one can say that a work of art is an opportunity of revising, and eventually reaffirming or changing, our habits in perception, imagination and cognition. It also helps us establish or keep relationships with the others (see Marquard 1994). Jauss' perspective on the aesthetic experience is deeply influenced by Kant's *Critique of judgment*: in the third *Critique*, we find indeed that the free play of the imagination with the understanding, which is at work in the aesthetic judgments, foreshadows the possibility of a new knowledge of reality, while engendering the feeling of the world is a suitable place for the human life. Jauss also refers the second aspect to Hegel's *Lessons of aesthetics* (Jauss 1972: 14).

The attention paid to the effect of the work of art on the public brings Jauss to the definition of his approach to the "aesthetics of reception" – an interest he shares with Wolfgang Iser and the other members of the so-called School of Konstanz, which he contributed to found. Reception (*Rezeption*), far from bringing a passive receiving of the artwork's "message", actually designates a creative disposition of accepting and elaborating its subject-matter (see Jauss 1982). With regard to the

experience of reading, Iser instead speaks of “response” (*Wirkung*), in order to highlight the active appropriation of the text by the reader (Iser 1980). In a similar vein, Jauss does not consider reception just as an act of receiving and interpreting the message contained in the text, or in the work of art generally speaking. The aesthetic experience has the power of reconfiguring our understanding of reality; this aspect is integrated with the interpretation of the work. Jauss shares the last claim with Gadamer’s hermeneutics. But, unlike Gadamer, Jauss does not believe that the reference of the aesthetic experience to the world passes through an endless appropriation and elaboration of the tradition to which one belongs. The fact of having an aesthetic experience cannot be fully explained by assimilating this experience inside a hermeneutic framework: hermeneutics stays here for an interpretive activity lying on the ground of a previously established system of references, which is supposed to be shared by the author and the interpreter, but is still open to revisions and improvements. On the contrary, Jauss finds the possibility of a reference to the world in the effect the work of art has on the sensibility and the imagination of the public. In other words, he believes in the autonomy of the aesthetic moment of the relationship to art. Gadamer believes on the contrary that the aesthetic moment taken alone reduces the experience of the work of art to the pure subjectivity of individual “lived experience” (*Erlebnis*).

As far as the aforementioned issue is concerned, Gadamer’s and Jauss’ positions could not but be more distant. However, this difference helps us understand what Jauss has in mind as he rehabilitates the aesthetic, (see Jauss 1972: 22-5). For Gadamer, the experience of the work of art is effective as far as it provokes a “fusion of horizons” between the author and the interpreter: tradition is kept alive and a valid only at this condition (see Gadamer 2005: 305 and f.). Jauss believes instead that the aesthetic experience has its own communicative import, which addresses the imagination of the audience. The last remark brings us back to the question of catharsis as far as Jauss considers the cathartic moment of the aesthetic experience as its “communicative function” (see Jauss 1972: 38 and f.). Catharsis is not especially bound to the tragic: on the contrary, it can be empowered by different narrative genres, displaying accordingly a variety of feelings and images, from the admiration for the hero to the irony for the antihero (Jauss 1972: 46). The tragic feeling is only one of the many possible ways a work of art has to be communicative.

The variation of the cathartic experience has consequences also in the way of conceiving its relationship to the ethical sphere. Being not

identified with the experience of the tragical fate of the hero, catharsis does not lead to recognize in fragility the only feature of the human life. Life is exposed to many different contingencies, either lucky or unlucky. Bound to fragility, life is characterized by an inner *indeterminacy*, which requires a constant reexamination, validation, rejection or reformulation of the norms which regulate our individual and collective lives. For this reason, catharsis primarily deals with this elaboration of the social norms to which one adheres.

Between the opposite functions of *breaking* a norm or *adhering* to it, between the transformation in a progressive sense and the adaptation to a prevailing ideology, there is a whole series of possibilities, today often neglected by the social action (*gesellschaftliche Wirkung*) of art, which, narrowly speaking, can be designated as communicative, that is, *productive of a norm (normbildende)*. (Jauss 1972: 42, my transl.)

This is most authentically catharsis according to Jauss. For this reason, *pace* Gadamer, it is not a process of liberation *of* passions, but *from* passions: for it does not refer human life to a preexisting interpretive structure, such as the tragic, which authorizes the understanding of contingency only as fragility. It rather reestablishes the indeterminacy of life, which may appear lucky or unlucky according to the single cases. Indeterminacy does not mean arbitrariness. The efficacy of catharsis is sought in a standard of intersubjective validity, whose model is the idea of common sense in Kant's third *Critique* (Jauss 1972: 49). Kant considers common sense as the regulative idea presiding to the formulation of aesthetic judgments. The claim to intersubjective validity of an aesthetic judgment concerns only the single case, taken as exemplary exhibition of beauty. If we apply this theory to catharsis, as does Jauss, then we must say that the cathartic process does not make life coincide with a single world image, for instance a tragical one. A narrative rather puts on display the criteria by which a variety of world images may entangle with our lives according to different perspectives and contingencies.

#### 4. *Remarks on the present*

Summarizing and comparing the previous paragraphs, we can say that Jauss assigns to catharsis a meta-ethical and meta-political import, beside its aesthetic significance, whilst Gadamer seems to recognize an immediately ethical and political meaning to the cathartic process.

According to the former, this process brings the public to feel the indeterminacy of life, thus reconsidering the validity of the ongoing social norms. According to the latter, the cathartic process brings to recognize the fragility of life in the light of a narrative model borrowed from the cultural heritage of the interpreter. These theories of catharsis are irreducible to each other under some crucial philosophical aspects. Jauss claims the possibility of taking a distance from the actual conditions of life through narrative. Gadamer's view on the tragic is instead based on the passage from the close condition of playing to the open condition of having an aesthetic experience of a work of art which offers a spectacle of reality to our eyes (see Gadamer 2004: 110-8). The irreducibility between these two positions lies perhaps in the different conceptions of *mimesis*: Gadamer (2004: 110) thinks of *mimesis* as the emergence of a "structure" (*Gebilde*), by which one is able to mirror reality. An elaboration of experience becomes thus possible through this act of mirroring. Jauss claims that the purpose of reimagining reality through art is the opening of a space for reflection: without this reflective moment, *mimesis* would be ineffective. On the one hand, emphasis is put on the representational power of *mimesis*; on the other hand, it is put on its reflective import.

Despite the aforementioned differences, I think that Gadamer's and Jauss' respective theories of catharsis can be considered as distinct but not alternative as soon as we use them as tools for analyzing how a narrative triggers and canalizes a cathartic effect on its public. I refer not only to the immediately recognizable forms of narrative, literary and non-literary, but also to the expanded forms of storytelling hosted by media. Media are able to promote forms of storytelling entangled with our everyday experience and social life. By the way, the reflection of Gadamer and Jauss on the cathartic nature of narrative may be useful to clarify an issue which, in my view, implicitly lies in the theoretical foundations of a recent trend of research called "social aesthetics" (see Carnevali, Pinotti 2020). Social aesthetics deals with the appearances by which the social actors display their presence in the public space (see Carnevali 2020; see also Arendt 1978). But it deals also with the devices by which we shape the space we share with the others; the artifacts by which we perform socially relevant actions; the artistic strategies by which we come to recognize our condition of social actors. In other words, we give the same label, "social aesthetics", to different kinds of experiences. For each of these cases, we consider different aesthetic marks, and we bind them to different aspects of our social life. Socialites who take care of their outfits

before attending an event immediately embody their aesthetics in their social performance. Designers who create objects which will become pieces of the furniture of our private and public spaces give a fundamental contribution to the way thousands if not millions of people will act socially, but do not necessarily partake the social interactions of their customers. Writers and filmmakers who aim at narrating facts of great political or social significance through their stories establish the conditions for reflecting upon social issues, but are not necessarily engaged with these issues. They are different ways of intending social aesthetics, as well as conjugating aesthetics and sociability.

There is at least one reason why the theories respectively developed by Gadamer and Jauss on catharsis are relevant to the articulation of the aforementioned differences existing inside social aesthetics. Both theories, while differing in their conclusions, point out to the passage from the direct involvement into an interaction with the world to an elaboration of this interaction through art. In Gadamer, the passage takes place from the engaged condition of players to the contemplative condition of spectators who consider reality as a whole. The artistic representation of reality so accomplishes a need for meaningfulness which has already emerged in playing: “one can say that the mimetic representation (*Darstellung*), the performance, brings into existence (*zum Dasein*) what the play itself requires” (Gadamer 2004: 116). If we consider that most of our social life can be considered as a sort of playful symbolic interaction with reality, then we can say that all forms of artistic representation and narrative do not passively mirror reality as such, but make sense of the interaction between the world and us. In a similar vein, Jauss thinks that when a narrative puts the emphasis on its communicative function, then a space is opened for reflecting upon the meaning of our engagement with the world. The distance we assume from the figures presented in the narrative is the prerequisite for elaborating models of social behavior.

The cathartic effect works accordingly. In Gadamer, it enhances the sense of belonging and engagement with the surrounding world, so recognizing the boundaries given to the possibility of our actions by our fragility. In Jauss, it offers a critical standpoint by which one is able to reconsider the validity of the ongoing social norms, so recognizing the indeterminacy of life as an opportunity. As far as we consider these two theories of catharsis as different strategies for making sense of the social aesthetics characterizing an age or a culture, we can alternatively apply them to the various conditions of our social life. In our social interaction,

we often show a preference for the heroic figures. A certain narrative background is therefore implicitly present in the social interaction, especially it has an evident symbolic import. Narratives and storytellings make the narrative background of the social interaction emerge according to different cultural and social frames. It is also possible to establish systems of correspondances between the aesthetics of the storytelling pervading our social life, for instance our political life, and the aesthetics of the narrative industries which supply entertainment to us. Walter Benjamin compares for instance the stars of Hollywood with the charismatic dictators of totalitarian regimes (see Benjamin 1969). Today we have a new form of narrative entanglement between the storytelling of the influencers and the storytelling of the political leaders – especially, but not only, the populist ones.

Catharsis is also a way of introducing complexity inside the narrative entanglements which give to our social life and its peculiar aesthetics. The social storytelling tends to the identification with heroic figures. This model immediately validates a social praxis aesthetically. An objective of narratives which exhibit a significant degree of catharsis would therefore be the discovery of the nuances bond to a certain figure. New social norms will be referable to the figure so reconfigured. As a consequence, we could distinguish between *embedded* and *non-embedded narratives*, that is, narrative which fulfil social expectations, and narratives which are free of reshaping them. In this perspective, the theory of Gadamer can be integrated one with the theory of Jauss. With his claim for the creative recovery of tradition, Gadamer opens the ground for the analyses of the transformation of a narrative figure inside a cultural tradition. Only to take a classical example, Brutus Minor epitomizes the fate of traitors in Dante's *Inferno*, as he murdered his mentor Caesar. With the rise of the revolutions he was revaluated as a representative of the republican virtue, being the responsible of a tyrannicide. We can understand in the same way of Brecht's figures, such as Arturo Ui, a satirical portrait of Hitler, or a "Mr Julius Caesar" revisited as a modern dandy. As we see, the reference of the narrative figure to a historical, mythical or stereotyped figure of hero can be explicit or implicit. The more this figure makes room for a creative reinterpretation of the figure, the more a cathartic effect can be empowered.

Jauss sheds light on another aspect of catharsis. He suggests in fact a close tie between the normative and the communicative dimension of narrative. The possibility of a critical exam of the political panorama, or of the ethical dilemmas of the contemporary age, is thus offered to the



public. Narratives let us criticize the values of our society: this is the *lectio facillior* of catharsis according to Jauss. But catharsis may also imply the discovery of the implicit ethical and political background laying behind certain forms of communication through the media; and this would be the *lectio difficilior*. In *Selfie*, the filmmaker Agostino Ferrente meets two teenagers who live in a degraded neighborhood of Naples. One of their friends has been killed by mistake during a police action. This event is the starting point for reflecting upon the condition of youth in such a context. Ferrente proposes to the teenagers to film the story by themselves, using their own phones. He aims at stimulating their partaking to the narration. But it is a way of enacting a process of self-recognition through the use of a phone, the most popular device in use among the youth. The movie is permeated with the typical aesthetics of the youth's communication, made of short-living and occasional pictures. Doubtlessly, the filmmaker runs the risk of falling into a parody of his characters. However, he offers them the opportunity of experimenting a cathartic effect by using their phones, not for communicating, but for narrating a story, and so reflecting upon its meaning.

The practice of selfie is particularly interesting to investigate to what extent digital media are available to cathartic processes when used as narrative devices. It is also interesting to verify whether the creative experimentation pursued by specialized filmmakers is able to discover the cathartic potentialities of devices and practice bound to the everyday experience. Is a selfie only a "booster" of the emotional flow permeating our social interaction, or can it be also the occasion for reflecting upon the meaning of our social life? Is this sort of pictures a kind of model to be indiscriminately followed, or can it become the object of critical evaluations? A critical evaluation should lead either to a new collocation of our experiences inside the contemporary cultural, ethical or political panorama, or to the reconfiguration of this panorama by the introduction of this new element.

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