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Sublime resonance The auditory experience between art and media

Abstract

Resonance is relevant to an aesthetic theory of media. In fact, since aesthetics has begun being committed to the understanding of the nature and functioning of media, also outside their usage in art, the medium has been recognized as a tool by the means of which sensations can resonate to our sense organs. This is especially the case for Rudolf Arnheim's theory of radio. Furthermore, we can say that, through media, it is our very experience that acquires a peculiar quality of resonance. In Arnheim's account, the aesthetic experience bound to the listening of radio dramas can be shaped and driven according to new aesthetic values, because of representing the imaginary space of action only by means of the resonances artfully created by skilled radio drama writers and directors, and eventually perceived by the audience. This broader sense of resonance attributed to media can be found also in Lyotard's reconsideration of the Kantian sublime as a way for theorizing modern art. In the latter case, art is the medium of a transcendence that would not be presentable outside this device of resonance.

Keywords

Media, Sublime, Resonance, Modernism, Imaginative presentation

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1. *Is Resonance Relevant to Aesthetics?*

1.1. *Resonance as Aesthetic Effect: A Critical Perspective*

Resonance is first of all a perceptual phenomenon: it concerns the way in which the perception of an object can assume unexpected configurations with regard to the different sensations this very object is able to engender in our perceptual apparatus. I assume here that the perception of an object is, so to speak, ontologically different from its sensation as far as the former implies the recognition of this very object by means of some intellectual mediation – what the *Gestaltpsychologie* calls sometimes “perceptual concepts” (cfr. Garroni 2010). This idea is, of course, not limited to the *Gestaltpsychologie*: let me mention only the notion of “perceptual symbolism” Alfred North Whitehead develops in many of his philosophical writings, including the short essay *Symbolism. Its Meaning and Effect* (1927). If I focus on the *Gestaltpsychologie*, it is just because one of its most important representatives, and probably the most influential one in the aesthetic studies, Rudolf Arnheim, gives us interesting suggestions for developing a theory of resonance, as we shall see in the next paragraph.

To state it in the simplest way, we can say that *resonance is the reversal of the ordinary relation between perception and sensation*. In ordinary perception, sensation is colonized by perception. As many thinkers coming from different philosophical traditions, including John Langshaw Austin, Martin Heidegger and Whitehead himself, have argued during the 20th century, we usually do not have *first* the sensation of an object and only *then* perceive it. Perception comes first and organizes sensibility according to its own needs and programs. In that sense, the example used by Heidegger in *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* is, at the same time, right and wrong: it is true that when we hear the sound of a hammer, we hear the hammer itself. In other words, we do not compose sensation and perception in successive and coordinated moments; we synthesize them in only one phase, which is predominantly perceptual, rather than sensitive. Nonetheless, it is also true that hearing at distance an invisible object is precisely the moment in which our perception could make room to some degree of ambiguity. In other words, hearing without the support of seeing could present perception unbound from the immediate recognition of the object. In this case, perception oscillates between bare sensation and intellectual recognition, and requires a surplus of reflection in order

to avoid failure. Emilio Garroni analyzes this situation in his last book, *Immagine Linguaggio Figura* (2005). According to the Kantian paradigm of transcendental philosophy he assumes, he considers this situation as the moment in which the inward image of the outward reality presents itself to consciousness only as an “aggregate”, which could even correspond to several and heterogeneous objects, and not as the “scheme” of only one object. Therefore, resonance potentially represents a condition of instability for perception, since it reaffirms the power of sensation in determining the former’s constituency.

This situation is already relevant to aesthetics: in fact, the relation between sensation and reflection has represented the possible pivot of every philosophically significant aesthetic theory since the foundation of this discipline by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten around the middle of the 18th century. The same relation between sensation and reflection occupies the center of Immanuel Kant’s critical investigation upon the status and the *a priori* conditions of the judgment of taste, although Kant develops this topic according to philosophical premises which radically diverge from Baumgarten’s ones. If we follow Garroni’s interpretation, together with his application of his Kantian reading to a theory of images, we could say that Kant’s identification of taste with an exemplary form of reflecting judgment implies the existence of a work of imagination which does not correspond to the “objective schematism” of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. According to this form of schematism, which is directly bound to cognitive purposes, perception could be reduced to the recognition of the object perceived. It is objective in the sense that the sensible presence of the object is fully absorbed by the intellectual representation of the object itself. Consequently, this objective schematism does not consider the subjective rest of perception: namely, the subject’s “feeling”, i.e. the individual attunement in accordance to this very sensible apprehension. As we know, Kant is especially concerned with distinguishing this feeling from the bare sensations of the object, having in mind the establishment of conditions of universalization for this feeling and for aesthetic judgments at large. In that sense, argues Garroni, *aesthetic experience could be regarded as an anticipation of cognition narrowly construed* (see also D’Angelo 2011): Garroni calls this particular work of imagination a “free schematism”¹. As far as the analysis of aesthetic judgments is concerned,

¹ The relationship between the First and the Third Critique in Kant’s philosophy has been largely investigated by Kantian scholars in Italy after the seminal works of Luigi

Kant's terminology is indeed addressed to state the "harmonious play" of the same cognitive faculties (imagination and understanding) which are at work in cognition. By means of their accordance, aesthetic experience foreshadows cognition, though only indirectly and without arguing any objective properties of the objects so considered: to the accordance between the faculties, in fact, corresponds the overall accordance to the object perceived as epitome of a more general accordance with nature as a whole available to our knowledge.

According to the abovementioned Kantian framework, the import of a theory of resonance to aesthetics would be that of unveiling also the uncanny side of this sentimental mood of experience. This might result not only in the *positive attunement* of perception and cognition to the objects of experience itself, but also in the *negative mood of bewilderment*, as happens for instance when we are able to apply only a partial recognition of an object, or no recognition at all, to our perception. We hear steps from somewhere not too far from the place where we are, but still produced by somebody who is invisible to our eyes. Or rather, we guess who she or he could be, and we know that she or he has bad intentions against us. We only perceive that she or he is approaching us. We start feeling a sensation of fright: our mind is full of all sorts of thoughts concerning whoever she or he could be, but none of them gives us a proper representation of the event in course; panic rises. Resonance offers good examples of this situation in perception. As we shall see, Kant's theory of the sublime might be considered as an analysis of such a bewilderment – although Kant limits his investigation of the sublime to nature, whilst, as I will argue, it might have a larger application.

1.2. *Resonance: between perception and creativity*

Resonance, however, is not relevant only to a reformulation of the theory of the feeling embedded within the aesthetic judgment. It might be relevant also to more immediately creative fields. I do not speak of art, at least not directly, because, as we shall see, the notion of *medium* is more appropriate than that of art to describe this situation. From a material

Scaravelli: cfr. Marcucci (1988-1990) and La Rocca (2003), among others. The two latter claim however for some differences from Garroni in the interpretation of this "free schematism". The connection of aesthetics and cognition in Kant recently raised the interest of many American scholars: cfr. Kukla (2006) and Palmer (2011).

point of view, in fact, the perception of resonance implies the experience of *touching* or being *touched* by an object. Resonance is, in that sense, the correlative of *echo*: the latter implies the perception of something we already know, e.g. our voice howling, by means of something else, e.g. an open valley before us, which mediates that perception. Likewise, resonance opens a way to our perception into the invisible parts of the object perceived: it is what happens, for instance, when something, which is void inside, resonates after being touched with a stick or a hammer – to use Nietzsche’s famous metaphor. In music, it is also the experience we have of the diapason when we tune an instrument. In all of these cases, the resonating object works as the “elemental medium” (Peters 2015) of our experience: we experience at the same time the object perceived and something being *simultaneously with and beyond* that very object.

I use however the concept of “elemental media” in a different way than John Durham Peters. He is concerned with reconstructing a theory of media starting from natural elements, whilst I focus on the *mediation* emerging in the course of the interaction with natural objects. This is not, first of all, a rational or intellectual mediation, being rather a form of *sensible mediation* preceding any rational or intellectual understanding of reality – but not excluding the passage to such an understanding (Grusin 2015; Montani 2014). This sensible mediation could be also regarded as a way of deconstructing the notion of expression and reconstructing it according to critical criteria, in the acceptance of a critical philosophy establishing the *a priori* conditions of experience. Medium, rather than art, is, in that sense, a more appropriate notion to describe the way artification happens in the abovementioned cases. In fact, we do not witness here the passage from beauty perceived in nature to beauty intentionally created by human beings. We rather discover the emergence of a mediation, that is, a form which is *immanent in the object and transcends it at the same time*; we also discover how far this mediation depends on *devices* broadly construed, which are *available to artificial manipulation*.

Consequently, an aesthetic theory of resonance lies beyond the opposition between aesthetics, meant as philosophy of perception, and the philosophy of art. It is primarily concerned with perception, but shows that this is intrinsically susceptible to its artificial reorganization. As soon as this artificial reorganization becomes explicit, it opens the path to a process of concrete artification of perception. This process, however, does not bring first of all to the creation of works of art. It rather leads to

build “artificial habitats”² within which human perception can be reorganized and even refreshed – in the sense, for instance, of Brecht’s theory of the “estrangement effect” (*Verfremdungseffekt*) in drama or Shlovsky’s theory of “defamiliarization” (*ostranenie*) in literature. What is most important to my argument is that, before and for the appearance of the work of art narrowly construed, we need to think of the existence of an artificial habitat, which makes the experience of this or that work of art consistent with our perception. This habitat stands in-between ‘nature’ (perception) and ‘culture’ (art). In the following paragraph, I will consider two thinkers – namely, the abovementioned Rudolf Arnheim and Friedrich Kittler – who will help us see how far a theory of resonance might describe the mediation at work in the passage from bare perception to its artistic, or broadly speaking cultural, elaboration. In particular, Arnheim will help us focus on the *material constituency of this mediation*, whilst Kittler is especially concerned with its different cultural uses – which, as I will argue, must be considered as *metaphors*.

2. Resonance as Aesthetic Effect

2.1. Arnheim on the Resonant Radio

Rudolf Arnheim is one of the scholars who mostly influenced aesthetics during the 20th century and probably the most important representative of *Gestaltpsychologie* in the field of the theory of art. What we tend sometimes to underrate is his role in the theory of media: most importantly, we underestimate the connections existing between the concept of medium and the understanding of different arts in his works. Noteworthy, he started his career as essayist with two significant books on two media: namely, they are *Film als Kunst* (1932) and *Rundfunk als Hörkunst* (1936). In both books the word “art” is referred to either cinema or radio. In the first case, the assimilation of the filmic medium into art is more evident and quicker, and has been largely confirmed by the history

² Wolfgang Iser (2013) coins the concept of “artificial habitat” (*künstliches Habitat*) to reconsider works of art as anthropological variants of experience. My use extends this concept to perception in a way which is consistent with Iser’s original commitment to the development of a theory of the aesthetic response (cfr. Iser 1978).

of this art/medium. In the second case, however, the identification of radio with a form of art is not as evident as for the former medium. At any rate, interestingly, Arnheim seems to construct his method of analyzing and theorizing “art” according to a principle of correlation, if not pure reversibility, between these two notions, that is art and medium: an art is art as far as it displays a media device, by the means of which it is able to share its communicative and expressive values; conversely, a medium appears as a medium, and can be analyzed, as far as its artistic use is experimented, developed and exploited, that is, shared with an audience.

As we shall see, the role of audience is fundamental to understand Arnheim’s insight into art, especially radio, which is notably called “art of listening” – the English translation of the subtitle of his book as “Art of Sound” is not literal. I cannot enter into the complex questions of either how the relationship between art and medium is established in Arnheim’s theory, or whether this relationship applies to his further works on art and perception. I can present my argument only as a hypothesis concerning the fact that his aesthetics is intelligible not according to the dual relation between art and perception, but rather according to the triad relationship among art, perception *and* media. In other words, art supplies the audience with a technologically mediated perception, as much as perception fosters an artistic use of media. In the former case, let us think of the widely recognized requirement of informal skills to watch a movie – Walter Benjamin, for instance, talks about this aspect of the filmic experience in depth in his *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. In the latter case, I assume that it is the reception of the audience that enhances, and sometimes even demands, the search for a more refined and creative use of a certain medium – which I assume to be an artistic use of it. Of course, it is not an actual audience who formulates this demand in most of the cases; it is rather the claim for the potential consensus of a virtual audience to the creative uses of a certain medium to be at stake here. It is Kant’s way of establishing *sensus communis* as the regulative principle of taste: it is not the effective exercise of commonsense according to the actual standards established within a certain community of people, but the claim for the possible universalization of our judgments. But, if we look at the aesthetic theory of the 20th century, this principle is assumed by the theory of reception too: let us think only of the way Hans Robert Jauss (1967) reconstructs the constitution of *Madame Bovary*’s audience at the moment of its publication.

The triangulation among art, perception and medium deserves a special and peculiar attention in Arnheim’s essay on radio. This medium, as I

said, is described as an art of listening: in other words, reception is likely to be directly engaged in an artistic work – the word “work” being intended here primarily as an activity, rather than as the final product of this activity. Arnheim famously eulogizes the radio audience’s “blindness”. This statement is often compared with his other famous judgment against the introduction of sound in film. Such statements are usually, and probably too easily, taken as declarations of *poetics*. But I argue that Arnheim is neither stating his own preference nor is trying to establish rules to create movies or radio dramas – which are, by the way, the specific object of his essay on radio. Arnheim is not arguing how work of art – no matter whether movies, radio dramas or other ones – *ought to be created*. If we limit our consideration of his theory of listening radio to this aspect, we fail to understand its meaning: the *aesthetic import* of these statements in favor of arts depending on the use of only one sense is at least as much important as the poetic one. Arnheim describes indeed the way radio *designs auditory perception*; more generally, he seems to argue that every art, or rather every medium-art, *chooses and selects only one sense* – hearing, in the case of radio – *and reconstructs the whole perception of reality around its predominance*. It is in this way that art is able to modify the audience’s world image³ – which is, by the way, the general purpose of both defamiliarization and estrangement.

In the case of radio, the starting point concerns the nature of the auditory experience in relation to the perception of space. On the basis of experiments, Arnheim argues that hearing contributes only very vaguely to the collocation of objects and events within the space. Sight provides the human perception of the space with this quality much better than hearing. According to Arnheim, hearing supplies only the information concerning the approximative distance or proximity of objects and events. Furthermore, we could add to his arguments, all objects, as far as they are objects of an auditory experience, display events: though hearing, we do not perceive objects as such, but objects in action. Arnheim

³ The concept of “world image” should not be confused with that of *Weltanschauung*, nor it should be understood according to Martin Heidegger’s use of the same formulation. I use it in the same way as Garroni (2005) does. He understands it as the continuous and overall organization of the sense data by the subject’s imagination, in order to make sense of the experience the subject endlessly has. In that sense, it is not a set of values or standards embedded by the artist with her or his work of art. It is rather, as far as art experience is concerned, the general, maybe transcendental, principle of reception by the audience: not an actual image, but the claim for the existence of a work of imagination which is immanent to the work’s reception.

finds indeed the exemplary use of radio as art in the radio dramas which were popular when he wrote this essay: the essence of drama, starting with the very etymology of the word, ultimately refers to the dimension of acting.

The impression one draws from the reading of Arnheim's essay is that his focus on radio drama is above all a way of highlighting and enucleating the fundamental traits of the auditory experience, as well as the way an auditory medium like radio can reconfigure this experience. Drama writers for radio should consider the bias of hearing, in order to make it meaningful to the audience's aesthetic experience: for example, they should use sounds to stimulate the imagination of spaces and actions. The "eulogy of blindness" defended by Arnheim should be considered as the result of his experimental remarks upon auditory perception, rather than a stylistic preference. Sounds should be used to suggest the configuration of the space and the dynamics of actions through radio. In this way, however, radio drama should be not only a way of doing art, in particular drama, with radio, but also, and above all, a way of experimenting the auditory agency of this medium – or rather the auditory agency of human perception as this is displayed by radio. The ring of a clock acquires a special value in the radio drama: it signals not only the flow of time, but also the appearance of a new dimension of action to the audience's ears and imagination: for instance, it leads the audience to believe that the actor acting is somewhere, but at the same time somewhere else, where the clock rings, something else is going to happen, or somebody else is going to appear.

To say that radio, aesthetically considered, is an *art of resonance*, we only need to make a step further from Arnheim's theory of radio drama. In fact, radio dramas train the audience to *grasp the spatial relations between things in terms of relationships of resonance*. Even the poverty of the auditory perception of space can be turned into richness for a predominantly auditory aesthetic experience. Hearing does not inform us about the whence of happenings, but rather on their how: it is a circumstance which helps the passage from perception to imagination. In a way, radio dramas create abstract spaces which expand the audience's capability of imagining events and situations, because they compel it to conceive the relationships between things and actors, as well as amid actors, according to their mutual resonance.

2.2. Kittler on Sound as Event

What lacks in Arnheim's reflection upon radio, together with the auditory experience this medium supplies, is probably the development of a theory concerning the elaboration of the interiorization of resonance into the subject's consciousness by her or his imagination: in other words, *the experience of the objects' resonance engenders an inward resonance*. One of the most famous examples of this passage from the purely sensible character of resonance to its imaginary transformation is probably Nietzsche's metaphor used at the beginning of the *Twilight of the Idols*: the idols of modernity are statues to be touched with a "hammer" – or it is rather a diapason, as suggests W.J.T. Mitchell (2011) – in order to discover the inner void, which is but a projection of the modern consciousness' condition.

This condition seems to be particularly investigated by Friedrich Kittler in his book *Das Nahen der Götter vorbereiten* (2011), in which the German media theorist analyzes the revolution in the use of the "sound" after Wagner's reformation of music opera and his theory and practice of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Kittler shows how a series of novelties and devices introduced by Wagner – such as the so-called *mystisches Abrgrund*, together with the darkness in the music hall during the performance – have a twofold function: on the one hand, Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* changes our ideas and the very experience of what a work of art is; on the other hand, it foreshadows the birth of cinema. The former insight is above all aesthetic, whilst the latter concerns a discipline, the archaeology of media, of which Kittler is considered one of the forefathers.

I am, of course, more interested here in the aesthetic implications of his discourse; the two perspectives – aesthetics and archaeology of media – are however intertwined. Let us take the analysis he makes of a famous passage of Wagner's *Walküre*. The composer replaces the actual presence of women riding horses with the martial effect of music, enhanced by the use on stage of magic lanterns which trigger the sensation of the real, though ghostly, presence of the Nordic amazons. Most evidently, Wagner anticipates here several aspects of the filmic vision, especially if we think of the traditional experience we have of movies in cinema halls: darkness in the hall, projection of illusionary motion pictures on a screen, montage of images and sounds, all these elements combined together enhance the sensation of witnessing a real action on stage. At the very beginning of the essay, however, Kittler introduces the analysis of Wagner's revolution in the world of music, and of the arts broadly construed,

giving also an aesthetic interpretation of it. Kittler argues that, before Wagner, the approach of “art” to sensibility, to use, he says, an “old word”, “symbolic”: in other words, the sensible matter of the work of art has to present its ideal content; nonetheless, some bias forbids their perfect fusion one with the other. As far as music is concerned, for instance, music alone, that is, sound as the predominant factor of drama, is unable to represent action: singers must pass from aria, which condensates their characters’ feelings and designs, to recitativo when they need to explain the development of action. So it is, at least before Wagner’s reformation of music opera, known as *Gesamtkunstwerk*. In this latter, as we have seen above with regard to the *Walküre*, *sound and images become the real actor on stage* because sounds and images, not the acting singers, perform the development of action: sounds and images ride indeed on stage, instead of women acting the role of the Valkyries. And, as far as action is concerned, the function of sounds is out of doubt predominant on that of images: for sound, by its very essence, provides the audience’s sensibility with the sensation of movement.

The ultimate step in the revolution of sound starting with Wagner is represented by a rock band, Pink Floyd. In fact, they make use of synthesizers, which become a fundamental element of their musical performances: they are not used for purely practical or aesthetic reasons, they are an essential part of the experience made available to the audience. Arguably, they serve to build “media environments” (see Montani, Cecchi, Feyles 2018) especially designed for live events, and then “remediated” (Bolter, Grusin 1999) into a series of other experiences (Cecchi 2017). Or, to put it in another way, they open the access to a certain “atmosphere” (Griffero 2016), which lies beyond the difference between natural and artificial: as for its constituency, it is independent from our manipulation, but is displayed by means of technological devices. To the purpose of the present paper, the most important aspect is that *resonance now happens inside the medium*: this latter loses the reference to something outside itself; resonance takes place inside it. The artistic experience, that is, the use of sound, is meant to experiment with the auditory agency of the different media, that is, their power of resonance.

The last statement brings us to a paradox of resonance meant as media-oriented aesthetic experience. According to Kittler, Wagner is likely to have launched a new form of non-symbolic art, in which the ideal content of the work of art corresponds to its sensible resonance. In other words, the internalized dimension of resonance necessarily reappears by means of a new “aesthetic device” (Carmagnola 2015; Cecchi 2015). In that

sense, Wagner seems to realize Nietzsche's wish of testing the idols of the modern consciousness. But, *contra* Nietzsche, the sound used by Wagner in his *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as well as that produced by synthesizers during the Pink Floyd's live concerts, keeps a certain degree of *ambiguity*: it refers to transcendence, e.g. the Nordic goddesses evoked by means of music and magic lanterns and, at the same time, cuts every reference to the reality around the medium – on the contrary, the radio dramas described by Arnheim still kept the assumption of a certain realism⁴. In other words, the interplay between inward and outward resonance does not dissipate the illusionary moment of representation, but rather enhances it.

3. *Resonance as Sublime*

Kittler shows how far media, or works of art that have become predominantly medial, offer an auditory experience in which resonance has become pivotal. But the resonance so described presents a problematic aspect, which I defined in terms of a certain ambiguity. In other words, considering Wagner and Pink Floyd, Kittler turns the experience of resonance back to a Romantic mood. Arnheim believed that the focus on a single sensory medium, hearing in this case, could promote a modern, somewhat Brechtian, approach to realism: for realism is not the exact reproduction of every aspect of reality, but its representation by means of special aspects of reality. Another modernist theorist of media and film maker, Sergei Eisenstein (2020), would speak of the metaphorical import of the audiovisual media. At the opposite side, Kittler argues that the audiovisual media inaugurates an age in which reality and illusion are confused. Of course, his statement concerns above all the way in which audiovisual media, as well as their musical forerunner, Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, deal with the representation not of everyday life, but of epics. The word he uses, "symbolic", is perhaps poorly chosen: he should rather speak of the *impossibility of allegory*. In other words, what is impossible in the age of the medialization of resonance is the allegorical mediation of transcendence, which can only reappear in illusionary, mythological and ultimately fake ways. Consequently, the sensory turn of media might result into a Romantic claim for the "transcendental" power of the symbolic hypotyposis. The notion of symbolic hypotyposis derives

⁴ For Kittler's interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy, cfr. Kittler (2014).

from Kant's third Critique, namely from § 59. However, I consider here a formulation, which is not exactly that of Kant, according to which symbols are really able to transfer experience beyond its sensible boundaries. Today, this regressive drift is represented by the spread of short-lived myths with sometimes millions of followers on Instagram, or the abuse of playlists for creating *ad hoc* atmospheres – even when we are just walking or travelling.

Is any therapy available to this sort of Romantic regression of everyday experience, as far as this is reshaped by the use of media⁵? As a conclusion, I only sketch a hypothesis upon this last point: namely, we have to assume the *sublime transformation of resonance*. The sublime can be indeed assumed as a line of resistance against any metaphysical drift of our media experience. For the very fact of being openly engaged not with the real substance of nature, but only with the subject's own representation, the Kantian sublime affirms, for instance, the difference between moral elevation and fanatic exaltation – or “enthusiasm”, as Kant would call it following Shaftesbury's use of the word. Reporting this distinction to our age, let us only think of the possible application of such a distinction with regard to phenomena like fake news, trolling and, broadly speaking, the whole world of the post-truth conveyed through the web. The sublime could be taken as a standard and a touchstone to orient oneself amid forms of sentimentally driven political engagement, which is still able to distinguish true facts from bullshits, and bare fanatic belonging to an ideology or a movement.

During the second half of 20th century, this enlarged approach to the sublime, which comprehends ethics and politics beside aesthetics, has been proposed by Jean-François Lyotard's (1994; 2009). After his interpretation of the Kantian sublime, it is now clear that this does not deal with making visible the invisible – which would still be an allegedly metaphysical approach. More precisely, the sublime is the experience of imagination representing the unrepresentability of what transcends the senses – representation being intended as the Kantian *Darstellung*, rather than the *Vorstellung*. In other words, the subject's grasp of reality is not limited to its inward representation: this requires an effective interaction, which makes the experience of the object not fully reducible to an image. The sublime can be therefore considered as the unavoidable remnant of experience at large, rather than the “appendage” of the aesthetic power of judgment. In that sense, argues Lyotard, it deals with the “presence”

⁵ For the notion of “everyday aesthetics”, cfr. Matteucci (2015).

of the object in a peculiar way, divergent but not isolated from the ordinary or the scientific *representation* of reality.

The purpose of the sublime, so to speak, is not the crossing of the sensible boundaries of imagination, as could be argued in the case of Romantic theories: it is rather the *acceptation of its collapse*, in order to realize a *creative detour in the circulation of information and communication*. In other words, the situation of mediation of reality through media (Grusin 2015), which often creates confusion in information, can be analyzed and eventually elaborated with the sublime. To use Lyotard's words, it is a matter of turning the original "distortion" of imagination, face to the representation of reality as a whole, into a "vibration" of the ideal stances that go through our grasp of reality. Lyotard seems indeed to be suspicious about the possibility that media engender the conditions for such a situation. Yet, his account of the sublime applies quite well to the contemporary practice of the audiovisual media, in which the 'scratch' effect is frequently used to add a sensation of creativity, or just of being live, to the auditory experience. It is, of course, not an allegory of anything transcending the actual experience of the sense; nor is it, however, the mere condensation of an epic into live events. It can be only grasped as an elusive evocation – which is one way of understanding the sublime.

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