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DIMENSIONS OF THE THIRD. ON THE ENTANGLEMENT BETWEEN LANDSCAPE, BODY AND ATMOSPHERE

1. Preliminaries

The dimensions of the third are those dimensions that were excluded in the dichotomous thinking of the great lines of occidental thought. They are situated between and alongside the understanding of the world split into subject and object, and they grasp the excluded knowledge that cannot be categorized and yet mean more than the clear and distinct (*clare et distincte*) thinking summarized in the scholastic terminology of modern scientific rationality. The idea that the totality of facts is the mere composition of innumerable units, which can be clearly delimited and distinguished from the others, can only be accepted through the loss of knowledge and relationship to the world. This loss is related to what Max Weber called the 'disenchantment' of the world, «that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation» (Weber 1948, 139) and which, alongside others, Marshall Sahlins (2022) tried to recuperate in his last publication *The new science of the enchanted universe – An anthropology of most of humanity*.

The third can be understood as either a personal third party that interposes itself between two related individuals, as an object that two opposite instances claim for themselves, or as a medium that connects two poles (Fischer 2013). Neither the I nor the You are conceivable without a third instance, without a third appearance, be it physical or psychological, or solely in language, which is maybe one of the most significant dimensions of the third. The third is not only of central importance in the theory of society (Simmel 1968) and in the political theory (Esposito 2012) and interwoven with it but it is effectively given in all vital relationships and is fundamental to becoming as such. The third is neither the one nor the other; it can be both and yet is never simply the combination of both, as the dialectical movement only

apparently suggests. Thesis and antithesis, proposition and opposition are uplifted and sublated in a third that unites both sides and yet appears on a different level through a 'more' and cannot be traced back to the opposition without losing this additional again. The third is not a combination or mixture of two opposing entities but something else. It is a third in the sense that it asserts its very own ontological consistency, which is, however, not comparable with the consistency and insistence of one or the other. The «more is not simply the nexus of the elements, but an other, mediated through this nexus and yet divided from it» (Adorno 2002, 79). Hegel's dialectic, but even before that, the Cartesian opposition of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, can only be thought and justified in their connection, and this is always marked by a third.

The dichotomous dimension, the differentiation and the relationship between two more or less clearly demarcated units determine the majority of past and present classifications down to the deepest meanders of perception and imagination. Man and woman, in function and broken up by the child, by the rival or previously by a third andro-gyn gender that is neither one nor the other, are mere fiction in their rigid positions determined by culture. Humans themselves are also defined since the most ancestral mythological thinking as the third between the animal and the divine, between animal and God, between the being which is completely immersed in immanence and obeying so-called instinct and the being spread out in transcendence, completely spiritualised. This sharp distinction, the reason for the specific difference between humans and animals, is increasingly being questioned today. However, not because one is equal to the other, because man is an animal and all animals are in themselves human, but because neither the one nor the other can be understood as a self-contained unit, but always open in interaction to a third, be it the earth as the common ground or simply life itself in its unclassifiable diversity. The third, understood simultaneously as the moment of differentiation and unification, is nothing more and nothing less than the moment of critique. It is, in essence, the moment that makes the opposites appear in their position, that places them in their specific location and, at the same time, destabilizes this location, which can only be fictitious, a provisional one, always anew. Understood as the separating and the connecting at the same time, as a moment of

criticism and reconciliation in incessant alternation, it is embedded in becoming itself. The instances or elements of the third are directed against stagnation and persistence and are thus the active factors of life.

Two recent examples which emphasise the third as an inescapable dimension appear in the short text *The third table*, written by Graham Harman and in the *Manifesto of the third landscape* by Gilles Clément. Harman, for example, describes the third table as what should/could be identified as the 'real' between the table that is generally defined by culture, the table, which is an object of daily use and the purely physical table, defined by physics. «By locating the third table (and to repeat, this is the only real table) in a space between the 'table' as particles and the 'table' in its effects on humans, we have apparently found the table that can be verified in no way at all, whether by science or by tangible effects in the human sphere» (Harman 2012, 11-12). His excursion, which is related to the so-called *object-oriented-ontology*, is basically the admission and the comprehension that the reality postulated by cultural science on the one hand and by natural science on the other, in their extreme positions, does not correspond to what the world of objects in incessant relation with the subjects is; that the separation between object and subject must not simply be abolished, but that the objects themselves should be understood as subjects and vice versa. This realization is not a renewed science of determination and exclusion but an attempt to grasp the world in its overall experience with an implicit reference to the disenchantment of the world by the sciences and, above all, to find an erotic (sensible), not rationalistic, approach to it. «The world is filled primarily not with electrons or human praxis, but with ghostly objects withdrawing from all human and inhuman access, accessible only by allusion and seducing us by means of *allure*» (Harman 2012, 12).

The third landscape evoked by Gilles Clément goes in the same direction. However, it refers directly to our dealings with the realm of the natural, with the appearances that are not given to us, each of which having their own way of being and which must not be deprived of this peculiarity. The third landscape is, on the one hand, a tautology as a term because the landscape itself is the third between culture and nature, but it is also an apt description of what constitutes the landscape itself. Landscapes are open

spaces that constantly manifest their anarchic character through constant change, and landscapes are only landscapes when they can spread out this characteristic in its fullness. The Third Landscape is «placed above (or beyond) the territorial stakes [and] acquires a political dimension» (Clément 2022, 13). It has an «unwritten but proven [planetary] status [and the] maintenance of its existence does not depend on wise people but on a collective consciousness» (Clément 2022, 13). The third landscape is «matrix in the sense of the Platonic *khôra*, which is ‘invisible and amorphous, receptive of everything’, a ‘third kind’ of being» (Bartalini 2019, 7). The third landscape, which is found between the opposites and can be encountered there as a special place (*χώρα*), is neither the place nor the non-place, but the ‘not-yet-place’ in the sense of what has found its way into the conceptual history and the imaginary notion of modernity as utopia.

2. Landscape, body and atmosphere

The three dimensions of the third, the landscape, the body and the atmosphere, form a triad that must be conceived as a fundamental and original connection. They are here understood not only in their aesthetic, ethical and aisthetic (*aisthetisch*) aspect, but foremost as ontological phenomena, groundless reasons, or anarchic elements of existence. The landscape is the ground and origin of world reference and represents the concrete experience of the world in its given materiality, but at the same time, it goes beyond pure objectivity and does not simply represent a territory, a piece of land or a specific framed area (Assunto 1976). Just as the idea of a pure materiality, a passive matter, a pure *res extensa*, is barely tenable, so too is it almost impossible to speak of a simply aesthetic landscape, a landscape given only in the imagination. Landscapes, as dimensions of the third, are the living connections and, therefore, have the same phenomenal content as the body. With the concept of landscape, we are dealing with a supersumption (*Aufhebung*) in the Hegelian sense, not completely denying the dynamics and epistemological value of dualism for the constitution and progress, especially technical-scientific, of Western civilization, but necessarily overcoming it due to the imminent need to include the notion of the third, to establish another form of perception and existence in the face of the polemical and destructive, not to say nihilistic nature of dichotomous ontology (Severino 1972).

The first signs of the dissolution of dichotomous thinking already appeared at the beginning of modernity, but the effective decline of dualistic ontology occurred precisely in the nineteenth century when landscape gained a broad presence in aesthetic consciousness, appearing at the beginning of the twentieth century for the first time explicitly within philosophy (Simmel 1913). Until the early twentieth century, and still to a large extent today, the perception of the world based on the antagonism between two opposing spheres prevailed: between a first Nature (*natura naturans*) and a second Nature (*natura naturata*), which for a long time made it impossible for the concept of landscape to be removed from its isolation in the picturesque or functional, enclosed within the fields of aesthetics, geography, architecture or geopolitics. Only since the imminence of the ontological crisis of Western civilisation in the second half of the twentieth century, after the great humanist and humanitarian failures, has the concept of landscape, and landscape as an event of a multi-sensory experience, as a third between and beyond the dichotomy of culture/nature, become a concept within and outside the area of the humanities that is no longer just aesthetic, but ethical, aisthetic and ontological, and a starting point and a point of return for a renewed inhabitation of the Earth.

The landscape, the body and the atmosphere are the essential dimensions of the third, both in their geophysical and in their aisthetic extension, and together they form the unassailable foundation of earthly existence, the Earth itself as the primordial ark (Husserl 1940) that can only be understood in this triad. They are the three spheres in which life itself takes place on Earth, and they describe phenomena of absence and presence at the same time, of visibility and invisibility. They do not fall under the category of attachable objects or objects themselves. They are not objects that can be possessed, as, for example, Giorgio Agamben stresses when he designates the language, the landscape and the body as in-appropriable (Agamben 2015, 82).

The body is what we do not possess. It is that which, according to Nietzsche, stands behind all things and events without us being able to master it and yet it controls us completely (Nietzsche 2006, 23). We can pay all our attention to the body, as in conventional medicine, and yet forget or simply disregard its necessity and needs. The body is the dimension that binds us to the Earth and the Earth, as the intangible ground of all existence,

can never be grasped. The Earth is always there, even if we, as humans, do not recognize it in our everyday activities and even think that it does not intervene in the sphere of our actions. We think of the situated, present and material existence and exclude the extensive existence of the Earth. However, the body is something like the sound space of an instrument on which we play the cacophony or the melody of our time. It is neither the instrument itself, the physical body, nor the beat with which we beat the sides of the instrument. The body is always there, even when we are no longer there; that is, it is always there with its memory and simultaneously in those who share this memory. The body cannot be divided. It accompanies our day and our night, our delirium in the realm of reality and our reason and clarity in our dreams. What comes forward is the physical body with the desire for thirst and satisfaction. Nevertheless, the memory, or rather the inscription of what we experience here and there, happens in the body. It is the placeless place of stratigraphy, where all events are deposited and which it only releases when it deems necessary. Its richness erupts unexpectedly, as in a magma current, when some moment in a dream or reality provokes it. Nevertheless, we can accompany the body, not in gymnastic exercises but through the unforeseen, every-day, natural inscriptions of our way of life. What counts most here is an unpredictable attention that is, in truth, uncontrollable like the body itself. How we have cared for the body and how it has responded to us, how it has been able to shape our lives together with us is the last of all answers and does not just accumulate at the moment of our last breath. It can be seen in the features of our writing, the children we were able to give and the deeds we left behind. The body is the direct reflection of what the Earth means for all living beings, the unquestionable ground of existence that we can animate and which we can transform into a desert or a place worth living in through our way of life. It is simultaneously existent and non-existent because every body is interchangeable and connected to every other body through its mere phenomenality. Nobody can feel or act in the same moment as the other or the others; each body acts in its own time, in its own way, and in its own sphere of endeavour and satisfaction. In every body, however, all possible forms of impression and expression are given, even if some kind of incapacity has displaced them; even he who does not hear because his ear is no longer capable of hearing, hears; even those who do

not love because their heart is no longer capable of it, love. This is the inescapable presence of the body, which, however, does not lend itself to any complaint or guilt. The body that as a body can give must give; the body that as a body was prevented from giving may receive. This is the ethics of the Earth, which is realized in the body.

The concept of the 'atmosphere' (Schmitz 2014; Böhme 2013) and previously the concept of 'disposition' or 'mood' (Carus 1831; Simmel 1913) and 'aura' (Benjamin 1963) gain their significance in a theoretical and philosophical discourse, given the progressive change and destruction of the natural environment. At the same time, their use occurs through an extension and translation of the experience of the sublime from the sphere of the natural in its manifold manifestations into the seemingly opposite sphere of the cultural, of artificial phenomena and appearances. Thus, for example, the idea of the sublime and the emphasis on sublime moods and atmospheres shifts from Kant's observation of nature in the eighteenth century to the significance of the sublime in culture, be it architectural buildings, technical inventions or simply complete human actions and events such as the great wars of the twentieth century, as, for example in Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel*, where the war appears as a natural force (Jünger 1920). The concepts of atmosphere, mood, aura and also the concept of 'ecology' and 'environment' were gaining importance and attention at the same time, and already at the beginning of the twentieth century, these areas merged in the demands of the emerging nature conservation movements (Klages 2013), which were already pointing to extensive destruction of the planetary biosphere that was radically hindering the human way of life and the survival of all living beings. Atmospheres and dispositions are phenomena that spread through space and lend it a specific character, which at the same time is always transient and changeable. They can simply be present and emerge from nature, be natural and cultural, or be created entirely and used as instruments for the design and construction of a particular object or space (in architecture, landscaping, design) or a particular society (in politics).

Like all other living beings, to some extent, humans always experience and produce atmospheres and dispositions that can only be perceived through our sensitive and bodily presence, not only physically but also living in inhabiting and traversing spaces,

environments and landscapes. They are phenomena of interstices that are neither objects nor subjects but emanations, preconditions for the appearance of objects and subjects and thus specific manifestations of the third. Atmospheres are the absent presences that emerge between subject and object, and they are essential for the constitution of communicative connections between the most diverse phenomena; they are events (*Ereignisse*) that make the mind vibrate, that tune the soul itself, that transmit a certain sound to it. Atmospheres are thus the primary conditions for the coming together of what is separated and what is merged and, therefore, like the entire atmosphere of our planet, the precondition for life in all its diversity. Based on this, the destruction of the planetary atmosphere must be understood as a reflection or even a consequence of a disgruntlement of humans with themselves, whereby the destruction of the atmospheric qualities in the economy of human feelings directly affects the whole planetary atmosphere. The destruction of human pathos must be seen as a contagious apathy that perforates the planetary atmosphere and the inner and outer spheres of the human and non-human in the world.

3. The Politics of the Sensible

To resume this panoramic view on the entanglement between landscape, body and atmosphere, it is now necessary to look towards the political consequences of such a reconsideration of the third dimension of our vital relation with Earth. If, after all this, we want to speak of the third as in the previous meaning and understand it as a separate but unavoidable something, with its specific coexistence but beyond the general materiality, then the discourse inevitably falls into a more or less unreal, but here more than this, utopian dimension. However, humans themselves are utopian in the sense that they are always in a different place than the one in which they supposedly find themselves. Humans are nomadic beings, always moving from one place to another, even if they remain in a certain place; they are beings that are thrown into the world and design themselves as projectile, un-insightful in the telos of their presence. The obsession for a telos interwoven with the mania of endless progress, a contradiction in itself, is the most serious problem of our time. Utopia would be the unity of the three times in the here and now without mutual negation. Humans, foremost those connected to the dichotomic ontology of

subject and object, are obsessed with their destiny in the delusion of having a task, a *τέλος*, and it would therefore be necessary for humans to devote themselves completely to the 'not-yet-place' without denying the place in which their existence unfolds.

In the storm of the present, the *Politics of the Sensible* is a utopian gesture, the reference to a place that does not yet exist, understood as a not-yet-place or as a place that simultaneously is and is not, as a third place, not simply in the stream of time, as if it were only in the future, but rather the three times in one: past, present and future at the same time. The *Politics of the Sensible* goes to the inner essence of politics and designates it as an intangible place or dimension, as an extended point of departure, as an unoccupiable and unattachable space, as an unfixable moment of 'critique', of incessant difference and incessant justice. It is a politics that places the landscape, the body and the atmospheres at the centre of attention and reveals this approach for a politics of the third. It is not a politics with and for art, for aesthetics, but a politics of *αἴσθησις*, of the meaning (*Sinn*) and the senses (*Sinne*) and a real emancipation of the senses (Marx 2009). It is an emancipation which does not ignore any esthetical consideration or re-creation of the world, which does not de-consider the development of the senses due to the cultural process that have led humans to their current point of sensibility in the most positive understanding. However, it does not repeat the abysses of civilization that channel the senses and sensibility into the stream of a certain economic ideology. The emancipation of the senses is a movement that takes up again what Walter Benjamin mentioned in his critique of historicism (Benjamin 1965). It is the task of the *Politics of the Sensible* to recover what has fallen under the ruins of history, under the pharaonic construction of our civilization, in order to signify and develop the body's own innate and learned sensibility.

There is, and not only since the most recent ontological turn in anthropology, an intimate relationship and interdependence between ontology and politics, recognizing that ontologies are, in their essence, politics, that is, ways of explaining and responding to a certain notion of the world, forms of orientation and ways of individual and collective existence and of responding to a certain temporal and historical interval, such as, for example, Platonic ontology, Cartesian ontology and Spinozist ontology.

It is possible to say that we still live to a large extent under the structure and order of Cartesian ontology and methodology, which in itself is nothing less than a political response or a mirror of the beginnings of the modern era, of concentration on the individual, of doubt as a method of appropriation, of the distancing and stepping back from the world of objects, of the continuous and growing separation between subject and object, of the creation of an image of the world, of the total objectification of objects and the physical world, of the rise of Capitalism and Protestantism and so on. Nevertheless, if all ontology is political, especially from the point of view of the antagonism between politics and nature, then all ontology is a politics of nature (Latour 1999). Politics is at first a response not only to the relationship between humans, as the Greek word *πόλις* suggests, which means the affairs of those who inhabit the city and live under the laws of the polis, but also a response to what lies outside the walls of the city, which is the total other, that which is non-human and traditionally designated as nature, as the realm of the natural. This antagonism between politics and nature, which has marked much of the history of politics until the present day, begins to be overcome by the Renaissance and the emergence of aesthetics. With the emergence of aesthetics, or more precisely, the formation of the sensual and sensitive faculty of perceiving the world as something beautiful and no longer just strange and terrifying, the possibility of overcoming the warlike antagonism between the sphere of politics and the sphere of the natural comes through. As long as politics is conceived as something directed against the natural and as long as politics is understood as a technique against human and non-human nature, politics remains a politics of survival and thus destructive politics. However, a politics that no longer corresponds to this antagonism, that is aesthetics in the sense of an *aisthesis*, of an understanding through the senses and the faculty of the senses, is a politics of life, a *Politics of the Sensible*.

One of the most common definitions of nature is nature as the realm of necessity, which is the opposite of the polis, which is generally understood to be the place of possibility and politics as the way of building possibilities. The *Politics of the Sensible* no longer refers to politics understood as a form of human liberation from natural determinants and needs. The virtue of politics, of making liberation possible and establishing recognition, is no

longer only realizable for humans. It will be necessary to liberate all forms of life and, even more so, to overcome the prevailing ontology; it will be necessary to liberate objects so as to free them from the vicious circle they are trapped in through human action. The *Politics of the Sensible* is a politics of feeling, and touches on the fundamental need for the sense of the senses and sense in general. Politics refers to the way of relating to the other and treating the other. However, a politics that does not even include the other and only refers to its own species is nothing more than a solipsistic politics. Authentic politics begins with the inclusion of the total other in the discourse of liberation and does not simply refer to individual and solipsistic liberation, that is to say, directed only at the all too human. This is why a politics that is also and primarily concerned with the total other is a school (*σχολή*), the free time for sensibility and sensitiveness. Justice and freedom thus necessarily refer to the in-appropriable of every living being, which is its own life, where the sensible emerges as a supreme possibility of understanding the total other.

In the ordinary and ideologically prevailing understanding, the natural sciences establish and base general knowledge about the natural as something determined and appropriable, as intelligible and manipulable matter, while the authentic essence of the natural is constantly withdrawn from any appropriation. Humans may manipulate, analyse and dissect nature, but in its essence, nature remains in-conceivable and in-appropriable (Hadot 2004). This is about the natural as the foundation without foundation or the irrational reason for all forms of life and existence itself, to show that the living body, the landscape and the atmospheres present themselves as representations of absence, as representations of this groundless foundation. The living body, which is situated between the notion of the physical body and the notion of the spirit or what is called thought, of the *res extensa* and the *res cogitans*, in Descartes' words, as well as the landscape, which is situated between the natural and the cultural, or in other words between the inconceivable and the conceivable, are designatable as quasi-objects, like the atmospheres (Griffero 2017).

All three appearances of absence present themselves as the third and as representations of the in-appropriable and, thus, as anarchic origins of life. For this reason, due to its anarchic and in-appropriable characteristics, the *Politics of the Sensible* does not

correspond to the field of biopolitics, which analyses and criticizes the historical and current process of manipulation and domination of the physical body of living beings, especially human and non-human animals. The *Politics of the Sensible* develop from the inappropriability of the sensible within the politics of the living body, landscape and atmosphere, from the notion that the original antagonism between nature and politics, between the state of necessity and the state of possibility, is overcome in the assumption of *aisthesis*. The *Politics of the Sensible* are not based on art, which is only one of its expressions and tools. It is foremost a politics of the senses, although not so much of the 'affections', interpreting affections here as the impulsive waves of living bodies. They are not just based on an economy of the senses, but first on the teaching, initiation and training of the senses with respect, sympathy and the constant balance with all other forms of human and non-human life.

The *Politics of the Sensible* are launched at a time when the senseless and the in-sensible are advancing due to an anguished closure of the senses in the face of the accelerated degradation and destruction of the human and non-human habitat on Earth. They also take place at a time when, since the beginning of the modern age and our conception of the world as an image in the Renaissance, the preference for the visual sense has been almost total and masks all the other senses, thus above all the multi-sensitivity of life. Therefore, this politics includes not some archaic return to a corporal and natural experience but a broad critique of technique and technical images; this means our construction of the world and reality through the most variable technical devices. It assumes that in the current and future global state, ecological issues and demands represent the core of all possible projections – all of them more or less technical – for a multiform and abundant life on Earth. In this sense, we must think of *Cosmopolitanism* not only as restricted to the human species but also to all living beings that are part of the intrinsic order of the planetary sphere.

Ecology, for its part, does not resolve itself into the sustainability of a current policy aimed solely at enduring the progressive interests of the capitalist economic system, which is based on the continuous and exponential exploitation of the natural world. Nor is it a mere science that can be summarized as advising the economy and anthropocentric politics, with all its

technological and scientific framework, in order to survive in the catastrophic panorama of ecosystems. Instead, ecology would necessarily be the realisation and expression of the *Politics of the Sensible*, where the sensible is understood here as everything that cannot be appropriated, that cannot be objectified or dissected, but that represents, above all for itself, in its in-appropriable integrity, life. The *Politics of the Sensible* encompasses the living body, the landscape and the atmospheres and, therefore, in a broader sense, the possibility and necessity of affectivity, of 'resonance', of disposition and po-ethical responsibility in an anesthetic and a-pathetic time and in the face of the degradation of life and life-forms on Earth. A *Politics of the Sensible* would thus be in line with sustaining sensitivity and affectivity towards the most diverse languages, that is, specific and inappropriate expressions of the multiple forms of life, in order to make possible an authentic non-anthropocentric cosmo-politics, capable of piercing the brutalized and violent politics present among human beings. Listening and responding to different languages seems to be one of the essential virtues of *Cosmopolitanism*. To do so, it will be necessary to include in the great planetary conversation those languages that have no voice in the prevailing logic of current politics.

Given these problems, how can we think of a non-anthropocentric cosmopolitics beyond the economic system of capitalism? What are the possible expressions of this politics, and how do we include the excluded and recognize them as agents? The concept of landscape necessarily includes the city as the space of politics, understood in the classical sense, which is no longer necessarily applicable to the state of today's metropolises and megalopolises. As sheer agglomerations of masses of people ever more separated and alienated from the outside, from what was understood as landscape or country itself, alienated from an encompassing and thus themselves without an inside, today's cities are no longer a political place in the classical sense. On the other hand, the landscape is still the space of politics, the sphere in which the politics of nature and natural phenomena intersect with the politics of culture. The body is the political centre of all political action. As a mere physical body, it is the object or subject of action; as a living body, it is the essence of politics, just within itself, and inaccessible to power, which in its essence is never political. The body traverses and affects all three dimensions. The

body traverses itself, traverses the landscape and the atmosphere and is constantly traversed by the atmosphere. The politics that situate themselves in the body and move through the landscapes, recognizing a necessary connection to the world in the sensual experience of the atmospheres, are not solipsistic politics, which in itself would be a contradiction. Nor are they agonistic politics, which, influenced by Carl Schmitt (1932), can only assert themselves in the negation of the other, even if consensus is ideally on the horizon, but which define the enemy as constitutive of the society and, however tolerant, mean violence as the starting point of politics.

The *Politics of the Sensible* is fundamentally anarchic; this means it is a politics that abandons what is one's own (the proper), which is part of the other (property) and never appropriates without being appropriated at the same time in order to practice the sharing of the sensible in the private and the public space (Rancière 2004). These politics are profoundly utopian, emerging from the third and aimed at preserving the third. Distant from a broad explanation, the previous essay has shown which elements of existence are at stake if the dimension of the third is to be caught up for a future *Politics of the Sensible*.

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