

Presentation

by Alice Barale and Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis

The monographic section of this issue of *Materiali di Estetica* is devoted to the topic of negative emotions in art. What motivates us to seek out performances, narratives or depictions of events that in real life might make us suffer or frighten? Aristotle is one of the first philosophers to ask this question: in his "Poetics" he observes that in art images of things that in themselves we view with annoyance turn out to be pleasant. In the eighteenth century this power of art to make even the most painful and negative aspects of life interesting and usable is investigated particularly deeply. Eighteen century scholars reflect on that mixture of pain and pleasure that is called the "sublime" and in general on the ability of artworks to move and arouse weeping and compassion. This eighteenth-century reflection on negative emotions proves to be extremely relevant today, as is shown by the contributions in this issue, which intersect eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories with investigations of the present. The issue collects the talks that were given at the "Conversazioni di Estetica" on "Negative Emotions in Art" held between March and May 2024 at the Fondazione Corrente, along with contributions selected through a call for papers.

The section opens with an essay by Oscar Meo investigating the influence of eighteenth-century reflection on the sublime in the work of the famous painter Johann Heinrich Füssli. In dialogue with Swiss critic Jacob Bodmer, Füssli develops his own original research on the subject, focusing not so much like Bodmer on the religious and moral dimensions of the sublime as on its "dark and disturbing side." Also contributing to this for Füssli is his encounter with the great London theater of the time, with its shadows and its relationship to the sphere of the body and passions. The next essay, by Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis, focuses on the sublime, investigating the connection between eighteenth-century theories and the current experiments that neuroscience has made possible. Indeed, today one can attempt to experimentally stimulate the experience of the sublime, using virtual reality, for example, and measure what happens at the level of our nervous system. To do this, however, it is necessary to investigate what the sublime is, in what declinations one wants to consider it. Thus an increasingly urgent and necessary dialogue is

established between scientific research on the sublime and its philosophical theorizing, which has its origins in the Age of Enlightenment.

However, the sublime is not the only negative emotion with which art deals. Deianira Amico's essay investigates loneliness as it is present in the works of Gustave Courbet and Odilon Redon. Solitude is for Courbet, and later for Redon, first and foremost detachment from the then-forming urban environment, from its physical and mental constraints. The attempt to be alone thus becomes an "essential instrument of philosophical and artistic inquiry." Pain, and in particular the pain of others, is instead the focus of Luca Vanzago's essay, which considers its representation in photographic images. Is it possible, the author asks, to experience the pain of others? Through an analysis that moves between phenomenology and some current investigations of media images, the author will arrive at a positive answer to this question. The experience of the pain of others is, however, Vanzago will explain, far from simple and immediate, but charged with different declinations of meaning and assumptions of responsibility. The role of pain and negative emotions in art is investigated in the essay by Francesca Mesiano, Zaira Cattaneo and Tomaso Vecchi from the perspective of psychology and cognitive science. If you think from the perspective of the individual's adaptation to the environment, emotions are never negative, but always functional to a situation. Negative is not the emotion, "but rather the way it is experienced, regulated and evaluated." In art this capacity for negative experiences can be reworked, "generating pleasure from suffering, beauty from pain." Of course, art is not the only field in which negative emotions can be retraced and reprocessed. Cristina Muccioli's essay, devoted to that fundamental negative emotion that is melancholy, focuses on Bergson's concept of fabulation, as the possibility of stitching together in the image (especially the mythical and religious one) what thought has separated and fragmented.

Pain, or more precisely the destruction of others, is also at the center of Lorenzo Donghi's essay on the thermographic images with which war is increasingly depicted. In these images, bodies appear as blobs of different color depending on their temperature, and are thus emptied of all individuality and capacity to arouse empathy. It is precisely this apparent neutrality, however, if used in a certain way-as happens, for example, in

contemporary cinema, which has begun to make this type of imagery its own—that can become a tool for denouncing and overturning the silent acceptance of horror that these technological images seem to promote. Also dedicated to cinema is Federica Celentano's essay, which focuses on the expression of anguish in expressionist films of the 1920s. Here "the motifs of deformity and laceration" pave the way for a radical "critique of their own historical time."

Another negative emotion, fear, is the focus of Tiziana Canfori's essay, which investigates the connection that music has with this emotion. Of course, music does not "scare" in the proper sense ("and, as a musician, I rejoice in that," comments the author), but it is able, through timbre, to evoke emotions (unease, disquiet, bewilderment, madness...) that are connected to fear. Unlike in the experience of fear, however, the listener does not feel the need to escape, but wants to go through them again and again: it is "a vibration that is prolonged and provides us with a subtle pleasure, a tension to be retraced and rekindled." This possibility that art offers to retrace the encounter with the negative and with absence is also at the center of Federico Mariani's essay on the uncanny in Lyotard. In the latter's criticism to Mikel Dufrenne and his idea of *rêverie*, in fact, the Freudian concept of the uncanny is delineated as that element of "loneliness, silence, obscurity" (to use Freud's words) that characterizes our own encounter with the sensible and with what escapes us from it.

The issue continues with a section devoted to poetry, collecting texts by two important authors, the Italian Federica Schiaffino and the Spanish Clara Janès. The part of the section devoted to the latter is meant to be a tribute to her work and at the same time a remembrance (ten years after her death) of her greatest Italian interpreter, Mariarosa Scaramuzza. Along with some documentation of the exchange between the two scholars (an interview from Mariarosa to Clara and a letter from Clara to Mariarosa), an essay by Janès kindly offered to the journal (*El viaje a la luna, de sueño a realidad*, dedicated precisely to Mariarosa) and some of her poems (*Dido y Eneas* and the poems collected in *Kamasutra tercer paso*) are offered.

The next section of the journal is devoted to Fulvio Papi and collects the texts of two conferences on him given in May 2024 to present "Materiali di Estetica. Numero 10.2. For Fulvio Papi" at the Ghislieri College in Pavia and at the House of Culture in Milan. Contributions by Silvana Borutti, Ferruccio Capelli, Daniele Goldoni, Alessandro Maranesi, Franco Sarcinelli, Marisa Papi, Daniele Papi, Gabriele Scaramuzza and Nicola Vitale are presented here.

The "Special Contributions," on the other hand, deal with reflections on different themes between philosophy, literature, art history and politics. The first contribution by Romano Romani questions the non-naturality of conflict in the human world, against the theories that think of the original state of man as war of all against all. In the same direction goes the contribution by Don Angelo Casati, who in his Dedication of the Milan Cathedral explores the meaning of the cathedral-home as a place of relationship and mutual tenderness. Silvia Vegetti Finzi's contribution takes the reader back into the world of art, reflecting on how the artist Gabriela Spector was able to represent the complex bond ("honey and lemon") between mother and daughter. Also in the field of artistic practice is Romano Romani's essay on sculptor Antonella Zazzera, and her sculptures made of copper wire, in which the material becomes light and as if made of light. Between art - in particular literature - and politics, on the other hand, moves Luca Melchiorre's essay, which questions the meaning and possibility of forgiveness in the face of evil starting with Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower*. Maria Maletta's contribution builds a bridge between contemporary art, mythology and ancient tragedy by considering painter Alberto Savinio's interpretation of the myth of Niobe-turned into stone out of grief for the loss of her beautiful and numerous children.

The "Bookmark" section offers reviews to some recent volumes: *Le vicissitudini del perturbante nell'arte e in psicoanalisi. Felix Vallotton e Francis Bacon*, by Maddalena Muzio Treccani and Mario Rivardo; *Figure dell'identità greca. L'io, l'anima, il corpo, il soggetto*, by Mario Vegetti; *Corpo, spazio, architettura. Fenomenologia dell'esperienza spaziale*, edited by Matteo Vegetti and Fabrizia Bandi. Finally, Giulio Mignani and Gigliola Biavaschi explain the idea of the "Day of Respect for All Spirituality", to be held every year in Liguria in early September.

The issue concludes with a call for papers for the next volume of *Materiali di estetica*, which will be devoted to empathy in music, and a brief remembrance of Eugenio Borgna and Corrado Ferri.