

Gioia Laura Iannilli¹

Towards a reconception of the polarity between aesthetics and economics. Introductory remarks

Abstract

According to the framework of the modern theory of knowledge, after their establishment in the second half of the 18th century as scientific disciplines, aesthetics and economics (and thus the aesthetic and the economic) had to part ways. It was thought that they marked the borderline between useless and useful from a social, ideological, cultural and philosophical-theoretical point of view. In these terms, their relationship has always been polarized into a dichotomy. Such polarity, although long perceived as irreconcilable, today may appear to be fruitful and, as such, deserves to be not only analyzed but also pursued. The peculiarity of this polarity is attested, for example, by the recent series of investigations carried out in various fields making polarity a strength, i.e. a reason for a reconsideration in positive of the relationship between aesthetics and economics. This article aims at understanding what it means to suggest that there could be a reconciliation between them. Does it mean that the aesthetic has laid down its weapons against the economic? Or does it mean that the aesthetic has won over the economic? We will suggest that reconciliation does not necessitate pacification, but it means initiating and keeping alive a dialogue and a confrontation that may entail also sharp contrasts. Reconciliation will be described as something which can mean that two conflicting terms are becoming dialectical polarities within a single overall antinomy, where mutual misrecognition becomes mutual recognition.

Keywords

Aesthetics, Economics, Polarity

1. Why aesthetics and economics?

Aesthetics in recent decades has been subjected to analyses that have shown how its traditionally conceived characters and scope have been

¹ gioialaura.iannilli@gmail.com.

redefined both in an intensional (i.e.: within it as a discipline and set of phenomena with established specificities) and in an extensional sense (i.e.: in terms of its role in the broader system of knowledge, in relation to other disciplines and phenomena in turn characterized in specific ways. See Matteucci 2016). The need to overcome a conception of aesthetics understood exclusively as a philosophy of art or of nature and of the aesthetic as an element corresponding to and qualifying such characteristics is testified by the abundance of sub-disciplines of aesthetics encompassing the most varied themes and problems classically disregarded by aesthetics, as proved by various editorial projects that offer important documentations of that proliferation (such as the *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* and the *International lexicon of aesthetics*).

This article cannot analyze the genesis of each of these sub-disciplines, or the relationships they have with each other and with aesthetics. It is limited to one that has perhaps contributed most to redefining aesthetics and the aesthetic in the sense mentioned above: Everyday Aesthetics. This sub-discipline has been able to establish a dialogue between everyday life and aesthetics (overviews are Leddy 2012, Di Stefano 2017, Iannilli 2019); a dialogue which has not been easy to institutionalize, precisely because it is based on a long process of deflation of the centrality of an art- and nature-centric paradigm of aesthetics. Considerations of this kind lead to a conception of the aesthetic that hinges on its characters of continuity with respect to current reality (in which we recognize kernels which are aesthetic in a pregnant sense) and of interaction (i.e. relationality) as regards its constitutive moments (contrasting with a purely spectatorial conception of aesthetic experience). This conception rejects characteristics usually attributed respectively to the everyday in terms of instrumentality, interest, ordinariness, work, concreteness, and to the aesthetic in terms of contemplation, disinterest, exceptionality, leisure, ideality.

But a similar polarization could be easily discerned in the relationship between economics and aesthetics. One could with good reason think to apply, in the context of an investigation into this relationship, the categories that have been reformulated, for example, within Everyday Aesthetics. However, comparing aesthetics and economics, and therefore the elements pertaining to them, namely the aesthetic and the economic, implies something different from the analysis of the relationship between aesthetics and its sub-disciplines, Everyday Aesthetics included. That is so, because a “science of the everyday”, a

“quotidianology” as such, has not yet been established, yet a multidisciplinary theoretical interest in this field has arisen, with an ever-increasing relevance during the 20th and 21st centuries (mainly from disciplines such as sociology and semiotics). Contrariwise, economics is a scientific discipline with its own defined identity, which dates back exactly to the 18th century like aesthetics and therefore can be defined as its “peer”, if not even as its “twin”.

According to the framework of the modern theory of knowledge, these two disciplines had to part because it was thought that they marked the borderline between useless and useful, as noted for example by Carnevali (2012), from a social, ideological, cultural and philosophical-theoretical point of view. While the various areas and phenomena promoted by the different sub-disciplines, such as the aforementioned everyday (but we could also consider the environment, food, etc.), can all presume to look specifically at aesthetics and therefore to bring about an update from within the aesthetic paradigm, economics is immediately seen as an alternative paradigm to aesthetics and the aesthetic.

In these terms, in order to understand the relationship between aesthetics and what is traditionally “other” from it, one can surely start from the need for a certain change expressed by the above mentioned sub-disciplines. Yet, one cannot think of solving the problem by limiting oneself to a tuning of the categories that are internal to aesthetics. Rather, one must question the very separation between aesthetics and economics, and this means reconsidering – so to speak – the genetic code of the two disciplines and of the phenomena with which they deal. This is possible if we learn to look at and dialogue with something that is beyond aesthetics and/or economics, so as to transform the aesthetic and/or the economic.

These introductory remarks, in the light of this need, aim at problematizing two key factors. First, the fact that analyzing the relationship between aesthetics and economics can involve more or less consolidated lines of research autonomously pursued in their respective fields. In this sense it is interesting to see how they can contribute to outline a shared horizon and react when they come into contact with “hybrid” themes, problems, and phenomena such as those implied by the relationship at issue here. Second, the fact that by addressing exactly that relationship, certain categories typically emerge exclusively

in the form of polarities. Such polarity, although long perceived as dichotomous and irreconcilable, now may appear to be fruitful and, as such, deserves to be not only analyzed but also pursued.

The peculiarity of this polarity is attested, for example, by the series of investigations carried out in various fields making polarity a strength (even by coining emphatic labels), i.e. a reason for a reconsideration in positive, or at least in an open-minded and constructive way, of the relationship between aesthetics and economics².

Among possible examples, pioneering work by Mossetto (1993) titled explicitly “aesthetics and economics” addresses many issues concerning the integration of aspects of economic thinking with aspects typical of aesthetics ranging from creativity to interpretation. More examples are the works on aestheticization by Postrel (2003), focused on style, aesthetic value, commerce and consciousness; Lipovetsky and Serroy (2013), concerning the so-called *capitalisme artiste*; Böhme (2017), who develops the notion of *Ästhetischer Kapitalismus*; research by Saito (2018) on consumer aesthetics; Arsel and Bean (2012) on taste regimes and market-mediated practices (see also the interdisciplinary volume Arsel, Bean 2018); Cometti (2015) on a new conception of the notion of aura in the light of the current relationship that exists between art, liberal globalization, fashion, luxury and globalized capitalism; the works on creativity by Menger (2014) and Reckwitz (2017); Carnevali (2012) on social aesthetics as a theory of social immaterialism; Naukkarinen (2012) on artification as a phenomenon of artistic-aesthetic implementation of public and private businesses and services³, academic institutions, etc.; Entwistle (2009) on the aesthetic economy of fashion; Newbery, Farnham (2013) on experience design;

² This was the aim of the call for papers of this issue of “Studi di estetica”, which suggested as its areas of interest the role of aesthetics in economic theory; organizational aesthetics as a perspective for management theory; marketing and aesthetic ephemerality; forecasting, cool-hunting and influencing as new paradigms for the production of economic and aesthetic value; the aesthetic root of sustainable production and consumption; conservation and consumption of beauty: differences and interactions between economic and aesthetic value; commodification and experience design between annihilation and promotion of aesthetic value; art and cultural economics; forms and practices of creativity; globalization and branding as configuration principles of taste standards; the economy of lifestyles: between artificiality, mimesis and spontaneity, etc.

³ For the literature produced in the field of leadership, organizational studies and management and marketing of art and culture, see the contributions by Biehl-Mislat and Strati in this issue of “Studi di estetica”.

Pine II and Gilmore (1999, 2011) on experience economy; Schmitt (1999) on experiential marketing; and Julier (2017) on the central role of design in contemporary capitalism.

The following quotation from Julier's book is particularly emblematic as it summarizes, by interestingly linking design to aesthetics, a difficult relationship that seemingly cannot be "worked out":

Economics and design have never been particularly good bedfellows. One suggests certainties and statistics or, at least, attempts to get a clear understanding of what is going on in the big picture of world events or the smaller one of firms and individuals. The other proposes sensations and aesthetics, opening up myriad ways of doing things, of living, of functioning *in* the world. One tries to demonstrate the knowable, the other is constantly pushing towards the unknowable. Putting these together creates a seemingly impossible nexus. (Julier 2017: 2)

The emphasis on the only seeming impossibility to bring together aesthetics as a dimension of "possibility" and "doing", and economics as a dimension of "certainties" and "knowing", is also corroborated by what the contributions included in this issue of "Studi di estetica" offer.

The main feature of these contributions is their treatment of significant aspects to the issues that in general are also taken into account in the works mentioned above, showing how polarities that traditionally characterize the relationship between aesthetics and economics can, with a greater or lesser degree of criticality, at least find spaces for dialogue. They therefore show how a relationship that has been historically destined not so much for conflict but rather for the mutual non-recognition of the elements that mark it out has increasingly expressly configured itself as a relationship of mutual recognition. They do so, moreover, from a specifically philosophical-aesthetic point of view, testifying almost exhaustively to the presence of theoretical families, or lines of research, that have characterized and still characterize the Western speculative tradition.

2. More than a collection of topics

Different orientations to systematizing contributions to a project such as the one put forward here are possible. In this case, the preferred orientation follows mainly theme-related criteria, so that the succes-

sion of papers corresponds to a path encompassing topics such as behaviours and perception, resistance, interaction, tacit knowledge and creativity, and sense of community. This is what will be first of all stressed in the following overview.

Emanuele Arielli offers an analysis of the dimension of decision-making processes in particular in the framework of a paradigm shift involving theories that have canonically dominated debates on the matter, a shift narrowing the gap between aesthetics and economics. In particular, Arielli points to a crisis occurring in the traditional normative model still guiding certain analyses of economic behaviour: the neoclassical paradigm based on instrumental rationality. He highlights how, on the basis of a growing adoption of descriptive approaches to the issue, the rationality implied by consumption practices is instead of a material type with a particular emphasis on the automatic and unconscious mechanisms by which human action is also regulated. The paradigm that the author reconstructs is a paradigm based on greater instability than what the neoclassical paradigm allows. Such a paradigm would be able to account for how, when a choice is made, it takes place by appealing to models that are neither abstract nor absolute, but occurs *in re*, and is therefore regulated by factors that are not entirely predictable.

Interestingly, the proposed paradigm suggests that the “heuristics” of thought that guide human action are partly shaped by aesthetic, formal, imaginative, and affective processes. These processes concern salience and attentional dynamics in progress, factors of order and formal balance – typically discussed by what can be defined as a gestaltic-ecological psychology – and narrativity. The new proximal relationship that Arielli ascribes to aesthetics and economics does not concern, however, a mere shift of emphasis but a complex and circular interweaving the cognitive-rational dimension and taste choices.

The perspective suggested by Carsten Friberg is based on the neo-phenomenological line of inquiry mainly developed by Gernot Böhme (see also one of the *Book forums* included in this issue of “*Studi di estetica*”), including a foray into classical French phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty) and a selected approach from Critical Theory (Wolfgang Fritz Haug). As such, it can also be defined *in re*.

The contribution opens by considering the possibility of combining aesthetics and economics insofar as to aesthetics, understood as “a perceptual form and skill” in the sense suggested by Böhme’s formu-

lation of aesthetic economy/capitalism and atmospherological approach (also following the line of research pioneered by Tonino Griffo), is recognized as the ability to provide critical aid to a society in which economics (or rather the economic interest) omnipresently informs the sensory and cognitive, or perceptual, element of experience. Three key elements of this contribution are: “experience”, as an interaction between subject and object within particular contexts, “happiness”, in the sense of a satisfaction not so much of needs but rather of desires, and “surveillance”, as an identification of experiential patterns and a design, or organization not only of environments, but also of lifestyles, using any means that can affect behaviour and perception.

In this context, the notion of “atmosphere” as a “concept of perception” assumes an increasingly important role. By virtue of elements to which it draws attention, that is, by challenging an understanding of perception as object-oriented, it emphasizes how in perception there is a “tension [...] between on the one hand the presence of something affecting us while perceiving and on the other hand how we also exercise an effect on it”. According to Friberg, when economy permeates current practices, the answer to the demand of a critical approach to the situation can be provided by the generation of a certain awareness of how our perception functions. The core question of the essay becomes whether aesthetics (that is, perception) can actually defy economic interest.

Brigitte Biehl-Missal analyzes both historically and conceptually the development of ways in which organizational aesthetics, or an aesthetic viewpoint in organizational studies, has challenged positivistic and quantitative managerial approaches by emphasizing the dimension of the sensual, bodily perception of experience in which interaction and resistance take place. This perspective upon organizational life entails a critique of the positivist mind-body separation and its logico-deductive thinking (following contributions by Böhme, the oft-neglected Gestalt Psychology, and Michael Polanyi) by bringing to the fore the importance of tacit knowledge or aesthetic knowing in the ways that work is not only perceived but also performed.

The emphasis on the implicit level of experience in organizations according to Biehl-Missal should also serve as a critical tool for organizational aesthetics, by problematizing frequently tacit but deep forms of control and manipulation taking place in post-Fordist organizations. The aesthetic level, “albeit often invisible, performative, transitory and

ephemeral, has been recognized as a sphere in which people in organizations vividly negotiate their work and existence". Not coincidentally, atmospheres are addressed as exemplary co-creative frameworks in which interaction, negotiation, and resistance widely take place. Taking this aesthetic viewpoint allows Biel-Missal to describe the important, yet often neglected, concept of leadership in non-hierarchical and non-bureaucratic terms – as a co-production of "leadership" and "followership" that takes place in-between participants through aesthetic perception.

A central role is also recognized for art metaphors: from theatre (i.e. staging), through jazz (i.e. improvisation and shared leadership) and dance (i.e. kinaesthetic dimension). Not only have they contributed to the emergence of an aesthetic viewpoint in organizational studies but, most importantly, they have progressively pointed towards an overcoming of a merely metaphorical approach, signalling the need for true and proper art-based methods that emphasize the role of the body and of sensibility in organizational life. This viewpoint furthermore insists upon the performative character of the aesthetic, outside of its spectatorial interpretation. It is not by chance that the performing arts inspire the terms of such comparisons.

Antonio Strati, a pioneer in the formulation and institutionalization of organizational aesthetics, also offers a historical-conceptual overview of that discipline, while emphasizing more explicitly than Biehl-Missal the European matrix to the aesthetic discourse on organization. According to Strati, this European line of research emerged in the context of the epistemological debate that characterized the Cultural Turn in organization studies and social theory in the 1980s. The area of organizational aesthetics research was shaped within epistemological critiques of the rationalist and positivistic paradigm prevailing in the sociology of organization, organizational theories and management studies, and the social sciences in general.

Strati's contribution also provides a conceptual-philosophical systematization to organizational aesthetics as a whole, maintaining that the latter is characterized by four approaches: the archaeological approach, the empathic-logical approach, the aesthetic approach, and the artistic approach. These approaches are infused in intricate ways by three philosophical sensibilities: a hermeneutic one, an aesthetic one, and a performative one. What this author carries out in his contribution is in particular a problematization of rationalist and positiv-

istic interpretations of organizations by using two methodological examples, mentioned in the contribution's title: "the riddle" (of an organizational artefact) and (a photopoem of) "the chair". In the first case, Strati refers to the use of an experiential learning method that does not employ "grand categories" but, in fact, is able to trigger discussions about an organizational artefact in a playful manner. In the second case, the reference is to a "photopoetic" methodology in which the connection between aesthetics and organization, and the intertwining between a widespread design and organizational life culture, is exemplified by the analysis of the production and post-production of an artistic photograph of a design chair. Both cases offer Strati the opportunity to develop considerations about creativity, negotiation processes, and aesthetic materiality in organization and everyday life, thus instantiating features of the aesthetic pervasive in contemporary experience while neglected by traditional philosophy of art.

Daniele Goldoni's contribution offers a rich overview bringing together different voices and perspectives, while revealing their dialectical implications. It is indebted to the argumentative style of Critical Theory, and testifies to an axiological grounding in the analysis of the meaning of aestheticized behaviour as the alienated meaning of aesthetic behaviour. Although Goldoni's argument takes into account a number of important philosophical viewpoints, in its analysis of both social and conceptual phenomena, the common thread is Walter Benjamin, whose perspective gains here further strength thanks to the peculiar testbed provided by contemporary problems. The central topic is the state of creativity in the aestheticized post-capitalist society. Its argumentative aim is to provide a different model of creativity from that currently dominant in international debates around the Creative Industries. Specifically, Goldoni contrasts the genealogical method adopted by Andreas Reckwitz (his main polemical target) with a theological genealogy of creativity centered on the concept of guilt, along with an alternative and emancipatory genealogy of (the modern conception of) singularity.

By adopting this methodology, the author outlines a new model of creativity no longer based on success, but on naturalness and spontaneity. The latter are directly related to inhabiting a place, understood as an activity that is usually "absent-minded". Akin to the bivalent conception of "habit" traditionally addressed by pragmatism, this activity can be positive as much as negative while it can corroborate as much

as it can be distorted, in its being both reliably of an everyday kind, and necessarily volatile and hardly describable.

The final part of Goldoni's contribution interweaves the practice of inhabiting with *flânerie* and tourism, a form of aestheticized habitation of the everyday (observed already by Michaud 2003). This can legitimately be considered as a form of experimentation of aestheticization on an economic basis, and symmetrically, of economics on an aesthetic basis. This interweaving of distraction, mirroring, and awareness is relevant as it is able to show a passage from a conception of individualistic singularity towards a singularity implying shared living, i.e., that common horizon characterizing the aesthetic in general.

Goldoni's essay adopts a dialectical-material Hegelian line of thought, while Stefano Velotti pursues the other main line of modern and contemporary Western thought: the formal-transcendental Kantian example. These decidedly heterogeneous lines of investigation, on closer examination, nevertheless address the same question of the creation of community. In Goldoni's case this issue is dealt with from a more historical-material perspective, while in Velotti's case the contemporary phenomena taken into consideration are analyzed within a formal-normative dimension. Interestingly, both essays are attempts to criticize the sociological contributions to the current debate on the forms of aestheticization and artistization/artification of society.

In his essay, Velotti develops a comparative analysis of the idea of "spontaneous order" developed by the neoliberalist theorist Friedrich Hayek with his "aesthetic-artistic counterpart", that is the notion of "purposiveness without purpose" formulated by Kant in the third *Critique*. What the two perspectives share, according to the author, is the idea of an order that cannot be managed consciously and intentionally, and which is characterized by an indeterminate purposiveness, by an indeterminate rule capable of blocking the infinite regress of a rule: "we cannot give up the regulative idea of sense, but the sense of our experience is indeterminate, not given, granted, or known in advance".

By historically and theoretically linking aesthetics and economics, i.e. the "two worldly sciences" (quoting Croce), within a common sphere of sense, Velotti opens a path that explains Hayek's and Kant's similar, but irreducible, views upon the nature-artifice nexus, and the role of ignorance (both in its theological and aesthetic meaning). And it is precisely here that these two perspectives part ways, although they both recognize that in this framework an important distinction

takes place. It is a distinction between particular purposes or the established order, and the sphere of human potentiality that we cannot know but is embodied by certain exemplary practices. In order to explain such practices in market exchanges, Hayek refers to the “game of catallaxy” in which each single transaction reveals a configuration of the *spontaneous order* by supposedly allowing inhabitants of the *kosmos* to feel at home, as part of a community. Involvement in this game, according to Velotti, *de facto* implies a conflation of the established order and the *kosmos*, making disappear the singularity and the exemplarity of each action leaving no room for individual reflectivity, critique, and negotiation. Art, then, as a (and not the only possible) way for people to satisfy the human need to make sense of experience, should not follow the rules of the market, and instead create a space “of friction” generating awareness and resistance against the *established order*. However, good intentions, according to Velotti, are not enough in a rigged system in which art finds itself. He finally suggests that sense can take other forms, implying that aesthetics (or perhaps art?) and economics are still not reconciled.

These contributions offer a rich opportunity for broad discussions, thanks to the breadth of the topics they cover, as well as the lines of philosophical and aesthetic research that they document. Among them, these can be identified:

- an “empirical-experimental” line carrying out an analysis of phenomena in which the centrality of emotional and cognitive responses of the subjects in experience is emphasized, using methodologies typical of psychology and neuroscience;
- a German neo-phenomenological line in its “critical” connotation (Critical Theory) and partly a French phenomenological line;
- an “analytical-empirical” line in which an analysis is carried out from a more immediately practical-concrete point of view (i.e. organizational); the label “analytical-empirical” underlines the attention paid to the concreteness of phenomena by these contributions, but understood as conceptual analysis;
- a speculative-dialectic line, which tends to be problematizing and convoluted;
- a Kantian line, indicated by the almost ethereal and abstract clarity which is typical of formalism.

In the light of this overview – and apart from Strati’s remark on a hermeneutical philosophical sensibility that would inform internal ap-

proaches to the discourse on organization – what is missing is an explicitly hermeneutical line. A line which addresses the relationship between aesthetics and economics in terms of a practical philosophy, for example in the sense suggested by Gadamer (1981) and Rorty (1989) that was central during the 1980s and 1990s when hermeneutics was seen as a specific *koinè* of that time (see Vattimo 1997). Might this signal how a once-crucial philosophical paradigm is no longer vital? Does this perhaps mean that the philosophy of interpretation no longer has much to say, especially in the light of this peculiar relationship? If so, why is that?

The analytical line, in turn, when it investigates borderline phenomena such as the relationship between aesthetics and economics, gets frayed from contact with these “impure” phenomena, so it adheres to the most empirical fields of observation, thus revealing its empirical root. These discussions are heard in those who talk about cognitive science (Arielli) and those who discuss field phenomena (Biel-Missal and Strati). Finally, it cannot be denied that there are traces of this in those who carry out their research from the perspective of neo-phenomenology (Friberg), positioned intermediately as partly analytic (in the way it investigates conceptual structures) and as partly empirical-conceptual, with a phenomenological root. In particular, this form of neo-phenomenology is emblematic because it is not strictly phenomenology, in the strong Husserlian sense of an investigation into essential structures of meaning, but rather by describing empirically captured phenomena.

Friberg’s contribution, placed for thematic affinity after Arielli with whom he dialogues directly on the theme of perception and materiality, could have been equally placed after the “organizational” contributions; it displays an increase in theoretical reflection while maintaining continuity with the primarily empirical basis seen in the three “analytical” contributions. The point is that, if the neo-phenomenological perspective tends towards the emphasis upon empirical phenomena (even in the direction of neo-realist research as a further form of counter-idealism), how is that genuinely different from investigations that an experimental psychologist, for example, can perform? How can analytical aesthetics, in its new “fringed” form, provide fruitful interweaving in debates such as those generated by an inquiry into the relationship between aesthetics and economics?

The absence of a clearly pragmatist line of research is also notable. Some reasons can be suggested here. A simple reason is this: having

already dealt with the relationship between the useful and useless, in the sense of an overcoming of modern dichotomies, pragmatism feels no urgency to return to the question. Another reason, in a more critical tone, is the supposition that pragmatism is just a form of inquiry easily confused with utilitarianism. Openly addressing the relationship between economics and aesthetics would hence expose a raw nerve, exposing some sort of bad conscience, as when pragmatists tend to assume the role of “pure theoreticians”, rather than being proud of having deflated the “world of ideas” with their anti-dualistic approach that emphasizes continuity.

An alternative to the question concerning the absence of a clearly pragmatist line could be leaving pragmatism aside as a perspective, rather considering it as a sort of horizon of development, a pragmatic one, *in re*, which is proper to phenomenology and critical theory. In this way it could contribute, perhaps, to create a shared field which can encompass both of them.

3. *To reconcile is to recognize each other*

Beyond these general considerations about various approaches to the subject, the fundamental question remains as to the meaning that can be assumed today by an attempt to reconcile aesthetics and economics.

For two hundred and fifty years, economics has been credited with understanding the socio-political situation, and regarded as a means to make the system work better and better. This view of economics is even taken by positions like that of Marx, for whom this system is at its best when it implodes and gives rise to a society without classes, where the capitalist system supplies the precondition for socialism. Economics has served the function of describing the socio-political system in order to find opportunities for increasing rationalization. The aesthetic, on the other hand, was used in this same period as an emblematical anti-system field: its peculiarity seemed to be its residuality with respect to the economic system. Aesthetics understood as knowledge of this residual element has been seen as a congenitally critical and oppositional knowledge with respect to the established system (e.g. forms of aestheticism, and then the artistic avant-gardes). Hence, also for this reason, a logic of division was established between economic and aesthetic knowledge.

Furthermore, aesthetics and economics, according to modernity, are thought of as independent and autonomous from other systems (Carnevali 2012). This means that the economic, according to this logic, would have its own rationality which cannot be interested in art, religion, family, ethics, politics, and so on, precisely because economic rationality is ruthlessly attached to its logic of productivity and growth. The same is true for that mode of art that reached the extreme of *art pour l'art*, and in this sense has been deaf to other systems by embodying ideals of unproductiveness to the point of promoting practices of pure hedonism.

We may now ask, what does it mean to suggest that there could be a reconciliation between aesthetic knowledge and economic knowledge (which can perhaps be abstracted, as systems, from other systems)? Does it mean that the aesthetic has laid down its weapons against the economic, by consequently surrendering its political connotation? For instance, according to Lipovetsky and Serroy (2012), aesthetic creativity, which accentuated its irrational components precisely because it was thought to be an anti-rationalistic-economic system, nowadays is incorporated into the system. Or does it mean that the aesthetic has won over the economic, because it has been discovered that the rationalizations of economics have “dark sides” that must be managed aesthetically? Could, perhaps, the project of instrumental rationality that characterizes economics turn out ultimately to be a smaller aspect of a broader material rationality?

In other words, does a reconciliation of aesthetics and economics only serve the economic system, or does it expose the critical-emancipatory potential of aesthetics within economic behaviour? These issues, in various respects, have been thematized in the contributions included in this issue of “Studi di estetica”.

In order to attempt to answer these questions, one could take as a paradigm the notions of “organization” and of “creativity”. When the organization of a company is conceived according to an aesthetic model, it is still true that there is a process of rationalization. Yet this process leaves ample room for action, not in the sense that it is entirely free of constraints, but that these constraints are quite flexible and provide the opportunity for wide, creative oscillations. The same process could be ascribed to consumption dynamics: designed, articulated within pre-constituted experiential frameworks, that is, pre-mediated – as facilitating and gratifying as they are – in any case they allow for

margins of creativity. Such creativity is carried out when the experiencing subject recognizes and manages to implement the creative potential of that particular, pre-constituted, organized framework. And this plasticity, most probably, is due to the particular type of reconciliation we are talking about.

Reconciling means restoring, even with all its ambiguities, a dialogue that is no longer a dialogue of the deaf. It is a dialogue that implies permeability, interaction: it is a dialogue in progress, which nevertheless runs the risk that the two interlocutors may ossify, so to speak, their positions, by taking on extreme attitudes, opposing each other in one direction (the aesthetic) or the other (the economic). Yet, so long as dialogue is sustained, its negotiations can give rise to dynamic developments.

A reconciliation does not necessitate pacification, but it means initiating and keeping alive a dialogue and a confrontation that may entail also sharp contrasts. Reconciliation is not a final embrace, but it can mean that two conflicting terms are becoming dialectical polarities within a single overall antinomy, where mutual misrecognition becomes mutual recognition. Reconciling requires competently recognizing the potential of something and implementing it. Just as aesthetics can teach economics how to modify its model of rationality, to become material and flexible, so too can economics teach aesthetics how to modify its model of creativity, which becomes more organizational and managerial.

In the first case, it is no longer necessarily a matter of a normative and formal rationality (i.e. the assembly line, in which materiality is not taken into consideration and processes and functions are clearly defined, remaining so even if the actors involved may vary). This model of rationality does not work not necessarily because it is immoral or unethical, but because in the end it is not economically efficient in this way, i.e. conscious fashion⁴. Aesthetics, after its role as an ideological antagonist has subsided, can serve to make economics more efficient: aesthetics becomes a factor of economic efficiency. This is what it

⁴ A recent article published in "Fortune" (see <https://fortune.com/2019/10/05/fashion-supply-chain-sustainability/>) shares this view, where sustainability is described as the most current battlefield in which fashion companies can compete to attract an important group of consumers represented by Millennials. They, in fact, would be more likely to buy clothes and accessories produced according to sustainability criteria.

means to say that the aesthetic dimension has entered into the economic and has not merely been absorbed and incorporated.

In the second case, we discover that aesthetics no longer centrally entails a demiurgical-promethean creativity, a creativity that proceeds *ex nihilo* and without pragmatic concerns (on the model of genius-like and inspired creativity typical of Romanticism, and that still informs some conceptions of aesthetic-artistic practices). We could take as an example what have been defined as “industrial arts”: design, photography, cinema, television, digital, and designed spaces in general. These arts have an ambiguous relationship with the tradition of “fine arts” because they share with them an expressive capacity of meaning, while also challenging them by following the same logic that governs the industrial system (Vitta 2012:7). In them economic planning is not a secondary component, but it is a decisive factor for the production of the “work”⁵ and the accomplishment of its expressive potential.

Reconciling, therefore, does not correspond to a “cold fusion”, or to a superficial juxtaposition according to which “the aesthetic sells” and “the economic becomes beautiful”. It rather means that aesthetics and economics mutually permeate each other’s core and modify the key element (i.e. the aesthetic and the economic) of the other.

Aesthetics, on the one hand, can be said to have become a factor of economic “operational efficiency” – “operationality” understood as the capacity to function properly and to accomplish a certain task – and as such modifies the concept of economics’ formal-regulative rationality. Economics, on the other hand, can be said to have become a factor of aesthetic “operative efficiency” – “operativity” understood as the capacity of having force in a specific context, of being significant – and as such modifies aesthetics’ model of expressivity and creativity, or production.

In this way, when the aesthetic meets the economic, it does not abdicate its distinctive role. It continues to refuse total commodification at the very moment in which it metabolizes commodification in its expressive monad, giving, however, this content an index of redeemability compared to the mere static functionalism of the “economic” in its “old-fashioned” sense. This reconciliation, therefore, could paradoxically confirm and not deny the same “proposal of non-conciliation”

⁵ For a further analysis of the changes occurring within two central categories in the aesthetic tradition as “artist” and “work” see Iannilli 2018a, 2018b.

that Adorno (1959) already put forward as an essential task in order to preserve the aesthetic in the era of aestheticization.

One could say that the aesthetic makes the economic more economically operational and the economic makes the aesthetic more aesthetically operative. The aesthetic, by remaining operative, implements something that is supposed to be operationally efficient; and the economic, by remaining operational, implements something that is supposed to be operatively efficient. For example, aesthetically organizing a company makes it more productive, and economically planning a cultural project makes it work better and makes it a better work. To be sure, there are still degenerate forms of interaction between aesthetics and economics, such as a “cosmetic beautification” of economics and/or the commodification of aesthetics. This degeneration is to be understood in the sense of those ossified, static forms of more dynamic processes which have been described above.

The question to be asked in conclusion may be this: how, in this reconciliation, can the aesthetic serve the economic to become a better economic as such (and not to become aesthetic), and how can the economic serve the aesthetic to become a better aesthetic as such (and not to become economic)?

There are additional issues not addressed here concerning a reconciliation between aesthetics and economics. Their encounter, for example, could provide useful tools to rethink urgent problems particularly felt today, such as sustainability. If the aesthetic is an area where the consideration of the environment, as a horizon of sense, becomes a crucial component of inquiry, then also the conception of the economic can benefit from it once a positive relationship between the two sides is established. Likewise, the aesthetic feature of experience also in its practical-economic reality could contribute to a fresh understanding of the forms of productive rationality that are increasingly crucial beyond the classical Western tradition. This topic remains difficult to address due to the persistent theoretical prevalence of a “modernist” model for economic rationality, despite the evident need for its revision, as attested by the essays collected here⁶.

⁶ I am deeply indebted to Giovanni Matteucci, who has widely discussed with me the contents of these introductory remarks in various phases of their development. I would also like to thank John Shook for his precious feedback, also from a linguistic viewpoint, on the final draft of the text.

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