

Studies in Applied Philosophy,
Epistemology and Rational Ethics

SAPERERE

Maria Teresa Catena
Felice Masi *Editors*

The Changing Faces of Space

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Editors

The Changing Faces of Space

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Maria Teresa Catena
Felice Masi

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From Trust to Body. Artspace, Prestige, Sensitivity

Filippo Fimiani

What are space and time to me? [...] What are all those forms to me through which the red blood of life does not flow? [...] Where there is no life—precisely there I miss it.

Robert Vischer

It seems to me that boredom is of the very nature of the air: which fills all the spaces placed between the other material things, and all the vain contents in each of them...

Giacomo Leopardi

It is the uses we make of them that qualify our spaces.

Jean-Pierre Cometti

Space has given me the right to be its 'Proprietor'...

Yves Klein

Perception of an object costs

Precise the Object's loss—

Perception in itself is a Gain

Replying to it's price—

The Object Absolute—is nought—

Emily Dickson

Abstract What happens to artist and to viewer when painting or sculpture emancipates itself from all physical mediums? What happens to art-world experts and to museum goers and amateurs when the piece of art turns immaterial, becoming indiscernible within its surrounding empty space and within the parergonal apparatus of the exposition site? What type of verbal depiction, of critical understanding and specific knowledge is attempted under these programmed and fabricated conditions? What kind of aesthetic experience—namely embodied and sensitive—is expected when a performative utterance of the artist about his art takes the place of a real piece of artwork seen or perceived, or that may be seen or perceived? In the spring of 1958, in Paris, an artist already well-known among the

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neo-avantgardes and accredited by the international art-world, shows up empty-handed and presents himself as a painter without paintings. Yves Klein displays himself as a *snob*, with an extraordinary showbiz *glamour* and literally *sine-nobilitate*, without the traditional marks of artistic manual skills. Against the modernist issues, he writes: «Credit was given to me. The gesture alone was enough. The public had accepted the abstract intention.» What's the matter with this powerful prestige and its influence on the critic and public? How to understand the public trust in the artist as a producer of an institutional “make-believe” without any object hood, devoid of any individual artwork presented to the sight or to any other sense? For Modernism and Minimalism, the work of art seems to have an internal coherence, whether formal or expressive, and is thus autonomous from the surrounding world, existing with only the clear opposition to the living space and set as a specialized and situated objection to the enclosing field. Instead, now the object melts into the air and becomes undetectable, confused with the atmosphere of the theory of art and with the stylish and snobbish life of the artist. What type of interpretation is put on regarding this unclassifiable and ambiguous field, simultaneously an-aesthetic and existential, theoretical and sensitive, at same time without a specialized position in the world made by the artist himself? And what kind of embodied experience is performed by the spectatorship? What type of phenomenology and pragmatics of aesthetic relationship is necessary to describe how the body of the beholder absorbs the space via a direct and immediate perception-assimilation? What kind of artistic rhetoric, what kind ontology of art? Until this day, after more than 50 years, Yves Klein's *The Void* has not ceased asking these and other questions on aesthetics, philosophy and the history of art.

1 *The Space of Art and the Artist Without Artworks*

In a chapter entitled “Atmospheres” of *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*,¹ written in April of 1975, the pop artist contrasts an “empty space”, yet one that is “rich” and in which he “believes”, with a “wasted space”, which is such because it is occupied by art and artifacts, which he calls “junk” (Warhol 1975: 129–130). A space filled by works of art would thus be consumed, as it would already be ‘artistic’, assigned to the institutions of art and designated to the exposition of artworks, of artifacts intentionally produced, realized and destined to be made into merchandise and consumed by an aesthetic fruition. Of course, nothing excludes the possibility that it would be the same even if it were to host the dynamics of ‘artialisation’ and

¹In 1974, there was published Georg Dickie's *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (see Dickie 1974: 19–52).

‘artification’, that is, if it were furnished with practical, utilitarian or expressive details of ordinary life that would requalify it as ‘artistic’ but not autonomous (see Heinich and Shapiro 2012: 267–299; Naukkarinen and Saitin 2012).

In any case, noise and junk are not only that which is seen by the naked eye—i.e. works of art in a specific place—but also those invisible and immaterial aspects that characterize such a singular space and the objects that occupy it, which are then experienced and interpreted as special undecided between masterpieces and mass-produced kitsch, artworks and artifacts or objects become artistic. This space that the eye cannot perceive and describe is, as Danto wrote in 1964 after having visited the exhibition *Brillo Box* at the Stable Gallery, “an atmosphere of artistic theory” (Danto 1964: 580–581) which, among other cultural prejudices, implies an artworld and a knowledge of a certain history of art.

“Wasted space is any space that has art in it”, writes Warhol. To what artworks, and to what space is he referring? The sole presence of ‘art’, generic and adjectiveless, would suffice to turn an ordinary space, whether institutional or private, a gallery, a museum, an atelier, a warehouse or a living room, and so on, into a wasted space (see De Duve 2009 and Cometti 1999: 15–27, 63–74). It does not matter whether they be traditional paintings or sculptures, past and contemporary avant-garde works, such as the Cubist *collages*, the Neo-Dada *assemblages* and combine-paintings, or other postmodern objects of *commodity art*, even *Brillo boxes*. At the beginning of the 1960s, the space for art had already changed radically, been turned upside-down, filled with non-art and junk, contested *per via di porre* or *per via di levare*, by addition or subtraction. Warhol owned two *Poubelles* of Arman, one of the founders of the Nouveau Réalisme who had moved to New York in 1961 and of whose work Pierre Restany chose a few exemplars for the show *New Realists* of 1962, at the Janis Gallery, the usual headquarters of Abstract Expressionism. Also in 1961 Daniel Spoerri with his wife Tut resold, in the Addi Koepke gallery of Stockholm, authentic food products purchased in shops, and Claes Oldenburg transformed an elegant shop of the East Side of Manhattan into *The Store* and sold his sculptures made of gesso, metallic mesh and rags repainted with varnish, clothes, underwear, beer cans and other everyday objects. Also in 1961, Rauschenberg sent a telegram-portrait to the Parisian gallerist shared by Yves Klein and Arman, Iris Clert, at whose gallery in the Spring of 1958 and Fall of 1960, respectively, two complementary exhibits had followed one upon the other, which were paradigmatic of the emptying and refilling of the space of art: *L’Exposition du Vide* by the former and *Le plein* by the latter (Buchloh 1998). It is almost superfluous to recall that the works of Rauschenberg, from the 1950s, had literally jumped out of the two-dimensionality of painting and, like a sculpture without a pedestal or a heap of rags, had been placed on the floor of the gallery and occupied the same space as the spectator, who was by now deprived of his privileged and univocal perceptual relation with the work, the visual one, or included by the space shaped and characterized by the artist as a “material of art” and an “active ingredient” in “a set of conditions”, as said in December 1969 Jennifer Licht, Associate Curator at the Department of Painting and Sculpture of MoMa about *SPACES Exhibition* (Reiss 1999: 96).

In all these cases, the exhibition space is no longer just the place where things happen, rather it is the things that make the space emerge (O'Doherty 1999: 38–39; see Lähnemann 2011). The exhibition space is an impure and altered, borderline space. All these cases involve things that have nothing in common with a work of art or with what one expects them to be, but are spaces in which however there is art, or art is believed to be there. Such things believed to be artworks by the artworld while not having any immediately perceivable aesthetic property in common with them, endow the spectator—who is by now the ghost and vicar of the avant-garde theories—with duties never before considered, they employ him in new or thankless, equivocal tasks.

After all, Warhol takes up a series of questions already grasped a decade before. Warhol had spoken of a radical discrediting of artistic workmanship and of the objectuality of works of art and of a ‘belief’ in a space without works of art but full of the artist’s life, in the land of the Ready-made and of Nouveau Réalisme. On the occasion of the Parisian exposition of *Flowers*, in May of 1965, at the gallery at the Quai des grands-Augustins, belonging to Leo Castelli’s ex-wife, Ileana Sonnabend, Warhol had announced his intention to stop painting, to give up and no longer produce works of art. In short, to no longer fill spaces with junk, to not waste them except by living in them—and perhaps by filming them.

2 Trash and Stories

However, Warhol knows well the need for the emptying—of the inner self and of the world—that had nourished the arts from the age of the avant-gardes, and knows well that to abandon art for life means making the two compatible and interchangeable; it is not possible to quit the occupied space, filled with artworks in favor of an empty space, barely marked with the ephemeral gestures of the artist’s life. Even if one truly were to leave art and thus quit wasting some kinds of spaces, the mind of any person, be he the artist or a member of the public, would not stop creating “spaces within spaces” (Warhol 1975: 129–130), constructing, that is, mental and lived spaces in the physical and interpersonal ones. With his typical *horror vacui* and anguish of time and death, Warhol knows that this continuous fabrication of existential and cognitive heterotopias increases with age; with the passing of the years, the spaces multiply and the mental and sentimental compartments harden, and there things accumulate—memories, regrets, sensations, affections, afterthoughts, ponderances, etc. Just like trash. Finally, Warhol reminds us that, as mass culture’s products and works of art, and above all pop artwork, necessarily occupy physical space and public places, just as inevitable—like trash—are the immaterial entities that occupy the interior space of the spirit, mind or soul, in short, that complex of thoughts, feelings and emotions that constitute subjectivity, the consciousness or “I” of each one of us.

Now, no less bitter and banal than this, is another reflection, again from the sweltering summer of 1965, but this time from a popular fictional character, the

protagonist of *Mad Men*, Don Draper²: “When a man walks in to a room”, he says, “he brings his whole life with him”. Almost like a snail with his shell, the interior life can be carried, each one brings it with him, into a room that is furnished or empty, private or public, destined to individual or collective uses, or neglected and abandoned. It is almost the motto of a subjectivism as absolute as it is ordinary, and of a naive psychologism, taken up for the most part as natural and naturally universal. Our lived events and our rituals, our practices and our habits, individual or shared, always accompany us, even despite ourselves, into the most diverse places and spaces—for instance, into a room, a public building, a museum or an art gallery, or an empty warehouse.

Now, this little psychological and phenomenological pseudo-evidence, implies, under the misleading garb of common sense, a much more problematic thesis: that each one projects his own lived experiences onto space and the surrounding objects, persons and events. It also seems that this unconscious projective mechanic is the matrix of a narrative logic that is useful, perhaps even indispensable, to the constitution and conservation of the Self. Because, as Ulrich says to himself, the anti-hero of Musil’s *The Man without Qualities*, as he passes from the perceptual monotony of the countryside to the sensorial chaos of the city, “in the basic relationship they have with themselves, nearly all men are narrators” (Musil 1933: 436).

Not only that: such a projective and narrative automatism seems to be corporeal and lived before being psychological and conscious. If the I brings its own story with itself wherever it goes and, therefore, recounts itself through the spaces it traverses or lives in, even without things—without those special forms of waste that are works of art—more originally the body swells when it enters a wide hall, or shrinks in a space occupied by objects, including artwork. We can all endorse these two affirmations, without necessarily referring them to a specific place—whether from the world of ordinary life or the artworld—and without knowing that a renowned contemporary scholar of visual culture, James Elkins, made them his own (Elkins 1996: 138), borrowing them from Robert Vischer, the young historian and philosopher of German art of the nineteenth century, author of *On the Optic Feeling of Form*. In that fundamental text on empathy, Vischer, contrasting it with a contractive feeling [*Zusammenfühulung*], discusses that particular corporeal feeling of expansion and freedom [*Ausfühulung*], which the subject feels when looking at immobile shapes, like the flat surface of a building, river or lake, the terse air of a cloudless sky, a jacket that’s too big, and so on. It involves natural examples and artifacts, always banal ones from everyday life, yet which are exceptional and artistic, regarding simple phenomena, different in their physical properties, dimensions and materials, but which possess the same modalities of manifestation and perception, sharing a common constancy of existence which corresponds to a static empathy. This motionless empathy experienced by one’s own body and lived

²*Summer man* is the eighth episode of the fourth season of the AMC serie created and written by Matthew Weiner, directed by Phil Abraham and on air in September 2010.

by the spectator, is said also to be physiognomic and emotional [*stimmungsvoll*] (Vischer 1873: 105–106).

It seems to me, then, that precisely in the light of this relation between perceptual uniformity or even boredom, an empathetic feeling of space that is neither without objects nor movement or narrative instance (see O'Doherty 1999: 13, and, on monotony, Moller 2014), one can reread some events of the exhibition-related and artistic canon of Modernism and its crisis. The *White Cube*, in fact, seems to be precisely that spoken of by Warhol, that is empty and rich because it is without works of art and there is nothing to see, it is full of life and there is nothing to contemplate, and in which the spectator experiences in any case an ambiguous feeling of bodily expansion and carries with him his own story.

3 Nothing to Do, Nothing to See

Before the end of painting announced ironically by Warhol, in April of 1958 at the Galerie Iris Clert, Yves Klein had realized the *Exposition du Vide*. In the few square meters of the gallery, painted white, with nothing on the walls and furnished solely with a china cabinet, a chair and a table, what takes place is an important event of the story of the *White Cube* and its ambiguity, between mystification and mysticism, irony and utopia.

On the one hand, there is an atmosphere in the sense of Danto's artworld, i.e. an 'atmosphere of theory', artificial, institutional and fictional, self-reflexive and with no ambiguity of (social and cultural) context, that cannot be perceived but only believed and interpreted, or evaluated, and which for this reason must also be felt. That is, it has to activate emotions and feelings. On the other hand, there is instead a phenomenologically primary atmosphere, immediately sensed and felt, breathed and worn by the mobile body of the spectator like the overlarge jacket mentioned by Vischer, transforming a metaphor from another context also related to the mystical. The 'operation' or 'manoeuvre' realized by Klein beyond the art work, as he himself refers to it, is meant to be both para-curatorial³ and perceptual; it is meant to be the result of procedures and protocols, and at the same time the object of incorporations and assimilations, is meant to deal with discursive devices but also with sensorial environments, is meant to be the topic of hermeneutical institutions and at the same time the object of physiological restitutions.

Like all art-related events, the *Exposition du Vide* has a story of its own, with plenty of intrigue and dramatic turns, protagonists, appearances and ghosts (see Cabañas 2010; Cabañas and Acquaviva 2012; Fimiani 2012a: 131–134). Klein had installed a double exhibition, which consisted of *Peintures*, at Iris Clert (10–25 May), which incorporated *Monochrome proposals, blue period*—11 paintings of

³In the sense of the 'para-artwork' proposed by Genette in *L'Œuvre de l'art*, recuperating the 'activation' according to Goodman.

the same size, 2 inches from the wall, as well as larger canvases and *sculpture-éponges*, already encountered, at the Galerie Apollinaire in Milan—and *Pigments purs, paravents, sculptures, feux de bengale, blocs et surfaces de sensibilité picturale*, at Colette Allendy (14–23 May). On the second floor of the Galleria Allendy—which originally housed the private study of the deceased husband of Colette Allendy, René Félix Eugène, one of the founders of the Société Française de Psychanalyse, and author of a book on Paracelsus and the doctor of Antonin Artaud in the early 1940s—Klein prepared a room without any objects, illuminating the walls repainted white; this room that is empty but with plenty of ghosts, is, therefore, the first version of the *Exposition du Vide*. After all, in the sign of Artaud and of a ‘monochrome stupefaction’ due to boredom and monotony, from 1947 he plans the *Monotone-Silence Symphony*, a musical composition of a single tone, and, in 1960, a *Theatre of the Void*, an absolutely static spectacle, without action or rhythm (Klein 2003: 176–180, 195, 346–347).

Already the famous *Monochromes*, of different colors and dimensions, or just blue and a single size, had been poorly understood by the public, which in any case refers them either to the history of art, or the history of oneself. The remedy devised by Klein to this twofold misunderstanding, both narrative and projective, is meant to be at once radical and critical, propaedeutic both for a proper perceptual enjoyment, and an adequate interpretation. The definitive and official title of the exhibition without works of art and with nothing to see is *La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée*, and required a technical explanation (see Riout 2009). Now, this curatorial supplement did not introduce one to the work as such, finally accessible, able to be enjoyed, appreciated and understood, but substituted it entirely, since the art in question was not how and where one usually expected it to be—a visible physical object, not too big or too small, which could be isolated from the surrounding environment through a frame or pedestal, tangible, produced by the artist, presented, in a certain way, etc.

What then does it mean to ‘specialize’ and ‘stabilize’ that which Klein defines as “abstract, but real, sensible density” or “atmosphere of a real and therefore invisible pictorial climate” (Klein 2003: 84, 88)? ‘Real’ is a spatial pictorial quality, emancipated from a material medium and ‘invisible’ because it has no objects, no empirical profiles or local traits offering themselves as candidates for appreciation and for any oriented aspectual attention or contemplation. Klein spatializes the monochrome painting and realizes an “extended sculpture installation” (Ran 2009: 92), and nevertheless that spatial quality is delimited within that specific and overdetermined place that is an art gallery.

4 Snobs and Cannibals

Klein essentially elaborates two strategies of a single economy: a rhetoric of prestige and a poetic of incorporation. Let us take a brief look at them.

Unchained from every work, object and support, emancipated from every perception as an image, the aesthetic relation with the empty space of *Exposition du Vide* is above all activated by an act of belief. Perverting the rules of Action Painting and of Abstract Expressionism, Klein affirms: “Credit was given to me. The gesture alone was enough. The public had accepted the abstract intention” (Klein 2003: 47; see Fimiani 2012b). He contrasts the “vertigo” of artistic creation—as he specifically calls it—with the “prestige” (Klein 2003: 120, 235) of an unproductive gesture, that does nothing, that does not realize what one usually expects from the technical and craftsmanlike skills of a painter worthy of the name, also in reference to the history of art in 1958. Without artmaking, without artwork, the gesture evoked by Klein is very singular. As an artist, Klein merely speaks of it, he never carries it out, he does nothing or disassembles and distances his action—for example, by directing from afar the women-paintbrushes of the *Empreintes* and of the *Anthropométries*. It is a gesture that can be discerned only by the intention and not by the result reached or the artifact produced, by what it means and not by what it expresses.

Like a ritual linguistic action, which is efficacious because it is suspended between doubt and belief, Klein’s spoken gesture, too, oscillates between trust and fiction, between faith and fraud, he subjects to a constant and programmatic perversion the institutional and medial, discursive and perceptual set of convictions of the modernist model of monochrome painting, he renders it entirely fictitious and bends it towards another use and another meaning.

Without making an artifact, without artwork, unproductive, there is, on the one hand, the artist, who with his sole “presence in action” (Klein 2003: 120; see McEvelley 2005: 64–66), almost as if he were a ritual official, acts as activator and catalyst, as a medium, in short, of a complex apparatus of recording devices, of putting the trans-individual and trans-objecthood space in circulation and in communication. On the other hand, there is the spectator, who sees nothing, who isolates no image—who sees nothing in it and with it, and not even according to it—who does not contemplate any work of art and is almost forced to the matize his own proprioceptive state while he inhabits the space set up and qualified by the artist. An empty space, though one rich and dense, and which he introjects, since he participates in it immediately with his sensoriality, and onto which he projects his own feeling of himself, corporeal and psychological. By repainting the Parisian gallery, Klein, like the later Californian artists of *Light and Space*, on the one hand spatializes volumetrically and architectonically the two-dimensional flatness and the perceptual impenetrability of the pictorial medium required by Modernism. On the other hand, opposite the purely phenomenological option of his American successors, he demands the absence of the craftsman like activity of the artist and places the accent on his performative intention and on the conceptual meaning of the immaterial quality of the atmosphere of painting, not on the aesthetic, physical and perceivable quality.

Klein’s abstract and conceptual gesture is *snob*: it is *sine nobilitate*, that is, it is bereft of all those technical skills and expressive characteristics historically associated with the artist and indispensable for his recognition and social distinction.

Precisely as such, because it is *snobbish*, this gesture does not emulate an artistic praxis—judged as having been overcome and in any case extraneous—but simulates a social and cultural practice of art; in brief, Klein's gesture feigns the prestige of which, on principle and de facto, for individual and historical reasons, it is deficient. The spectator's enjoyment of the work is also *snobbish*; he is apparently incapable or deprived of a focused or peripheral perceptual activity, of an attention towards a set of aspects and the contexts of the 'work', of an appreciation about artistic phenomena. Regarding the empty space devoid of works of art but symbolically rich, his attention is cleared of any emotive projection or historical or psychological narration.

Now, such an auratic rhetoric of prestige is, according to the economic logic of art organized by Klein, complementary to a poetic of atmospheric incorporation. For him, an accurate and planned conceptual and para- or meta-artistic operation is accompanied by a (postulated and planned) immediate and unreflexive, performative, sensorial and physiological experience. In an article published two years before the *Exposition du Vide*, we find a parallelism of snobbery and cannibalism that helps us to better understand, given a space without artmaking and artwork, this dialectic between prestige and incorporation, between conceptual and performance. The snobbish assimilation, Van Den Haag sustains, is neither an effective emulation, nor a real sacrificial act—as in cannibalism—it is neither moved by admiration or veneration, nor interested in the intrinsic and substantial merit of the Thing that the snobby nature does not have (Van Den Haag 1956). The assimilation realized in the ritual practices of cannibalism is aimed at a literal, direct or symbolically mediated acquisition of the qualities of the victim—strength, courage, prescience, etc.—and of the prestige that are connatural to them. The snobbish assimilation, instead, is impelled only to seize the social existence of that which he lacks: the insensible qualities and immaterial values, in short, the effects of a reputation that he can enjoy and of which he can make use.

If one applies this distinction between snobbery and cannibalism to Klein—but also to Warhol—what do we obtain? Indifferent to the quality and substantial value of painting and its material making, the artist is, on the one hand, a snob in the measure in which he accomplishes nothing and realizes no works of art; on the other hand, in a manner analogous to what instead a cannibal really does, he does everything to take possession of the generic value of Art as such, of Art without works. By hiding the artificiality of his work, at once conceptual and performative, the artist affirms that, with his sole presence, he incarnates the very space of Art without works and then, thanks to the belief in his abstract and unproductive gesture, the immaterial space is communicated to the public and distributed in the artworld and the world of life.

5 Traces of the Immediate

On the one hand, in other words, a belief in prestige is presupposed or, as Warhol too will say, a belief in the riches of the empty space, in the “social [and atmospheric] patrimony” (Klein 2003: 99–100). That belief is made possible by an indirect activation external to or beyond the work proper—which as such does not exist and is replaced by an expositive apparatus, which is spoken and shown, but neither made nor factual. On the other hand, though presupposing an act of faith in the immaterial, the aesthetic act should also be properly *esthetic*, it should be nothing other than a biological action and a physiological fact: as Klein says, a “direct and immediate perception-assimilation which no longer has any effect, trick or deception beyond the five senses” (Klein 2003: 84) of incorporeal properties, which are assumed but not consumed, incorporated but not produced. Just as happens with the qualities and forces, intangible and untouchable, spiritual and charismatic, in the ritual and social practices of snobbery and cannibalism.

During the 1959 conference at the Sorbonne, Klein affirms that “there should be no intermediaries. It is necessary to find oneself literally impregnated by this pictorial atmosphere, specialized and established beforehand by the artist in the given space” (Klein 2003: 305 ss.). This phenomenological option—here stated through the metaphor of impregnation—is in any case conditioned and refers to an institutional hypothesis. The common domain of man and of space is sensibility. However, if the *habitat* of the expositive space is *haptic* (see Bruno 2001: 320–321; Wigley 1995: 242), since, without objects, it touches in a diffused and unlocalizable manner the whole sensoriality of the spectator and envelops him, wrapping his body like a *garment* that becomes a second skin. But, if the static spatial empathy is, as Vischer had already said, “a pure condition, an involuntary inclination and *habitus*” (Vischer 1873: 105–106), the unreflexive and unconscious experience claimed by Klein is in any case inscribed in the historically and socially determined frame of a cultural *habit* and *habitus*. Only within a frame, or, if one prefers, only starting from a set of pre-understandings and tacit knowledge, is it possible and plausible for an artist to make nothing and exhibit no work of art, to invite the public to visit and appreciate—since it involves feeling—an empty gallery.

With the support and product of the artist having dematerialized in the air, as Marx would have said, that air both real (felt) and institutional (believed) of the exhibition space, in turn deprived beforehand of its habitual function and ‘specialized’ in order to serve as an environmental medium for an aesthetic experience without objects to see, what becomes of the public? The body of such a surrounded spectator is in any case a “sensible vehicle” (Klein 2003: 102–103; see Fimiani 2011), it is the medium of incorporation of the space as *pneuma* both internal and external, as a limitless and ownerless air, as breath with no origins and no end.

The importance of the indexing and photographic paradigm in Klein has been noted (see Dubois 1983: 241; Riout 2004: 23–33; Belting 2005: 315; Everaert-Desmedt 2006: 116–120; Fimiani 2009, 2017). In many operations of de-specification of the medium, he stresses profoundly the ontology of the

photographic picture, i.e. its nature of as a continuous and direct mechanical recording of the visible and of being in general. The artist, the work of art, the spectators, are all, in fact, like photographic film and as a witness and a document: sensible and present to the static event, without actions and without transformations, and are impressed and physically changed by the undifferentiated real, they are touched and moved by the all-enveloping and invisible space (see Klein 2003: 154, 230). The aesthetic act is then like the photographic act: during the exposition *of the emptiness*, in the gallery of Iris Clert there is realized an exposition *to the emptiness*, like that of photographic film, of a rigid protocol—the visit was not supposed to last more than two or three minutes.

In the wordplays typical of Klein, upon close examination one reads an original reflection that mixes theory of art and of the media, cultural anthropology of the symbolic practices and phenomenology of one's own living body and of space. For him, the spectators are 'viveurs': they live in the worldly scene of an art that has by now abandoned the traditional makings, works and places of the art world, and they are living bodies, more precisely living media or carnal media, in which there is directly inscribed a "trace of the Immediate" (Klein 2003: 305; see Belting 2005: 306–307).

It is in Delacroix's adored *Journal*—in a note from 25 October 1825—that Klein, in 1956, finds this notion of "marking" of that which is "fugitive" and "indefinable", starting from which and contrasting the artistic praxis of "making" he elaborates a poetic of the trace in which to articulate body, medium and space. For him, opposed to all activity, whether it be real, or virtual and psychic, the body, both of the artist and the spectator, and of the work or environmental installation, is a passive and mobile support, impressionable and retentive almost without any human agency, capable of recording and conserving the most labile and ephemeral events and phenomena, able to guard the traces of everything it encounters and to move (and to be moved) in the space of the world.

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Commentary to Part 4: Space of Arts

Ronald Shusterman

*What, then, is time?
If no one ask of me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks,
I know not.*
Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, London, Dent, 1920, p. 272

Abstract Current cosmology emphasises the interdependence (or perhaps even the identity) of space and time, and any history or theory of space is automatically a brief history of time as well. Artists from Fra Angelico to today have often exploited and explored the aporia and the singularities of our relation to time and space. What is interesting, in the space of art and aesthetics, is the way that artists can render problematic and/or explore, in subtle ways, our notions or intuitions of extension and intension, space and meaning. Some historians indeed believe that the space of art has shaped the world in a fundamental way, since our need for images seamy have laid the foundations of what we call “civilisation”. But perhaps we should be wary of any rigid determinism, since the space of art has subtly taught us a healthy form of pluralism that can guide us in both our cosmological and axiological endeavours.

What, then, is time?

Quoting Augustine thus at the outset of this commentary on the *Space* of the arts is no idle provocation. Since at least Einstein, if not before, current cosmology emphasises the interdependence (or perhaps even the identity) of space and time, and any history or theory of space is automatically a brief history of time as well. What goes for cosmology goes for philosophy. The English philosopher J.M. McTaggart famously argued that time is unreal; following the logic of the most recent research in astrophysics, he should also conclude that space as we know it is merely a projection of contingent mental categories. And what applies in philosophy also holds true in the arts, since artists from Fra Angelico to today have often exploited and explored the aporia and the singularities of our relation to time and space. In the installations and experimentations of creators such as James Turrell

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and Olafur Eliasson, one does indeed encounter “the corporeal feeling of expansion” underlined by Filippo Fimiani in his article on the space of art.

Turrell is an especially pertinent example in this context, since much of his work specifically investigates the notion of *space-time* and the body’s relation to it. There is a moral dimension here that I will not develop (Turrell was raised as a Quaker), but one should linger on the way that these explorations of space correspond to an artistic ideal of exchange and communion. Popular science fiction of recent years has imagined various versions of a future utopia based on the conquest of spatial dimensions, and the “wormhole” might be seen as a paroxysm of this dream of total fusion of time and space. I have in mind here films such as *Interstellar* (C. Nolan, 2014) where space and time become rhizomatic, infinite, and infinitely interconnected. Indeed, such conceptions seem to produce the kind of ultimate *deteritorialization* that Francesco Vitale considers in his article on Deleuze and Koolhaas.

Science fiction, of course, isn’t exactly philosophy, and there are indeed perennial problems connected to space and time that cannot be resolved merely by the whims of blockbuster films. Our concepts of being and nothingness depend clearly on our vision of space and matter, and to this extent the investigation into the possible senses or implications of the Platonic concept of *chora* (as carried out by Dario Giugliano) is highly relevant. If no one asks of me what space is, I know indeed how to live in it. But if I stop to consider its nature, as a *container* or perhaps a *substance* in itself, as a sort of emptiness or a potentiality, perhaps as a vehicle for something else, then I may indeed need to confess my confusion.

What is interesting, in the space of art and aesthetics, is the way that artists can render problematic and/or explore, in subtle ways, our notions or intuitions of *extension* and *intension*, space and meaning. But here we should acknowledge not only the concept of “intensionality” but that of *intentionality* as well. To come back to Fimiani and Yves Klein, it is the once-banished notion of intentionality that finds Klein’s artistic gesture: “Credit was given to me. The gesture alone was enough. The public had accepted the abstract intention.” The connection of this to Fimiani’s initial quote from Jean-Pierre Cometti is clear: it is our intentional *use* (of art, of space, of time) that gives it its *working* definition in a Wittgensteinian, anti-essentialist manner. It is thus *intention*, operating along the lines of John Searle’s interpretation of linguistic exchange (“I know that you know that I know the rules of *x*”), that allows Klein or Warhol to redefine the space of exhibition itself as an artistic, aesthetic and aesthetic substance. It is indeed intentionality that can give space the “atmosphere of artistic theory” that Danto mentions. We can see this change of orientation in the passage from traditional painting to the development of “Light Art”: light is no longer simply a medium for the representation of space; it becomes the work itself, the space of art to be explored. Indeed, it is to this extent that art takes on a cosmological dimension: our experience of space *through* art redefines our position in the world, in the city, and in our social interactions. Ultimately, it is perhaps impossible to separate the personal and interpersonal aspects of our perception or experience of space, since, as Fimiani argues, everyone “projects his own lived experiences onto space and the surrounding objects.”

Klein does indeed explore, in his own way, the eternal conflict of *being and becoming* that is discussed by Giugliano, both in the way that the *Exposition du vide* renders problematic the notions of space and substance, and in the way that the spectator's subjectivity is shaken by the experience. It is to this extent that such experimentation can involve various disciplines, as Giugliano argues, "from political theory to aesthetics, from ethics to physics and cosmology". Be he human, posthuman, transhuman, or some other form that may yet be imagined, the Subject is shaped and defined by many factors, including, as Vitale argues, by the spaces and architectures in which he or she lives. One can indeed see the city as a "striating force"—a term that implies a clear dose of negativity and restraint. But perhaps such a force might be conceived of in a more positive way. A work such as Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* (1942–43) does indeed capture the delimitations (or territorializations) of the rigid urban grid, but it is not so clear whether such patterns lead to stability or to movement. Clearly, one cannot cut across such a grid in a totally random or nomadic movement. But, indeed, as a street, Broadway itself interrupts and destabilizes the pattern of Manhattan, transferring to the subject (if I may allow myself a literary pun...) a bit of unpredictability within the rectangular system.

Deleuze may be wrong when he implies that the city is responsible for the invention of agriculture. Some recent theories imply that it happened the other way around, or, more precisely, that what might loosely be called *art* was responsible for the birth of agriculture. Dr. Nigel Spivey, a Cambridge historian of art, argues that the need to feed the workers building the temple at Göbekli Tepe in Turkey pushed the nomadic people involved in the project to develop the basic techniques of farming. Analysing the DNA of various strains of wheat from all over the world, Spivey claims, shows that they are all linked to the strain that grew naturally around the site of the temple. If this is true, then one might conclude that the space of art has shaped the world in a fundamental way, since our need for images seems to have laid the foundations of what we call "civilisation".

It would be imprudent, however, to give primacy to one dimension of human existence or to establish some kind of determinate hierarchy of our functions or institutions. There may be a chemical basis to some of our spatial orientations, as Ernst Mach once implied. But Andrea Pinotti is wise to conclude that "the history of images is too rich and complex to allow such a rigid taxonomy. There will always be more than one exception to any rule." Perhaps the question raised by Pinotti as to whether or not the human body has projected categories onto space, or whether the cosmos itself has shaped these categories, is one of those enduring problems that philosophy will never really solve. Cassirer argued, as Pinotti points out, that "space is now divided into definitive zones and directions; but each of these has not only a purely intuitive meaning but also an expressive character of its own." But one can still wonder if this expressive character is biologically or culturally determined. Is it connected in some way to brain structure, or simply the product of contingent social factors? In the West, the colour *black* is seen as the universal colour of mourning, and, for us, *white* has positive connotations. Indeed, black and white sometimes function the way *left* and *right* do with respect to

laterality. But not everything is “black and white” in this way: *white* is the colour associated with death in India. So perhaps we should be wary of any rigid determinism. And perhaps, in its variety and unpredictability, the space of art has subtly taught us a healthy form of pluralism that can guide us in both our cosmological and axiological endeavours.