

ART AND ITS BALANCE BETWEEN THE ESSENTIAL AND SECONDARY

If, heaven forbid, someone demands «your money or your life,» we must quickly assess the situation. Choosing the less risky option, we must decisively overcome doubts and suspicions to stay alive while navigating between two uneven choices, discerning the real intentions behind the drastic ultimatum. Some may argue that life without resources ceases to be truly livable, but my aim here isn't to delve into that debate, at least not without additional parameters. Hesitation has its reasons, and to avoid being overwhelmed by doubts, it's reasonable to take a moment—sometimes just a few crucial seconds—to distinguish between what's primary and what's secondary, preventing us from being misled by appearances. Amid varied discernments or a lack of reflection time, we might not always align with our own judgments.

The multiple disquisitions that revolve around the primary and the secondary can affect university research and teaching, an old topic that we will have discussed or seen discussed in more than one corridor or meeting. Nor do we need to go into much detail now. Suffice it to say that the two practices cannot be separated without the prospect of shipwreck. On the other hand, immersed in a patrimonial or museographic perspective, I would not assign much existential basis to the opposition (or hierarchisation) of communication and conservation, although the debate exists, often driven by a rather primary sense of pragmatism. The sun goes down, with the hope of reappearing, of course, when we send the originals to inaccessible limbs that theoretically guarantee their preservation. As a palliative, an idea of the copy is born that does not want to be distinguished from its model and agrees to replace it. In this case, it is worth considering what is more appropriate, whether to consolidate an intimate «creationist» zeal, whether to return to a specular categorization of the things of the world or

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of the world and things, or whether we should in fact admit that we have a problem of (re)knowledge. In these or similar coordinates, the fish bites its own tail, and like the Uroboros (or Ouroboros), be it dragon or serpent, it insists on chasing itself. We would say that it becomes vicious, circular, incapable of stopping itself or promoting its destiny. Like the suffering of Sisyphus in hell, it does not know how to overcome the wild dynamics of its eternal return. Finally, the Uroboros—head and tail in chains—can also be linked to the internal hecatomb suffered by Envy, self-destructive, greedy and densely sculptural, which Giotto paints in the Chapel of the Arena in Padua: an invention for eternity.

In research frameworks, circles form a chain. The circumscriptions of the main objectives are a formula, sometimes useful and sometimes perverse, virtuous or vicious, with which we adhere to an academic convention that, whether accepted or demanded, seeks to delimit the Mecca of a project. In any case, if our research is successful and not unsuccessful, the best ideas may come early in the process or, in certain situations, well into the research. If we have to describe, even rudimentarily, the stages before the itinerary is drawn up, no one can be surprised if the pieces that are put in place praise an orderly whole, an architecture in which we want to have confidence, even if it is not built on a secure or sufficient foundation.

Scholastics, as true school founders, utilized dialectical art, creating logical schemes, although not purely scientific, still in use today. This new form of rhetoric, based on very ancient ideas, built the walls of their own castles, intricate networks of hypotheses and verifications, often tied to theology. It doesn't matter how far away the final destination is, or how difficult the path is, if we know how to tame the form of the dissertation. This doesn't diminish the importance of discerning and understanding, which remains fundamental. Separating the wheat from the chaff is more than a goal; it's a method for clarifying and categorizing.

In our fields, nonetheless, deeply rooted in human complexities, to the power of imagination, to the art aventure and the ideals, the journey has never been about abstracting from the circumstances affecting artistic matter. Deciding how to distinguish or explain the relationship between chaff and wheat, based on perspective, is crucial. Stereotyping the search within a linear path, ignoring other directions, seems inefficient and futile, even without malicious intent. Innovation in method can be positive or negative. Familiar paths can still be refreshing and lead to success with each new season. Only time will reveal if we were truly pioneers, modernists, or avant-gardists.

It is disappointing, however, to imprison thought in a binary discourse, for a yes or no, determined between a contemplative or emphatic «one» and

a more expectant and receptive «zero.» We should not be afraid to take all measures, observe nuances, or delve into the specifics. If this commitment is judged as impertinent, fear will set in as a preventive measure, but it does not need to paralyze us. We are not always meant to navigate on the surface, and, aware of the risk involved in moving underwater, the idea of visiting the depths can attract us as much as flying, even if we have not chosen Antarctica as our main destination. From the so-called «humanities,» it would be absurd to renounce unique instruments and demands determined by specific values necessary to seek Paradises or visit Hells, whether we describe them as enameled and eloquent, majestic and luminously irritating, or dark and traversed by long silences.

If we develop objectives within a scientific report applied to our field, beyond possible polarities and tempting deviations, we notice a tendency to move from the general to the particular. I am not saying that, strictly speaking, we advocate starting with the roof, denying the method that advises thinking first about the foundations. It is reasonable, though not obligatory, to describe as soon as possible the conceptual roof that shelters the research determination that drives us. Carried by the river of objectives, we pursue an outcome, a beneficial end, a demonstration that brings conclusions, reaching a point where it becomes difficult to synthesize everything into a geometric figure. Insisting on finding it, adopting the attitude of the snake or the dragon, we might evoke a regular pyramidal shape. At the peak or apex, and with a glittering label, we place the main objective (perhaps overlapping with the project title), accompanied by multiple goals that aim to enrich the arrival at this summit, now understood as a starting point. These other titles attach to the polyhedron the branches and twigs that can dress the top of an artificial tree. An arborescent fantasy that, piercing the lateral faces of our geometric figure, would be typical of magical realism.

If the rules of the game change and the breadth of the objectives varies, the scheme may cease to be the conventional pyramid or square base. Inverting it, figuratively or literally, would paradoxically be a positivist idea; replacing it with a cube or a truncated pyramid might be a realistic approach. If we aspire to a more conceptual, speculatively round way, setting aside the tetrahedron, I would recommend choosing a crystal ball or a transparent globe, as long as they are not inherited utensils from dishonest alchemies or excessive technocratic mystics. Provided we are not required to conceal doubts and no monster or strange and indefinable specimen has been locked in a horrid spherical interior.

We can attest that it is not the same to oppose the center and the periphery, black and white, good and evil, or peace and war. When we refer to eccentric or extravagant tensions between the main and the secondary in art,

we notice the murmur of a swing that does not have arbitrary rhythms. In any case, we observe that, in the realm of representation, some eccentricities create true principles of graphic and spatial necessity. We know that the enthroned thundering being has an undeniable dependence on the vassal; whether echoing categorical or more relative subjects, or unusual ones, as were the kings of the East in the Epiphany. Far from wanting to analyze now the narrative schemes that affect the spatiality of the figurations, a topic of immense complexity, I will point to the well-known and more basic spatial polarization embodied in those figures that seem predestined to occupy the left or the right of some of the simulacra we study. Gothic works are not scarce, with votive dimension and often anchored in severe symmetries, revealing very evident gender affections. Following this path, we go beyond the topical oppositions between the elevated and the low, or the eminent and the ignoble, described in countless Final Judgments, where it is decided to visualize the radical distance between the blessed and the damned, conceived as an exponent of a physical and significant separation.

The reception of the good, as we know, takes place on the Judge's right while the rejection of the wrongdoers is determined by the fall of his left hand. A back-and-forth is unleashed, inevitably in love with the right, moving hands, gazes, and even the scales managed by Saint Michael. For the theme of the archangel, it is enough to review the meaning given to the ascent and descent of the «animated weighs» in full Psychostasis. In Universal Judgments, with the corresponding exceptions, men and women are indistinctly integrated into two large opposing groups. It is not evident that one is primary (the blessed?) and the other secondary (the damned?), given that they are needed due to their tight antagonism. They must corroborate the transcendental and global content in which God, located in his omniscient centrality, judges their fate.

There is no shortage of artworks where men and women are distinctly separated based on the space they occupy. They form homogeneously male or female congregations which, at the antipodes of a «unisexual» spatiality, reveal a rank cut based on gender. In various cases, and apart from sex, which remains highly conditional on other levels of interpretation, the inhabitants of the space are assigned a similar categorization and function. Nonetheless, a generally comparable status does not prevent numerous figurative works from showing men occupying the left side of the representation and women the antithetical zone in a very stable manner. The chosen placements prescribe and guide, without a doubt, the «quality» of the represented individuals. To deduce from this that all women will be condemned and all men blessed would be an abuse and an absurdity, but the selection of the «seat» contains a principle of hierarchy that is neither neutral nor

natural, one might add. The desire to impose order pushes men to occupy the space considered a priority, that is, the left side which provides the substantive «*Dextera Domini* » or the right hand of the welcoming God, the one described as «*la destra del cielo*» in Dante's verses (*Paradise*, Chant V). This discrimination was quite common in epiphanic scenes featuring donors. In those richer «Epiphanies of the Donors», which include more and more assorted characters not belonging to the historical scene, when actors of both sexes are represented, it is most common for the Infant Jesus to turn towards the «gentlemen» while the Virgin attends to the ladies, relegated to the right flank following usual conventions. This strict ordering is repeated under the large cloaks of some powerful Virgins of Mercy, always gigantic in relation to the heights of their protected men and women. Models are adapted to hagiographic schemes, well exemplified by a panel by Alegretto Nuzi dedicated to Saint Anthony (Pinacoteca of Fabriano).

Some Coronations of the Virgin, similar to the grand Siense formulas of the *Maestà*, can be seen as expanded glorifications integrating the members of the sainthood, invited to attend an extemporaneous encounter that connects with other grand moments or celestial stops, including the Last Judgment day. Although it's possible for some patron to sneak into the Coronation, the canonical actors of the scene are figures with halos, determined to amplify a winged court of offering, serving, watchful, or musical angels, the only ones appearing in reduced or synthetic versions of the theme. The segregation of figures based on their sex ceases to be a mandatory spatial note within the celestial universe and all seem to stand out to some extent, mixed, on both sides of the throne that hosts Mary and Christ. In any case, equality remains relative. No matter how ambitious the composition, it is always limited, makes a selection, and creates first and second rows. Apart from rarities, women are usually less numerous than the saints and, more occasionally, these are the only visible attendees. When the graphic necessity of reducing guests is imposed, the protocols that have persisted in each case are revealed. The conventions link these spectacles to those conceived to symbolically gather all the saints (and saintesses) more or less. In summary, although the distributive proposal is not entirely balanced, the amalgam coheres the spirit of some of the celestial images of the sainthood, but not all.

Exceptions opposed to normativity make iconographic issues more interesting and, therefore, I think it is fair to highlight a Catalan work, the *Bellpuig Coronation*, a painting on panel of disputed authorship which I nevertheless place, without going into details, as a piece from the catalog of the 14th-century painter Ferrer Bassa. Possibly lost in 1936, the piece breaks the previous norm in two ways. The painter, adhering to the prescription of

placing Mary to the right of Christ, maintains the placement of the saintesses on this same side, while the saints move to the opposite side, the area so ungrateful and sad that will be connoted by the condemned when their day comes. The Catalan piece does not coincide, at this point, with the most common solutions in Italian Trecento Coronations, a theme for which numerous variables are known, and it is possible that some have escaped my notice. In any case, under the mantle of a stable number of models, they reveal the progressive interest of painters and promoters in refining their smallest details, as must have happened with other equally or more represented scenes.

In Bellpuig, the male saints are placed on Christ's side and, in the foreground, they do not represent a much larger group than that defined by the saintesses. It should be noted that both the women's and men's formations are made up of an imprecise number of characters. In fact, the vast majority of those present are alluded to by a sea of halos. The painter exploits a solution that, *pars pro toto*, is known from ancient times with unequal applications and formalizations. Even so, the density achieved in the Catalan panel is not normative. The aureoled heads in depth overlap behind the few identifiable figures, nine in total, four saintesses and five saints, just to further enhance the scene that will counterbalance the gynaeceum.

Despite the weight of our mental structures, the norm that places women to the left of Christ declines from the moment they are called to flood the left of the painting and thus swell the flank intended for the Mother, who appears on the right of the Son. Fra Angelico rejects the first idea, if he ever considered it, and returns the holy women's to the usual zone, or the zone of the «convicted» of the Judgment (Coronations of the Louvre Museum, Paris, and the Uffizi Gallery, Florence). Confronted with a majority of canonized men, the Dominican painter emphasizes the diagonal axis that brings Mary closer to the saintesses in the foreground, but it is the male block that floods the left and the entire background of the episode. Bellpuig emerges as a significant exception, although, especially from the Quattrocento onwards, similar options are seen in the Italian context, admitting that the saints, displaced to the right in the Bassian panel, still outnumber the saints on the opposite side. It should not be forgotten that we have to add the eight bearded men rising behind the two formations in the foreground. Reversing the photographic negative would place Mary in a possible but unusual flank, overturning the unique position of the women's.

If we wanted to delve deeper into the subject, we would have to resort to many other examples that would facilitate a transversal demonstration, forced to travel to the paradoxes and contradictions in which the powerful extravagances of the primary and the secondary embody when other spatial

systems and revisions of other centuries are activated. It is worth admiring, for example, the conceptual wisdom applied by the second Renaissance, known as Mannerism. However, the topic of the Bassian panel allows us to emphasize ideals that respect the central, what must appear in the center, while originally hierarchizing what will only serve as a retinue. Symmetrical figurative densities are radicalized, forced into what become spatial gender asymmetries. Mary leads the virgins like the bride of the *Anglo-Catalan Psalter* of Paris (BnF, ms. Lat. 8846), although in this nuptial vignette of folio 96v (Psalm 55), painted like the panel in Ferrer Bassa's workshop, the women, no longer saints, have returned to the right. In the miniature, the groom enjoys a wide entourage of his own sex that, balancing the feminine space, now settles on the left side. Considering the schemes applied to the weddings of Mary and Joseph would not be amiss since, despite his appreciated discretion, the husband will come to occupy the left side in some works. Logically, the feared sentences of the Last Judgment are now camouflaged or forgotten to generate these earthly spaces which, supposedly coherent and univocal, we compare with the celestial and symbolic space where the Virgin, seen as the bride of the Lamb, must be crowned. In Bellpuig and the Psalter, we observe that it is operated with awareness and that a sociological murmur imposes itself, agitating or consenting to some of the most frequent iconic coordinates.

In the Upper Basilica of Assisi, the episode of the «Greccio Nativity» shows the segregation of genders by placing women peering through the open access in the «tramezzo» while men, whether friars or laypeople, are located in the presbytery of the temple, the place where the famous idea, recognized in St. Francis, of commemorating the Birth of Jesus, is brewed. The image adopts a fairly plausible perspective by moving the figures of the scene, breaking the right-left scheme and leaving gender issues, quite evident in any case, aside from the more rigid symmetries. The women retreat to the background, but they are placed at the center of a complexly conceived episode that, avoiding overly obvious routines, reorganizes the internal balances of the painting and complicates the relationships between spaces and figures.

Much later, in some panels of the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo of Siena, attributed to Sano di Pietro (1406-1481), we notice a new interpretation of the groupings that strictly segregate men from women. The Italian painter and miniaturist, like our Ferrer Bassa, reflects more than a hundred years later two homogeneous and distinct audiences, identifiable by the harmonious attire of the women in contrast to the men. The two groups pay attention to the sermons of St. Bernardino, with a singular depth bias that, however, alternates the placement sides of ladies and gentlemen, gathered

in two large open spaces of Siena: the Piazza del Campo, with the Palazzo Pubblico in the background, and the spacious esplanade that reveals the unfinished state of the convent church of San Francesco's façade.

Art in its long history is not measured by what we today consider politically correct. The most substantial grievances and inconveniences we may perceive are not an intrinsic flaw of art. The suggestive contingencies I have described, and many others that would complete a panorama immersed in very dark shadows, are not its *raison d'être*, as art emerges from the societies in which it is generated, those it inhabits and that inhabit it. Therefore, if instead of the purse we were asked for art, we would have to think more than twice before handing it over to our internal vengeful furies. Faced with the demand «art or life,» always in a figurative but concise sense, it would be wise not to betray art, and I refer to its manifestations in general. Destroying art does not annul the past. Removing it from life does not seem like a good deal to me, and it makes no sense to want it equidistant from our ideals or a servant of rhetoric that are not its own, especially if it is to the detriment of its very strength, authenticity, charm, and sensitive notoriety, which are drawn and redrawn over time.

Art is alive and interesting insofar as it comes to us quietly or explodes, making all the noise possible, and insofar as it has no borders and helps us penetrate universes that enjoy autonomy and specific dimensions, helping us gain perspective on other realities and on ourselves. I don't see many ways out of the idea of identifying life with art, especially if the intention is to confuse the two things and their arguments at all costs and risks. Making life an art, or dedicating life to art, seem to me to be different alternatives. The former obliges one to enter into metaphorical disquisitions and evanescent analogies that seek to relate harmonies that scale to diverse frequencies. The latter regulates the privilege of a negotiation that must be managed very carefully so as not to lose either life or art.

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A calm sea does not usually bring omens of more calm. In recent years, the waters have not been calm, nor have we been. Storms have torn through a tranquility that has not been much felt. The future forecasts still do not appear positive, but I did not want to be confused by big-screen fictions, cinemascope, or virtual or augmented realities, by prefigurations that seek to push us to one side or the other, perhaps eager to sweep away our smallest and closest fictions. Therefore, beyond the circular skills of the primary and the secondary, which would never end, I will give way to the series of contributions that, having reached the editorial office of *MATERIA*, have

been selected to form part of the new volume of the journal. I am very pleased, in any case, that it is still tangible and that we can hold it in our hands, whether in a textual or metaphorical sense. The works you will find now constitute the core of a very varied thematic content, yet cohesive with a broad vision of music, which also benefits some strokes and contributions made from other territories of art.

The article by Santi Torras i Tilló brings us closer to the painting of the modern era in Catalonia, a topic that, despite having generated significant interest and contributions, must be and still is a source of discoveries and important discussions. The study remains focused on two well-crafted paintings that have been revealed, under a mantle attributed to the mid-17th century, and after the cleaning and repair process, as pieces of a considered older altarpiece, notable for their attractiveness, luminosity, brushstroke fluidity, and sense of balance. The author suggests their attribution to a German or Flemish painter, who could have contributed rare formulas among the masters of the Catalan Baroque. Next, Oriol Brugarolas and Antonio Esquerro Esteban's contribution delves into what they call «soundscape,» applied to the 18th-century Barcelona context. The study begins with the analysis of a set of materials available in the funds of the University of Barcelona, aiming to establish the geography of urban, civil, and religious spaces intended to host the itineraries of Barcelona's musical chapels dedicated to opera and other forms of singing, mainly oratorios and nativities. It highlights the reception of these performances or concerts and establishes comparative links with the uses of Italian theaters of the second half of the century.

We proceed with an article that, bringing together many voices, talks to us about the Signs of instrumental music of the Classical period in Ukraine. Once again, we enter the 1700s and, already in the second half of the century, the research by Olha V. Putiatytska, Tetiana V. Husarchuk, Maryna Yu. Severynova, Olena O. Derevianchenko, and Larysa A. Hnatiuk, determine the interest, structure, and nature of choral concerts that, as an established genre, refer to Vienna and the premises of classicism, without neglecting the ancient traditions linked to Ukrainian sacred music.

The next intervention is based on research conducted on gender barriers in the field of metal music, in what are defined as the Global North and Global South. By María J. Miranda Suárez, Susana González Martínez, Nelson Varas Díaz, and Vanesa Balón, it offers the results of a collective investigation, involving up to thirty-six feminist members engaged in the analyzed sector, with the aim of highlighting the tensions and obstacles imposed on women, simply because they are women, in these metal music communities, making evident situations that have been trying to be reversed in this and many other fields for a long time.

The last of the articles does not abandon the field of music and confronts us with a series of complex concepts that, starting from the second half of the 19th century, transport us to the present day. The author, Magda Polo, describes the general features and objectives of the so-called Hybrid Conceptual Music, traces its antecedents in the so-called Programmatic Music, and brings us closer to the interpretation of this phenomenon at a time when high technologies and artificial intelligences are seeking new fields of exploration, expansion, and projection.

A restless, sometimes turbulent sea has carried us in recent years, now beyond the cursed pandemic, to the sad losses of Roger Alier, Núria de Dalmases, and Pere Salabert. All of them worked in our Department for many academic cycles, as professors and researchers at the University of Barcelona, making their contributions in very diverse fields of our studies. Their interests take us from Music to the History and Theory of Art, in a flow of concerns, works, and projects that often transcended beyond the University. For a better understanding of their profiles, I am pleased to refer to the writings that, in their memory, this volume, number 23 of *MATÈRIA. REVISTA INTERNACIONAL DE ARTE* contains. Approaching the heterogeneous and interesting itineraries of these deceased professors, colleagues, and friends is, far beyond a debt, a way to contribute to enlivening their memory while gaining a firmer perspective on a series of realities that broaden the view of our recent past.

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