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The modern aspect of *mètis*: *Flânerie* and strategies of sense in the labyrinth of the metropolis

Abstract

The essay aims to show how the notion of mètis could work as an interpretative tool philosophically fruitful in view for a new understanding of some fundamental theoretical-problematic knots revolving around the Baudelairean theme of the flâneur: the question of the relationship between mind and world; the need of rethinking the critical function of art within a reality more and more commercialized and homologated; the motif of sense and its link to the dimension of contingency.

Keywords

Mètis, Flâneur, Nexus “sense-metropolis”

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By addressing some relevant theoretical suggestions put forward by François Jullien, my essay formulates the hypothesis that the notion of *mètis* could represent a useful key for a re-reading of the reciprocal presupposition between “sense” and “contingency”. The Baudelairean figure of the *flâneur*, especially when revisited in the light of Benjamin’s constellation made up of “metropolis”, “merchandise” and “fashion”, has the merit of putting such implication in the foreground. If this is to be the *fil rouge* of our approach, we need to refer also to the aesthetical thought of Theodor W. Adorno. For him, in fact, it is possible to find in the Baudelaire’s work one of the exemplary grounding places of the art that Adorno defines as “modern”, characterised by its *ambivalence*: that is, its undecidable suspension between the instance of “sense”, meant as an indefinite openness to the surplus of that which is possible, and the dimension of “contingency”, meant as an expression of the impossibility of transcending the non-sense of reality. Let us try then to understand better the specific role performed by the notion of *mètis* in the path proposed, and what scheme of interpretation will allow the most fruitful use of it.

In his introduction to the Italian edition of *Labyrinth-Studien* by Károly Kerényi, Corrado Bologna establishes a productive connection between the notion of *mètis* and the mythologem of “labyrinth”. Bologna writes:

Beyond its purely religious value [...], the mythologem of labyrinth has traced, since its origins, an important path in the history of European culture *as an abstract model of conjecturality, of the very form of dialectical thought*. In other words, what we are considering is the thought that overcomes obstacles by attacking them, not removing or overstepping them. Such thought struggles against what is unforeseen by elaborating projects that are always suitable to its own goals and requirements, never repetitive, but rather elastically specular, and, at the same time, deforming in relation to the object of competition. The ancients gave the name of *mètis* to that kind of thought. For them *mètis* was the special capability of adhering in solidarity to reality, in a complicit, chameleonic, ambiguous, flexible way. Such illusionistic force, or shrewdness and plasticity, permits victory precisely where no solution or disbandment would enter into the common mind. (Bologna 1983: 8, my translation)

So, contingency – in Aristotelian terms, the sphere of the *endechòme-non àllos échein*, i.e. the possibility that things may be thus *or* otherwise – is the territory that by definition is always rebellious, unruly and irregular, and therefore it amounts to an eminently labyrinthine dimension. In this sense, the fact that contingency represents a labyrinthine dimension means that, inside it, it is not possible to orient ourselves by appeal-

ing to the abstract timeless purity of a “method”. From an etymological point of view, *mèthodos* is “the straight road”, and the straight road means the linear path that directs those who follow it to the attainment of an entire cognitive dominion over the chaos of experience. In fact, following such straight road means trusting that “Ariadne’s thread”, that is represented by the “net of abstraction” (see Colli 1975), i.e. by the logical-deductive thought.

In 1974, Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant dedicated a fundamental and by now classic book to the concept of *mètis* entitled *Les ruses de l’intelligence. La mètis des Grecs*. In their work, the authors recognise in this kind of “cunning intelligence” a proper “way of knowing”: a “complex but very coherent body of mental attitudes and intellectual behaviour which combine flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills, and experience acquired over the years” (Detienne, Vernant 1991: 3). So we are dealing with a type of intelligence that excels for its characteristics of flexibility and elasticity, in the sense that it is able to establish itself – in the restlessness of becoming – precisely for its versatility, or its capability of maintaining a high degree of pliancy and of malleability in its connection with experience, with the non-predictable variety of practical-cognitive challenges that it continually allows to erupt into the scene. “*Mètis* is characterized precisely by the way it operates by continuously oscillating between two opposite poles”, the authors write (Detienne, Vernant 1991: 5). If we think of it in this way, the notion of *mètis* tends to coincide with the notion of “practical efficacy” (see Julien 2004).

Mètis is that ability which consists in being able to wait for the propitious opportunity, or the ability that, for example in the context of competition, succeeds in getting the better of its opponent. It is also the ability that one sees at work in the moment when one manages to engage with a situation subjected to contradictory forces in a state of reciprocal attrition. Moreover, it is the willingness shown by a subject to transform her/his style of behaviour from time to time, adapting it to a multifarious reality and so creating implicitly the conditions to overturn in her/his favour a set of circumstances that are in the first instance hostile and disadvantageous. Success of this kind is due to the ability of such a subject to tune into the complexity of the experiential context of the operation.

It is not by chance that, following the interpretation proposed by Vernant and Detienne, the hero par excellence of *mètis* is Odysseus (ac-

according to Homer, the *polýmetis* and *polýtropos* hero). Moreover, this kind of intelligence — full of talent and dexterity in the use of thought and, as such, strongly putting into play the discriminative and evaluative resources of attention — can also be symbolised by the images of the “fox” (for its ease in getting out of awkward situations), or of the “octopus” (for its ability in entrapping its victims in its coils, paralyzing them) or indeed of the “crab” (for the “ambiguous” form of its body that is characterised by the simultaneous compresence of divergent orientations: its claws point outwards, while its paws point inwards). The deep meaning of *mètis* should be traced in just this inseparable connection between *obliquity* and *ambiguity* (see Jullien 2012, 2015). The subject concerned must have the ability to act “sideways” or “in an abstruse way” (in that ability consists her/his obliquity), and the capacity to become “double” like a chameleon in the face of an unruly, rebellious reality, that escapes from the possibility of being “explained” in logical-categorical terms (in that capacity consists her/his ambiguity). In order to prevail within a hostile and unintelligible world, always threatening and elusive, the subject involved in the challenge must be able to become *ever more* uncatchable, *ever more* ambiguous.

This is exactly *the strategy of sense* enacted by *mètis*. The person who is *ankylométes* — that is, possessed of “a twisted and curved mind” — is able to respond to the polymorphic and polyphonic character of the world by assuming a versatile practical-cognitive attitude which can become similarly swaying and oscillating, similarly elastic and flexible. This is achieved, in an exemplary way, by adopting that typically not-straight gait together with that multi-perspective approach that allows the subject to be *simultaneously open to all directions*. This is achieved by maintaining attention in a state of perpetual willingness to a collaborative interaction with the experiential context of reference. Therefore, the image of the octopus painted on the Minoic Gurnià jug becomes here the privileged symbolic referent. Carlo Diano has recognized in that octopus, all made of “glimpses and spirals”, one of the exemplary representations of the so called “logic of the event”, embodied with the utmost evidence precisely by Odysseus himself. This is a logic that Diano — not by chance quoted in a footnote by Detienne and Vernant (Detienne, Vernant 1991: 7) — distinguishes from the “logic of form”, which, instead, is personified by the well-rounded image of Achilles. To the unity of light and dark exhibited by the figure of Ulysses, which can adhere in a constructive way to the changeability of the event, the figure of Achilles opposes a solid *ethos* uniformly saturated by the eternal immutable light of “form”,

which is “necessity” and “spatiality”. As such, it is opposed to the contingency and to the temporality of the “event” (see Diano 1993: 63-4).

Furthermore, what makes the oblique gait of *mètis* necessary is, especially, a situation in which the subject active in the competition realizes that she/he should proceed *simultaneously*, “without the possibility of a prediction” (because unable to rely on the rigour of an abstract modeling), and “without improvisation” (given that the same subject, although knowing that she/he cannot be fully “prepared” in relation to the specific difficulties that will occur, is however capable of being found not completely unarmed. See Jullien 2015: 79). More in general, though, the notion of *mètis* indicates a modality of the relation between the mind and the world where what counts is not the equalising legality of the concept – always powerless when the *tyche* bursts into action in a destabilising way –, but rather the very *mode* of dealing with the situation: that is to say, the *qualitative tenor* of action (not the “what”, but rather the “how”). From this point of view, what is in the foreground is the subject’s ability of taking charge of everything pertaining to the order of the individual and the singular. In other words, what comes to the fore is the “conditioning” encounter and, at the same time, the emotionally intelligent confrontation, with the unrepeatability and uniqueness of the particular, i.e. with its non-substitutable nature.

The point is, though, that this adhesion of the subject to the mobility of what is contingent should never give rise to what François Jullien calls an “obtuse and helpless submission [*soumission enlisée, inintelligente et désemparée*] as we become too blindly enclosed within the particularity of the case confronted, and lack any further perspective” (Jullien 2015: 78. my translation). On the contrary, the recourse to *mètis* implies that the subject takes as a starting point the understanding of the specific “potential of the situation” expressed by the concreteness of the actual circumstances in which she/he from time to time acts by taking into account their unclassifiable singularity. What this means is to start, in the profiling of operative strategy, from an understanding of the “full dimensions” and the “empty dimensions” immanent in the givenness of that situation, and also from the discernment of the *lines of force* and of the *internal tensions* within it. In so doing, the subject does always aim at the identification of the hold that will prove to be strategically advantageous in relation to the objective she/he intends to achieve.

In this perspective, the obliquity of *mètis* consists in the human capacity to react to the difficulties that from time to time arise, presupposing every time – “as we go along”, so to say – the most appropriate

solutions for defusing them. This means opening a margin of maneuver from the inside of one's "being in a situation". For this reason, to a frontal and therefore always potentially auto-destructive clash (potentially destructive precisely because it renders the subject localisable and therefore reachable by the adversary) *mètis* substitutes a typically sinuous style, which thrives on *diversions* and *deferments*, on *delays* and *de-tours*. Replacing linearity with obliquity has the virtue of getting rid of the opponent not through a direct initiative, where it is always possible "to get bogged down" or "to get stuck", but rather by enhancing the resources implied in a fluctuating and vacillating movement never definable in logical-analytical terms. This steals from the rival the knowledge of the subject's position, boosting the condition of disorientation where the rival's reaction capabilities are inhibited and his defensive ability is depowered. It finishes by causing the immanent destructuration of the strategic mental set of the opponent (see Jullien 1995: 41-66 and 2015: 165-78).

The power of *mètis*, therefore, consists in the fact that the favourable result is conquered, *paradoxically*, through a clever oscillation between manifestation and retraction, between presence and evanescence, by adopting that oblique approach which allows the subject "to remain unfathomable" to the enemy's eyes. This approach makes the subject's presence on the battlefield (whatever the nature of the "battlefield") always elusive and, therefore, always "perturbing-uncanny". From this point of view, *becoming unfathomable* means to make the subject's power of attack always surprising and at the same time potentially inexhaustible. With reference to verbal confrontation, as an example, this triple connection that is created between "obliquity", "unfathomableness" and "inexhaustibility", gives rise to a situation in which "there is always something more to say [...]. Criticism contains in itself the principle of a *never ending oscillation*. It can keep moving forward crawling, but it will never reach the end of its own meanders". "The oblique approach – Jullien adds – finishes from a strategic point of view in becoming *implicit* with respect to the dialogue. The oblique trajectory gives rise to the profundity of sense" (Jullien 1995: 65, my translation). This is because one of the characteristic features of *mètis* must be detected in the capacity by the subject to maintain gesture at a permanently *inchoative* and *evocative* level. What this means is the capacity of dwelling in that condition which is always oscillating between mutually opposed instances – for example: presence and absence, or presence and evanescence, but also proximity and distance –, condition which

ends up by changing the antagonistic relationship into an *always open process*. And this process is qualified for being never blocked in a conceptually definable and logically assignable position. That is why even “invective”, as Jullien points out, is an “art”. “Thanks to its obliquity, verbal attack possesses that *remainder*, or *surplus*, which ensure its depth. They open it into an afterworld and offer us the chance to look beyond” (Jullien 1995: 66, my translation).

Acting according to the *mètis* mood means being able to *remain without position*. It consists in the ability to place oneself upstream of every actualised and determined configuration (for example, having as a target to induce the adversary to come out into the open by taking up a position on the ground *before* we do). This means remaining always on the alert, in a condition of vigilant reactivity. Such behavior implies that the subject is constantly and indefinitely *open* to the emergence of what is possible, available to face the sudden advent of a possibility of de-coincidence, or of de-fixation, with respect to the presumed fixity of what already exists (of what is already thought, already configured, already understood). At the same time the subject is aware that such a possibility of de-coincidence, *if* and *when* it comes to light, is something that one’s action has certainly fostered, stimulating and preparing it. But, however, it will be qualified above all by its virtue of emerging, *sponte sua*, from the same immanence of the given situation, from its phenomonic texture, in the form of a “silent transformation” (see Jullien 2012: 131-56).

So, with reference to the cultural horizon of modernity, it seems to me that the notion of *mètis* can operate as an interpretative instrument that is philosophically fruitful, and in some ways privileged, in view of a new comprehension of the Baudelarian figure of the *flâneur*. This figure assumes a value that is not only “exemplary” but also, in many ways, “inaugural” in relation to the notion of “modern art” (according to the special, not historiographic but above all theoretical, acceptance that the adjective “modern” acquires in the Adornian wording “modern art”). As we know, the *flâneur* is the man who *roams* like a nomad within that “croisement de leurs innombrables rapports” (Baudelaire 2013: 8), within that space integrally decentralised and, by now, deprived of a meta-physical anchor and for this very reason “labyrinthine”, that is the modern metropolis (Benjamin 2002: 352). *Roaming like a nomad* means to cross this space “aimlessly”, without a *telos* not only exactly pre-ordered with respect to one’s roaming, but also capable of conferring on it a sense, an order, a conceptually necessitating structure of intelligibility.

In this respect, the *flâneur's* “cunning”, the oblique multiform cunning intelligence that distinguishes him, is shown in his capability of oscillating cleverly between the emotional involvement and the reflective distancing. The *flâneur* remains constantly open to the possibility of an endless re-articulation of the relation that, in his perceptive trade-off with the “chaos mouvant” of urban life (Baudelaire 2013: 118), is established between the emotional participation and the contemplative detachment, between the “mimetic” adherence to what is empirically existing and the attitude to move away from the given order of things.

Furthermore, the *flâneur* is also characterized by his ability to use such an oscillation in a *semantically dense and imaginatively fruitful* way, embodying and enhancing this oscillation in its more markedly constructive features, in the genuinely elaborative and actively projectural aspect that qualifies it not only aesthetically, but also ethically and politically. “Of the vaporization and centralization of the *Ego*”, Baudelaire writes indeed in his *My heart laid bare*: “Everything is there” (Baudelaire 2017: 68). “Everything is played at this level”, we might reword, in the sense that it is exactly *the suspension between modalities that are qualitatively different in the deployment of one’s own mental life* that constitutes the strategy that is “cunning” in the Odyssean way. It is the rule of effectiveness, or “of manoeuver”, that allows the *flâneur* to introduce that instance of postponement into the phenomenological definiteness of the current praxis that has the virtue of “refloating” the datum, thus opening a breach (a “faïlle”, a fissure, an escape route) in its immanence. And this breach, so to say, makes the datum “out of joint” with respect to itself, thus preventing it from complying with its givenness (Jullien 2017: 9-21). It means releasing the datum from that *coercion to identity* where the “instrumental” logic dominating within the world, tends, instead, to block it.

In this perspective, what makes the implementing of a “cunning” mind (that is, an intelligence that is at once adaptable and elusive) both ethically and politically productive is the encounter with a reality within which the challenge of sense becomes as much harsh and urgent as more the two distinctive tracts of modernity, apparently (at least at first sight) incompatible with one another, are knotted together in a nexus that makes them paradoxically sympathetic and complementary. These features correspond to the following tendencies: on the one hand we have the ever more pronounced *decline of the aura of experience*, implying the prevalence of a discontinuous perception of things (one that proceeds by clicks, jumps, bumps, sudden tremors and clashes); on the

other hand, we find the not less accentuated tendency towards a renewed mythologizing and towards a re-enchantment of the world, meaning with this the reduction of such a world to a mere “phantasmagoria” (Benjamin 2002: 40). The world is thus reduced to the condition of a “product” that conceals, by removing it, the historicity of its “productive processes”¹. On the one side, then, there is the fall of all that traditionally used to be considered immutable – that is, the process of decentralisation and at the same time of de-substantialisation of sense, process that Baudelaire, in *Le spleen de Paris*, calls *the loss of the halo* (Baudelaire 2013: 118-9)². On the other side, there is the aptitude of the urban world to stiffen in an auto-referential closure of normative strategies which, characterised by a logic that is primarily objectifying and calculatory, finishes by downgrading the phenomenal appearance of things to an empty immanence, to a mere appearance, to a surface devoid of any depth. The logic that presides over the functioning of the capitalist-bourgeois system is, indeed, primarily a *logic* of identity. It is a logic which excludes the Other, in the sense that it tends to neutralize any possible reference to a “beyond” by denying it beforehand, or by reabsorbing-engulfing it. Such a logic excludes any possible reference to *something more*, something able to exceed the oppressive weight of the mere fact, the mere presence of simply being, of what is claimed to matter *only* because of its disposition towards being manipulated and dominated.

In his essay *On some motifs in Baudelaire*, Benjamin refers to that *fantasque escrime* that the *flâneur* constantly undertakes through his confrontation with the deafening swarming of the numerous forms of urban life, inducing the *Nervenleben* (the intensification of the nervous life) of which the world of the metropolis is the theatre³. With regard to this *fantasque escrime*, Benjamin introduces the notion of “traumatophilia” (Benjamin 2003: 319), meaning with this the protention of the

¹ For a new-understanding of the notion of “aura”, see in particular Desideri 1995 and the contributes in Di Giacomo, Marchetti 2013.

² In this respect, see also Masini 1990, Vitiello 2006: 26-32.

³ In this regard, see the now “classic” reflections by G. Simmel (see, in particular, Simmel 1971). More in general, to a philosophically more productive new-evaluation of the notion of “metropolis”, see the contributes in Vegetti 2011. With particular reference to the Simmel’s reading of the nexus “metropolis-fashion”, see the clear analysis by Squicciarino 1999 (in particular: 111-57).

flâneur to the inevitably disorienting, destabilising encounter with the dimension of *shock*. In other words, *flâneur's* traumatophilia consists in his willingness to live the experience of a sudden collision with a life that has been made *alien to itself*, in the sense that it has been dispossessed of its limitless semantic-expressive richness, of the unfathomable deepness of its qualitative thickness. From this point of view, the notion of *shock* indicates above all the trauma caused, again and again, by the alienating encounter with the silent opacity of a non-sense that, by now, is incorporated within the same phenomenal texture of the sensible. In the age of advanced capitalism, what coincides with the dimension of non-sense is above all that eternal revival of the *always-the-same* that is embodied in the never ending production of consumption through the inexorable perpetuation of the circuit "money-merchandise-money". That endless repetition of the identical has one of its exemplary manifestations for Benjamin in the triumph of fashion, intended by him as the *sex-appeal of the inorganic*. This is the dimension in which the erotically perverse fascination of the object-merchandise, i.e. the implacable seductive force exerted by its flat exteriority, becomes an agent of a false consciousness (see Lehmann 2000). In this perspective, the *shock* is generated by the proliferation of homogenising and devitalising effects deriving from the fact that the object-merchandise is considered like a fetish. The result is the prevailing of a way of perception in which the subjective consciousness ends up being subjugated by the pervasiveness of the fascinating power exerted by an object that has been reduced to a mere article of trade. In this sense, the consciousness ends up assigning every feeling, and every impulse of the imagination, to the "absolute presence" of the object, to its obstinate self-sufficiency. From this point of view, the object qualifies itself for its tautological closure, i.e. it gives itself as the "appearance" without no more "apparition".

It is not by chance that the world expressed by a modern metropolis is one where "the expectation aroused by the gaze of the human eye is not fulfilled". It is a world inhabited by eyes that "have lost the ability to look" (Benjamin 2003: 339). In this sense, one of the distinctive characteristics of urban life must be found in the fact that, within it, what has dissolved, *at least as a tendency*, is the possibility of experiencing that "exchange", or that *crossing of glances*, during which the "subject who is watching" suddenly feels herself/himself overrun and captured by the irruption of something extraneous which looks her/him back, and that in its unassimilable alterity escapes every possibility of explaining it in logical-intellectual terms. Benjamin himself, not by chance, equates the

shock of the *flâneur* with the serial and mechanised experience of factory workers at the production line. The latter is a system of relations and procedures where the particular has value only *because* it is organically integrated in a “mechanism” of impersonal structures that regulate the functioning of that system, imposing themselves in the form of an incontrovertible necessary automatism. In the labyrinth of the metropolis, the *shock* to which the *flâneur* is constantly exposed, and which he is even stubbornly searching for, arises precisely from the incessant manifestation of this *loss of the Other*, experienced as a loss of what is *properly human*. In this context, what is traumatic is the recognition of the fact that the Other (that which is the qualitatively heterogeneous, the non-classifiable, i.e. which is not likely to be subsumed under abstract pre-ordered schemes) allows itself to be, by now, perceived-and-thought only as a denied and removed possibility. Such a possibility, however, *just because it has been “cancelled”*, still glints in the background, if only in the form of an absence, of what cannot be said. It remains in the spectral form of a shadow zone that is always about to re-surface, or in the form of a latency that never gives up waiting for the time of its awakening, the hour of its knowability.

For the *flâneur*, then, fighting a “fantastic combat” (*fantasque escrime*: this is a line taken from the poem *Le soleil* included in *Les fleurs du mal*) means being able to advance within the urban space “dealing blows” and “parring” those that from time to time are struck by his adversary (see Benjamin 2003: 319-21). If “the blows he deals are designed to open a path for him through the crowd”, then, in the eyes of the *flâneur*, it is just through his participation in this *fantasque escrime* that, unexpectedly, the possibility opens up of transforming the shock into an authentic *vector of sense*, a heuristic and projectual factor for the transformation of the existent. The possibility of emerging victorious from that *fantasque escrime*, then, depends on a single condition: to have the ability *to look through* the traumatic crash of the *shock* until one can read in it what Benjamin himself defines as the *flâneur’s* “poetic booty”. This consists in the looming of a sudden chance of transcending the datum, even if it can appear only in the conceptually vague and indeterminate form of a “hidden constellation” (Benjamin 2003: 321). “Winning” that challenge, then, means being able to promptly recognise, in the determinateness of sensible, the “lucky chance”, the *both* favorably significant and inexorably fugitive “happy circumstance”. For those who are able to take up an attitude of listening to the oppressed life condensed in the datum, for those who are able to do justice to it,

that “lucky chance” has the virtue of working as an authentic breeding ground of that which is possible but has not yet been realised. In this perspective, the datum becomes a creative material in need of being re-laborated, or *otherwise configured*. We could also say it is like the eminent place designated to implement the *polarisation of the datum*, through which the phenomenon perceived suddenly transfigures itself into an “event”. In this way, the concreteness of the phenomenon becomes the horizon of the appearance of “something beyond” that it is never possible to fully say, never possible to totally represent⁴.

In *Le peintre de la vie moderne*, the *flâneur’s* ability to catch in the datum the *other of the datum* is defined in particular as the ability to extract the absolute from the contingent. Baudelaire writes: “He [i.e. the artist-*flâneur*] makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history to distil the eternal from the transitory” (Baudelaire 1964: 12). In this respect, what plays a crucial role is the fact that the *flâneur*, although he is driven by the will to “interrupt the course of the world” (Benjamin 1999: 318), knows that he cannot explicitly oppose the determinateness of an alternative sense to the non-sense of the alienated and reified life. Translating such an alternative possibility of sense in affirmative terms would end up confirming, and even reinforcing, the current functionally integrated system of power relations. Such system constitutes what, according to Adorno’s terminology, coincides with the dimension of the “administered world”. Making explicit the *other of the datum*, i.e. the unexpressed possible that this implicitly presupposes, would be equivalent to ratifying the identitarian and “protocol” logic that dominates the world. In fact, this dominating logic is the logic of the sayable and of the explicitly enunciable. It is an apophantic logic that is able to absorb any otherness by assigning it to the givenness of a meaning that is univocally localisable and exactly circumscribed.

This gives rise to what would seem to be an insurmountable *im-passe*: one that would consist in being paralysed in the “false” alternative between a “quietist” abandonment to the existent (this will imply renouncing any critical questioning of the datum) and the awareness

⁴ Therefore, there is in Baudelaire the looming of a genuine “aesthetics of the city”, in the horizon of which the urban phenomena tend to *imaginatively* transfigure themselves into “signs” able to hint to a depth of sense that “*dépasse toute possibilité de représentation et d’interprétation*” (Stierle 2001: 543).

that any affirmation-explicitation of a “different” order of sense would end up confirming the currently dominating structures of meaning. That would lead to become complicit with the prevailing order. However, what characterises the artist-*flâneur*'s gesture is precisely his ability to avoid this aporia, which is only apparently insurmountable, by responsibly accepting the challenge and *thinking it* to the core. That means cultivating an awareness of the real stakes that the challenge hides in its folds. It is precisely at this level that the special ethical-cognitive attitude expressed by the idea of *mètis* can assert its resources in a fruitful way. The artist-*flâneur* in fact is aware that if he wishes to introduce into the world an authentically subversive instance of transcendence with respect to the datum, he must in some sense “increase the dose” (Baudrillard 2012: 16, my translation). It means that he must succeed in absorbing the adversary's strength, interiorising it *homeopathically* (Di Giacomo 2015: 24) according to a controlled and careful dosage. From this point of view, the *ankyломètes* gesture of the *flâneur* consists in his ability to adhere to the dominant grammar of the world, *somehow* absorbing and taking it upon himself, but at the same time reconfiguring it by following new trajectories of sense according to *settings of understanding what exists* that are not only qualitatively different with respect to the dominating paradigm, but which have the virtue of *destructuring from within* the logic of the “administrated world”.

In order to create the conditions of a real transformation of the praxis, it is necessary above all to be able to assimilate “mimetically” the non-sense that we oppose, i.e. against which we wish to promote and favour an action of resistance that should be responsibly critical. Being able to adhere to the non-sense of the world, means, then, first of all, *being able to confide in immanence*. It means starting to listen to the forces and to the contradictions that inhabit it, aiming in the first place at the comprehension of the “potential of the situation” that is implicit within those forces and contradictions (see Jullien 2012: 149-56 and 2015: 19-26). In Baudelairean terms, recognising one's involvement in things — this capacity of *relying on immanence* — consists, in the case of the *flâneur*, in his aptitude of plunging into the chaos of the metropolis, in his aptitude of *épouser la foule*, of becoming “*one flesh with the crowd*” (Baudelaire 1964: 9), to the point of losing his own identity, of getting himself lost in the confusing ecstasy of the embrace of the crowd (the “vaporization” of the “*Ego*”). The fact remains, though, that this “perfect *flâneur*” is and remains a “*prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito” (the “centralization of the *Ego*”, Baudelaire 1964: 9).

This, while the *flâneur* roams “in the heart of the multitude” as a “passionate spectator” who is comparable to “a mirror as vast as the crowd itself”, to a “kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness”. As kaleidoscope, the *flâneur* responds “to each one of its movements” and reproduces “the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life” (Baudelaire 1964: 9). This oscillation between “vaporization” and “centralization” of the *Ego* can be also translated in the fact that for the *flâneur* “to see the world” means, *at the same time*, “to be at the centre of the world and yet to remain hidden from the world” (Baudelaire 1964: 9). If *being at the centre of the world* is equivalent to the pathemic-affective moment of participation, *being hidden from it* coincides instead with the theoretical-contemplative moment of detachment. This gives rise to that ineliminable ambiguity that, as has already been said, constitutes one of the distinctive features of the emotional and cognitive *habitus* ascribable to the *flâneur*. He must know how to remain always in a *precarious balance*, in a condition of continuous suspension and oscillation between different modes of articulation of his way of being-in-the-world. This corresponds exactly with his ability to keep his “gesture” at a permanently inchoative and suggestive level. Here, the connection *mètis-flânerie* appears in the most perspicuous way. The *flâneur* avoids the fixity of a position that is univocally determined and clearly intelligible. In so doing, he reactivates and promotes the *transit of sense*, restoring to the possibility of accessing to the sense, and of experiencing it, its virtually unlimited wide.

Baudelaire’s art takes its critical strength (which, according to Adorno, is indissolubly linked to its utopic function) from the implementation of a strategy that is ethically and politically “cunning”. This art assumes a posture that is irreducibly oblique and ambivalent with respect to reality. It is an art that develops itself “programmatically” in the form of a double movement. What distinguishes it is the ability to hold together terms that are, *at the same time*, opposed and complementary. On the one hand the instance of autonomy, i.e. the moment of auto-referentiality, which Adorno calls the “monadic” character of art. On the other hand, there is the moment of non-autonomy, or of hetero-referentiality (that “content of truth” of the artwork which is one and all with its ability to speak of the world). So, if on one side we have the work “on” the form and the work “of” the form, which guarantees the independence of the artwork from reality, on the other we have that structural openness of the form towards the ephemeral (towards the fortuitous, the “occasional”, the fugitive) without which the artwork

would condemn itself to a condition of “blindness” with respect to history, i.e. with respect to the unspeakable suffering condensed within it. Once again it is Adorno who underlines the crucial importance of this double movement of which Baudelaire’s work is an exemplary expression:

If it is not to betray itself, art must resist fashion, but it must also innervate fashion in order not to make itself blind to the world, to its own substance. In his poetic work and in his essays, Baudelaire was the first to practice this double relation toward fashion. Of this his eulogy for Constantin Guys is the most compelling evidence. For Baudelaire, the artist *de la vie moderne* is he who remains in self-control while abandoning himself to what is completely ephemeral. (Adorno 2002: 316)

In the above quote from Adorno, the notion of “fashion” designates exactly the ephemeral and the transient⁵, i.e. the unredeemable contingency of a world that is marked, even in its most intimate fibres, by the fall of what traditionally was considered immutable (the idea of a “metaphysical ground”). This means the dissolution of *sense* as a supreme significance always already guaranteed, and given once and for all. At the same time, though, the term “fashion” names also another aspect of modernity that is inextricably intertwined with the previous one. This coincides with the dimension of repetition, with that “eternal recurrence” of the ever-equal that Benjamin calls “temporality of hell” (Benjamin 1999: 66). In the ever more commercialised horizon of the metropolis, what reappears in the shape of an identical that repeats itself blindly (and *mythically*), is precisely that “fetishism of the merchandise” (that is to say, that idolatric absolutisation of the datum) that tends to remove the inappropriable individuality of things (their “visage”, their non-repeatability to parity of sense) in the abstract equivalence of the “exchange value”, i.e. in the dehistoricified and decorporised uniformity of what is universally exchangeable-and-saleable.

In this sense, what qualifies the Baudelairean art is the fact that it can adhere *mimetically* to the grammar that factually dominates reality, assimilating and introjecting it, although in controlled and selective ways. But it is also true that such an incorporation of the historical-social materials coming from the empirical dimension (which is the dimension of “fashion” and of the “ephemeral”) is indissolubly linked to its func-

⁵ On the nexus “art-fashion” according to Adorno, see Matteucci 2012: 97-132.

tionally unavoidable *pendant* that is represented by the critical-reflective instance, by the valutive and discriminating moment always implicitly in action in the autonomy consciously claimed by the work. In opening itself to the embrace with the heterogeneous, Baudelaire's work "knows" that it must conserve its ability to distance itself from the empirically existing and, with it, from the specific historical configuration that the relationships of domination assume in the world. Furthermore, in Baudelaire, this distancing from reality is one with the necessity of otherwise configuring that same reality, according to a logic that the work gives to itself freely and immanently, i.e. without bringing it out from the outside world.

The organisation of the physical-material elements that compose the Baudelairean form, i.e. the actively reconfiguring and remodeling work made by the sensible texture of its internal relations, assumes here a role of primary importance. But the point here is that, according to Adorno, that same form that appears as a dimension that is above all *intransitive* (like a texture of signs that, in the first instance, "says itself"), is offered to us as "a sedimented content" (Adorno 2002: 5). Now, assuming that the artistic form *is* a sedimented content means that it appears as the result of the multicontradictory stratification of its own cultural and social history. Form, then, presents itself as the outcome of precipitating and imploding — in the same determinateness of the physical-material means that constitute it — of that historically conditioned (and culturally mediated) multiplicity of experiences, materials and relations that the work *at the same time* reveals and hides. Form brings such a multiplicity to manifestation at the same time as it renders it occult, i.e. at the same moment in which it hints at the impossibility of a full and complete explicitation of it.

In Baudelaire's work, then, it is the same non-sense of urban life that has become "stratified" and "coagulated" in the givenness of its sensible means. In this perspective, if the dissonance exhibited by the artistic form consists in a tendentially paratactic juxtaposition of polar tensions that remain logically undecidable, then it is precisely such a dissonance that *bears witness to*, i.e. that *shows* although without *saying* it, the dissonance of a reality lacerated by irresolvable tensions and contradictions that can no longer be recomposed or harmonised. This is exhibited in an exemplary way by the ever unresolved tension that, in the Baudelairean lyric production, is established among those antithetical and interdependent terms that are "heaven" and "hell", *spleen* and *idéel*, "elevation" and "abyss". So, if the Baudelairean form is able to escape the

all-levelling grasp of the principle of identity (i.e. the principle set in the foundations of the capitalist-bourgeois system), this is due to the fact that the transparency of every intelligible meaning that from time to time emerges from within it, is something that always tends to “darken”. Paradoxically, the coming out of such a meaning coincides with its tendency to become elusive and fleeting, with its aptitude for “unsaying” its own meaningfulness, denouncing itself as something fictional and illusory. Baudelaire’s art continually evokes or “promises” a sense that, at the same time as it affirms itself (even if precariously), never stops denying itself. In this way it continually revokes and contradicts its own being valid as a principle of unity capable of transfiguring what exists by reconciling and pacifying it.

The result is the construction of an “order” which always appears as irremediably *lacerated* and *disfigured*. In this sense, Baudelairean work presents itself as a “totality” that, paradoxically, draws its completeness from its absence of completeness, just as it draws its unity from the absence of unity. From this point of view, we can say that in Baudelaire it is precisely the compositional work expressed by form that institutes a difference between art and reality. Thus, it introduces into the givenness of what exists a discontinuity, i.e. an instance of transcendence, that, *all of a sudden*, gives the fixity of the datum back to the possibility of further meanings. Therefore, by subtracting things from the identitarian coercion current in the world — by freeing them from the submission to a logic according to which they have value only as means to be employed in view of the achievement of that *unique* end that has been preemptively assigned to them by the capitalist-bourgeois system — the Baudelairean form loads things with an impact force that upsets them. By dialectising them, i.e. by getting them endlessly short-circuiting with their own givenness, form returns them to the incompleteness of the becoming, to the possibility of being other-than-themselves.

In conclusion, if it is true that what characterises Baudelaire’s work is the need to fulfil a function that is both critical and utopic with regard to reality, it is also true that it never expresses such criticism in terms of a “head-on collision”, in the explicitness of a direct opposition to reality. As we said, in fact, this would end up confirming those same structures of meaning with respect to which the work must function, according to Adorno, as a “determinate negation”. What prevails, instead, is a kind of “lateral” and “oblique” way of proceeding that programmatically uses deviations and circumventions, suggestions and withdrawals from the presence. It is precisely in this way of proceeding, as we have seen, that

it is possible to recognise one of the most prominent features of the idea of *mètis*. From this point of view, the “cunning” strategy implemented by Baudelairean art consists in its ability of being, *simultaneously*, autonomous and non-autonomous with respect to reality. It is, indeed, an art that, on the one hand, knows that it cannot renounce its referential performance which is all one with the honouring of its own *debt of witness* with regard to the sufferings accumulated in the course of history (a debt qualified, in any case, by the fact that it is inextinguishable). On the other hand, Baudelaire’s art feels, with the same urgency, the necessity of taking a stance regarding the world in authentically critical terms. This means that, by radicalising that non-sense that the work has been able to introject, by adhering to it mimetically and taking it on its own, Baudelaire’s art makes us feel the above all *ethical* need for sense.

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