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**Sensorium and Aesthetic Experience.
Human Self-Reflection in Technological Art¹**

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The aim of this paper is to clarify and discuss the thesis about the historical development of the aesthetic experience and of the senses as a consequence of the parallel development of technologies. To begin with, I will present and analyse one of the latest approaches to the historical development of the senses, namely, the one that C. A. Jones develops in *Sensorium* (2006: MIT). Her main thesis sustains that the system conformed by our senses – which she names as *sensorium*-, depends directly on the technological environment and, because of that, the relation of both is the responsible for human knowledge and behaviour. Thus, following her, the improvement of technology in Modernity and the possibility of a high amplification and anesthetisation of the senses have enabled an increasing control over them. However, even if such a poststructuralist approach can critically explain many social phenomena, I will argue that, in considering this, Jones does not coherently hold a conception of the aesthetic experience, one of the cornerstones of her theoretical reflections. Secondly, I will try to work out this problem by introducing the main pillars of a phenomenological theory applied to aesthetic experience. I do not only consider that this alliance between a poststructuralist and a phenomenological theory is not contradictory, but also necessary as well as very enriching in order to solve some theoretical problems of both methodologies. This proposal will show, on the one hand, that works of art produce in the subject, a paradoxical experience at both the sensible and the emotive levels while at the same time they lead him to a process of self-reflection. On the other hand, I will show that this embodied reflection has a semantic dimension where the idea of oneself as a human being is implied. Some examples of current technological art (like Paik, Cardiff & Miller) will be provided to exemplify these theses. To be confronted by the new ideas more or less implicit in technological art is a challenge in which we are involved as citizens of a future which, beyond cultures, affects the whole of humanity.

Modern sensorium and technology

Caroline A. Jones’ essay “The Mediated Sensorium” we want to review here belongs to a wider and ambitious theoretical and curatorial project. Jones’ opening essay describes how social ways of thinking depend directly on the technological environment. The curatorial project aims to join some works of art whose effects are mediated by technological devices and, in this way, show and query current ways of subjectivation. The exhibition catalogue

also includes essays about the works of art exhibited and about a selection of the more recent and important concepts on this subject to understand XXI-century presumable shifts.

Jones's main thesis asserts that our senses constitute a whole system or an "access-set" to the world and, in this sense, they shape our way of thinking. However, she argues that the senses as such don't have a direct access to the world, but they are always referred to it through a "medium": sometimes, through air or water, usually through much more complex means such as newspapers, books, glasses, television, mobiles, web-cams, drugs, nanosurgical implants, etc. Hence, what Jones calls *sensorium* is not our five senses as such, but rather the system which unifies both the physiological senses and the medium. Thus, this sensorium is the "corporeality" through which the subject gets access to the world, experiences it and acquires knowledge. Therefore, *sensorium* is

"the subjects way of coordinating all of the body's perceptual and proprioceptive signals as well as the changing sensory envelope of the self".²

Anyone who is familiar with post-structuralist approaches like those of Foucault or Deleuze will have already suspected that this embodied experience constitutes our way of thinking and explains how the subjectivity is built. As Jones says,

"the sensorium is at any historical moment shifting, contingent, dynamic, and *alive*. It lives only in us and through us, enhanced by our technologies and extended prosthetically but always subject to our consciousness (itself dependent on sensory formations)".³

Thus, the main features that define the modern age we have inherited are: a wider and more specialised knowledge of each of our different senses; a subsequently technological improvement, which makes possible a segmentation and intensification of the senses (op. cit. pg. 10 ff.), the colonisation and control of the body functions (v.g. pg. 6, 11), and the comfortable self-access and control of these functions (through pills, DSL, i-pod, joysticks, and artificial tastes). However, according to Jones, our current age could also be a shifting one where, without rejecting technologies, we could become aware of other alternatives that appeared in the periphery of Modernity. These alternatives could be pointed out by technological art-expressions and genres. In relation to this, I agree with Jones' reflections which state that art is one of the best motives to interrogate embryonic perceptual modes and social relationships. But to do that, it is first necessary to consider the technological development through the relevant historical background. In order to argue this, I'm going now to summarize Jones' explanation of the development of sensorium in Modernity.

Jones relates the recent history of our sensorium beginning with the denigration process of the sense of smell in the Nineteenth-Century, "when anthropologists 'proved' that savages had a better sense of smell because they were closer to the ground" (ib. pg. 12).⁴ The problem posed was that as human beings we can hardly control the natural odours of our body. In the same way, we neither have any power at all on how pheromones affect our molecular receptors, get into our brains "bypassing conscious cognition" and create all kinds of unexpected reactions (ib. pg. 13). For instance, bodily odours were associated with the lower class in the Enlightenment, whilst hygienic mechanisms and habits were more common in the high-classes (the first toilet in Europe was imported from England by the King of France, ib. pg. 17). The perfume industry was improved, the urban engineers wanted to organize city smells, moving some of them out of the cities (like rubbish or concrete industries) or organising social behaviours. In the end, smells had to be controlled in order to not disturb the perceptive functions related to the other senses (pg. 16). The segmenting of senses had begun, and with it, their control and instrumentalisation.

The growth of cities, of city noise and of population created the necessity of amplifying the public oratory, which became possible with the loudspeaker (Jones quotes Hitler's statement published in the newspapers: "without the loudspeaker, we would never have conquered Germany"). But with this process of amplification, it also became necessary to segment sounds, by parcelling places and isolating them from the chaotic city and the mechanically produced noise. One of the first places that was acoustically isolated was the Harvard's fine-arts lecture hall: for that purpose both knowledge on acoustics and new swaddling materials were developed. They could not only obstruct noise coming from outside, but also dispersed the noise inside. "In order to see, impressionable Harvard students had to be barred from *hearing*" (pg. 26). In the same way, ear protection was provided in noisy factories to help workers concentrate on their work. In other cases factories would use music to entertain and diminish their feeling of alienation. Thus, Modern science of acoustics and the acoustical abatement of city noise, according to Emily Thompson's studies, "was not a search for pastoral calm, but an effort to regulate urban behaviour and improve productivity".⁵

The division of spaces, the separation of acoustic atmospheres and the distancing from the madding crowd resulted in, quoting Jones, "an illusory separation of the individual from the mass". If "premodern spaces had used resonance to build community", now every uncontrolled noise had to be eliminated to let modern subject emerge without external distortions. In the new private isolated chambers –Foucault's "dead rooms"– direct and uncontrolled stimuli were kept away and new technological apparatuses were improved to intensify specific sensations. Hi-Fi sound, for example, with its potential to personalise and individualise different tune modes, is one of the examples of this tendency to abstract sensation. With Hi-Fi technique, music prepared its field, like painting, only to be listened to, not to be danced to, not to be sung to or mixed with social or religious rituals. What does fidelity actually mean? In classical music, for example, truthfulness to original notes entails playing the piece many times and mixing the most accurate passages in a new and single work. This sort of works was possible at the price of the music original soul and of the intensity of the performance, including its possible inaccuracies. Broadcasted live-music first, followed then by recorded concerts, studio music and finally digital sounds never heard before enabled an ever-more abstract music. These sounds produced less embodied experiences, a much more refined and intensified specific perception and a subsequent more reflective subject. The act of listening to pure music changed some social behaviours and, as Susan Douglas's study confirms, "broke away from all those daily tasks".⁶

According to Jones's text, there are three ways of controlling sound: amplification, reduction and isolation, all orchestrated to create the emerging space of the modern individualistic subject. On the one side, there is a competition between sounds in the open-air; on the other side, there is an increasingly over-protection of the individual acoustic atmosphere and the subsequent over-concentration on the self. With the support of psychoanalytical sources, Jones argues that this twofold process has dire effects on an inadequate and problematic development of the subject: he would grow separated from the social body and would produce an ever increasing fragmentation of his personality. Or in other words this would lead to individual isolation and/or "neurasthenic fragmentation" (pg. 31).

I would like to proceed now with the most important sense in Modernity: sight. As we have seen, technologies of the senses –adapting Foucault's expression- used to segregate every sense from each other in order to intensify the respective sensations. In this segmentation of

the sensorium, sight reached a greater importance than the others –even more than in the previous centuries.

Jones's approach goes beyond Foucault's, and even beyond more recent studies about visuality and society of spectacle –see for example Martin Jay-. Actually, what interests me the most, is that she comprehends visuality together with its inherent textuality. As she says: "text has become a primary constituent of our ocular consciousness" (pg. 32??). Conceptual drafts, computer interfaces, adverts, statistic tables are evidence that it is not only the visuality, but the combination between "text and graphic imagery that remains the most efficient means to navigate" through information (pg. 33). Thus, in conformity with Jones, our sight is textual as much as our reading is saturated with imagery. Our perception of objects is like reading conceptually their properties and that makes our visuality abstract rather than material or pure. Something similar is what Paul de Man expressed while writing about Mallarmé: human perception of nature has never been natural or pure; it has always been mediated by language and we are forever separated from its substance.⁷ Actually, Jones argues that it has probably been the increasing importance of writing and reading in our society that has given sight an abstract character and has made us still more ocular-centric (pg. 33).

Therefore, Jones puts into question if the famous "pictorial turn" could be considered a such one "beyond its textual rhetoric". Quite apart from the fact that Greenberg's theoretical proposals about "pure painting" and "eyesight alone" became only cultural "via reams and reams of journalistic prose" (pg. 34), she analyses what kind of sight is intrinsic to this "pure looking at". In analogy with the other senses, we could infer that the separation of the pictorial as the pure optical in formalist paintings could enhance the intensification of visual sensation. Even if sometimes Greenberg used creative imagination rather than reproductive memory, no one can doubt how fine and subtle are his descriptions of paintings. However, this kind of visuality still has got the abstraction essence of the text. This abstraction, as Greenberg himself explained is only pictorial and flat and cannot even be related to sculpture. There is no third dimension, no touch nor texture. Therefore pure sight doesn't see the colour, the line and the thing itself; on the contrary, the sight must take distance from the thing and pigment itself in order to conceive only colour and form. We have to learn how to read pictures like these and I agree with Jones' argument that Greenberg's vision of pure materiality has to be interpreted as an abstraction of the materiality of things. That is to say, we produce an abstraction of an attribute (or a number of attributes) of certain objects and then we reverse this attribute into a representation of an object. Nevertheless, what is important is that this kind of sight over things, even if it is not so natural nor even so original as some art critics had pretended,⁸ we can agree in that it can bring us a more intensified sensation, a sensation of something "present".

As we have already seen with hearing, this kind of separation of sight from other senses makes possible an activity in which the sensibility can become more accurate and refined, and it can also bring a deeper knowledge of its constitution and activity. We could find many examples that show how this specialisation and intensification of sight and hearing promotes a further development of their knowledge as well as a process of bureaucratisation and instrumentalisation of these senses. Psychological studies analyse how sight navigates over an image and this knowledge is used in advertising in order to send the intended messages more effectively or to place specific products in the supermarkets exactly where it is already known we are going to look at. Also all kind of commercial films and TV shows

organize their narrative structure to grab the audience's attention to the maximum and, as it is well known for this sort of purposes, technology is the best ally.

Similarly to other post-structuralist philosophers, Jones' approach also emphasizes the current predomination of sight over all other senses. Sight is today, according to this, the most important source of stimuli for the production of the subject, which becomes a distant, disengaged observer, a self-reflective subject, a disembodied perceptive subject. This conception brings Jones to point out the individual and social tensions produced by such hierarchisation of the senses. Some texts of Deleuze and Guattari and of psychology are also quoted here in order to focus on the outcomes that can follow such hierarchisation and destabilization of the subject: tension, isolation, anxiety, schizophrenia, etc. These don't lead necessarily to illness or to other worse consequences. To lighten these sort of problems, in the last decades, science and technology have brought some analgesics and other comfortable but superficial patches for all kinds of modern disruptions.

Before giving my opinion about Jones' critical approach, I would like to quote a passage about the social function of art in this context. Jones talks about a sort of compensation function of the mid-century art, which was followed by a more critical and counter-culture phenomena in the 60's and 70's.

"(...) most artists within hegemonic mid-century modernism felt compelled to reintegrate the subject for interpellation in normative capitalism (...) The modernist self could be idealized as an "integrated personality"; perhaps the contemporary moment calls for a more creatively dissociated self (...) [In current art], leaving us open, unbounded, or fragmented is not meant to produce us as psychotic, but to make us available for re-organization in terms we might be able to negotiate for ourselves (...) The drift seems to be toward creative dissociation and polymorphous reassembly, with technology allowing us to initiate, simulate, or cancel our multiplied subjectivities."

Virtues and Vices of the Sensorium's Theory

I have not summarized Jones' conception and modern historization of human sensorium in order to persuade the audience about the correctness of her theoretical approach, but to share a closer idea of this model of analysis in order to consider its virtues and vices (pros and cons). In doing this, I will endeavour to show the value of complementing that type of theory with a phenomenological perspective, whose main pillars I will present briefly. At that stage my major interest will be to consider the possibility of bringing together both structuralist and phenomenological perspectives. At the end of the essay, I will illustrate by means of examples of current art how this theoretical instrument is conducive to interpreting artworks.

1.- The sensorium hypothesis: The sensorium as a complex system comprising human senses and their (technological) means achieves a very narrow approach in the relation between current social order and human understanding. Furthermore, this perspective is philosophical rather than sociological; that is to say: it does not only lead to a diagnosis of society, but also to an explanation of that analysis by applying the hypothesis of the sensorium in social and technological shifts. The methodology to apply that explanation is not so much a historical one, but a sort of genetic one –in foucaultian terms-. That means that it endeavours to find the multiple and contingent origins of our present situation and, from that point, explains the social changes empirically. I appreciate that, even if it is very risky, as I will argue in the first point under Vices. The genetic analysis does not only have the virtue that it can be mended and revisited. In addition to that, in principle, this

perspective must not postulate *a priori* neither controversial essences of human being, nor deterministic relations in history, nor relations of necessity between the technological influence and the construction of the subject. This brings us to the second advantage.

2.- The sensorium hypothesis. It is more plausible to explain the development of the senses in relation to social and technological changes than its orthodox Marxist-Darwinist version. This one had an important influence over other thinkers such as Benjamin and stated that what actually changes with technological progress are the senses as such. In Marx's words, "the forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present".⁹ But nowadays, with our current empirical data, it is very doubtful that our physiological senses have been developing considerably for millennia. In any case, some small changes in development could not justify the great improvement of our technical world since, at least, the Neolithic Age.

3.- The relation art-sensorium-society. From an aesthetic point of view, the sensorium becomes a very useful instrument to describe the mutual influences between art and society. As we all know, this relation is such a problematic one that most aesthetic theories have oversimplified it by reducing it to a single-way direction, whether art influences society or society influences art. Jones' approach does not fall victim to naivety of defending the classical avant-garde principles, nor to the skepticism of the sociological perspective, which considers art merely a product of culture. Instead, it seems rather that she tries to combine the formalistic with the post-structuralistic approach: since art is an activity particularly focused on the means, it can have, amongst others, two functions: firstly, it can help either to become aware of the dominant social sensorium; secondly, it can be analysed as a very influential means on the construction of society and the subject, by configuring new modes of perception. We have already seen how Jones uses, for instance, Greenberg's conception of aesthetic perception –that is: "the eyesight alone" or "pure painting"- as one of the most refined ways for the intensification and improvement of the visuality; and how all that has its influence over the production of a dominant ideology. (I will later talk about how this awareness of a mode of perception is valued positively or negatively).

Based on current art trends, such as those displayed in *Sensorium's* exhibition, Jones describes how current art comes up with a new conception of human being, that is, a less systematized, more fragmented and unbounded subject (pg. 39). On one hand, some works of art use technology to produce an involving and embodied blend of sensations, allowing us to experiment with new self-re-organ-izations and to "initiate, simulate, or cancel our multiplied subjectivities" (pg. 40). On the other hand, some other use a technological means to intensify concrete sensations, but in a paradoxical and disagreeable way that leads the viewer to a self-awareness of the mode of perception. In *Opera for a Small Room*, Cardiff and Miller use a highly-developed multichannel audio and lighting system to perform a fictive scene where a character is playing records and remembering an old love story that ended tragically. Following Jones' essay, Cardiff & Miller's work of art evokes that sixties world of Hi-Fi and "pure listening to music". The visitor is sometimes involved in the scene, as if he were invited to share the character's feelings, and sometimes excluded, as, for example at the end, he is placed where the applause is heard. Then he realised it was all a spectacle. Inviting the viewer to become involved and then distancing him from the work, the artists seem to bring to light the "whole cultural and psychological package evoked by always-mediated sound" (...) and "revealing how uncanny was that sonic segmentation" (pg. 32).



Figure 1: J. Cardiff & G. B. Miller, "Opera for a small room", 2005, MACBA, 2007, © Photo: Lisbeth Salas

Even if I find this interpretation appropriate and interesting, I will now try to argue why, with Jones' theory, we cannot deeply explain two important points: first, how the mechanisms of the aesthetic experience work; second, how we can deeply interpret the effects of such works of art. I will argue that by introducing some of the problems of Jones' theory. Later, they will bring us to a new proposal.

1.- The **first vice**: There are many possible philosophical critiques of the post-structuralist perspective in general, but I don't want to repeat them, falling into the trap of criticising a theory from the point of view of another one. Neither I think it is necessary to discuss the demonizing vocabulary –"instrumentalizing", "burocratization", "control", etc.- against the alienation of society and the confabulation of our past centuries –my a bit more integrated perspective does not always empathise with it-. I would rather point out what I call the naivety and risk of such critical approaches. As I have already pointed out above with the first virtue of Jones' proposal, this method works inductively, so it seeks genetically a cause in the past for the present situation. The double problem of that approach is, first, to not recognise that a diagnosis of a present situation is not a mere fact: the past that is being criticised –the cultural tradition- transmits the conditions of possibility and the categories of "alienation", "instrumentalisation", etc. That also queries whether the observer's situation is involved or kept away from that alienated society. Nevertheless, these epistemological problems would not really bother me if they had not run the risk of a pragmatic problem. So, secondly, without recognising that arbitrary point of departure, one can fall into the trap of not considering some facts that could easily contradict the genetic analysis. As we will see in the following points, this implies further problems to think over aesthetic theory.

2.- Jones illustrates the climax of the ocular-centrism in mid-century Modernity with Greenberg's conception of art, which stems from the model of abstract expressionism and advocates a "sight" without any intellectual interference. Greenberg's criticism is adopted

by Jones, who claims that mid-century art is a reflection of the fore-mentioned culture, which was based on sight and was the last stage of the atomized modern subject. Even if it is true that Greenberg's criticism has produced millions of academic and artistic responses, I am not sure if Jones is overestimating Greenberg's social representativity. For instance, we should not forget two phenomena that Jones does not take into account: firstly, a tradition that includes opera, "total artwork" (*Gesamtkunswerk*) and movies with sound; all these art forms combine two or more senses to produce a more involving aesthetic experience.¹⁰ Secondly, Jones uses Greenberg's criticism to interpret mid-century art (above all abstract expressionism), without considering other different and important interpretations like Eduard-Lucie Smith's, which does not entail such a monolithic conception of the subject. All that brings us to a third problem.

3.- Jones' essay lacks a concrete conception of the role and power of the aesthetic experience in Modernity. Bearing in mind Greenberg's theory, Jones values the aesthetic reflection caused by, for example, "pure painting" as negative, because it implies a division between subject and reality and a trend to an abstracted, disembodied subject. Meanwhile, however, a different type of self-reflection is positively considered: see, for example, the paradoxical experience of perception that a current work of art can produce through a more embodied experience, the self-reflection that can make us aware of the process of perception, like in Haghigian and Cardiff's work. In doing this, it seems to be that Jones treats mid-century art through arbitrary critical sources rather than through her own experience. And this means: her conception of historic art depends on the ideology that she would like to defeat. But, if we want to understand art in relation to its effects over society, we must be able to explain these effects through the aesthetic experience itself. We must be able to explain that a work of art has power over our conception of what is a human being or what is society. Then, we must be able to explain how this is done. If we do not want to treat art as if it were a mere cultural product depending on our discourses, we must try to justify the effects that they could have over the society through the aesthetic experience itself.

4.- In my opinion, the three previous points show that the *Sensorium's* essay has a deficient theory of the aesthetic experience, which could be rather beneficial in solving some theoretical problems as well as enriching in the interpretation of works of art. Since Jones' theoretical proposal also entails an exhibition project, that complementary theory of the aesthetic experience should satisfy some conditions:

- Firstly, taking into account that the selected works of art in the exhibition mix and experiment with different sensations, the theory will have to include emotional and bodily elements.

- Secondly, considering the importance of technology in Jones' theory: we will have to be able to justify the artistic formal means as an important factor in the overall effect the art has on the viewer.

- Thirdly, the theory will have to explain the possibility that the work's reception can be generalized and that it can interfere on the subjectivation process. That is: it will have to justify the intersubjective self-reflection of the experience of art, which, in the end, gives us an implicit conception of the world, the subject or whatever the work of art is about.

- Fourthly, if art can sometimes take advantage of social ideology, a sort of aesthetic autonomy will have to be defended. I will start with this point.

Main principles of a theory of aesthetic experience

I will now summarize the main pillars of a theory of the aesthetic experience. It tries to work out the problems I have already pointed out, but it has to be compatible with Jones' interesting conception of sensorium. I worked on that theory in my last projects especially in phenomenological terms, but I will reformulate some of its principles in order to show that both approaches are not only compatible, but complementary. My thesis is that the main categories for a theory of the experience of art can be found in the Kantian *Critique of the Capacity to Judge*, in an embryonic form. My proposal is to read it from a very contemporary point of view, for example, from the perspective that literature theorist Hans-Robert Jauss offered some years ago.¹¹

Therefore, a theory of the aesthetic experience has four main moments: a negative, a reflective, an intersubjective and an emotive one.

1.- Autonomy and negativity of the aesthetic perception. The aesthetic experience can set off a perceptive process that is not governed by the same rules that determine the cognitive or the moral experience. The aesthetic experience works independently from these experiences and can even negate them. It is independent because it performs a perceptual process that does not have the recognition of an object or of its function as its goal. For example, when we come across Nam June Paik's sculpture "Turtle", the goal of our experience of the work of art is not to recognise the TV-sets or the sculpture as a representation of a turtle. These recognitions would define a common cognitive perception. Even if we did not actually know the turtle is an important symbol in Korean culture, I think we would suspect a link between this object and traditional symbolism. But, in any case, the aesthetic experience of that work would not be the evocation of an ancient tradition. I would rather think it could remind us of the transformation of that symbolism by new development into a banal, ironical, entertaining object.

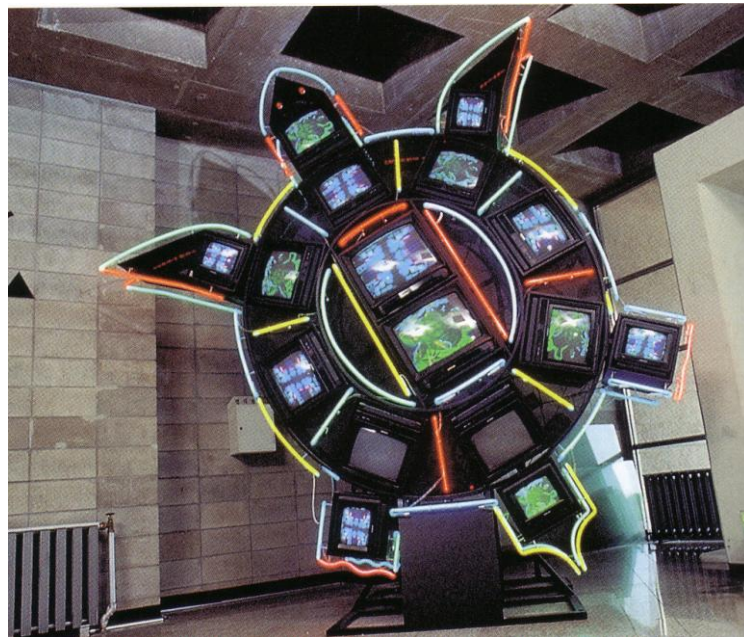


Figure 2: Nam June Paik, "Turtle", 1993

In other works of art, that kind of autonomy is radicalized to the extreme that neither narratives, nor representation, nor moral or cognitive reflections appear to be possible in

that type of art, for example, electroacoustic music or minimal art. Some works of electroacoustic music use previously unheard sounds and play with textures or paradoxical psychoacoustic effects. These are the most common examples of the art which tends to negate and escape from every kind of reference or designated meaning. There are, of course, countless manifestations in which art shows its autonomy.

Nevertheless, knowing the connotations both 'autonomy' and 'negativity' have, I must distance myself from what Greenberg meant with autonomy and Paul de Man named "pure sight".¹²

The aesthetic object turns very ambiguous. But this is the necessary condition to understand the experience of art itself, without compulsorily making it dependent of knowledge, moral or common experiences. That also means that the aesthetic experience achieves a relative independence from the dominant ideology and from the dominant mode of subjectivation of the social sensorium. The aesthetic experience can be different than for example those that would arise through adverts and has got the possibility to make us aware of our mode of perceiving or even to bring something new to our sensorium. In that sense, this feature explains, for example, that Cardiff & Miller's *Opera for a Small Room* can short-circuit the expected perception of some sounds and makes us aware of the possibilities of our auditory apparatus. However, if the autonomy can fulfil the condition of making us conscious of the subjectivation process –like Jones also defends- it still does not explain an important question: the reason why this is potentially critical and that it can also have an influence – positive or negative- over the mode of perception. The point is that the art experience is hence defined by a relative liberation of the senses and of the reflection of what is perceived.

2.- (Re-)production of a cognitive perspective: Whatever the physical and aesthetical structure of the object may be, its irreducible ambiguity moves the receiver to produce actively the form of the object. That 'actively' means, to have to produce by oneself the cognitive rules that can produce the aesthetic object. Therefore, the autonomy of the aesthetic perception requests the subject to perceive it as if it were the first time he had perceived an object of that type. In order to do that, he also has to produce a mode of perceiving it; he has to work out how to perceive it. Consciously or unconsciously, an aesthetic experience implies a reflection of a cognitive perspective. That is what I call the aesthetic reflection.

I am afraid I do not have enough time to develop further that the aesthetic reflection is always present in every art experience, no matter if it is narrative, representative or if it is abstract, conceptual or minimal. But let me give a couple of examples. Sometimes what I have called *the mode of perceiving* or cognitive perspective evokes almost a whole cosmogony, like in Classical and Renaissance art, or a scientific theory, like in Impressionism. Sometimes this cognitive perspective becomes, as in conceptual art, the theoretical or historical discourse without which that object would not have been considered a work of art. However these reflections do not always have to be made explicit as they are in a critical discourse. Whether the aesthetic reflection is implicit or explicit, art motivates us to confront our way of knowing the world in a very physical, palpable, sensible manner. When we deal with the way we "see" the world, we are also becoming aware of the way our subjectivity develops. This is a way of claiming something as concrete as, for example, witnessing the irreducible individuality of a person expressing herself in a work of art, we share in some way that type of self-consciousness.

I hope all this can bring a philosophical explanation to what Jones defends with the whole curatorial project, that is, treating art as a very interesting field to enquire about current and alternative modes of perceiving and of subjectivation.

3.- Intersubjectivity: We have defined the aesthetic activity as a game between the perceived object and the cognitive rules that shape that object. Now we state that this activity tends to be intersubjective. The aesthetic perception takes into account the perception of others. As Kant already argued in his Third *Critique*, this only means that this experience can be applied to other subjects. Therefore, the experience of art is not a universal experience, so it cannot assume that everyone will compulsorily have the same experience. It is neither merely an individual one, because it does not associate just relevant individual experiences. For instance, we do not think a work of art can refer uniquely to a concrete event of our single life, but it can evoke a more or less generalized aspect of it.

Another important point is that the autonomic aesthetic activity of building a cognitive mode of perception does not imply that this mode is new, original or revolutionary. It only means that is not determined by external rules or authorities. Actually, the mode of perceiving a work of art usually corresponds to an already generalised mode of perceiving the world. The aesthetic experience usually matches the common horizon of sense and it reinforces the dominant values. But an experience of a work of art, even if it is old, can also imply the necessity of an opening of previously hidden aspects. In conclusion, the shift of a social dominant mode of perception can reveal the old influence of a work of art –as Jones' analysis testifies in relation to Greenberg's conception of painting-, but it can also discover a new mode of reading a work of art and new innovative aspects of it –what Jones seems to forget-. This potential double function of art in relation to ideology can explain why Jones sometimes treats art as an integrated power influenced by ideology, that is, as a mere cultural product, and sometimes as an avant-gardist movement. However, as I said previously, it cannot justify her disregard of her own experience of mid-century art.

From both intersubjective and cognitive moments, I would like to point out, that the experience of art does not reveal anything concrete from the aesthetic object, but it reassures our world or reveals something new by exercising a mode of perception.

4.- Aesthetic emotion: when we experience that our world is being guaranteed, or when we experience new possibilities of comprehending our world, then one of our basic functions has been fulfilled. We are a sort of mammal that has distanced ourselves from our original, intuitive and inborn knowledge.¹³ So we must acquire very complex knowledge to cope in the world, improving and enriching our modes of perception and we must act taking advantage of all that knowledge to the maximum. We are also very often exposed to doubts and mistakes. Therefore, when we become conscious of our modes of perception or when we feel they are guaranteed or enriched, but also when we come up against our cognitive limits, then we have improved one of our main functions as cognoscent animals. In conclusion, fulfilling a necessity, even if it is a cognitive one, leads to a feeling of satisfaction or of pleasure.

Different from the simple sensation, the aesthetic emotion does not, however, refer to any concrete quality of the work, although it has got something to do with it. The aesthetic feeling refers to the mode of perceiving it and can obviously be as complex and paradoxical as works of art. There have always been works of art that do not try to be nice or beautiful. It is natural that works of art that refuse to engage the spectator with emotions, that have got an apparent hermetism or refer conceptually to an implicit discourse, do not directly

transmit an emotion. But this is an argument for my thesis, as long as it shows that the aesthetic emotion does not belong as such to the object, but instead to the whole and complex experience of it. It is also evident that there are works that try to produce a sort of negative experience: some are ugly or noisy, others are tragic or pessimistic, others dark or mysterious, grotesque or sinister: all those kinds of categories used to describe works of art show how paradoxical an aesthetic experience can be. They thoroughly show that, even if having disagreeable aspects, we take some advantage by experiencing them. We enjoy watching tragedies, horror films, sardonic paintings, ugly sculptures or repulsive performances. But, how is it possible that we like experiencing disagreeable works of art?

My thesis is that the repellent aspect and the positive feeling have to be considered under two different levels: the first belongs to the representative, narrative, fictional or apparent level of the work of art, which becomes only one of the moments of the aesthetic experience. The second is concerned with the aesthetic experience as a whole. These disagreeable types of works of art would show, not so much a mode of perceiving, but the limits of our world perception. They are less a guide to act in our world, but show something we cannot stand happening. (Probably, the only emotion that does not take place in art is indifference).

Embodied self-reflection in technological art

According to my earlier ideas, I have always held that every experience of art is an embodied experience, even if in some works of art this seems to be a residual element. Only this can explain that we can have a paradoxical experience on one or more levels: in the senses or / and in the reflective; and even though it produces an emotion. This can agree with Jones' thesis that current art trends try to produce a more embodied experience, but it also contradicts her when she says that formalism painting was disembodied. Of course, a conception of that kind of aesthetic feeling can only be understood -as it is now more accepted every day-, through a wider concept of rationality. We also need a different idea of emotions, which are not opposite to rational thinking. I do not have time to elaborate this point now, but it is quite easy to observe the rationality of emotional attitudes and the irrationality or fanaticism of pure logical or systematic coherence. I have tried to briefly explain the rational base that lies under the aesthetic feeling and, in consequence, under every embodied aesthetic experience. In my opinion, my point of view has a lot in common with Jones' claim of a more embodied experience in art. Let's try to illustrate all this with a last example of technological art.

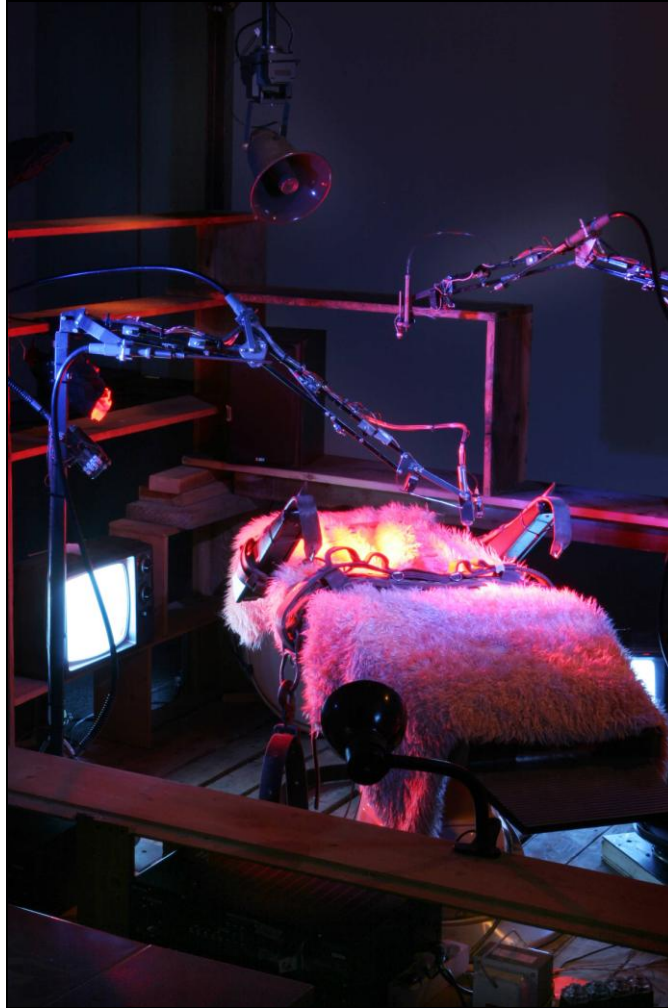


Figure 3: J. Cardiff & G. B. Miller, "The Killing Machine", 2007. MACBA, 2007. © Photo: Seber Ugarte

The artist couple Janet Cardiff & Georges Bures Miller presented their latest work, *The Killing Machine*, in Barcelona last spring. It is a big robotic machine made up of a sort of dentist chair covered with a pink kitsch blanket, two arms that move around the seat and some musical instruments controlled by other robotic devices. When you press a button, sinister music is played and the robotic arms simulate a dead dance as if inflicting stings on the abstract victim. The visitor leaves the room with a very contradictory feeling: on one hand, he has been invited to witness the fictive performance of what wants to appear as a capital execution; on the other hand, there are some distancing elements: the irony, the lack of a visible victim, and all the musical instruments, TV-sets, lights, etc., that suggest that it is all a spectacle.

So, the first interpretation is that it seems to perform a critical spectacle of the death penalty, but I am not sure if the work's frightening feeling can only come from the representation of this idea. I have seen other works of art that criticise the death penalty and they do not necessarily transmit this uncomfortable feeling. As I have already argued, the aesthetic feeling does not actually come from what is represented. According to my proposal, they

must come from an embodied awareness of the implicit background of the work, which arrives through the formal means.

Many other works of Cardiff & Miller play with the technological element to short-circuit the experience. First, they usually try to involve the viewer in the work, using different strategies of identification, reality simulation, etc. Then, they break with that narrative by making the visitor aware of the trick. I would say this is an interesting but, in the end, also currently classical idea of technology. That corresponds to the idea (positive or terrible, it depends) of a humanized technology. So we could read something like this in *The Killing Machine*.

As we press the button of *The Killing Machine*, we become spectators of a completely automated process in which the main character is not the victim or the condemned anymore, but the technological show. The human character is wiped out by the machine, which gives the impression of becoming alive. Just like in Kafka's tale *Die Strafkolonie (The penitentiary Colony)*, where, for hours, the sentence is being slowly engraved with a blade into the condemned's body by an automated machine; that process makes him disappear during the execution. This expresses one of the terrible manifestations of Cardiff & Miller's *The Killing Machine*, that is, the automatising of the process of dying and punishing and its current outcomes. Nevertheless, in my opinion, there is something else. The last work *The Killing Machine* would take a small step towards a new situation.

Nothing is new under the sun, you could say, remembering the topic on cyborgs and the antiutopies showing the terrible feeling of losing control of our lives in the face of intelligent machines. But I see this as more an up-to-date treatment of such a topic by making it a grand spectacle. I am not sure *The Killing Machine* tries to humanize technology or to reveal the danger of expelling power in a process of self-objectifying. There are elements of irony and satire in this work that do not demonize technology on the whole anymore, but makes us reflect on some of its outcomes. The automatising of the dead penalty, distancing itself from the human pathos, has become a spectacle that leaves us as the ridiculous element of the performance. From there comes, in my opinion, the disagreeable sensation of this work. The impression of the grotesque, ridiculous and strange beings in which humans become when we let ourselves be comfortable, relaxed as well as controlled beings. In the end, what is at stake is not human survival, but human dignity. Dignity, that depends, hence, on what of our lives we do care to control or we leave to be controlled by external instruments.

The challenge of new technologies is thrown down. All countries and cultures, no matter their origin or richness are confronting more or less quickly the transformation to technologised societies and will have to understand themselves through the type of relation they establish with it. That is like a common horizon or like a mirror in which we are constructing the idea of our societies and of ourselves. But, as always, mirrors do not always give back the same image. We have seen, for example, that it is not the same to be a technology producer culture or a technology receiver. With subjects happens something similar: it is not the same to be aware of how our technological devices work than to use them as magical machines. But in this comparison between cultures and individuals, there is an important difference: we could ask ourselves if we are not individuals condemned to fall into the magic imagery of the ever-more impenetrable, mysterious complexity of technology.

¹ This paper has been possible thanks to the grand Beatriu de Pinós and it has been written in the context of the research projects: "The Historicity of the Aesthetic Experience" HUM2005-05757/FISO (Spain) and the SFB 626 "Ästhetische Erfahrung im Bereich der Entgrenzung der Künste" (Germany), which I am linked through the University of Potsdam with.

² Caroline A. Jones, *Sensorium. Embodied experience, technology, and contemporary art*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006, pg. 8.

³ Id. pg. 8.

⁴ Corbin, Alain, *The Foul and the Fragrant. Odor and the French Social Imagination*, 6. Quoted by C. A. Jones, 2006, pg. 12.

⁵ Emily Thompson, "Listening To/ For Modernity", in Peter Galison and Emily Thompson (eds.), *The Architecture of Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), pg. 264. Quoted by C. A. Jones, 2006, pg. 26.

⁶ Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination, from Amos 'n' Andy and Edgard Rl Murrow to Wolfamn Jack and Howard Stern*. New York: Random House, 1999. Quoted by C. A. Jones, 2006, pg. 32.

⁷ Jones refers some passages of Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pgs. 69-70.

⁸ I am thinking in Paul de Man and, for example, his essay on Kant: See conferences "Kant's Materialism" and "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant" in *Aesthetic Autonomy*, 1996, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

⁹ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. I have taken Jones quotation for the English translation. Benjamin's thesis in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* is more or less the same.

¹⁰ I thank Gerard Vilar for reminding me that point. In relation to the English term 'experience', I think these art forms can produce what in Spanish is said by "vivencia" or in German by "Erlebnis".

¹¹ This is not the place to quote Jauss and Kant, whose ideas I am reformulating here. See H.-R. Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, University of Minnesota Press, 1982. Two articles in Spanish and another in German provide a more argued theory of the aesthetic experience than the one here. I am afraid there is only one is already available: <http://www.uibcongres.org/congresos/ponencia.en.html?cc=68&mes=14&ordpon=2>. My doctoral Thesis (in Spanish) works on this subject: http://www.tesisnaxarxa.net/TESIS_UAB/AVAILABLE/TDX-0117107-150402/.

¹² Greenberg *Homemade Esthetics*, Oxford University Press, 1999, pg. 70 ff. Paul de Man, op. cit. *Aesthetic Ideology*, 1996. See conferences "Kant's Materialism" and "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant".

¹³ See, for example, Max Scheller, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Cosmos*, 1928 (*Human's place on the Cosmos*).