



GRUPPO RICERCA SARTRE

## «Studi Sartriani» 2021: Call for Papers SARTRE AND CONTEMPORARY ART. IMAGES AND IMAGINARIES

Sartre never wrote a definite system of aesthetics. Despite this, art always remained at the centre of his philosophical investigations. The current issue of *Studi Sartriani* intends to examine the crucial role of art in Sartre's philosophy, opening up a space for reflection based on the fragments of this aesthetic that was never written and always postponed. The importance of the question in the economy of Sartre's thought is immediately apparent and has been perceived by critics such as Blanchot, Sicard and Bauer. Indeed, the issue is difficult to circumvent, since references to aesthetics are practically omnipresent in Sartre's work: for example, *Situations II*, dedicated to literature, evokes Picasso alongside poetry. For Sartre, art can reach heights which poetry cannot: it is a language that dilates meanings and escapes the unifying sphere of the concept. Similar interests are present in *Situations III, IV* and *IX*, where the question of human activity is addressed through a meticulous analysis of the domain of the aesthetic. Here Sartre writes about sculpture (Giacometti, Calder, Hare), poetry (the notion of rhythm through African poetry), the urbanism of American cities, and, finally, painting – his great passion. With the exception of dance (still considered too academic at the beginning of the 1950's), it is not an exaggeration to say that Sartre deals with all the main fields of contemporary art. The magazine *Les Temps Modernes* showcased this fundamental line of research, featuring essays by important critics (Masson, Limbour, Ferrier) and publishing numerous writings by artists of the calibre of Picasso, Klee, Dubuffet, Giacometti, Léger and Moore. The journal quickly became a crucial forum for the understanding of contemporary art, as testified by the substantial contributions of Kahnweiler, Greenberg, and the philosopher Maldiney (a great admirer of the informal artist Tal-Coat).

Thus, with this issue, we invite reflection on the importance that the plastic arts, the visual arts in general (painting, sculpture, photography, cinema), and performing arts (music, theatre) had on Sartre's research.

Contemporary painting's break with the traditional method of representing reality – achieved by its use of colour to communicate practical and intellectual tensions – was something that inspired Sartre's great interest in music in his youth. The freedom and emancipatory force seen in painting can also be found in contemporary music. Classical music, according to Sartre, is conservative: prey to the myth of the predictability of forms – contemporary music, on the other hand, values improvisation; the free play of the non-identical. Accordingly, music also played an important role in the elaboration of Sartre's philosophical categories. Sartre's interest in music was present throughout his life, as he confided to the general public for the first time in his autobiography. It is also observable in the literary production that ranges from *Carnets de la drôle de guerre*, through *La Nausée*, and up to the writings and interviews of the late 1970's. His knowledge of the subject moves with ease from the Baroque to atonal music (Schönberg, Berg, Webern), without neglecting jazz – he met Parker and Davis – and pop music (Greco). Having already discovered jazz between 1922 and 1923, it is important to note that Sartre was the only author to give philosophical importance to this musical genre before the 1950's.

Sartre's aim, in short, was the renewal of the notion of aesthetics through reflection on the contemporary. The traditional theory of art at the end of the first half of the 20th century seemed stale to Sartre, as it was weighed down by its inheritance of the aesthetics of German romanticism. Hegel had treated artistic productions according to genres (architecture, sculpture, painting, music, poetry) and catalogued them into periods (symbolic art, classical art, romantic art) – all this is absent in Sartre, whose vision tends to go beyond rigid disciplinary delimitations. Tintoretto, obsessed by the heaviness of bodies, treats space more like a sculptor than a painter; Giacometti, Sartre maintains, in some ways replicates the same movement, dialecticising pictorial and sculptural space; Calder's mobiles attempt to integrate movement into the rigidity of sculpture; in Wols, the supposed opposition between drawing and painting is erased.

Another important element of this approach is the interest in the artist and his life rather than in the doctrine of beauty and the sublime; in the work of art as a unique existential production of the creator understood as a singular universal. It is the relationship between art

and the subject, between creation and experience that is at the centre of Sartre's interests in this respect. The concept of a line, for example, takes on theoretical significance when – even before being a symbolic representation – it is seen as a trace: a clue to the passage of human action, an event between the active and the casual (here one may think of Hartung's research on informal painting). The work of the artist – whether painter, sculptor, actor, musician, or film-maker – becomes then the creative point of convergence between improvisation and glance; between instantaneousness and planning; between intentional happening and chance. From this point of view, art can only ever be the de-construction of subjectivity, the dematerialisation of the self-referentiality of the *cogito*: it is concerned with grasping the metamorphoses of the human being in an attempt to restore the self-giving of the never-identical for-itself as pure freedom and projection. It is for this reason that, in Sartre – as in the artists he refers to – the line can be without a referent: rather than having the task of fixing nature (as in Klee), it can free it.

The goal of this issue is thus to deepen and broaden the question of the interpretation of contemporary art in Sartre through an interdisciplinary methodological approach: contributions are welcome from disciplines such as the history of philosophy, aesthetics, the history of ideas, and visual studies. These essays should investigate, starting from Sartre's aesthetic reflection on 20th century art, some of the following lines of research (parentheses indicate suggestions for particular themes):

- the critique of the concepts of form, representation, and imitation (*mimesis*); the problematic nature of the notion of phenomenon and *analogon* in contemporary art – especially with regard to the categories of appearance and representation; the theoretical link between speculation and imagination, philosophy and image;
- the relationship between art and politics, with particular attention to the role of the engaged intellectual (Sartre and Fougeron's socialist realism; Rebeyrolle's painting as a critique of imperialism and colonialism; Luigi Nono and music as a commitment; the political responsibility of the artist with respect to his own present); the relationship between reader and writer in the formation of the literary work, as a place of transformation of society;

- Sartre's relationship with artists (influences, correspondence, collaborative works) and with contemporary art in general (Sartre and the performing arts – music and theatre, cinema as visual art, Sartre and surrealism, Sartre and American abstract expressionism, Sartre and twelve-tone serial music); the link between music and the visual arts (the comparison between Calder's mobiles and Jazz); the link between spontaneity and artistic creation (the CoBrA group, surrealism, action painting, Dadaism, the New York School, jazz, and pop music);
- Sartrean aesthetics in its methods and contents: art and improvisation; reflection on space and movement as the relationship between the finite and the infinite (Cage and the problem of the open form); deformation, "disfiguration" and dematerialisation as critical tools of aesthetics; the notion of metamorphosis and that of ambiguity as a cipher of the for-itself (Masson, Calder); the void-matter dialectic in contemporary art; the image as visible presence and transcendence (the question of the portrait); the relationship between literary creation, visual and performing arts; the liberation of form through the logic of the decomposition of spaces (dynamic art); the relationship between animate and inanimate, artificial and natural (Calder).

Contributions should be sent no later than May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021 to [russo.maria@hsr.it](mailto:russo.maria@hsr.it). All articles will be subject to double blind peer review. Notification of acceptance or non-acceptance of articles, with indications for any major or minor changes, will be sent by August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021. Submissions will then be published by the end of 2021.

The maximum length of each article, including spaces and notes, is 50,000 characters.

We accept contributions in Italian, English, and French.

Two files must be sent:

- an 'anonymous' .doc file without the author's name. The text must be preceded by an abstract in English of no more than 300 words as well as a list of five keywords;
- a second .doc file with the author's data: name, surname, academic affiliation, title of the essay, and e-mail address.