Towards a practical aesthetics: thinking WITH[1]

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Abstract In recent years, there has been a proliferation of approaches and formats, such as media philosophy, artistic research, the audiovisual essay, the audio paper, etc., which, although disparate, have something in common – they are grounded in what I would like to call "practical aesthetics". I am speculating about aesthetics as a "critical practice" that imitatively observes the practice of art in its performance, i.e. a "practical aesthetics" not as "aesthetic practice", but as an approach that takes seriously the double coding of aesthetics as science and art, and performs it from the perspective of the philosopher, not the artist – it takes the practice of the work of art not as an object of analysis, but as its own modus operandi: this approach does not want so much to think about art in terms of external (usually rational, propositional) categories, which in most cases follow the logic of the "written word" but to think with art: with images, with sound, etc. It is not about what methods we use to understand works of art, but about how we think *with* works of art, how they shape both our understanding and experience of the world, how they become "accomplices" to our thinking. When a practical aesthetic carries out thinking *with* images, *with* sounds, *with* texts, etc., such non-propositional thinking pushes strictly representational and logocentric reflection to its limits. And if what we have on our side is an accomplice, it means to enter into a relationship with someone whose sensibility one shares, in a way that is not identical, otherwise there would be nothing more to say or do. Practical aesthetics is a mobile and dynamic approach that sees art not as an object of (external) analysis, but as a subject with its own knowledge, and establishes a "co-composing" conceptual interference pattern between theory and practice.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Thinking With, Philosophy, Art, Alexander Baumgarten, Gilles Deleuze

Invited paper.

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0. Introduction

When in 1750 Alexander Baumgarten published the first part of his *Aesthetica*, he basically re-invented philosophy by defining a new way of how to perceive its objects of inquiry: logical analysis could not cope with the complexity of individual objects. Thus, logic had to be complemented by a non-abstractive way of analysis Baumgarten dubbed *aesthetics*, a theory of sensate thinking. Sensible or aesthetic cognition, "clear-obscure" as it is, is of the utmost importance for "making sense" of the world – the "logic of sense" has to be aligned with the "logic of sensation".

It might be of interest here that Baumgarten's *Aesthetics* (which he considers *both* a science *and* an art: a "science of the lower cognitive faculties" and an "art of beautiful thinking", see §1) opens with a chapter on "heuristics" – which does not denote a clear-cut method (the term *method* in fact denotes a μετάόδός, meta-hodos, a *way afterwards*, a retroactive abstraction, a recipe), but is more related to a (non-finite) inventiveness, an improvisation—and here Baumgarten relates to the αυτοσχεδιασ-ματα (improvisations) of the child that imitates beauty when it sees it, not merely apprehends it (like the adult), (see § 57). Thus, what is at stake is not so much the issue of method, but rather the question of art's specific potential for expressing sensible cognition, with aesthetics as an *analogonrationis*, both analogous to and different from rational logics. Aesthetics thus counts as a defense of the Sensual as the Non-Representational, and this is not only evident in the content of thinking, but also in new forms of presentation, in which figures of thought reveal themselves.

The second part of Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*, though never published, was to be called *Aesthetica practica* – "practical aesthetics". And although it is safe to say that Baumgarten here wanted to show practical examples of his theory, I would rather pick up the thread of heuristics and improvisation, and would like to speculate on aesthetics as a science|art that mimics and imitates beauty and art in its performance, that is a "practical aesthetics" not as an "aesthetic practice", but an approach that takes aesthetics' double signification as both science *and* art serious and performs it from the perspective of the philosopher, not the artist – it takes the practice of the artwork not as its object of analysis, but as its own *modus operandi*: not thinking *about* art according to external (mostly rational, propositional) categories that more often than not follow the logic of the "written word", but thinking *with* art, thinking *with* images, thinking *with* sound, etc.

The term "practical aesthetics" has of course been used before. Gesa Ziemer, who in *Verletzbare Orte* proposes a similar project, singles out Deleuze and Blumenberg as two "thinkers with art". She relates her idea of "practical aesthetics" to the architect Gottfried Semper, while I think that already Baumgarten points into a similar direction (Ziemer 2008) – as I mentioned, the term itself is his own. And of course, there is Jill Bennett's book *Practical Aesthetics. Events, Affect and Art after 9/11* (Bennett 2012). But while Ziemer is mainly relating this concept to artistic (or arts-based) research, Bennett calls for «an aesthetics informed by and derived from practical, real world encounters» (Bennett 2012: 2). Bennett's influential book is clearly indebted to Jacques Ranciere's idea of *aisthesis*, as perception and experience, whereas this essay is rather about the more old-fashioned idea of philosophical aesthetics as "judgement of art", but under a new perspective. While Bennett deals with affect' and its relation to a wider political and social field, pointing at an almost "therapeutic" dimension of art (in particular as a – or in its – response to the 9/11 trauma), the concept of "practical aesthetics" is much more small-scale: it is rather about a change in perspective and judgement on art - aesthetics in the philosophical sense – that might be welcomed (and is already approaching), an approach as theoretical, as it is practical. This concept of practical aesthetics will have some aspects in common with both approaches, but will follow a different path.

In their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue for the importance of the artisan: «We will therefore define the artisan as one who is determined in such a way as to follow a flow of matter […]. It is a question of surrendering to the wood, then following where it leads by connecting operations to a materiality, instead of imposing a form upon matter» (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 409-410). This quote praises the artisan in contrast to the artist, who does not work *with* the material, following its direction, but imposes his thought (and his form) on an otherwise stupid matter. If we take this idea one level further, a practical aesthetics, as I conceive it, requires a researcher who thinks with and through the artwork, not about it (in the sense of imposing external concepts on it).

According to Gilles Deleuze, one of the philosophers who, I argue, was instrumental in the notion of thinking *with* art:

> [T]he theory of cinema does not bear on the cinema, but on the concepts of the cinema, which are no less practical, effective or existent than cinema itself. […] Cinema's concepts are not given in cinema. And yet they are cinema's concepts, not theories about cinema. […] Cinema itself is a new practice of images and signs, whose theory philosophy must produce as conceptual practice (Deleuze 1989: 280).

For Deleuze, art cannot be contained by making it conform to pre-existent categories and concepts, explanations and thus "judgments" that are brought to it from the outside. For Deleuze, the most important question is if – and in how far – art addresses life, how its creativity liberates vitality and processuality (of affects, of thought), or if it is rather a blockage to these forces, containing the free-play of vitality and making it "play by the rules" of any given institution, language system, or "organization". Art thus is evaluated by the way it either enhances, or reduces our powers to act, and it does so by affecting us in a particular manner. Art – as well as life – is a process of production and creation, and by that very characteristic involved in the bringing-forth of "newness", which by definition is what evades "normative criteria": the indeterminable processes of both life and art can only be evaluated by and on their own terms, by features that are immanent to these processes themselves, but not by explanatory logics external to them. What is at stake here is not representation, but presentation – practical Aesthetics is not the theorization of the sensual, but the inquiring and accompanying production of sensuality – or sensual thinking. Philosophy here does not morph into art, but proceeds in a playful proximity to art. To do philosophy in the way of a practical aesthetics is «to fabricate concepts in resonance and interference with the arts» (Rajchman 2000: 115), to facilitate an encounter «in which both art and thought come alive and discover their resonances with one another» (*Ibidem*).

«Do not count upon thought to ensure the relative necessity of what it thinks. Rather, count upon the contingency of an encounter with that which forces thought to rise up and educate the absolute necessity of an act of thought or a passion to think» (Deleuze 1994: 139). Deleuze distinguishes between two strategies of knowing, of thinking, of making sense. The one is what we might call [re]cognition, which simply relies on matching our experience with our culturally acquired knowledge, ideology, habits and beliefs. It only confirms our expectations, what we already know, and this lack of friction does not allow for real thinking. This other strategy is what Deleuze calls an encounter.

An encounter challenges our habitual ways of experiencing and perceiving the world. It creates a fundamental break with our strategies how to conceive the world. Making or

perceiving art is an encounter that opens up possible worlds, and it is 'the object in question' that determines the strategies with which you "make sense".

As Deleuze specifies in one of his seminars, «between a philosophical concept, a painted line and a musical sonorous bloc, resonances emerge, very, very strange correspondences that one shouldn't even theorize, I think, and which I would prefer to call "affective" […], these are privileged moments» (Deleuze 1983)[2]. These moments privilege an affect where thought and sensation merge into a very specific way of "doing thinking" *beyond* representation and categorization – here, "traditional [rational] thinking" faces its own shortcomings. This is why, for Deleuze (and Guattari), «[p]hilosophy needs a nonphilosophy that comprehends it; it needs a nonphilosophical comprehension just as art needs nonart and science needs nonscience» (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 218), in order to focus on the ways in which art, philosophy, and science ask the same kinds of questions and relate to each other's "findings", as it were. In that respect, whereas science involves the creation of functions, of a propositional mapping of the world, art involves the creation of blocs of sensation (or affects and percepts), and philosophy involves the invention of concepts. Yet, since «sciences, arts, and philosophies are all equally creative» (*Ivi*: 5), it might be fruitful, as Deleuze proposes, "to pose the question of echoes and resonances between them» (Deleuze 1995: 123).

1. Film Philosophy

During the last 10-15 years, the convergence of Film Studies and Philosophy has become the recent "big thing", with a community growing fast, and on a global scale. However, under the heading of Film Philosophy, different approaches have found an umbrella term—mainly an American tradition, represented by scholars such as Noel Carroll, Thomas Wartenberg, a.o., and a German line, with researchers such as Martin Seel, Gertrud Koch, etc. Both these approaches relate film to philosophical questions (ethics, justice, aesthetics, anthropology, etc.), but leave the disciplinary boundaries intact– film may illustrate philosophical problems, but these problems "belong" to the field of (academic) philosophy proper.

However, there is an alternative tradition in which philosophy takes film as a serious field of philosophical engagement: beginning with Henri Bergson this contestation culminated in recent decades in the approaches of the film philosophies of Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze, who argued for an appreciation of film *as* philosophy. How can this relationship between film and philosophy be thought anew? Can philosophy renew our concepts of film as art and/or as a medium? And vice versa: can film change our understanding of philosophy as a scholarly practice and endeavor? Should both concepts of "film" and "philosophy" be reconsidered once we dare their encounter? Regarding the recent ubiquity of neuroscience in the humanities a new perspective opens which puts a focus on the process of thinking itself: What is thought and where does it occur? Examining the philosophical status of film, this project thus situates it within a greater context: Is there something like cinematic thought? And if cinema can be a medium of thought, how does it relate to philosophical enquiries or to scientific analyses of this process? Can those disciplines benefit from each other?

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[2] My translation of : «Alors je dirais que le concept philosophiquen'est pas seulement source d'opinionquelconque, ilest source de transmission trèsparticulière, ou entre un concept philosophique, unelignepicturale, un bloc sonore musical, s'établissent des correspondances, des correspondancestrèstrèscurieuses, que à mon avisil ne fautmême pas théoriser, que jepréféreraisappelerl'affectifengénéral […]. Làc'est des moments privilégiés» (Deleuze 1983).

This essay argues that the two questions "What is film?" (as a slight rephrasing of Bazin's question *What is Cinema?*) and "What is philosophy?" (as Deleuze and Guattari have asked) are intimately intertwined – also in a very pragmatic and institutional way. When Roger Odin, one of the pioneers of "institutionalized" Film Studies in France, was called to office in the early 1980s, he was faced with the fact that the field of Film Studies as a discipline did not (yet) exist. But, far from despairing, Odin rather felt confirmed in his belief that film and cinema are not suitable objects for an academic discipline. By that he did not mean to discredit cinema as an object not worthy of academic analysis – on the contrary, Odin's firm belief was that cinema opens up a whole field of research, with a whole range of disciplines contributing. While Odin was taking Gilbert Cohen-Séat's *Institut de filmologie* as a model, which was an interdisciplinary institute par excellence, he found that his own institute was still miles away from that ideal. But nevertheless: it can be stated that the amount of film scholars worldwide that have a degree in another subject (Odin himself is a linguist by training) –be it one of the National Philologies, Art History, Musicology, or Philosophy – is overwhelming. So, also institution-wise, an interdisciplinary approach to film (including philosophical expertise) is not only desired, but fact [3].

In the 1980s, cognitive film studies discovered the brain for the analysis of film. Against the "Grand Theories" of psychoanalytic and (post) structuralist theory they employed the findings of cognitive psychology for explaining the processes in the spectator's mind to "make meaning", seeing the understanding of film as a rational and cognitive endeavor that applies scientific «theories of perception, information processing, hypothesis-building, and interpretation» (Currie 2004: 106). At that time, the dominant strand in neuroscience was the field of "computation", which took the computer as its model: the brain here was essentially seen as an input|output machine of representation. Approximately at the same time, Gilles Deleuze, in the "new image of thought" he developed (among others) in his two Cinema books, also utilizes the concept of the brain, with implicit and explicit references to on the one hand Henri Bergson, and on the other hand to a more constructivist brand of neurosciences in the wake of Maturana, Varela, and Changeux, seeing both film and brain as agencies of the "creation of worlds" – «the Brain is the Screen» (Flaxman 2000). Certainly, the brain that cognitive film studies, neuroscience, and Deleuze talk about is not the same 'object concept' in these discourses. Recent developments in cognitive neuroscience into the so called 4EA-cognitivism that considers the brain as embodied, enacted, extended, embedded, and affective might however create new insights into the encounters of brains and screens. Here, in contrast to classical computation, and even in contrast to "connectionism", which is more advanced than computation in so far that it involves a far more complex (and a-centered) dynamics, thinking finally does not take place inside our skull (only) anymore, but "out of our heads" (to quote the title of Alva Noë's book). Yet one of the main difficulties that impede a smooth and simple marriage of film studies, (Deleuzian) philosophy, and the neurosciences is the fact that the brain in question is in fact many brains. Not only do the concepts of the brain between these various disciplines differ, Deleuze himself uses the brain in different guises. First, on a very general level, he traces the motif or metaphor of the brain in movies by Alain Resnais and Stanley Kubrick. Far more important in the context of our interest however are Deleuze's references to the philosophy of Henri Bergson and his "new conception" of the brain – Bergson «introduced a profound element of transformation: the brain was now only an interval [écart], a void, nothing but a void, between a stimulation and a response» (Deleuze 1989: 211). In a universe that consists, as Bergson has it, of images

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in motion that all react on one another, the subject (and the brain) functions as «centers of indetermination» (Bergson 1991: 36), in which the direct cause/effect or stimulus/response reaction is slowed down. This idea of the brain as a center of indetermination is supported by findings in neurosciences that focus on the brain as «an uncertain system» (Deleuze 1989: 211), as rhizomatic neural networks. Deleuze is here referring to Jean-Pierre Changeux' *Neuronal Man. The Biology of Mind*, and Steven Rose's *The Conscious Brain* (which also refers to Delisle Burns' *The Uncertain Nervous System*): what it boils down to for Deleuze is that

> [W]e can consider the brain as a relatively undifferentiated mass and ask what circuits, what kinds of circuit, the movement-image or time-image traces out, or invent, because the circuits aren't there to begin with […] the brain's the hidden side of all circuits, and these can allow the most basic conditioned reflexes to prevail, as well as leaving room for more creative tracings, less 'probable' links. The brain's a spatio-temporal volume: it's up to art to trace through it the new paths open to us today. You might see continuities and false continuities as cinematic synapses – you get different links, and different circuits, in Godard and Resnais, for example. The overall importance or significance of cinema seems to me to depend on this sort of problem. (Deleuze 1995: 60- 61)

One of the most decisive questions that emerges in the wake of thinking the interrelation between media – and here, more specifically, film – and thought is related to the respective status of "philosophy". As we have seen, there seems to be a great divide between analytic and continental "schools of thought". A possible answer is best summarized by the Cavell inspired words of Stephen Mulhall:

> I do not look at these films as handy or popular illustrations of views and arguments properly developed by philosophers; I see them rather as themselves reflecting on and evaluating such views and arguments, as thinking seriously and systematically about them in just the ways that philosophers do. Such films are not philosophy's raw material, nor a source for its ornamentation; they are philosophical exercises, philosophy in action–film as philosophizing (Mulhall 2008: 4).

In this claim, films themselves are seen as capable of doing a unique kind of philosophical work (even though Mulhall's characterization of films philosophizing "in just the ways that philosophers do" might still be in need of some qualification). Thus, the question is, what kind of knowledge (affects and percepts themselves giving rise to concepts) does the medium film generate qua medium?

Ultimately, the question "What is film philosophy" might better be restated as "Where is film philosophy"? Does it reside in the institutionalized version of (academic) philosophy ("proper"), or might it also be said to be inherent to film itself? An important qualification has tobe made here: the question of "What is philosophy" has to be addressed again at this point, because the different relations of film and philosophy also owe a lot to the definition of the philosophical. If the rubric of film as philosophy claims that films or cinema can do philosophy, this does not mean the institutionalized version of academic philosophy, i.e. the production of propositional knowledge but rather what Deleuze and Guattari call the «creation of concepts» (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 5). This entails a definition of philosophy that goes beyond its traditional territorialization, one that is extensional, forming assemblages rather than propositions,

what – again – Deleuze has called "the new image of thought"[4]. Following this approach the terms "philosophy" and "thinking" do not necessarily refer to rational propositions and|or a purely neural activity, though. Thinking is not just a representation of the world as "it is" – as Deleuze puts it, «[s]omething in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition, but a fundamental *encounter*» (Deleuze 1994: 139). While the idea of "thinking as (re-)cognition" is based on the verification of ideologies, of pre-collected knowledge, customs and articles of faith, the notion of "thinking as an encounter" shatters our epistemological and experiential habits, it produces a break in our "normal", habitual perspective of the world and enables the possibility to approach alternative points of view and means of thought and to question our common practices. Thus film-thought is philosophical since it offers its own genuine cinematic reflections about the world. According to Deleuze these are especially new looks at concepts of images, time, space, and movement (concepts which are grounded in the peculiarity of the medium as a stream of "moving images").

In an interview with Raymond Bellour and François Ewald, Deleuze stated, «I've never been worried about going beyond metaphysics or any death of philosophy. The function of philosophy, still thoroughly relevant, is to create concepts» (Deleuze 1995: 136). This affirmative function of philosophy is also a call to transdisciplinarity, so that even when Deleuze was working on «painting and cinema: images, on the face of it… [he] was writing philosophy books» (*Ivi*: 137). In defense of Deleuze against Sokal|Bricmont's attempt to control and regulate the limits of the disciplinary fields, Paul Harris points out that Deleuze's work in contrast shows «how productive it is to work with and think through material from others and other fields, working with ideas cooked up in geology and geography, zoology and ornithology, archeology and paleontology, and even mathematics and physics» (Harris 2010: 24-25). The philosophical practice of "creating concepts", as a creation of "newness" as well, necessitates, according to Deleuze, that philosophy enters into manifold relations with arts and sciences, since philosophy «creates and expounds its concepts only in relation to what it can grasp of scientific functions and artistic constructions. [...] Philosophy cannot be undertaken independently of science or art» (Deleuze 1994: XVI). It is these resonances and exchanges between philosophy, science, and art that make philosophy "creative", not reflective. These relations – from the perspective of philosophy – are vital for reasons internal to philosophy itself, that is, vital for the creation of "concepts", and – from the perspective of Film Philosophy – in resonance with the percepts and affective logics and modalities of art in general, and film in particular.

This approach attempts to bring film studies and philosophy into a productive dialogue without assigning the role of a dominant and all encompassing referee to one of these disciplines. Rather it is about relating the diverse entry points – the many colors of the spectrum – toward each other in a fertile manner in order to establish, ultimately, a media philosophy that puts the status, the role, and the function of the medium – here film – into a new perspective: no longer are the representational techniques of the medium at the center of inquiry but rather its ability to "think" and to assume an active role in processes of thought, in finding alternative and differentiating point(s) of view.

If we take this a step further, relating this approach to the whole range of media (production), but also take a step back, and see what this approach basically means, we begin to see the seeds of a new "media philosophy" – not talking about media by way of "philosophy proper", but by realizing the "philosophical qualities and impacts" of the

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[4] With a nod to Arthur Danto, Robber Sinnerbrink has shown this tightrope act as an oscillation between the philosophical 'disenfranchisement' of film and its 're-enfranchising.' See Sinnerbrink (2010 and 2011).

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medium: it all starts from the assumption that our memory, perception, and thinking is not just a given, as a body- and weightless, immaterial logics, reason or internal process that takes place behind the walls of our skull and is purely mental – there is always a "material basis": as Nietzsche already claimed, «*our* writing equipment takes part in the forming of *our* thoughts». From here, we can derive the media-philosophical insight that media (help us) think (differently). Media thus reveal themselves as the body (or, better: different bodies) of thought. It is important to note that these 'bodies' are not "retroactive" to those thoughts that they "materialize", just like the telescope is not retroactive to the discovery of planets – media are coextensive to the thoughts they "allow", Media Philosophy is an event, even a praxis – but *of* the media *themselves*. It takes place *through* and *in* the media in question – and this in turn opens up the question if this philosophy could only be described by translating it into the human "master-medium": philosophical writing-thinking?

2. The Audiovisual Essay

One way to deal with this problem of "media change" is a form of aesthetic presentation that stays within the realm of the art form or medium it reflects on, thereby using the very modus operandi that somehow defines that very art form/medium – in this case: film.

Question: Does film analysis have to exist in the form of words alone, words in written or spoken language, as conventionally published in books and journals, or as verbally delivered in lecture halls, or on a DVD audio commentary? Might one not perform a thinking *with* film with the very tools of the cinema itself – with images and sound, that is? Hence the audiovisual essay – and I like the term audiovisual essay much better than other terms such as Videographic or Digital Criticism, because it both keeps the provisional and experimental character of the "form of the essay" intact, as Adorno described it, and it also makes a point of the "relational character", or the montage, that is characteristic of the audiovisual essay as well:

> The essay […] incorporates the anti-systematic impulse into its own way of proceeding and introduces concepts unceremoniously, 'immediately,' just as it receives them. They are made more precise through their relationship to one another (Adorno 1991: 12).

Thus, even if there are academic audiovisual essays that present a combination of written commentary and film- and sound-clips, a more radical version of the audiovisual essay – "truer" to the idea of practical aesthetics, that is – consists in the form of a creative montage and juxtaposition of images, sequences of pre-existing film works that 'realizes' a filmic idea, a film-thought, so to speak.

In his 1919 dissertation on *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* (*The Concept of Art-Criticism in German Romanticism*), Walter Benjamin describes one of the key notions of the Romantics' aesthetic as follows: «Thus, criticism is, as it were, an experiment on the artwork, one through which the latter's own reflection is awakened, through which it is brought to consciousness and to knowledge of itself» (Benjamin 1996: 151).

The work of art, according to Benjamin, thus already contains its own criticism, a knowledge of its own which, if we follow Deleuze, is not (yet) conceptual or, rather: propositional. Again, Adorno points at the form of the essay to accomplish exactly this (and essay here, I argue, does not only refer to the written essay – it is rather a certain form, or a way of doing thinking that is hinted at):

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> The essay approaches the logic of music, that stringent and yet aconceptual art of transition, in order to appropriate for verbal language something it forfeited under the domination of discursive logic […] it coordinates elements instead of subordinating them, and only the essence of its content, not the manner in which it is presented, is commensurable with logical criteria[…] the essay is more dynamic than traditional thought by virtue of the tension between the presentation and the matter presented.But at the same time, as a constructed juxtaposition of elements, it is more static. Its affinity with the image lies solely in this, except that the staticness of the essay is one in which relationships of tension have been brought, as it were, to a standstill (Adorno 1991: 22).

Today, there are quite some approaches to different arts that work on that brink between art and science, "sensible cognition" and proposition, aesthetic knowledge and rational knowledge, while thinking *with* art (or the artistic material) rather than *about* it. New forms of aesthetic research and presentation, such as media philosophy, the audiovisual essay, the audio paper, Artistic Research, etc., are no longer only a topic or an object of study, but a medium of medi(t)ation, aesthetic modes of representation are increasingly being incorporated into critical academic practice, with the role of the aesthetic for "thought" coming to matter more directly than mere discussions of the aesthetic in whatever discipline hitherto could envision. What is at stake is not to explain and interpret, but to «appropriate the artistic forms we encounter» (Felski 2015: 176). The question here is no longer about what kinds of critical methodologies we adopt to understand works of art, but about how we think *with* works of art – how they both shape our understanding and experience of the world, and also how they serve as "partners in crime" to our thought. If a practical aesthetics performs a thinking with images, with sounds, etc, such a non-writerly, non-propositional thinking pushes a strictly representational and logocentric reflection to its limits. And if what we have is a companion, then that relation is not one of hierarchy, subservience or distance, but is instead a relation predicated on an attraction that cannot be explained in terms of absolute identity. To have a partner or companion is to be with someone whose sensibility one shares, but in ways that are not identical, or else it would result in an entropic deadlock.

Practical Aesthetics cannot be reduced to a common singular practice. It is a mobile and disparate set of practices; as a dynamic approach, it takes art not as an object of (external) analysis, but as a subject with a knowledge in its own right, creating a co-composing «conceptual interference pattern» (Manning and Massumi 2014: VIII) between theory and practice. A "practical aesthetics", thus understood, can be described as thinking *with* art, and *with* media, in order to find new ways to create worlds and thus to perceive and experience the world in different ways.

Practical Aesthetics is a multilayered issue: on the one hand, there are artists thinking WITH thematerial, not about it, going along with what the material they are working with provides, and not attempting to make it "succumb" to their own will. Then there are analyses of the way artists think with their material; and finally, a practical aesthetics refers to the way researchers, academics, philosophers themselves comment on/analyze artistic works from a new perspective – not by making it adhere to external principles (thinking ABOUT), but to the artworks' internal principles. Not only does every artform/genrehave its own parameters that determine a thinking with, but also every single work, and every single reading does so as well – practical aesthetics, as I understand it,is not (and will never be) a "unified field" or "unified theory".

If this all gives the impression that practical aesthetics is only possible in other media then writing (film, sound, etc), let me tell you: by no means!

One of the ways in which language and writing can be implemented here, is to use writing in academic essays – but the non-academic way. Writing not as a means of "transparent information", but as a means of "obscure affects". Everything that Julia Kristeva has termed the semiotic (in opposition to the symbolic), Barthes punctum vs stadium, might be of help here: languages capacitiy for metaphors, puns, musicality… Why not have that infuse your academic writing? Metaphors might not be a shorthand for an argument, but they surely add a certain atmosphere to the writing – so why not make that work? Another issue of course would be to take over structures, maybe even concepts and aesthetic criteria from the text you are writing "about" or commenting "on". Again, the simple idea is not to treat the object analysis as if coming from a "higher position", bringing your conceptual and analytical toolbox already with you, but forging your tools from the materials of the text in question. It would be a writing that "is tainted" by literary and experimental modes of writing, a writing that does not judge, confine, or define, but a writing that – like art – is «a tool for blazing life lines» (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 187)[5].

And if you're looking for role-models: the writings of Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze, etc. – all beautiful examples, I argue, of a practical aesthetics in writing. The problem is, I think, we too often dismiss these writings as "not academic enough" (to the point of calling them "delirious" even, or simply 'feuilletonistic'). But this is only the poor response and deplorable effect of not having an adequate language to give a name to this kind of writing in a context that has for centuries been resting on the gold-standard of academic writing called "critique" …

let freedom ring!

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[5] See here my *Et in Academia Ego: Affect and Academic Writing* (Herzogenrath 2019).

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