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In Praise of a Strategic Beauty. Mario Perniola's Aesthetics between Stoicism, the Baroque and the Avant-Gardes

Abstract

Several scholars (Bartoloni 2019, Bukdahl 2017, Vogt 2019) focused on Mario Perniola's perspective on art, post-human sexuality and political theory. Yet little has been written on the philosophical and literary sources—specifically Stoicism, the Baroque and the Avant-Gardes—which influenced his standpoint. The objective of this paper is to develop Perniola's conception of a *strategically oriented beauty*, which implies a connection between the aesthetic element and the political-effectual one.

Keywords

Mario Perniola, Stoicism, Baroque, Avant-Gardes, Strategic Beauty

Introduction

Mario Perniola has always avoided defining his philosophy within a set formula. One of the fundamental characteristics of philosophers—according to him—is their atopy or placelessness, that is, their being singular, unusual, and unclassifiable figures. The philosopher, instead of trying to provide a definite personal image, a clear identity (if not a mythology), should try to dissolve their ego in order to elaborate a closer connection with society: "To read, to think and to write is not expressing a subjectivity or realizing oneself, it is rather to lose oneself, to turn oneself into a medium, a passage,

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a transit of something different and extraneous" (Perniola 1995, 48). Nonetheless, Perniola identifies three main sources that influenced his reflections: "my work can be considered as a form of Baroque neo-Stoicism that went through the experience of literary and artistic avant-gardes of the twentieth century" (Perniola 2014, 9). This paper will explore this statement, which represents a unique passage that helps the reader in better understanding Perniola's aesthetic conception. As Farris Wahbeh noticed: "In his quest to find intersections between contemporary and ancient thought, his mélange of references reaches all the way back to Heraclitus and the Stoics, mixing his text with Jean-François Lyotard, Walter Benjamin, and a dash of phenomenology" (2006, 493). Perniola's aesthetic conception is at odd with the objectivist tradition. According to this tradition, which—starting from Pythagoras and Plato—went on to heavily influence Western culture, beauty is defined in terms of objectivity. In other words, beauty is considered as a quality inherent to objects which display harmony and proportion. Besides this major perspective on beauty, a less widespread theory focused on subjectivity—elaborated first by the Sophists. For this tradition the beauty of something depends on the subject perceiving it as such. Alongside these two theories a third one emerged within Stoicism which considers beautiful something that is "appropriate," or "convenient" (*to prepon* in Greek and *decorum* in Latin). The *to prepon* implies that beauty depends on occasions, circumstances, on transitory combinations of elements that are relative to a given context. Furthermore, it conveys an idea of beauty which does not emerge within a harmonic discourse, grounded upon aesthetic objectivity and unity of parts. On the contrary, beauty is seen as the consequence of conflict and contingency. This theory, for which beauty *is* action, will clarify in what terms Perniola holds together heterogeneous philosophies and perspectives such as Stoicism, the Baroque, post-Renaissance Catholicism, and the Situationist avant-garde. Perniola places his thought within a strategically oriented beauty, which implies a close connection between the aesthetic element and the political one, between beauty on one side and effectuality on the other.

I. Stoicism or Beauty as Action

Before exploring Perniola's interpretation, I will provide some brief philosophical coordinates on Stoicism. The first great assumption that differentiates Greek (and late Roman) Stoicism from Platonism is a monistic view of reality. Where Plato elaborates a dualism between the earthly world and

the ideal world, where the former is an imperfect copy of the latter, Zeno, the founding father of Stoicism, affirms that the whole world is permeated by the *logos* (reason), and therefore the true good, harmony and beauty, are traceable in the world itself (and not in the hyperuranium). As Gianni Carchia points out, the Stoics abolish the distinction between form and content: since there is no place to be, so to speak, for ideas within the Stoic theory, the material world is not seen as a copy or as a residue of something greater than itself (Carchia 2006, 139). The ordering principle that governs reality (*logos*), therefore, is not something distant or detached from the world, but is itself present everywhere in everything. In other words, Stoic philosophy is founded on the physical universality of the *logos* (not a meta-physical Platonic universality). Moreover, since the *logos*—according to the Stoics—is the best ruler, the things of the world necessarily happen the way they happen; that is to say, they are as they ought to be, and cannot be otherwise. For the Stoics, ultimately, there is a universal reason that directs the universal order of the cosmos.

Since the world is given to individuals in its necessity, does this mean that they are enslaved to destiny? That they do not possess freedom and live within a contemplative fatalism? On the contrary, for the Stoics the ultimate goal is to live following virtue (Sherman 2007) by accepting the *logos* and distinguishing what falls under the control of the sage from what does not pertain to them. Epictetus, one of the most influential representatives of Roman Late Stoicism (together with Seneca, Marcus Aurelius and Cicero) exemplifies this attitude in this way:

> Some things are up to us and some are not up to us. Our opinions are up to us, and our impulses, desires, aversions—in short, whatever is our own doing. Our bodies are not up to us, nor are our possessions, our reputations, or our public offices, or that is, whatever is not our own doing […] And if it is about one of the things that is not up to us, be ready to say, "You are nothing in relation to me" (Epictetus 1983, § 1).

Epictetus suggests that we should be able to monitor our actions and thoughts by distinguishing what is "up to us" from what is "not up to us." In spite of our unknown and uncertain circumstances, what we are capable of doing is—for Epictetus—mastering our judgements on external things in order not to be affected by them.

It might seem contradictory to argue that our emotions, impulses and desires are under our control. But, as Nancy Sherman notes on her volume on Stoicism and the military mind, the "Stoics hold that an ordinary emotion

such as fear or distress is not primarily a sensation or feeling but rather an opinion or cognition that something bad is happening and a second opinion that a certain course of action is to be taken or avoided" (Sherman 2007, 9). In other words, emotions would be a matter of judgement and will and are thus under our power. Stoic's suspicious attitude towards emotions is based on their belief that ordinary emotions involve false opinions or misguided applications of reason: "emotions, then, are assents to a mistaken conception of what is good and evil" (Sherman 2007, 81). In contrast, "good emotions" (*eupatheiai*) result from the education and the transformation of the sage and consist of a different feeling repertoire grounded upon—as will shortly be clarified—the acceptance of one's own destiny: the *amor fati*.

The first objective of the Stoic practice is, therefore, to identify the causes of human unhappiness. For the Stoics, human misery is caused by looking for goods that are difficult to obtain (or destined to disappear) or trying to avoid an evil (which is often inevitable).

The Stoics, in addition, take a further step: it is not only a matter of accepting what is necessary, but also of loving it. "Why love? Because nature loves itself, and events are the result of the necessary concatenation of the causes which together constitute Fate, Destiny" (Hadot 1988, 143). Loving one's own fate echoes Perniola's considerations on Ignatius of Loyola. Like Ignatius, Stoics' "exercises" are oriented towards experiencing a joyful and comforting disposition through one's life's events (see also Bukdahl 2017). The Stoics, alongside other Greek schools of thought (such as the Epicureans and the Sceptics), but also together with several exponents of the post-Renaissance Catholic thought (as Loyola and Gracián), develop theories on how to behave well in the world. In other words, they teach ways of life, through exercises, meditations, and attitudes.

Stoic philosophy, although explicitly oriented towards ethics and actions, is not oblivious to aesthetics. The key term through which the Stoics designate beauty is *to prepon* (in Greek context) and *decorum* (in Roman culture). Firstly, *to prepon* means "the appropriate". For instance, according to classical rhetorical theory, a speech can be defined as *prepon* if it is appropriate for the context in which it is given, that is, if it conforms both the occasion and the public. Perniola provided this definition of the concept of *prepon*: "that particular type of beauty which adapts, which is convenient, and is therefore opposed precisely in virtue of the relation with respect to that which constitutes it, to the absolute and universal conception of beauty, implicit in the canon" (Perniola 1985, 190).

This quotation contains some essential elements for understanding the influence of Stoicism on Perniola. To begin with, Perniola, by interpreting the concept of *to prepon* as "the beauty which adapts," emphasizes its difference from the ideal beauty proper to objectivism. An ideal beauty does not adapt to reality, but rather does the opposite. This is why, for Perniola, an objectivist theory of beauty is stuck within a passive contemplation and does not have any connection to reality and its events. Perniola thus privileges the concept of beauty elaborated within Stoicism precisely because its main feature (the *to prepon*), does not forget, so to speak, reality—that is, it does not forget its relationship to history and to particular situations.

Another element taken from the previous quotation is worth investigation. Beauty is in fact linked with the concept of "opposition". If beauty adapts itself—that is to say, it depends on several factors within contextual circumstances—that means that it is produced in opposition to something else, because it is caused, generated, by an alterity through which it emerges. In this passage we can begin to see the position of Perniola on beauty: the beautiful is not that which is in itself perfect and complete, but what, placed in front of reality and its manifestations, is able to adapt to it, to have a pragmatic relationship of effectiveness with it.

It is no coincidence that Perniola in his volume *Transiti*, before dwelling on the ritual without myth in ancient Rome and on the role of the ceremony (1985, 189–204), anchors his discussion on Cicero's notion of *decorum* (translatable as "seemliness"). The Roman *decorum* is in fact the transposition of the Greek *to prepon*. *Decorum*, specifically, emphasizes a unity between behavior and effectiveness. It is associated with being "seemly" towards deities or, for an orator—as Cicero was—towards audiences. It means therefore to possess an exterior *habitus* made of gestures, words, rhetorical styles and rituals that are convenient, suitable, and decorous with respect to the particular circumstances and to one's various roles in life. The link between beauty and decorum is highlighted by Cicero himself: "for just as the eye is aroused by the beauty of a body […] so this seemliness [*decorum*], shining out in one's life, arouses the approval of one's fellows, because of the order and constancy and moderation of every word and action" (1991, I, 98).

Stoics believe that what is external to us is not up to us, and thus should be considered "indifferent". It is a *cliché* to consider Stoicism only as a moralistic asceticism based on virtuous discipline. Instead, the *nihil admirari* (translatable as "do not let yourself be astonished by anything") of the Stoics is a desubjectivation not to be confused with a self-annihilation. In fact, the disappearance of one's self is pursued in order to act more effectively in the world. As Nancy Sherman writes:

> It is tempting to read Epictetus as urging complacency in his listeners or at least a retreat to a narrow circle of safety. But this is not the message. We are to continue to meet challenges, take risks, and stretch the limits of our mastery. […] In this sense, the message is one of empowerment. But at the same time, we are to cultivate greater strength and equanimity in the face of what we truly can't change. We must learn where our mastery begins, but also where it ends (2007, 3).

It is not a coincidence that Stoic philosophy has been practiced by emperors (such as Marcus Aurelius) and slaves (such as Epictetus), by politicians (such as Cicero) to contemporary soldiers (such as Stockdale[1]).

Nonetheless Perniola's philosophy does not wish to replicate Stoicism in its entirety in the contemporary world. What Perniola leaves behind of traditional Stoicism is the focus on the moral element on the one hand and, on the other, the search for harmony between the individual and the world. As will be clear from the following section, the Italian philosopher praises a "polemological" attitude rather than a harmonic one. In other words, philosophy as the identification and the exploration of conflicts and oppositions rather than philosophy as the theorization of a conciliated worldview. The theme of conflict is precisely what characterizes the second theoretical figure taken into account in this paper: after neo-Stoicism, Baroque thought.

II. Gracián or Beauty as a Blade

This section will show the theoretical roots of Perniola's position on the Baroque, focusing particularly on Baltasar Gracián, to whom, together with Ignatius of Loyola, the Italian philosopher has dedicated a careful attention in his writings. Perniola's interpretation of Gracián allows this paper to clarify the concept of beauty developed by Perniola.

Gracián, born in Belmonte (Aragon) in 1601, entered the Jesus Order as a young man. He spent his life within the ecclesiastical hierarchies, teaching Latin grammar, moral theology, and philosophy in various colleges between Lérida, Gandìa, Huesca, Zaragoza, and Madrid. At the same time, he knew well Madrid's court environments, having been confessor of the viceroy of Navarre. He published most of his writings, such as *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* (1647), *The Hero* (1637), *The Complete Gentleman* (1646), *The Critic*

[1] Interestingly enough, James Bond Stockdale (1923-2005) a US Navy admiral and aviator, stated that he managed to survive seven years of imprisonment and tortures during the Vietnam War thanks to Stoic philosophy and Epictetus' *Handbook*. See Sherman 2007, 1-17.

(1651), and *Wit and the Art of Inventiveness* (1648), under a pseudonym and, therefore, without the approval of the Order. His proximity both to court circles and to some politicians of the time, such as Don Vincenzo Giovanni of Lastanosa, caused him internal enmities within the Society of Jesus. Eventually, in 1651, Gracián lost the Chair of Sacred Scriptures in Zaragoza (the most coveted within ecclesiastical studies) and was transferred to Graus. Almost exiled, away from supporters and friends, he died December 6, 1658, in Terragona.

Perniola focuses mainly on two works by the Spanish priest: *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* and *Wit and the Art of Inventiveness*. The first contains a "biotechnique" (Tatarkiewicz 1979, 484), that is, an art of living well. The second is considered to be the most important text Gracián left on aesthetic theory. This section will deal with Perniola's interpretation of Gracián's theories and will underline in what ways his thought has been influenced by them. Specifically, Perniola focuses on three main notions emerging from Gracián's works, namely *agudeza* (literally "acuteness", translated as "wit"), *ingenium* (translated with "inventiveness" and "ingenuity") and *concepto* ("concept").

Agudeza is presented in a variety of attitudes—a subtle comment, a witty remark, a seductive silence, and so on. *Agudeza* has roots in treatises on courtesy such as *The Book of the Courtier* (published in 1528) by Baldassarre Castiglione, and Giovanni Della Casa's *Galateo* (1558). Gracián shares with these late-Renaissance writers the attention to subtlety, *sprezzatura*, *je ne sais quoi*—attitudes and behaviors not understood as empty forms but at the crossroads between seduction, politics, and art.

Agudeza implies an aesthetic conception of existence in which "what glitters and what succeeds, form and action, ornament and substance" are closely joined (Perniola 1995, 113). Here the connection between the conception of beauty of Gracián's literary mannerism and the Greek *to prepon* and the Roman *decorum* emerge. In Gracián's works, beauty is not unfolded by a proportionate and harmonious object; it does not depend on an eternal canon or measure; it is not essentially spherical, soft, round, and it is not an object of contemplation. On the contrary, beauty is the result of a challenge between manners and circumstances. I emphasize the word challenge precisely to stress the attention Perniola's interpretation pays to Gracián's works. Being witty means behaving like something acute, pungent, sharp, pointed (like a needle or a sword) which penetrates the things of the world: "Wit, 'acuteness,' belong within a semantic field in which speech, gesture, and even silence, are understood as a weapon and the literate per-

son as a combatant, a warrior, a hero" (Perniola 1995, 113). Thus, wit is that particular notion which holds together the dimensions of aesthetics and existence, beauty and effectiveness, art and strategy, opportunity and seduction.

Although the concept of beauty has always been present within the Western tradition, aesthetic principles started to be studied systematically with eighteenth century thinkers like Baumgarten, Burke, and Kant. In fact, these figures put aesthetics side by side with ethics and logics and researched the conditions of possibility of beauty, taste, pleasure, and so on. A question might arise at this stage. Why does Perniola write frequently on aesthetics—devoting several monographs (see 2013a; 2017) to contemporary worldwide aesthetics, while being at the same time suspicious towards the discipline of aesthetics, paradoxically since the precise period it was founded?

Philosophical aesthetics is oriented, according to Perniola, towards dissecting the various notions and experiences belonging to the realm of feeling. The main objective is in fact producing a new typology of knowledge around *aisthesis*, the perceptions of the senses. In doing so, aesthetics became a distinct and particular discipline with its own rules and principles. The aesthetics of the eighteenth century onwards, in other words, has produced above all treatises on feeling, in which the main aim has been to systematize it, catalogue it, and grasp its properties. In doing so, beauty ended up being separate if not isolated from everyday attitudes. On the contrary, by combining rock art (2009), Egyptian architecture (1995), Roman and post-Renaissance rituals (2001), Stoicism, and Baroque, Perniola emphasizes the idea of an aesthetic which includes a global vision of the individual. To put it briefly: aesthetics and action as two sides of the same coin. This is the reason why a notion like *agudeza*, Perniola suggests, does not "speak" easily to the experience of the contemporary person. *Agudeza* still belongs to the ideal of a person in which will, attitudes, tastes are inseparable from one another.

The second notion explored by Gracián and discussed by Perniola is *ingenium*. The meanings with which Gracián characterizes ingenuity are far from the use made of traditional aesthetics of the same concept. In fact, *ingenium* is connected, in the aesthetic field, to the figure of the genius. On the other hand, ingenious, in common language, does not relate to art and aesthetics but rather to the practical realization of something, especially in the field of technology and mechanics. As Perniola points out, in fact, modern aesthetics "on the one hand ties ingenuity to a practical and mechanical ef-

fectiveness, on the other isolates genius in a poetic and formal purity" (1995, 116). The ingenuity conceived by Gracián, instead, far from being solely spiritual or merely functional, is closer to the conception that Francis Bacon has of the imagination (and which Perniola borrows in order to define the influence that the Baroque has had on his philosophy), which consists in making unlawful matches and divorces among things (Perniola 2008, 4).

In order to clarify an ingenious attitude, Perniola highlights (1995, 116) a series of aphorisms within Gracián's work. The varieties of operations produced by ingenuity can be summarized in the ability to transform nature into culture and make this transformation seem natural. Ingenuity can be produced by forming paradoxes, concealing criticism through praise, setting enigmas, alluding, discovering affinities between distant things, and so on. In other words, it implies the ability to move, dislocate, and transform with art the data given in their immediacy. The goal of this attitude is to transform a mere fact, event, encounter, into a prism of surprising possibilities. *Ingenium* is thus an act of subtle artifice concerned specifically with beauty: "*ingenium* cannot content itself only with truth, like judgement, but aspires to beauty" (Gracián 1967, 241). And, in addition: "[ingenuity] is an act of understanding which expresses existing and present correspondence between objects" (Gracián 1967, 236). Gracián writes of "existing and present" relationships between objects, in order to underline that with this "metaphorical comparison," *ingenium* is not addressed to creativity but to the development of something that is already present. As Hidalgo Serna and Oliver Olson note: "*ingenium* counterposes two separate things over against each other and with images objectifies relationships or similarities between them which are already present" (Serna *et al.* 1980, 253).

Finally, the third pivotal notion of Gracián's aesthetics: the *concepto*. A "concept" is usually defined as an idea that collects the essential elements of a given reality or phenomenon. A concept, so to speak, "grasps," "grabs," "seizes" its objects. In order to explain Gracián's notion of *concepto*, Perniola leaves behind this interpretation and comes back to the Latin etymology of the word concept, which is *conceptus*, derived from *con-capio*. *Con-capio* means "to take" in the sense of "welcoming" or "gathering in" something: "to conceive [*concepire*] does not mean therefore to appropriate anything, but rather to make room for it" (Perniola 1995, 122). In other words, a concept would imply not so much an activity of the subject towards an object as a disposition of the subject, a welcoming attitude, willing to receive what comes from the outside. Indeed, as Emilio Hidalgo Serna writes, commenting on the notion of *concepto* in Gracián:

> The Gracián concept is not demonstrative. The logic of the ingenious concept cannot be formal or rational. Its concepts cannot express logical relationships, but always only new, real relationships, which constitute the unique essence of things. Gracián attempts to show, not to demonstrate. Concepts therefore must be a re-representation of reality… (Serna *et al* 1980, 252).

The "ingenious concept" is thus a method for displaying and showing original correspondences between things, combining them in a new language outside rational and logical structures. *Ingenium*, in this case, is considered by Serna and Perniola as a faculty capable of creating a "conceptual attitude" by drawing out relationships between images and objects.

In this context another theme shared by the traditions explored returns: that of a benevolent and affirmative disposition towards the events, towards what is independent and cannot be controlled by the individual. It implies becoming-nothing, downsizing oneself, remaining in a state of suspension which ultimately allows the individual to being open to the world and its uncanny and ever-changing manifestations. However, since *agudeza*, *ingenio*, and *concepto* are not three separate moments but should be understood as a fundamental triad for the art of living well, gathering in what comes from outside does not mean passively receiving anything. On the contrary, it implies using ingenuity, discerning, having discretion, knowing how to move in concrete circumstances, on occasions that arise from time to time. This conception is what Perniola praises as "strategic beauty," in which aesthetics and manners are never oblivious to the practical element.

To conclude, Gracián grounded his aesthetic theory upon the notions of *agudeza*, *ingenium* and *concepto*. *Agudeza*, as suggested, has the characteristics of something pointed, close to a needle or a sword. The dimension of penetrating, piercing, and "becoming" sharp is essential to Gracián's theory. The Baroque wise man is close to an elegant warrior, who uses words, gesture, silences, and witty remarks as blades. Gracián therefore places the element of conflict and challenge at the core of an aesthetic attitude which does not necessarily result in a final harmony. Indeed, it is precisely the disharmonic or discordant element, as Tatarkiewicz points out, that is crucial for Baroque theory:

> The most desirable themes for an artist or a thinker—writes Tatarkiewicz—consist precisely in what is disharmonic, dissonant, disproportionate, paradoxical, incoherent, incommensurable, in *disparidad*, in difficulties, in contradictions, in mystery, in enigmas, in hyperboles, in the imaginative, in the ambiguous, in the unclear etc. All these are the ideal subjects for *agudeza* and constitutes the true essence of Mannerist aesthetics (Tatarkiewicz 1980, 485-486).

Agudeza is highlighted in this passage as that ability which enables one to perceive the conflict that animates the relations between the things of the world without consequently bringing it back to a final unity or conciliation. Its peculiarity, and at the same time its paradoxicality, is that of being on one hand close to Stoic discretion and prudence, and, on the other hand, to a Heraclitean conception of life. In fact, Heraclitus can be considered an outsider among the aesthetics theorists explored so far. His philosophy cannot be traced back either to the objectivistic theory of beauty, nor to the subjectivist theory, nor to that of the Stoics. For Heraclitus beauty emerges from *enantiodromia*, namely the tension between each thing and its opposite. The originality of this perspective lies in the fact that opposition is never overcome by a greater harmony: the state of ambivalence that characterizes everything remains.

III. Debord or Beauty as Displacement

Beyond neo-Stoicism and Baroque tradition, the third theoretical figure, so to speak, which influenced Perniola's work is that of the avant-garde. Specifically, at the end of the Sixties he was close to the Situationist International (1957–1972), a revolutionary movement founded by the French philosopher Guy Debord. Although Perniola continued to research for his whole life the significance of this movement, to which he also refers as "the last avant-garde of the XXth century" (2013b, 19), he did never define himself as a Situationist. As it is known, the Situationist International grounded its revolutionary project on the creation of new types of "situations", which criticize the existing order and open up the possibility to a re-appropriation of everyday life. Against the repetition of pre-existing life-styles, loyal to the capitalist apparatus, Debord elaborated practices for this re-appropriation from several points of view (urban, architectural, artistic, political, and so on). For example, the "drift" (*dérive*), considered a "rapid passage technique through various environments" (Debord 1958, 19). Ordinarily, one moves around in a city to go from point A to point B, that is, approaching the urban space only in a function-oriented manner. The Situationists rethink the very relationship between subjects and their urban environment through *drifts*, an urban practice which isn't related to neither strolling nor walking. A drift consists in the creation of a qualitatively alternative situation—different from the exclusively functionalist approach, which conveys a merely quantitative idea of space and considers the urban setting only as an obstacle to be traversed. This practice is part of a broad

field of study which is defined as "psychogeography," or the study of the "precise effects that the geographical environment, consciously ordered or not, exerts directly on the affective behavior of individuals" (Perniola 2005, 16). A drift thus implies a theoretical study of the emotional aspects that it produces on a psychological level. The drift is an example of a situation, that is, of the deliberate construction of a creative experience against (but within) the "society of the spectacle."

Another practice that attempts to instantiate a qualitatively different situation from the *status quo* is the so-called *détournement*. This term can be translated as "rerouting," "hijacking," "displacement," and consists in the attribution of a new aesthetic value to pre-existing elements. For example, images belonging to the capitalist world, as advertising, comics and posters are no longer used for the purpose for which they were produced: their original context is transformed into a revolutionary perspective. To give an example, the image of a smiling couple next to a refrigerator, which, according to the advertising logic of the market conveys an idea of happiness linked to consumption, is completely subverted by the Situationists. Instead of a bubble where the couple express its satisfaction with the purchase, the Situationists inserted statements such as: "my thoughts have been replaced by moving images" or, "I didn't go to work today; I don't think I'll go tomorrow. Let's take control of our lives and live for pleasure not pain." In short, the Situationists sought to reorganize the meaning of a certain object by transforming its context and purposes. In this sense, the *détournement* is a critical and aesthetical weapon against the spectacle. According to Perniola, a *détournement* has two main aspects: "the loss of importance of the original meaning of each individual autonomous element and the organization of another significant group, which gives each element a new end" (2005, 22-23). The *détournement*, as Anselm Jappe notes (1999, 61), is a practice that allows us to understand an essential characteristic of the concept of society according to the Situationists. In fact, the construction of situations—such as those brought by drifts, *détournement*, and so on—does not imply any utopianism, in the sense of a search for the revolutionary moment in a future that is yet to come. On the contrary, the premises for the revolution are all present, they are already *ready-made*—to borrow a notion typical of Dadaist avant-garde—that is to say, it is a matter of recombining the present, to "reassemble" it in order to open up new possible experiences and ways of existence. The situation, therefore, implies a choice in favor of the present and its not-yet-uncovered possibilities, which awaits practices and exemplary actions to be elaborated and developed. The idea of fullness

of the present will never be dismissed by Perniola, and precisely in the Situationist *détournement* lies the common thread between neo-Stoicism, Baroque thought, and avant-garde practices.

Conclusion

Perniola's main contributions to aesthetics and contemporary thinking, such as his ideas of the "simulacrum," "ritual without myth," "transit," "the sex appeal of the inorganic," and "artistic shadow," can be understood—according to this paper—if we take them into account alongside the theoretical thread which unites heterogeneous traditions and world views. This thread can go under the name of "strategic beauty," borrowing several pivotal elements from Stoicism, Baroque, and avant-gardism. Against objectivist and subjectivist aesthetic theories, Perniola praises the connection between aesthetics, forms, and rituals on the one hand, and effectuality, tangible results, tactics, on the other. This peculiar conception of beauty is characterized by two main theoretical attributes. Firstly, a strategic beauty implies the suspension of one's own subjectivity in order to experience reality without a pre-existent ideology or doctrine. Indifference is seen as a key attitude to accept and love one's own destiny. This does not imply a neutralization of feeling, but, on the contrary, a welcoming disposition, namely, the possibility of gathering in what comes from outside. Secondly, a strategic beauty is not grounded upon eternal canons or mathematical proportions. It is rather the result of circumstances, peculiar conditions and accidents, an effectual oriented beauty which is plastic towards the enigmatic and ever-changing combinations of events. Contrary to narrow specialism, Perniola's re-evaluation of Stoicism and Baroque within the contemporary world, I would argue, should be understood as an effort to bring back together aesthetics and politics, manners and lifestyles, form and effectuality in one comprehensive dimension.

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