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## The métier of living

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# The métier of living: Art, genocide and education

John Baldacchino

**Abstract:** In art what appears to be a condition for change is almost always strategically expedient. This is especially the case when one positions art and change within a *prosthetic* space. Charles Garoian lays claim to this strategy by posing prosthesis as the fourth dimension that follows a third synthetic stage that dialectically binds a thesis to its antithesis. Re-reading Garoian's claims against the Soviet and Neo-Liberal renditions of Hegel's theory of the dialectic, this paper argues that such claims could reduce art's space to a *prosthetic synthesis* that risks pedagogical and aesthetic ossification. Given the performative élan by which Garoian invests education, this appears paradoxical, especially in terms of the personal dimension by which he invests his art as a metier of living and surviving a history that is firmly marked by the devastation of genocide. Strangely, this paradox is what gives us the ability and power by which we could seek a counter-*Bildung*. As this paper's author puts it, in art such a counter-*Bildung* takes the form of *unlearning* by which one would exit the predicament of instrumental reason. For unlearning to become possible prosthetic syntheses must be reversed by making of arts education a case for *synthetic prostheses*. Only then could Garoian's performative method begin to assert an inverse positioning that would effectively counter the instrumentalization of the dialectic, and with it, that of history and art.

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# The *métier* of living

## Art, genocide and education

John Baldacchino

Quiero bajar al pozo  
quiero morir mi muerte a bocanadas  
quiero llenar mi corazón de musgo  
para ver al herido por el agua.

*I want to drop down the well,  
I want to die by mouthfuls  
I want to fill my heart with moss  
to see the wounded by water.*

Federico Garcia Lorca (1996a), *Casida Del Herido Por El Agua*  
[*Casida for The Wounded by Water*]

Mind is not an inert being but, on the contrary, absolutely restless being, pure activity, the negating of ideality of every fixed category of the abstractive intellect; not abstractly simple but, in its simplicity, at the same time a distinguishing of itself from itself; not an essence that is already finished and complete before its manifestation, keeping itself aloof behind its host of appearances, but an essence which is truly actual only through the specific forms of its necessary self-manifestation ...

Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind* (Book III of the *Encyclopedia*) (1971, p. 2, para. 378)

Charles Garoian clearly sets his theoretical trajectory from the very start of his book: “The expansion and extension of my cultural space interconnecting with those of others indefinitely, represents the premise of this book: *The prosthetic space of art*” (Garoian, 2013, p. 6). If not closely read this could be misleading. It may well be an aim, though as such, the expansion of one’s cultural space remains conditional and more so contingent on what it portends to *do* when (and if) the time comes for an end-objective to be realized, if at all.

I want to think that where prosthesis—let alone a *prosthetic space*—is concerned, it has to give itself the benefit of change. This change often runs on borrowed time, as it is neither permanent nor secured. In terms of art, what appears to be a condition for change remains expedient. This expediency must not be read as improper, but as strategic. Upon entering such space, one must adopt a playful approach, where knowledge is more than a set of facts. Here I am thinking of a form of gaining knowledge by stealth, a form of espionage.

In allowing ourselves the advantage of borrowed time that gives us knowledge of what we’re not supposed to know, we could argue that it is not bad to have a *modicum* of an aim. In this way we are more adept to make approximations rather than pin ourselves to secured objectives. A modicum, that by its nature is never really secured but wagered on prosthetic possibilities, allows us to state that an aim  $x$  only serves its purpose in telling us what to expect as long as  $y$  does not indicate that in terms of  $z$  it would be better to affirm other objectives, such as aims  $a, b, d$ , or  $n \dots$  Far from uncertainty, to know other than  $x$  or  $y$  puts one at a vantage point, while at the same time such a way of knowing gives the impression of a prescient understanding for which art is often known but where in actual fact there is none other than a calculated guess.

## 1. Presumed space

As art finds itself in a presumed space (a space whose truth must always remain questioned), it has the privilege of its own speciality. In this respect, art must refuse to deliver any affirmed resolution of what seems to be promised in the dialectical predicaments of its spatial condition. So while Garoian's aim appears to be promised from the start, a suspended question soon follows suit. This is mostly prompted by a desire to engage art with the dialectics of space.

Given that Garoian consciously wagers his prosthetic ontology and epistemology on art (Garoian, 2013, p. 27), his method of engagement by suspension, by *epoché*, is unavoidable. The suspension is intrinsically phenomenological by force of the questions that it poses—in case an objective *x* finds itself perplexed by other possibilities, such as aims *a, b, d* or *n* ...

The space where suspension happens is more than simply inhabited. It is performed. This also means that any attempt to define this space remains inadequate. By suspending the question and refusing to give *one* answer, Garoian the performance artist plays for time. He also plays *with* time as he becomes expedient with what he calls a *prosthetic* space. This is where space and time are eternally borrowed from what the artist articulates as a further fourth dimension in a dialectic that he consciously extends from an aimed *synthesis* to a newly extended *prosthesis*.

Initially one can never be sure whether Garoian wants the *prosthesis* to necessarily 'follow' in the expected triadic procedure of *thesis, antithesis* and *synthesis*, where he appears to follow Henri Lefebvre and assert a positive dialectic. However, a positive dialectic seeks progress and a degree of resolution through a

number of meditational mechanisms. Because Garoian's is a practice of *embodied* art and not just a space or time within which this embodiment is simply encased, resolution and mediation become questionable. Rather, this state of affairs appears to belong to: (a) the ideational assumptions of space as these accommodate anything that we as bodied actors would regard as dialectically resolvable (hence Garoian's allusion to Lefebvre's "science of space" and the mediated dialectic that is enacted through the subject *qua* body); and (b) art's iteration of a frozen *terminus a quo* (a point of departure) that seems to be hopelessly impeded from ever resolving itself, let alone allowed to find its *terminus ad quem* (a point of arrival). This is because, also from the start, Garoian wants to assert with Brian Franklin, that in art a *terminus* is likely to be transformed into a *fermata* (see Garoian, 2013, pp. 10-12).

In this respect, Garoian's book prompts a line of questioning intended to probe the claim of a suspended space and a borrowed time. One wonders whether Garoian's borrowing of time does indeed lapse into a spatial dimension which, as we find in art's method of *epoché* must be asserted beyond the expected dimensionality with which we still struggle since Galileo, even when we have had more than a reassuring note, after Einstein, that we can safely go beyond such promised certainties.

## 2. Finding paradox

In its method of *epoché* art must seek those paradoxical moments, or events, by which it could assert itself as non-art (Baldacchino, 2012). In avoiding the limits of a spatial dialectic (Negri, 1991; Baldacchino, 2014), we must substitute the spatial with the paradoxical, the relativist with the relational, the factual with the fabular, form with the body ... etc.

At a further, subjective and indeed personal, level ...

*I want to juxtapose* the narrative of Garoian the artist and performer with those of his history. I want to know what this juxtaposition brings to the *prosthetic* space that he invites us to share in a pedagogical *polis* (or is it an *agon*?) where art and education engage in alternating bouts of dispute and accordance.

*I want to see* the artist's life for what it is, as a life dedicated to something other than art, even though without art one suspects that there will be no life—or at least, life will not be able to assert itself in the reality that Garoian may want to recognise as art's *truth*.

*I want to understand* what Garoian means when in the first pages of his book, he exercises the highest ontological claim imaginable: his right to *be*—a right that moves beyond sheer existence and begins to suggest a concept of reality that might even propound the ability to be itself as *in and of itself*. By dint of this superior right—*superior* because it sits high on any other human right imaginable—Garoian puts form and word into play by means of a “drifting of the imagination and facility with the hand.” Beyond art itself, Garoian tells us that the notion of a “playful work” coincides with his Armenian parents' example of survival from genocide.

Such drifting of the imagination and facility with the hand, playful work, research for making meaning, coincided with our parents' fractured lives, their telling of persecutions and atrocities experienced as children, surviving the Armenian Genocide, forced from their homeland (Garoian, 2013, p. 4).

As I see Garoian's art and philosophy collide and converge with the historical fact that he was born notwithstanding the very possibility that genocide would have impeded him from even being conceived, I am reminded of Primo Levi's concept of “*il mestiere di vivere*”—the trade, or indeed the *métier*, of living (Levi, 1975).

### 3. Prosthetic syntheses

The dialectic is a manifestation of an obstinate and ambiguous beast. It resides in our consolations, by which we seek to explain our perceived limits of contingency. It is also an aspiring affirmation of the necessary ideals by which we seek to balance out the limits that afflict us.

As an attitude that is literally thrown in the direction of our grammatical assumptions, the dialectic is a self-inflicted externalised explanation. It helps us rationalise what we want to retain in its immediacy: our very being.

As beings whose reasoning enables us to consciously *make* our world, we insist on taking advantage *of* and *from* the poetics of a dialectical logic by which we further impose our will on the world. Historically, the consequences of such a poetic logic have been varied, ranging from a celebration of “life”—a concept which Ivan Illich (Illich & Cayley, 1992, p. 127), rightly reminds us, is a reified distortion of the act of living; to the abject rationalisation of death — where, as reflective onlookers, we meet “the laughing placard of a toothpaste beauty [and] discern in her flashlight grin the grimace of torture” (Adorno, 1991, p. 141).

The dialectic is not dissimilar from Promethean fire in that it is stolen from history to be used against history. In Marx—or shall we say, *after* Marx—the dialectic found itself split from history, running parallel as a system of dialectical materialism to vying for a place with historical materialism. The move seems far removed from the Hegelian system that was meant to explain everything without surrogate prosthetic events like State Communism or the affirmation of the Monarchic State that Hegel (wrongly) regarded as the fulfilment of the Idea in history.



Unforeseen and equally undeterred by the dialectic's critical logic, old Soviet manuals of the dialectic were specifically intent on sealing this binary route doctrinally, even where Marx, let alone Hegel, would have objected.<sup>1</sup> The scholastics of certainty assumed that this would put a scientific structure to the dialectic and demonstrate its historical fulfilment in the new proletarian state. They did this by *prosthetizing* the synthesis that was meant to seal the predicament caused by the advent of capital in the way humans produce, distribute and consume wealth, which is ultimately appropriated and therefore fulfilled by the advent of a command economy marked by collective ownership that throws the dialectic into impasse, in that the State will wither away.

The Soviet fulfilment of the State turned out to be even more problematic than Hegel's comfort with the monarchic State as the fulfilment of the Idea, in that by dint of this newly found prosthetic reason, this post-Hegelian generation of self-proclaimed dialectical scientists wanted to *instrumentally*—rather than *critically*—liberate the proletariat from the gods of capital, religion and the monarchy in one go. In many ways, this prosthetic infliction appeared to turn the dialectic onto itself and ultimately neuter both its logic and history.

#### **4. Shared belonging(s)**

Even when we dismiss the *Bildung* by which the Soviets prosthetized the dialectic as a system that was supposed to enhance the political, social and educational emancipation of the proletariat, we expediently forget that in the wake of the so-called “post-communist” era, a similar cycle of instrumental—and prosthetic—construction

was soon to be reinforced by a period that now carries the misguided appellation of “neo-liberalism.”

While the Soviet *Bildung* was publicly rejected in the academic, political and mediatized square of George Bush Senior’s New World Order, we often forget that what followed suit in Bush’s neo-conservative agenda for the so-called “West” was no less reified than the Soviet structure of perceived redemption. Though rejecting the outer shell of State-sponsored redemption, the victors saw themselves as the legitimate heirs of the spoils of war and acted accordingly. In true post-war fashion, those who came forward to write the “Western” victor’s history, such as Francis Fukuyama (1992), reclaimed the same philosophical patriarch: Hegel. Yet again, Hegel is the prophet of “Western” claim to the “end of history.” Not unlike his Soviet counterparts, Fukuyama presents Bush’s New World Order with a dialectic that vied with history intending to bring it to an end. In other words, albeit reworded and carefully choreographed as a victory of liberal-democracy, the split between the dialectic and history remained firmly within the Western world-outlook. The prosthesis got a new look, but it functioned just as it did in the “Old” World Order.

On humbler domestic grounds, the same state of affairs was being confirmed. Similar assumptions were (and continue to be) made on art and education, in that to this day nothing has changed in the instrumental outlook that moves them. Considered as the domains of human action where society is expected to fulfil the presumed termini by which men and women are deemed to have their future secured and guaranteed, art and education form part of the same prosthetic synthesis by which contradiction is ironed out and the assumptions of coherence, realization and freedom are force-fed.

There is no doubt that the folding of the dialectic onto itself by prosthetic means—be they Soviet or liberal, social-democratic or neo-liberal, reactionary or neo-conservative—has remained broadly unchanged by the end of the Cold War. This extended and supplemented scenario continues to sustain the same aprioristic assumptions that were presumed by the vying relationship between history and the dialectic, as formulated by the post-Hegelian engineers of the Soviet State on one hand and the conservative custodians of the Hegelian justification of the State on the other. One could even argue that the scenario of Left and Right Hegelians, with which Marx and Engels so sharply engaged in their youth (Marx & Engels, 1975), never left us. The same patterns of an instrumental rendition of a dialectical logic retain great relevance to our reading of history today—especially after history’s presumed “end” was falsely heralded from the abandoned trenches of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup>

So it should not be surprising to realise that in the constructivist assumptions to which we still attach our many banners, we are still technically professed to the very same structure that Hegel’s self-proclaimed heirs on the right and the left have transformed into an instrumental prosthetic tool.

More so the reassurance of this prosthetic solution is continuously being domesticated by the actuality of human thinking and action. In this respect we all belong to this reassuring abode, even though many are not ready to admit it. Now that the Cold War is over, we can see how we all claim a common prosthetic belonging. This cuts across the parameters of all the conservative, liberal and progressive educational polities, which, in our divergent postures, we claim as exclusively ours.

As we begin to understand what this means to us people of the post-communist and neo-liberal diaspora, we realise that far from the gods, the makers of fire and history are none other than us—whether we happen to be proud independents,

members of a progressive, liberal or conservative middle class, self-proclaimed members of the Occupy Movement, or the angry revellers of the Tea Party. As the conservative British Prime Minister, David Cameron, has (in)famously said about the most recent economic recession when he announced his government's programme of austerity: "We are all in it together." (And we must not forget that Mr. Cameron's government brought together two diametrically opposed parties, Liberals and Tories, who a week before they formed their coalition represented the left and right spectrum of British politics, leaving the traditionally left-of-centre Labour party in the middle.)

## 5. Exiting

At this stage, we are struck by a sense of impasse in that there seems to be no real getaway. Prospects of an exit by which, like the disciples of old, we could escape into society to proclaim the Spirit, look pretty dim. Pentecostal exits look frightfully shut. This is because the prosthetic supplementation of the dialectic appears to have extinguished the very fire that we planned to steal.

Thus we take refuge in the nostalgic, and though we don't profess the realism by which art, together with philosophy, always felt obliged to "change" the world (a world that would have changed anyway because after all is said and done, the dialectic is historically bound), the productivist aesthetic that ensued in our political, cultural and educational projects remained central to our narratives of freedom and knowledge—especially in those pseudo-liberal guises by which history's temporal relativity was conveniently suppressed in the name of a supplemented system that was hailed as the offshoot of Hegel's dialectic.

John Dewey already anticipates this absolutist phenomenon in the 1930s, where he specifically warns against this predicament:

This absolutism, this ignoring and denial of temporal relativity, is one great reason why the earlier liberalism degenerated so easily into pseudo-liberalism. For the sake of saving time, I shall identify what I mean by this spurious liberalism, the kind of social ideas represented by the “Liberty League” and ex-President Hoover. I call it a pseudo-liberalism because it ossified and narrowed generous ideas and aspirations. Even when words remain the same, they mean something very different when they are uttered by a minority struggling against repressive measures and when expressed by a group that, having attained power, then uses ideas that were once weapons of emancipation as instruments for keeping the power and wealth it has obtained (Dewey, 1935, p. 226).

Those who still insist on the redemptive qualities, by which they pose their claim for political, educational and artistic constructs, mostly ignore this predicament and are the first to deny temporal relativity. Perhaps the best examples of this denial are found in the cycle of overarching educational policies where a standardised utopian promise seals the worse of possible outcomes. In the United States, we find *No Child Left Behind* and now its would-be answer, *Common Core*. In Britain we find iterations of a similar kind that broadly anticipate or follow what happens across the Atlantic. In both Britain and the US, the rhetoric is the same, where what is perceived as “poor performance,” attention is drawn towards Asia, particularly China, South Korea and Japan. At this stage one can only imagine what effect such policies have had on the arts in education, where more often than not, an epistemological hierarchy is reinforced against the expected measures of production and industry (See Baldacchino, 2013b).

This is where Garoian's work raises some thorny issues, especially when he invites us to consider a dialogical horizon where discourse has no choice but to recognise its fragmentary and contingent condition. This condition is pretty much represented by the method of collage where complete pictures are no more—not that there has ever been a complete picture! In rejecting the myth of an original or consequent completion, we are urged to value the connections rather than the object, by recognizing the fragmentary as truth in its state of perpetual altering and slippage.

Here I find the possibility of education—more specifically the possibility of *pedagogy*—to which Garoian invites me to consider his concept of a prosthetic space. But as I hear this invitation, I also look back with fear and anxiety to the prosthetic syntheses that the legatees of the Cold War continue to add to the dialectic. I also wonder how safe we are and whether we could be in for another problematic relationship of this kind.

On the other hand, Garoian reassures me when he says that he sees the possibility of pedagogy in the “troubling, incompatibility of prosthesis” (Garoian, 2013, p. 29). He further explains that a *prosthetic pedagogy* is “an embodied form of art research and teaching that challenges and resists both the disabling stereotypes and stigmas of the amputated as dysfunctional, and the fear and loathing of technological supplements that enable the body's agency” (Garoian, 2013, p. 29).

## 6. Impasse

As I begin to assess Garoian's reassurances, I would also insist that I am not ready to ascribe a redemptive character to his prosthetic pedagogy, and I suspect neither would he. This is because I see no fulfilment or atonement in trying to reify, let alone use

education as some realm where childhood dreams are realized or where social foundations for peace and tranquillity are laid down, let alone guaranteed. If anything, education promises the opposite, and that is why pedagogy should be read as a form of negation, indeed a road to *Bildung*, which Hegel (1977, p. 49) reminds us, is “the pathway of doubt, or more precisely as the way of despair.”

While childhood cannot afford the comforts of memory (because we only have a memory of childhood, while childhood itself is too short to entertain for itself a memory of its own), we have to “grow up” and confront the realities by which we question and reject learning per se.

By challenging every single assumption that is held constant—such as that of learning and development through art and education—I find strength in Garoian’s proposal. It may well be that this is not what Garoian wants or intends, and I am sure he would probably object to my insistence that there is no solace to be found in learning per se (See Baldacchino, 2013a and 2014). Yet far from being dystopian, I would argue that this is what we have and we cannot assume that we can have anything else, although this does not mean that we have lost the ability to transcend the here and now. Indeed it is imperative that as artists and educators we engage in the aesthetic possibilities that Maxine Greene, referring to Herbert Marcuse, articulates as “the qualities of art that allow it to indict established reality and evoke images of liberation” and “the relevance of art in overcoming the inability to see others” (Greene, 2000, p. 136).

I would argue that on art’s horizon we must be allowed to run riot, while imagining and seeking a desired exit. I would hone in on the idea of exiting because, as I have argued at length elsewhere, art makes a clear case for an *exit pedagogy*. (Baldacchino, 2012) More so, our ability to exit belongs to the quandary of art’s

political realization of impasse as that moment where revolution begins to appear. I would accentuate art's *quandary* because art cannot prescribe how, when, or in what form does a revolutionary condition emerge, if at all.

What seems to entertain us with a degree of certainty (at least when we look back at recent or distant forms of revolutionary practice) is that revolutions are events that emerge in disparate ways—very much like fragments that refuse the notion of necessary completion. By means of these willed fragments, women and men assume their right to put together a collage that accentuates the very transience by which they value life's contingent nature.

One could argue that Goya's pictorial predicament of a revolution (in the figure of Saturn) devouring its own children represents that very moment when men and women begin to insist that *their* picture is exclusively complete and that there is no longer a need for a collage of other pictures. At this stage the revolution devours its own children and begins to impose the historical myth of a completed image. This predicament afflicted all great revolutions—American, French and Soviet alike. It also aborted the most recent uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, where new forms of completion soon emerged as soon as new dictators began to prosthetise the syntheses of the people's revolution and suppressed the course of the people's own dialectic.

Here I would reassert the revolutionary case for impasse as that which emerges from an historical awareness that any attempt to politicize art by turning it into a form of direct action results in fetishist consumption and ultimately in a prosthetic condition that halts its embodied self.

More importantly, I would add that this risk of fetishist consumption is clearly found in those constructivist arguments by which we have continuously promised an



emancipatory outcome through the arts and education. This is why any assumption of the political in art must be sought in the condition of impasse and the asserted right of an exit pedagogy, where the myth of benign emancipation and constructivist completion is rejected and where we begin to argue that as a political act, art is located in “what we have not yet found” (See Baldacchino, 2012, pp. 12-14).

## 6. Synthetic prosthesis

Before I continue to follow Garoian’s pedagogical trajectories, I want to qualify my terms of reference, especially in view of the implicit critique that I offer above (particularly in §3 and §4), where I express great anxiety over the constructivist foreclosure by which the dialectic becomes afflicted when, in their parallel ways, both the right and the left purposely alienate the dialectic from history, purporting to supplement it with their own prostheses in an effort to control the people’s history.

I therefore propose that Garoian’s argument for prosthesis needs to assert an *inverse* positioning that would effectively counter the prosthetic synthesis by which the dialectic has become instrumentalized, especially in tangible and sensitive realms such as art and education. This prompts me to re-read Garoian’s dialectical positioning vis-à-vis Hegel’s triadic structure, which in its logical structure does not necessitate supplementation because it is implicitly assumed to supplement itself by dint of its contradictory nature. Paradoxically the triad is not fixed as a threesome, but as a pattern by which contradiction is legitimised and the scenario of “*A is not A*” gains full philosophical and practical validity (see §7, below).

When a legitimised paradox is further supplemented by a prosthetic space that is signified by liminality, contingency and ephemerality (see Garoian, 2013, p. 62), it

represents an iteration of a further contradiction. While this may well be a pedagogical and artistic inevitability, on a political level this iteration could be very problematic. A second iterative contradiction, unless qualified and critically positioned, could well expose the assumption of a prosthetic pedagogy of art to systematic manipulation—as indeed one finds in various examples of progressive and critical pedagogical projects which find themselves co-opted in those reactionary and conservative political practices that originally they set out to refuse.

As in the case of the articulation of the State as a prosthetic synthesis that is meant to marginalise, and ultimately eliminate the liminal and the contingent, unless qualified, a second iterative contradiction could well neuter the legitimation of paradox by which a dialectical logic proceeds.

I therefore suggest that to perceive this prosthetic space as a further iteration of the legitimation of a paradox that sustains itself (perhaps as a *fermata*), prosthesis must be consciously posed as a *synthetic prosthesis*, and therefore as a performative event within the dialectical space itself. In many ways, this could be a viable approach to understand art as aporia. The inversion of a *prosthetic synthesis* to a *synthetic prosthesis* is important because to say that a fourth, prosthetic dimension must be construed as an interruption—a *fermata*—of the teleological projects inherent in everyone's history, is not only bold but carries immense political-aesthetic responsibilities, particularly in matters pedagogical.

Furthermore, the notion of a prosthesis raises questions around the possibilities of *doing* and *thinking*, as inherently assumed in art as a critical event, and more so with regards to education in its perlocutionary assumptions of learning and development. To argue that a dialectical approach needs to be supplemented by a fourth prosthetic moment is to alter the fundamental “space” of critical reasoning

itself. Lest we forget, the dialectic remains at the very core of critical theory's logic. Without such logic there is no critical theory as such, but there will be something else. This is not to assert a foundational methodological approach to theory—far from it! But if one must assert a critical theoretical approach, its logical categories must remain, by their paradoxical implications, dialectical.

So in the allocated space that remains for this essay, I will briefly revisit the context in which Garoian locates his prosthetic pedagogical theory of art. Then I will position this against three commentaries by which Hegel's dialectic is in turn located: McTaggart's, Stace's and Adorno's. In addition, I want to set this analysis within the educational contexts of a dialectical logic as a form of thinking and teaching, as articulated by Evald Ilyenkov; after which I will briefly return to the ideational assumptions of space and art's frozen iterations of its possible *termini* (that I pose in §1), by which I would then attempt to locate Garoian's theory of prosthetic art pedagogy vis-à-vis the metier of living on the edges of genocide.

## **7. The dialectic's *beyond***

Garoian attributes the addition of prosthesis to Hegel's dialectical triad of thesis—antithesis—synthesis to Chris Gray et al.'s *The Cyborg Handbook* (1995), which he cites and elaborates as follows:

As these scholars [Gray et al] suggest, thesis/antithesis/synthesis/prosthesis represents a fourfold, open and mutable epistemology that enables oppositional discourses beginning with the dialogic thesis/antithesis, followed by a resolving of its tension through synthesis, then indeterminate flights of understanding that extend beyond our bodies and symbiotically interconnect with

others and broaden our capacity to understand and accept difference in the world. The indeterminacy of prosthesis is constituted by disjunctive, incongruous fragments of image and ideas, knowledge and understandings, whose complex, irreducible slippages of meaning resist synthetic closure similar to the ways in which collage narrative resists conrescence (Garoian, 2013, p. 32).

This urges me to briefly make reference to other approaches to Hegel's dialectic, where we have to remind ourselves that, as Adorno (1993, p. 9) put it, "The dialectic is neither a mere method by which spirit might elude the cogency of its object (...) nor is it a weltanschauung into whose schema one has to squeeze reality." Rather, the dialectic is marked by implicit contradictions, as these emerge from insights and needs that are historically and experientially bound to ways of understanding the world. "Just as the dialectic does not favour individual definitions, so there is no definition that fits it." Adorno sums this by adding that the "[d]ialectic is the unswerving effort to conjoin reason's critical consciousness of itself and the critical experience of objects" (Adorno, 1993, p. 10).

Interestingly there is always a tendency of straightjacketing the dialectic, both by those who turn it into an instrumental method—as we have seen in the case of the State; and more so by those who, in the name of positivist measure and verification (so commonly used in educational theory), regard it as a futile theoretical exercise.

Yet classical commentators on Hegel's dialectic such as John McTaggart, state from the start that, "the first and deepest cause of the dialectic movement is the instability of all finite categories, due to their imperfect nature" (McTaggart, 1922, para. 4). It is this state of immediacy, an uncritical state that many would assume as *being there* and therefore taken as a measure to be verified, that a dialectical approach will immediately put into question. "The immediate result of this instability is the

production of contradictions,” adds McTaggart, “since the imperfect category endeavours to return to the more concrete unity of which it is one side, it is found to involve the other side of that unity, which is its own contrary” (McTaggart, 1922, para. 4).

Rather than a fixed method, we find that in our own logical instincts of discerning a contradiction in anything that claims to be immediately fixed, our critical approach leads us to argue that nothing can be assumed as such, or indeed as not needing any form of mediation. The gap between what we might expect as an ideal immediate form of completion and what is lacking, prompts us to think critically: “And, again, to the existence of the contradiction we owe the advance of the dialectic.” McTaggart goes on to sum up Hegel’s approach as follows:

[I]t is the contradiction involved in the impossibility of predicating a category without predicating its opposite which causes us to abandon that category as inadequate. *We are driven on first to its antithesis. And when we find that this involves the predication of the thesis, as much as this latter had involved the predication of the antithesis, the impossibility of escaping from contradictions in either extreme drives us to remove them by combining both extremes in a synthesis which transcends them.* (McTaggart, 1922, para. 4, emphasis added)

Another classic articulation of Hegel’s dialectic, this time found in W.T. Stace’s *The Philosophy of Hegel* (1955), confirms this state of affairs in a slightly more technical approach. “What is new in Hegel, then, is that he formulates, as an explicit logical principle, what was tacitly implied in previous systems.” Stace explains how, “[h]itherto it had always been assumed that, logically speaking, a positive and its negative simply excluded each other, were cut off from each other by

an impassable gulf. It had always been assumed that we can only say A is A, and that we can never under any circumstances say A is not-A” (Stace, 1955, p. 96 para. 129).

Hegel, on the other hand, had to find a way out of this predicament because otherwise the gaps and subsequent negation, by which a contradiction would allow us to engage critically with the world, would remain proscribed. “If we can only say A is A, the infinite is the infinite, then A must remain A for ever, the infinite must remain infinite, and therefore sterile within itself, forever, and the infinite world can never arise out of it. We can only solve this problem if the infinite contains the finite, just as being contains not-being, if the infinite is the finite, if A is not-A” (Stace, 1955, p. 96 para. 129).

This is where the whole mystery of the Hegelian triad disappears and becomes germane to our experience as thinking beings that make the world. Stace already warns his readers that this is not to be presented as a perfect system, and by implication it must be read for what it is. “The description of the dialectic method (...) is an ideal description,” says Stace, “a description of what the method aims at being or ought to be. In practice it is sometimes difficult to see how this description applies to some of Hegel’s actual triads.”

For example, in the philosophy of spirit Hegel puts forward as one of his triads the notions of art, religion, and philosophy. Here art is supposed to be the thesis, religion the antithesis, philosophy the synthesis. It is very difficult to see in what sense religion is the opposite of art; and it is quite impossible to see that art and philosophy are related as genus and species, or that religion can be regarded as the differentia. Numerous similar examples might be given. There are even cases of triads which contain four terms! (Stace, 1995, p. 96, para. 130)

Far from being seen as a weakness in Hegelian thought, we find in this a fecundity that flows beyond its perceived boundaries. It might be scandalous to those scholastics who expected it to retain a ferrous method; while such talk still appears as folly to those in whose expectations, theory and reasoning must only belong to forms of “research” which, apart from attracting huge grants for universities, they are expected to remain simple and measurable enough to have an “impact” on what they see as immediate and “useful” (read “instrumental”).

Adorno reminds his readers that, “[t]he quintessence of the conditioned, according to Hegel, is the unconditioned. It is this, not least of all, that gives rise to the hovering, suspended quality of Hegelian philosophy, its quality of being up in the air, its permanent *skandalon*: the name of the highest speculative concept, that of the absolute, of something utterly detached, is literally the name of that suspended quality” (Adorno, 1993, p. 13). It is in this *skandalon* that Hegel pays the price of his consistency, and in this Adorno says, one finds the essence of Hegelian dialectic “its ultimate truth, that of its own impossibility, in its unresolved and vulnerable quality” (1993, p. 13).

## **9. Paradox’s pedagogy**

Though far less known than his colleague Lev Vygotsky, the Soviet philosopher, psychologist and logician Evald Ilyenkov has left a body of vibrant work that covers, amongst other the profound relationship between ontology, epistemology and dialectical logic. In his brilliant essay “Our schools must teach how to think!” he boldly states that in contrast with Pavlov’s dog, “[f]or a human being (...) the

appearance of a contradiction is a signal to activate ‘thinking’ and not hysteria” (Ilyenkov, 2007, p. 22).

That contradiction signals an activation of “thinking” must be taught from childhood, Ilyenkov states. “Here lies the sole key to the transformation of ‘didactics’ on the basis of dialectical materialism, on the basis of dialectics as the materialist logic and theory of knowledge” (2007, p. 22). The core of dialectics is indeed contradiction, and to that effect Ilyenkov wants to use the vibrant heritage of dialectical forms of reasoning which he traces from Aristotle, through to scholastic philosophers like Duns Scotus, to the vibrancy of Spinoza’s philosophy of knowledge, onto Hegel and Marx.

Ilyenkov’s care for the materialist, or indeed dialectical materialism, is not prompted by the Soviet commissar’s attention to the vying between history and the dialectic. Instead this must be read and traced from forms of philosophical thinking which paid utmost attention to the actuality by which *matter*—understood as the ground on which Aristotelian thinking emerges—converges with a further, much more dynamic notion of matter, which takes a major shift with the turn in quantum physics and the theory of relativity. Thus not surprisingly, this *materialist* tradition also includes a theologian of the calibre of Duns Scotus, whose philosophy must feature, if not with overt prominence, with tacit implication.

Once the equivocal use of politically accepted terms is cleared and understood, <sup>3</sup> and once Ilyenkov’s attention to materialism is reviewed from the wider sense of an attention to immanence (including the realms of the subject, of which the positivist would disapprove), his approach to education gains considerable appreciation in its fuller dynamic qualities. Here, Ilyenkov argues for the expectation, or aim, for “a person [to develop] the ability to perform actions that require him to go



beyond the *given conditions* of a task.” In this action, we find the ever-growing horizon a dialectical approach, which “exists wherever a person goes beyond that set of given conditions within which the task remains solved and unsolved (and therefore has the appearance of a ‘logical contradiction’ between the ‘goal’ and the ‘means’ for attaining it) into that broader set of conditions within which it is really (...) solved” (Ilyenkov, 2007, p. 23).

Resolution for Ilyenkov, implies transformation and indeed a paradox. It is never positivist and is far from being an obliging sense of pacification. This prompts him to attribute a robust pedagogical value to the triadic pattern that moves from thesis, to antithesis, to synthesis. Thinking moves from an object-oriented form of action to that of contemplation, and so from object to subject, thus engaging in realms of knowledge by which one mediates an immediate situation with a far wider transcendental context—understood as a context beyond the immediate.

If “A” is known to us (its qualitative or quantitative characteristics or “parameters” are given) and we need to find “B”—that is, express “B” through the characteristics of “A”—and do not as yet know this “B,” then this means that for the time being we can say only that it is “not-A.” But what is it apart from being “not-A”?

It is for this that we need to find a transition or “bridge.” The transition from one thing to a second—from “A” to “not-A”—can in general be accomplished only through a “mediating link,” through a “middle term of the deduction,” or—as it is called in logic—through “a third.”

Finding such a middle term is always the chief difficulty of a task. It is here that the presence or absence of “sharp-wittedness,” “resourcefulness,” and other qualities of the “intelligent mind” comes to light.

This unknown “third” always possesses clearly marked dialectical properties. Namely, it must incorporate simultaneously the characteristics of “A” and the characteristics of “B” (that is, “not-A”).

For “A” it must represent “B” and for “B” it must be an image of “A.” (Ilyenkov, 2007, p. 23)

In his contextualisation of the Hegelian triad within a pedagogical realm, Ilyenkov clearly articulates a way of valuing contradiction, indeed paradox, within an environment where knowledge is not simply concerned with what is expected, but where it emerges from that which is never learnt, that which is not there. “Dialectics consists in formulating a ‘contradiction,’ bringing it to the fullest sharpness and clarity of expression, and then finding a real, concrete, object-related, and therefore obvious, resolution of it. And this is always accomplished by discovering a new fact in the context of which the “contradiction” previously exposed by us is simultaneously *realized* and *concretely resolved*” (Ilyenkov, 2007, p. 24).

## 10. Wounded by water

Ilyenkov operates with great mastery in all the skills that require him to be a dialectician. As he hides his real and radical meanings behind acceptable jargon, he plays his nomenclature against the nomenklatura. The skills by which he plays the dialectic are not dissimilar from the skills by which an artist like Garoian plays the general assumptions of life, against the peculiarities, indeed the happiness, tragedies, and forms of survival, by which he sees himself growing up on the edge of the well in which many have fallen to the cataclysms of history.

This finally brings me back, and juxtaposes my dialectical excursus over Garoian’s prosthetic pedagogy of art. As he promises in the very first page, in his art

and in his role as educator, the jocular ways of survival are never out of his reach: “I lost track of time during that conversation with my teacher. I felt relief as the words released effortlessly from my mouth,” Garoian recounts, “although our exchange seemed strange and out of context. Prior to this, no teacher had ever asked or cared about my cultural history” (Garoian, 2013, p. 82).

Garoian recalls when his art teacher asked him about his Armenian heritage, sparking a moment which turned a space of learning into a space of unlearning the normality by which one’s heritage and ancestry is often taken for granted. Garoian soon unlearned the assumptions that a classroom is unrelated to the personal world out there. Garoian exited into the reality of his own history, and became aware that his and his family form part of a world in which education also matters to the streets and to the vineyard where his father grew grapes in California, and to the home where his mother took up sewing to earn extra cash.

This recalls the concept of space and art’s *fermata* that I questioned in the opening paragraphs of this essay. There I probed into (a) the ideational assumptions of space as these accommodate anything that we as bodied actors would regard as dialectically resolvable; and (b) art’s iteration of a frozen *terminus a quo* that seems to be hopelessly impeded from ever resolving itself. In these two questions I find an echo in Garoian’s purpose for giving an account of the story from his youth: (a) he “wanted to accentuate the liminal and contingent characteristics of art making, namely, its enabling learners to expose, examine, and critique academic institutions and corporate assumptions through performances of subjectivity based on their personal memories and cultural histories” (Garoian, 2013, p. 83), and (b) “to evoke suspense, an anxious curiosity about how the associative yet indeterminate

relationship between our individual private memories and the corporate, public memory of the museum is constituted by prosthetic pedagogy” (Garoian, 2013, p. 84).

In this I begin to find forms of convergence between my own anxiety over the prosthetic synthesis of the State and the synthetic prosthesis that Garoian offers on account of his own engagement with the wounds of history. As I say this, I am reminded of how the metier of living shifts, at least in my imaginary, from that of the holocaust survivor Primo Levi, to the poet who is murdered by Franco’s fascist squads, Federico Garcia Lorca.

Lorca had a particular affectation for the feeling and image of the wound, which he regarded as a permanence that never finds healing. In his *Ode to Dalí*, he depicts the image of wounded handkerchiefs that virginally mark a horizon that is self-aggregating in crystals of fish and the moon. In his *Theory and Play of the Duende*, he explains how “[w]ith idea, sound and gesture, the *duende* enjoys an open struggle with the creator on the edge of a well” (Lorca, 1996b, pp. 152-3). The image of the well folds onto that of the open wound, where Lorca’s work sustains the image of a permanent injury in a state of perpetuation—almost as a fermata; whether it is St. Teresa of Avila being wounded by an angel, the torero Ignacio Sánchez Mejías killed in a bullfight, or the child wounded by water in the well. Lorca’s wound metaphor also denotes an abyss that is never closed and a verge that is never surpassed.<sup>4</sup>

Does this leave us on the verge of life, one wonders? Where does this verge appear, if at all? And how could one bode for survival or indeed a healing or resolution, if there seems to be no hope that the wound will cure?

This is where I find most value in Garoian’s argument for the prosthetic hope by which we find ways of realizing that what has been lost cannot come back, or cannot be recovered, and yet while this holds true, we also know that what we can

create moves beyond what has been lost. In this, I would go with Garoian's reassurance and while I remain cautious of the prosthesis that follows the synthesis, I also know that politically, we still have a chance of stealing the fire, which the prosthetic State has carefully concealed from us.

But how do we know where the fire is hidden and how could we win?

When all is said and done, the dialectic's scandalous claim of the Absolute is one of our few cues to what it actually is—us, ourselves, in whose “restless being,” Hegel reminds us, we come to negate the “ideality of every fixed category.”

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A good example of this manual is Sheptulin's *Marxist-Leninist Philosophy* (1980) which, written in a systematic style, it clearly distinguishes these two pillars of the dialectic, conceived partly to confirm how dialectical materialism and historical materialism follow a pattern of fulfillment between theory (dialectical logic) and practice (history).

<sup>2</sup> Here I have in mind the great Soviet philosopher and psychologist Evald Ilyenkov, whose work *Dialectical Logic* (1977) remains, albeit little known, one of the best books on dialectics and epistemology. Ilyenkov offers a succinct study of the dialectic during a time when in the Soviet Union it was not advisable for philosophers to dwell

much on the Hegelian, let alone Spinozist lineage in Marx. In threading between the ideological police of the Marxist-Leninist Institute and his own philosophical rigour, Ilyenkov provides his readers with an invaluable insight into the development of dialectical logic and epistemology, presented within the parameters that Soviet philosophy, without, however, succumbing to the dogmatic implications that it imposed.

<sup>3</sup> Readers must bear in mind that in adopting accepted terminology, Ilyenkov could guarantee not only his academic survival, but more often than not, his own life (which ended in tragic circumstances in 1979). One needs to bear in mind that Soviet scholars were expected to demonstrate their loyalty to a jargon that did not always fit within their own scheme, but which they had to adapt and adopt in order to retain exposure with their students and other academics within and beyond the Soviet Union. In this respect, reading Ilyenkov always requires a degree of familiarity with Soviet “Marxist-Leninist” discourse. A skill for reading between the lines of Soviet philosophy, reveals more than what the philosopher appears to be saying in the immediacy of his or her words. This is particularly important when reading books like Ilyenkov’s *Dialectical Logic* (1977), *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism* (1982a), which begins but then moves beyond Lenin, offering an interesting critique of positivism that retains tangible relevance in today’s climate of measure, and *Dialectics of the Abstract and the concrete in Marx’s Capital* (1982b), which in the 60s reflects a fundamental turn in the Soviet acceptance of the “young Marx” whose Hegelian undertones were anathematized by Stalin’s ideological police.



<sup>4</sup> I discuss Lorca's aesthetic in some detail in *Makings of the Sea*. (Baldacchino, 2010, pp. 115-134)