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Marc Richir and the transitional area of sublime

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Abstract

This paper attempts to elaborate the notion of the transitional area of sublime. To accomplish this task, I will first draw on the works of Marc Richir, in which he correlates the concept of the transitional area with the experience of sublime, albeit without insisting on their possible conjunction. Therefore, my task would be to prove how the relation between the transitional area and the experience of the sublime can be considered a consequence of Richir's developing thought. Richir has drawn on Immanuel Kant's aesthetics, concerning the former's theory of sublime, while the transitional area is a concept borrowed from Donald Winnicott's psychoanalytical framework. To demonstrate how the transitional area of the sublime functions, I will provide an account of what Richir calls the phenomenon of celebration. I will argue that, for Richir, the celebration resonates with Winnicott's transitional area, which can represent a hybrid zone where imagination fuses perpetually with the world and the world appears as a coherent dream, this being rendered possible by the experience of the sublime. Finally, I will retrace Richir's steps back to the theories of Kant, Winnicott and Merleau-Ponty, to show how these authors influenced his conception of the transitional area of sublime.

Keywords: sublime, dream, reality, celebration, phenomenology.

Introduction

Despite the recent body of literature concerning Marc Richir's work which is rapidly increasing (Forestier 2015; Fazakas 2016; Fazakas 2019; Fazakas & Gozé 2020; Furtună 2016; Bodea 2018; Flock 2021; Ekweariri 2021a; Ekweariri 2021b; Prášek 2021; Schnell 2021; Chu 2023; Senatore 2024), the relation between Richir's appraisal of Winnicott's

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transitional area and his appropriation of the Kantian sublime has not been thematized as such. Marc Richir has analyzed the concepts of transitional area and the sublime several times, although he did not explore extensively the possible, and fruitful conjunction between these two notions. In this paper, I will attempt to provide an account of the transitional area of sublime, by advancing a philosophical analysis of the phenomenon of celebration, as it is found in Richir's thematization from *The Sublime in Politics*. Instead of focusing on Richir's contribution to historiography and socio-political theory, I will rather be emphasizing the phenomenon of celebration as an exemplification of what could be termed the "transitional area of sublime". To strengthen my claim, I will retrace the conceptions of the philosophical forerunners of Richir's theory of the collective sublime, namely the authors who have influenced him the most. Therefore, this paper will be divided into several chapters, including a short analysis of the Kantian sublime, followed by a comparison between Winnicott's notion of the transitional area and Merleau-Ponty's oneirism of wakefulness, an analysis of the exchange of gazes, which will lead finally towards Richir's perspective on the phenomenon of celebration, in which the transitional area of the sublime will be addressed the most. The thesis asserting the existence of the transitional area of sublime in Richir's corpus, even before he discovered the theories of Winnicott, will be proved alongside this paper. Each chapter will be ended by Richir's view on that certain subject, i.e. the sublime, oneirism etc.

This paper also investigates what makes us feel human, i.e. one of the elements specific to human nature, that is, the experience of sublime. Concerning the definition of the transitional area of sublime, it could be designated as a hybrid realm, in which imagination and reality constantly fuse together, bringing forth the most wonderful contents of experience. This happens thanks to the experience of the sublime insofar as this undergoing reveals the transitional area as not a mere passive interchange between inner and outer, but rather, as involving the elements of surprise, awe and amazement. Ultimately, the transitional area of sublime is a realm of delight and enjoyment, which could be compared to the

life of the infant and even to the pleasure felt in regarding a play at the theatre. Nonetheless, although the feeling of sublime might consist in anguish or even fear (Kant 2007, 90), in this paper, I will inquire into the fortunate encounter with this phenomenon. Richir's claim is even more striking, because he states that the phenomenon of celebration is rendered possible by a sort of bracketing of the human being's symbolical landmarks, which allows the phenomenological dimension to become operative. This bracketing also entails an ethical feature, referring to the possibility of dwelling together in the world in a harmonious manner.

Regarding the methodological considerations of my paper, it must be stated that it is a comparative study, in which I draw on phenomenological and psychoanalytical resources to describe the phenomenon that I want to unveil. I proceed now to demarcate the boundaries of my paper, regarding the notions which will be used. The theories of Kant, Winnicott and Merleau-Ponty are all present in the works of Marc Richir, depending on his period of inquiry into different regions of phenomenology. For example, the Kantian thematization of the sublime is an omnipresent motif in Richir's work, starting with *Phenomenology and Symbolic Institution.* From there onwards, the notion of the sublime will receive different meanings in the works of Marc Richir, depending on the perspective he wants to employ to describe human nature. Therefore, in the very first pages in which he addresses the issue of the sublime, Richir comments upon Kant's *Third Critique,* while in his later work, he advances the notion of the "moment" of sublime to render the infant's relation to his/her mother. Richir will discover Donald Winnicott's works after the 2000's, and from there onwards the theories of the British psychoanalyst will become of great interest to Richir, because of the conjunction between the latter's account of the archaic phenomenological field[1], and the former's empirical research on child-rearing. Inspired by the Husserlian theories of aesthetic experience (Husserl 2005, 616), Richir will employ Winnicott's concepts of the transitional object and transitional phenomena, providing a phenomenological reading of them. From Merleau-Ponty, Richir will borrow the notion of the flesh of the world, but also the

latter's notion of *phantasia* might be considered a sort of response to the former's notion of the oneirism of wakefulness[2].

1. The Kantian sublime

Before providing a brief account of Kant's theory of the sublime, we ought to recall his notion of schematism from the *First Critique.* There, Kant suggested that the transcendental function of imagination is to mediate between sensibility and understanding in producing schemas. (Kant 1996, 214) Thus, schemas were the product of transcendental imagination. If in the *First Critique,* the transcendental imagination operated the process of schematization using categories (the pure concepts of understanding), in the *Third Critique* imagination does not appeal to such concepts, but rather, it schematizes freely. This would be the Kantian distinction between determinate judgements (in which the imagination schematizes with a concept), and reflective judgements (in which the imagination schematizes without a predetermined concept). This distinction will be of great use to us even when we are going to venture into Winnicott's account of the transitional area. As Fazakas has already proved, Winnicott's playing without pregiven rules resembles Kant's schematism without predetermined concepts. (Fazakas 2019, 73)

Advancing towards the Kantian notion of sublime, the author suggests that it, the sublime is to be found in an object devoid of form, its main attribute being that of limitlessness[3]. The pleasure which the sublime arises is an indirect one, because it represents a momentary check to our vital forces, followed by an even more powerful discharge[4]. This would be a serios matter in the exercise of imagination. (Kant 2007, 75-76) The feeling of sublime might be triggered by chaos, or by the wildest and most irregular disorders and desolations that nature can provide. The key notions used by Kant are magnitude and power, and these will provide the distinction between the mathematically and the dynamically sublime. (Kant 2007, 77) I am going to briefly sketch the two types of experience, to show how this distinction persisted even in the works of Marc Richir, most notably, in his account of celebration.

The mathematically sublime is the name given to something which is absolutely great. This designates the sublime to be something absolutely great without another object of possible comparison. (Kant 2007, 78) Interestingly, Kant notices that concerning the experience of sublime, we do not have any interest whatsoever in the real existence of the object, rather, the greatness of it is able to convey to us a universally communicable delight. (Kant 2007, 80) This already points towards a sort of "spontaneous aesthetic bracketing", as Richir suggested in his later works. (Richir 2015, 83)

> Nature can be sublime, because its phenomena convey the idea of infinity, which is to be sought only in the mind of the judging subject. This statement might seem at first perplexing, but Kant explains that even when we contemplate the pyramids of ice or the dark tempestuous ocean, the mind abandons itself to the imagination and to reason. (Kant 2007, 86-87)

The most important element in Kant's theory of sublime, and even in his analysis of aesthetic phenomena, is the relation to morality[5]. We are thereby informed that the feeling of our inability to attain an idea that is a law for us is called respect. Therefore, the violence done by the sublime to our imagination awakens in us the moral feeling of respect. Kant correlates further the relation between the feeling of sublime with the respect for our own vocation as human beings. (Kant 2007, 88) This thesis will prove to be pivotal when I am going to discuss Richir's phenomenon of celebration, because likewise Kant, Richir is attempting to lay out the basic tenets of the relation between aesthetic feelings and morality, using his distinction between the symbolic and the phenomenological registers. The idea of a relation between aesthetics and ethics is further advanced in Kant's anthropology, in which he directly links the feeling of sublime with respect. (Kant 2006, 140-141)

On the other hand, regarding the dynamically sublime, Kant commences by defining might as a power that enables us to cope with great hindrances. (Kant 2007, 90) Another key aspect which is present both in Kant's work and in Richir's is the feature of the feeling of sublime, which renders a sort of awakening of the moral feeling and even humanity's call, thanks to the safety felt when encountering the sublime.

Drawing on Husserl's theory of the transcendental soil (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 117), Richir would insist too that, from a phenomenological standpoint, the earth does not actually move. (Richir 2006, 284) Moreover, recalling Richir's theory of the positive and negative moments of sublime, and comparing it with recent thematizations[6], we ought to consider the earth to be the *sine qua non* of a fruitful encounter with the sublime. Otherwise, if the earth shakes or even trembles when experiencing the sublime, this might even result in trauma, as Richir insists. (Richir 2004, 329) Furthermore, the moral feeling and the aesthetic experience and interrelated. On the one hand, moral feeling is the presupposition of this type of pleasure, and on the other, the sublime awakens the feeling of respect towards the idea of humanity in us. (Kant 2007, 95) As we have stated above, this interrelation between morality and the sublime will be most evident when analyzing Richir's notion of celebration, because the collective sublime becomes an opportune moment when human beings can gather around in a sort of universal fraternization.

We finally receive a concise definition of the sublime, which sums up all the aspects that Kant has been thematizing until now. We are informed that the sublime determines the mind to regard the elevation of nature beyond our reach as equivalent to a presentation of ideas. (Kant 2007, 98) Bearing this analysis in mind, we can now move towards the second section of our paper, which presents the effects of the sublime on the subject, namely the possibility of the pleasurable interaction between what is subjectively conceived and what is objectively perceived, between imagination and reality, inner and outer, and so forth. Nonetheless, before moving onwards, Richir's appraisal of the Kantian sublime should be emphasized once again. Richir advances a phenomenological theory of sublime in which Kant's notion is sought to provide the soil for the process of humanization (Richir 2015). Therefore, Richir will be discussing the notions of the "moment" of sublime, the sublime instants and affections, to designate this overload of affectivity which awakens the human being to his or her own humanity, but also to the humanity of others. (Richir 2008, 84-85) The "moment" of sublime becomes the very first

manifestation of the humanity of the human being, understood as the possibility of an ethical relation with the other.

2. Oneirism and the transitional area

The theme of oneirism seems to have been a long-time preoccupation of Merleau-Ponty's works, and so we can find scattered remarks about this phenomenon in the corpus of literature pertaining to his thought. Nevertheless, the French phenomenological author has never given a full-fledged account of this concept, hence we are left just with his dissipated remarks on the subject, out of which we aim to draw the bigger picture.

For example, in his lectures held at Sorbonne on child psychology, Merleau-Ponty states that the infant does not live in the bipolar world of the adult, but rather he/she inhabits a hybrid zone of oneiric ambiguity. (Merleau-Ponty 2010a, 181-182) This claim already resonates with Winnicott's overall thematization of the child's life, and we will explain why this is so in the following subchapters. Merleau-Ponty's claim ought to be investigated in detail, appealing to other remarks concerning the phenomenon of oneirism.

This oneiric ambiguity designates the state in which imagination and reality are not autonomous in relation to one another, but rather there exists a perpetual intertwining and overlapping between these two regions of existence. Moreover, the ambiguous character of the oneirism also consists in the way it applies to our waking life, thereby the expression "oneirism of wakefulness". Conversely, and following Merleau-Ponty's account, one could also insist on a quasi-perceptual character of dreams, this being termed by the French phenomenologist "the mythical". (Merleau-Ponty 2010b, 147) Therefore, by virtue of his perspective on the oneiric ambiguity of our lives, Merleau-Ponty somehow aims to rethink Bergson's notion of the "attention to life", in which there were two poles of attention, the one of reality and shared world, and the one pertaining to dreams and unconsciousness. The key notions that Bergson used were those of intensity and tension, to show how our level of attention towards life was directly proportional

to the tension of duration felt by the subject. (Bergson 1919, 226)

Returning to Merleau-Ponty, in *The Visible and the Invisible,* he regards the child as projecting his dreams onto external reality, (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 11-12) coloring it subjectively, and even idiosyncratically. We can already presuppose that by virtue of his notion of chiasm[7], introduced in the fourth chapter of the book, Merleau-Ponty was already aware of the perceptual interchange between what is subjective and what is objective, namely between what is conceived and what is perceived. The theories of Merleau-Ponty and those of Winnicott seem once again strikingly similar, because both asserted that the world never consists of mere imaginary content or sheer perceived reality, but rather, the world is a result of the interaction between these two regions of existence. Only by virtue of the overlapping between the two poles of reality, the subjective and the objective, do we arrive at a world worthy of inhabiting.

In another of his texts concerning oneirism, the French phenomenologist introduces the issue of alterity. There, he writes that others are present to us in the way dreams and myths appear. This once again points to the inherent oneiric dimension of our existence, which in this case can be applied to the relations with others. Furthermore, the cleavage between the real and the imaginary should be once again questioned accordingly. (Merleau-Ponty 1970, 48) The cleavage implied in this equation does never become a full-fledge reality, because the two regions of existence, the imaginary and the shared world cannot become autonomous to each other. Drawing inspiration from Merleau-Ponty ontology of the imaginary, Dufourcq (2015, 47) even coined the term "imaginareal", to describe the state of perpetual fusion between different "finite provinces of meaning", as they were described, for example, by Alfred Schutz. (Schutz 1962, 207) But what does this discussion add to Richir's notion of celebration? As we are going to suggest, the transitional area of sublime is the prototype of this "imaginareal" realm, which is conditioned and rendered possible precisely by the overload of affectivity provided by the sublime.

Comparing once again the statements referring to the oneiric or mythical relation to the other with the discussion concerning Winnicott's psychoanalytical theory, the British psychoanalyst noticed that play and playing as such strengthen interhuman and social relationships. Nonetheless, he did not thematize the oneiric element of our relations with others as such, but rather, this feature of our everyday existence was only implicit in Winnicott's framework. Even though Winnicott inquired in the reciprocal relation of mother and infant (Winnicott 1989, 251), he focused on the infant's experience of things and objects, as subjectively conceived, and not that much on the child's, so to say, oneiric relationship with others. He nevertheless stated that dreams contribute to our waking lives and external reality provides material or data for our dreams, albeit he did not dwell on this thought further. Marc Richir himself emphasized the function played by the notion of *phantasia* in establishing what he has called transcendental interfacticity (Richir 1992, 49) and transcendental intersubjectivity. Moreover, the *phantasia* involved in the exchange of gazes provides the passage from transcendental interfacticity to transcendental intersubjectivity, because it marks the very first operations played by the sublime in the life of the infant. (Richir 2015, 244) In other words, this passage represents the movement from mere coexistence to interhuman interactions.

In the very first chapter of his book entitled *Playing and Reality,* Winnicott introduces the notion of transitional area to describe the phases of through which the infant passes in the case of his/her development. Therefore, we are informed about the concepts of transitional object and transitional phenomenon as designating the intermediate area of experience between the thumb and the teddy bear, between oral erotism and the true object-relationship, between primary creative activity and projection of what has already been introjected, and nonetheless between primary unawareness of indebtedness and the acknowledgement of indebtedness. (Winnicott 2009, 2) This passage ought to be commented on further, because in it one can already find the leading threads of Winnicott's theory of human nature. This discussion is necessary, because only

thanks to it can we reach the genetic presupposition of our discussion concerning the transitional area of sublime, namely the exchange of gazes.

The first phase of transitional phenomena, i.e. that from the thumb to the teddy bear represents the infant's neediness for attachment, thus he/she will project his/her feelings onto a teddy bear, for example, to feel the real and whole presence of the other, in this case, the mother. The transitional object becomes henceforth a substitute for the maternal presence. The second phase of transition seems to indicate the same movement. Winnicott even implicitly attempts to describe the steps which the infant has to follow in order that he/she arrives at an authentic and affectionate relationship with his/her mother, and so Winnicott insists on the passage from erotism to the true object-relationship, which in psychoanalytical terms, designates the relation between two whole human beings[8].

Next, the primary creativity and the dialectics between introjection and projection will prove to be crucial elements for our inquiry, because they provide the firm ground onto which the transitional area of sublime can be established. We will see further how this process unfolds, when we are going to analyze a specific transitional phase described by Winnicott, namely the mirror role of the mother's face. For now, it ought to be emphasized that primary creativity or creative apperception makes life worth living, because it allows us to see the world in a creative fashion. (Winnicott 2009, 87) This is due to the dialectical exchange between introjection and projection, which permits the human being to live in the third area of experience, i.e. in the transitional area. The Finnish phenomenologist Joona Taipale even emphasized how we come to live in a world worthy of inhabiting, by suggesting that the subjective and idiosyncratically elements of our life are projected onto external reality, making a mere house, for example, inhabitable. Hence the house becomes a home, i.e. a place for creative and artistic activity too. (Taipale 2021a, 34) This statement resonates and even becomes analogous to Richir's description of the phenomenon of celebration.

Perhaps the transitional phase onto which Winnicott emphasized the least is the one concerning the passage from

unawareness of indebtedness to the acknowledgment of it. This represents certainly one of the first steps the infant has to follow into his/her ethical life, and in this manner the process of humanization is also addressed. Therefore, by indebtedness Winnicott alludes to how the infant will soon start to acknowledge everything the mother does for him/her by virtue of her ordinary devotion and care. This recognition does not imply a struggle, as in Hegel's sense, since it represents the infant's capacity to become aware of the mother's love, and in this way, to love her back.

Now that we have delineated all the basic presuppositions of Winnicott's notion of the transitional area, which as we have insisted, are very rich and useful to our inquiry, we ought to dwell more on the chapters from his book in which he discusses "the place where we live". These chapters explicitly address the transitional area, in a similar vein to Richir's approach of the phenomenon of celebration. Therefore, we are going to analyze the two chapters dedicated to the transitional area from *Playing and Reality,* where the transitional area is also designated as a potential space. Next, a short discussion will be brought forward concerning the exchange of gazes between mother and infant. This will be our starting point in demonstrating how the sublime starts to be operative in the life of the infant. The exchange of gazes might even be described as the genetic presupposition of the experience of sublime. Marc Richir even calls this constitutive feature of our experience the operative "moment" of sublime. All these discussions are crucial for our thematization of the transitional area of sublime, because by virtue of them we can retrace Richir's steps back to Winnicott's theory, comparing the thematizations of the two authors and advancing further our own proposal. Moreover, we attempt to prove that the two authors had similar thoughts concerning what makes life worth living and enjoying. In the case of Marc Richir's discussion of the phenomenon of celebration, we will also notice how close he came towards Winnicott's theory, at a moment when he did not know his work yet. As we will attempt to demonstrate, what Richir adds to the notion of the transitional area is the sublime

feature, that could refer to awe, surprise and wonder, elements seemingly lacking from Winnicott framework[9].

In his papers on the place of cultural activity, Winnicott states that throughout his career as a psychoanalyst, he struggled to identify the actual location of play. He quickly came to observe that play does not happen simply inside the human being's mind, nor merely outside of him/her, in the playground for example, but rather, it takes place in the *in-between.* (Winnicott 2009, 129) Returning to his notion of transitional object, Winnicott emphasizes the role played by the symbolic object or transitional object, which can be located in space and time. Therefore, he argues for the dwelling of the transitional object in the *in-between* space between mother and infant. This statement demands further explanation. The transitional object is an object "in transition" because it represents the passage from the mother as experienced purely subjectively, to the mother perceived objectively. Moreover, it also represents the union of both mother and infant, by somehow facilitating their state of separation. (Winnicott 2009, 130) The British psychoanalyst returns once again to his main idea concerning the transitional area, and he acknowledges that it designates what life is actually all about. (Winnicott 2009, 133)

Winnicott makes another very interesting claim when he relates the dialectics of cultural experience, namely the interplay between originality and acceptance of the tradition, to the to-and-fro play between the initial states of separateness and union between mother and infant. (Winnicott 2009, 134) Drawing some concluding lines, Winnicott recapitulates his main theses on the transitional area. Henceforth, he suggests that the place of cultural experience is located in the potential space (the transitional area) between the individual and the environment. Moreover, the use of this space depends mostly on the early life experiences which the individual had with his/her mother. Creativity results out of the interplay between the object as subjectively perceived and objectively conceived, this tension between the two poles being of utmost importance. The potential space can be set up only thanks to a feeling of confidence towards the mother, or more generally, towards the

other. This short observation concerning trust will prove to be pivotal when we are going to analyze Richir's phenomenon of celebration, wherein every participant at the event befriends the others in a sort of universal fraternization. Once again, for the British psychoanalyst, everything that pertains to the external shared reality is first and foremost invested with subjective imaginative contents by the infant, this giving a certain coloring to the environment, making it an inhabitable and joyful one. Play becomes the direct continuation of the transitional area, which in this chapter has been called the potential space. (Winnicott 2009, 136)

In a complementary text, entitled "The place where we live", Winnicott develops further his ideas concerning the relation between the transitional area and cultural experience. The British psychoanalyst asks once again the same question as in the previous chapter, namely where exactly are we when playing, celebrating, enjoying a piece of music, or a theatrical performance? The dichotomy between inside and outside does not suffice in Winnicott's view, so he introduces an intermediate zone, which represents also an intertwining and overlapping of the internal and the external. (Winnicott 2009, 142)

For Winnicott, playing leads naturally to cultural experience, thus the early experiences of the infant, such as creative gestures towards the mother will be directly related to experiences such as enjoyment and beauty in adult life. (Winnicott 2009, 143) The different experiences of play and of cultural activity vary from individual to individual due to the early interactions between the infant and the environment. Henceforth, Winnicott introduces the notion of potential space. (Winnicott 2009, 144) For example, if vocal interactions were preponderant between mother and infant in the case of the latter's early life experiences, then the child might even develop musical capabilities, such as singing. Here the musicality of babbling seems to be a strikingly meaningful example. When the infant starts trusting his/her mother, the transitional area becomes one of infinite separation, but nonetheless, this separation can be filled creatively with playing, which will become in time an area of cultural enjoyment. (Winnicott 2009, 146) Playing and cultural activity take place in time and space,

uniting or linking together the past, the present, and the future. (Winnicott 2009, 147)

Winnicott insisted very much on the continuity between the early life experiences of the infant and the later adult life, in which cultural activity would flourish. But we could ask ourselves how is this connection possible? Or we could ask, more exactly, what is the key element from our early childhood that ensures the later enjoyment of the transitional area of sublime? What we are exactly asking is what is the constitutive element, the condition which functions constantly, and renders possible the experience of delight in the world of culture and art? Up until now, we have analyzed the basic tenets of what Winnicott has called the transitional area, but we ought to advance towards Richir's thematization of the phenomenon of celebration. Our claim is that the missing link, or the key element which marks the passage from the early life experiences of the infant to the enjoyment of cultural activity later in life is exactly the operative "moment" of sublime. This notion was first introduced by Marc Richir throughout his several readings of Winnicott's empirical work on child psychoanalysis. Before providing an account of the phenomenon of celebration, in which the transitional area of sublime manifests itself most explicitly, we ought to dwell more on one of Winnicott's chapters from *Playing and Reality,* which tackles the issue of the mirror-role of the mother's face. We are analyzing this chapter too, because it will represent great inspiration for Richir's notion of the exchange of gazes between mother and infant. In the case of this exchange, we first encounter the "moment" of sublime, namely our guiding thread from now on to the end of our paper. For the time being, we ought to insist more on Richir's assessment of Winnicott's work concerning the transitional area. The Belgian phenomenologist holds the transitional area to represent the original spatiality of the human being, also functioning like a *choratic* space, a receptacle which holds us, and it has held us, before the institution of the first "absolute here". (Richir 2006, 268) Once again, Richir correlates the mother's lap with the earth that does not move, because he considers the lap to be a prototype of this nonmoving earth. The lap (the primitive earth that does

not move) is to be considered both in its phenomenological function as well as in its symbolic one. Therefore, it would not only represent the infant's actual feeling of safety, i.e. the fact of being held, but also, the symbolic security that helps him/her to cope with the sublime, resulting in a fortunate encounter with it.

3. The exchange of gazes

Winnicott commences the presentation of his theory by mentioning Lacan's mirror-stage. (Lacan 2006, 75) The former contests the primordiality of the latter's mirror theory for the development of the self. Instead of describing the mirror as the first object in which the infant recognizes himself/herself, Winnicott suggests that the mother's face plays this peculiar role. (Winnicott 2009, 149) Furthermore, Winnicott asserts, in a puzzling manner, that what the baby sees when regarding the mother's visage is actually himself/herself. (Winnicott 2009, 151) The theory of the British psychoanalyst partly resonates with phenomenological thematizations, such as those of Merleau-Ponty. (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 139) Moreover, Hegel (2004, 111) and Deleuze (2001, 97) could be recalled as well, alongside the thesis regarding the fundamental narcissism of vision. This fundamental narcissism designates the phenomenon wherein every time we look at something or someone, we somehow see ourselves too. (Merleau-Ponty 1968)

Winnicott's entire theory of the mirror-role of the mother's face must be connected with his approach of creative apperception, namely how the infant conceives of reality subjectively. Therefore, in Winnicott's words, when the infant sees himself or herself regarding the mother's visage, the mother will reflect the child's self back by virtue of her expression. This phenomenon is rendered possible by the state the mother finds herself in, which was termed by Winnicott the primary maternal preoccupation. (Winnicott 1958, 300) By reflecting the infant's self, the mother will give him/her back something which actually belongs to him/her. This process is always menaced by a possibility, i.e. the case when the mother's expression seems not to be responsive enough. If this happens, then the infant will not see herself/himself, but rather the

mother's face. Winnicott explains that if this happens, the mother's face will not be a mirror anymore. As he suggests, perception will take the place of apperception, and what could have been a significant two-way exchange between self and world does not occur anymore. (Winnicott 2009, 151)

As we had previously explained, the world of the infant is to be considered under the heading of what Joona Taipale called an illusion-model (Taipale 2021b, 202). The illusion-model signifies that at first perception and apperception, namely the subjective and the objective, are in a state of fusion, out of which disillusionment coming from the mother's part might occur[10]. In the event of being seen, Winnicott postulates a process wherein apperception is linked to perception. As Winnicott asserts, we look and we are seen, so we exist. We can now afford to look and to see the world creatively, whereas what I apperceive, I also perceive. (Winnicott 2009, 154) Joona Taipale has already emphasized the way in which social mirrors function, alongside the importance of being seen (Taipale 2016, 15). Now we should advance towards Richir's thematization of the exchange of gazes between mother and infant, to prove how exactly the sublime becomes operative.

As we have suggested before, Richir himself draws heavily on Winnicott's theory of the mirror-role of the mother face, at the same time providing a novel account of this phenomenon, which also includes the feature of the sublime. Summarizing Richir's scattered remarks on the exchange of gazes, it could be argued that the forerunner of the experience of the beautiful and the sublime, as in Kant's sense, is exactly the sublime felt in the exchange of gazes (Prášek 2021, 66). We could wonder for example why Richir did not discuss, at that moment, how the mother mirrors the infant's babbling, as in mother-infant vocalization. We could also wonder why he does not expand upon the phenomenon of touching and being touched in the case of these early interactions. (Richir 2010, 36) The answer is to be found in the case of the pivotal role played by the exchange of gazes, namely the possibility of fixing the infant's gaze by virtue of the mother's one. Thanks to this process, two absolute "here" are instituted, the infant's and the mother's one. This would be the peculiar function of the

exchange of gazes[11]. But what about the sublime, which was invoked earlier? Richir employs different expressions to highlight the function played by the sublime in the case of these exchanges, thus he mentions the "moment" of sublime, the instant of sublime and the sublime affections[12]. (Richir 2008, 84-85) All of these components are present in the infant's experience of sublime, which should be conceived in two distinct yet highly interconnected moments, these being already somehow present in Kant's theory. First, there is the so-called "systole" of this experience, namely what Richir calls the hyper-condensation of affectivity, which is followed by the "diastole", in the guise of the excess of affectivity. Nevertheless, Richir is very attentive when he describes the expression of the mother's visage, and its role in providing a certain atmosphere for the infant. This process usually happens after what Winnicott has called the first theoretical feed, more precisely, the moment when the infant is held by the mother, and he/she has his/her needs fulfilled. From there on, the very first interactions might take place, including of course touching and being touched, babbling and vocalizing back, and the exchange of gazes, which from the standpoint of phenomenology, is paramount. Without engaging into a detailed discussion of what Richir conceived as "perceptual" *phantasia,* the peculiarity of the exchange of gazes resides exactly in that it involves the "perceptual" *phantasia,* considering of course the meaning that Richir attaches to it. Shortly put, the exchange of gazes involves the presence of empathy, but it is also related to what Richir designated under the title of "transcendental interfacticity". (Richir 2008, 83) Now that we have briefly analyzed the genetic presupposition of the experiences of beauty and sublime (as in Kant's sense), we are ready to investigate the phenomenon of celebration, and to outline the notion at stake, i.e. the transitional area of sublime. To accomplish this activity, we need to retrace Richir's steps back to his work *The Sublime in Politics,* and analyze the first chapter of it, which might seem rather poetic, but nonetheless full of very important remarks concerning what it means to be human, and to enjoy inhabiting the world together with other human beings.

4. The phenomenon of celebration

As we have indicated before, Richir's poetic attempt to describe the phenomenon of celebration echoes the efforts of certain historians or historiographers, such as Michelet and Quinet, to describe the atmosphere felt by the people of France after the Revolution of 1789. This chapter of Richir's work could be thematized in conjunction with his later reading of Winnicott's transitional area and the issue of sublime, yet this task will not be undertaken in the present paper. Instead of the comparative analysis between Richir's early and late conception of the transitional area, we will limit ourselves to an in-depth description of the phenomenon of celebration as it is found in *The Sublime in Politics*. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of celebration is of utmost importance for illustrating how the transitional area of sublime unfurls. Eugen Fink's account of play and celebration has the merit of somehow anticipating Richir's thematization (Fink 2016, 216), while the theory of the Belgian phenomenologist includes multiple notions which were not present in Fink's perspective. For example, Fink admits that celebration is a manifestation of the intermingling between imagination and reality, while the element of the sublime is not present in his conception.

Richir commences by arguing that due to the celebrations following the events of the French revolution, people reengaged in a sort of dream-like state with nature, similar to Merleau-Ponty's oneirism of wakefulness. This spontaneity reminded them of their being-in-the-world as necessarily being-with-one-another. The community of people appears like a sort of dream, without any temporal or spatial landmarks. (Richir 1991, 14-15) Here Richir recalls Husserl's wording that our waking world seems to resemble a coherent dream. (Husserl 1970, 17)

These dream-like or oneiric encounters, to recall Merleau-Ponty's thematization, of people with each other, the fraternity of man with man, is a way of inhabiting the world together harmoniously. This specific phenomenon is called by Richir "the sublime in politics". The human being becomes an incarnated symbol, representing the harmonious co-existence of everydayness, the world and the human community.

Nevertheless, this joyful encounter is always menaced in a latent manner by the negative side of this phenomenon, i.e. by terror[13]. (Richir 1991, 16) Richir echoes Kant's theory of the sublime, wherein it was argued that the sublime consisted of both a sort of attraction and a repulsion. Moreover, the sublime awakens the feeling of respect, but somehow negatively, through a sort of fear. We will shortly notice how the key element permitting this celebration to unfold is exactly the earth that does not move, namely what we have designated, following Richir, under the heading of the feeling of symbolic security.

By virtue of this possibility of inhabiting the world together, which appears in the eyes of the people as a sort of dream, they find again their being-in-the-world. What is peculiar about this process is that our being-in-the-world is found anew through this dream-like celebration, while for Heidegger, for example, dream and sleep existed outside of human historicity. (Heidegger 2001, 229-230) Nevertheless, this dream-like celebration seems more real than reality itself, as Richir argues. (Richir 1991, 17)

The next feature introduced by Richir in the equation of the phenomenon of celebration is the landscape. Already in his 1988 book entitled *Phenomenology and Symbolic Institution,* he stressed the relation between the experience of the sublime, as it is presented in Kant's *Third Critique,* and the notion of the "transcendental landscape". (Richir 1988, 353) In the case of the phenomenon of celebration, the landscape does not involve this transcendental function, but rather, it becomes a landscape of the world. Shortly put, in the case of celebration, the world becomes a landscape of the world. (Richir 1991, 18) Richir considers that at the core of the celebration lays a profound silence, which might even represent the origin of speech. The silence of the celebration might also be connected to what Richir has called indetermination or even the loss of the symbolic features of the human being, implied in the celebration. Even though human beings might have never experienced this sort of celebration, which follows a historical event, there is a certain familiarity with the world, thereby the world becomes something very familiar to us, because of the

way the landscape of the world appears. The landscape of the world summons a sort of "transcendental reminiscence" (Richir 1987, 186-187), connecting the feelings aroused by the celebration with a sort of immemorial familiarity with the world insofar as we are speaking of a humanized world. This virtual loss of all the symbolic features of the human being is made possible by a sort of phenomenological bracketing, as the Belgian phenomenologist asserts. (Richir 1991, 19) This immemorial familiarity with the world, which is found in celebration, and the transcendental reminiscence of the sublime felt thereof could represent the trace played by the "moment" of sublime in the early mother-infant interactions. Thereby, this would be the operative feature of the "moment" of sublime[14], to connect the very early experiences with the joy felt later. (Richir 2010, 73)

This fraternity of people with each other is made possible by the "moment" of sublime opened by the experience of the starry sky, as Kant described it at the end of the *Second Critique*. (Kant 2002, 203) Therefore, the human being's terrestrial sojourn becomes unlimited because the earth is discovered alongside its horizon. This means that the earth, in the case of celebration, is not to be envisaged as the object of geography, but rather as the indefinite opening place of the landscape of the world. Furthermore, the phenomenon of celebration appears like an innocent dream, because people are attuned to the feeling of the sublime by virtue of this immemorial familiarity, which renders possible the fraternization. (Richir 1991, 20)

Moreover, nature, the earth and the world become synonymous terms. The ephemeral incarnation taking place in the event of the celebration is analogous to what Merleau-Ponty described as the flesh of the world. (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 248) Ataraxy and serenity are the key terms used by Richir, hence they denote a successful encounter with the sublime. Nonetheless, he also discusses the other possible side of this situation, namely the eruption of forces of destruction and anxiety[15]. (Richir 1991, 21)

Regarding the issue of unconsciousness, a key aspect of the phenomenon of celebration, Richir suggests that in the case

of this happening, the unconscious state refers precisely to the impossibility of demarcating imagination from reality and vice versa. As in Winnicott's transitional area, there is no clear-cut landmark between what pertains to reality, and what is furnished by imagination. This atmosphere is in Richir's description a sort of surreal aspect of our existence in the world. (Richir 1991, 22)

Mirroring his definition of phenomenological schematism, with which we have started our paper, Richir argues for the structure of celebration as an "improvisation without concepts". Likewise in the case of the *Third Critique,* wherein imagination was schematizing freely, no predeterminate concepts intervene in the process of schematization as such. As Fazakas has proved, even Winnicott's notion of playing without preestablished rules can be subsumed under the category of schematism without pregiven concepts. (Fazakas 2019, 73) Richir emphasizes once again the dream-like feature of celebration, namely the fact that within it, imagination and reality cannot be distinguished from one another. Moreover, concerning the spatial characteristics of this phenomenon, the earth (which does not move), seems to encounter the sky, the latter embracing the former. (Richir 1991, 25)

The experience of sublime, as it is encountered when contemplating the starry sky, involves a sort of phenomenological bracketing, wherein the symbolic landmarks of the human being are suspended. The paradox of this experience consists exactly in the way in which the starry sky, likewise the earth, brings people together. (Richir 1991, 26-27) Therefore, the sky gives us the law in the Kantian sense of the term, which designates freedom. (Richir 1991, 29) The way the earth and the sky interact in the case of the celebration is of utmost importance, because their intertwining represents the ethical position of the subject, as Richir notices. The Belgian phenomenologist even addresses the question of the tension between earth and sky in establishing a landscape of the world. (Richir 1991, 31) Therefore, this tension played between earth and sky evokes the sublime further, primarily under the guise of the landscape of the world.

Summing up our discussion so far, the collective sublime is the direct consequence of a historical event, which leaves a sort of trace of it in the guise of an atmosphere, depending upon the result of that specific historical event. Marc Richir has analyzed rather poetically the fortunate outcome of a historical event for example, while he could as well had interrogated the other side of the event, which could have consisted in terror. In the case of the sublime event, the transitional area is the key structure that renders possible the tension between the seemingly contrasting elements, for example, between dream and world, imagination and reality, and earth and sky. Thus, the transitional area of sublime represents a sort of atmosphere wherein imagination and reality merge together, by virtue of the sublime, hence providing the most wonderful contents of our experience, i.e. the experience of the landscape of the world. Once again, we have investigated the fortunate outcome of the encounter with the sublime, whereas there exists a perpetual tension between the two poles of affectivity involved in this sort of experience. This swing consists precisely in how enjoyment might be menaced by anxiety, and how fear might transform itself in an instant into delight.

5. Conclusion

This paper attempted to prove that Richir's thoughts on the transitional area of sublime were already present when preparing the work *The Sublime in Politics*. From the very early analysis of Kantian schematism and phenomenological schematism (Richir 1983, 111-112), Marc Richir brought forth an original attempt to envisage the role played by imagination in the overall economy of the human being. We consider *The Sublime in Politics* to be a pivotal example of Richir's developing thinking, starting from the early works on Kant and Husserl and following his rethinking of the notion of *phantasia*. Next, this paper provided a historical background to Richir's notion of the transitional area of sublime, evoking different authors who were sources of inspiration for Richir, such as Kant, Winnicott and Merleau-Ponty. Nevertheless, by proposing the concept of the transitional area of sublime we have attempted to open the space for further research, which

might concern itself to the experience of the early life of the infant, or even with the delight felt in regarding certain artistic or cultural activities. The transitional area of sublime becomes the atmosphere in which the infant's life develops, alongside certain experiences, such as surprise, awe and wonder, provided that he or she has always a presence in which he or she can trust, i.e. the mother. The phenomenon of celebration reminded us once more what it means to be a human, ethically speaking. By virtue of the sublime triggered by the historical event, people come to see each other as what they are and not what they seem to be, thus fraternizing together, in a sort of collective dream. This would be exactly the peculiar function that the phenomenological bracketing of the symbolic landmarks would play. Further research might also point towards a psychopathology of the transitional area, this being rendered possible by the perpetual swing of affectivity which is involved in the experience of the sublime.

NOTES

[1] The archaic phenomenological field designates primarily the experience of the world in the case of the infant, which is governed by fantasy (*phantasia,* as Richir puts it). (Richir 2010)

[2] It must be stated that Merleau-Ponty himself has drawn heavily on the Husserlian notion of phantasy, without naming it as such. Although, Richir's notion of "perceptive" *phantasia* seem to indicate toward the same purpose of inquiry as Merleau-Ponty's oneirism of wakefulness.

[3] In the middle period of his work, for example in Richir (1992), he even advances the relation between the phenomenological sublime and the phenomenological apeiron.

[4] In his later work, Richir will use the notions of systole and diastole, which he borrowed from Henri Maldiney, to describe the two critical instants of the experience of sublime.

[5] As we are going to see, the phenomenon of celebration involves an ethical position towards the others, thus building up an authentic community of individuals.

[6] See for example, Fazakas and Gozé (2020).

[7] Even though Merleau-Ponty uses the notion of chiasm to describe the interaction between the "subjective body" and the "objective body", the term can also be applied to the interrelation between imagination and reality.

[8] This would once again mark the passage from transcendental interfacticity to transcendental intersubjectivity, in Richir words, namely the movement

from drive to presence, or from mere coexistence to interaction. (Richir 2015, 240)

[9] Although the sublime seems to be lacking from Winnicott's overall theory of human nature, he nonetheless alludes to the possibility that the infant might even surprise himself or herself in playing, for example, in the case of the Squiggle game. (Winnicott 2009, 68)

[10] As Winnicott has insisted several times, the paramount role of the mother, besides holding and handling the infant, would be that of disillusionment.

[11] The exchange of gazes becomes thus one of the very first manifestations of spatiality.

[12] Richir differentiates between moment and instant of sublime. Therefore, if the first pertains to the immemorial past of the infant, and cannot be pinpointed as such, the latter refers more precisely to the instantaneous occurring of an event, as for example, in Plato's Parmenides.

[13] Following our argument, the transitional area always involves the sublime, both in the case of the exchange of gazes, and in the phenomenon of celebration, hence the menace of counterbalancing affectivity to its opposite is always at stake. Thus, the transitional area of sublime involves the risk that affectivity such as joy might transform itself into fear, and vice-versa.

[14] By the operative "moment" of sublime, Richir alluded to this sort of excess of affectivity as being somehow omnipresent throughout the life of the human being. Thus, the sublime accompanies all our emotions, by virtue of its complex structure involving both joy and fear. (Richir 2010).

[15] As we have seen, in the case of Kant's aesthetics, the sublime can trigger either joy or fear, depending on whether the subject finds himself in a state of symbolic security or not. (Kant 2007, 99) .

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