

The Sensible Openness of Space in the Works of Daniele Del Giudice, Peter Handke and Jean-Philippe Toussaint

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Abstract

During the Renaissance, Alberti's concept of total visibility and, more specifically, the rediscovery of perspective as an artificial instrument of space construction led to an analytical representation of spatiality. Since then, our understanding of the subject's perception has changed, both in nature and in function, as a consequence of a progressive anthropogenetic deconstruction. The subject's gaze used to focus on physical elements, and thus on functional elements, that fill space rather than perceiving space as such. Consequently, visibility has been structured by solid shapes. However, in the works of Daniele del Giudice, Peter Handke, and Jean-Philippe Toussaint, the subject overcomes perspective as a symbolic form that structures its relationship to the outside world by opening the subject's perception beyond any conceptual form. According to Maldiney's phenomenological approach, the genesis of space is prior to the constitution of the emerging reality as an object. In fact, he states that space contains a dynamic that eludes any positivist psychology concerned with existential questions in terms of representation or objectifying causality. Visibility figures as an open semantic signification that does not claim to ground itself as truth in the objective world of perception and science. Therefore, art is not the expression of an artistic ideal that precedes its existence, and that could be represented outside and before it; rather, it emerges and unfolds as it appears. I intend to show that space does not serve as a background for the representation of material objects, but instead becomes the constitutive principle of form. When 'form' evolves within a flow of spatiotemporal continuity, it forms itself while forming the space in which it forms. The emergence of form implies the opening of a space-creating surface that embeds the artwork in a process of becoming.

Keywords: Spatiotemporal continuity, representation, visibility, sensible openness, phenomenological perception, emergence of form

1. Introduction

One tendency in European literature today and in the last thirty years foregrounds the question of the modes of representation of the present, the subject's perception of the world, and the subject's inscription in a teleologically oriented historical flow. These questions, which are the subject of theoretical reflections on the exegetical process of a literary work, point to a change

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in the question of the mutation of the subject, which, when viewed from an anthropological perspective, suggests that a significant shift has occurred in the subject's field of visibility. The narratives of Daniele del Giudice, Peter Handke, and Jean-Philippe Toussaint testify to such a change; they transform literary space into an eventful experience in which form is involved in a process of constant becoming. To stop portraying nature and to open up to the space of the landscape itself: This is the new approach to perceiving the world as a sensual place embedded in time.

Toussaint's *La Disparition du Paysage* conveys the image of a subject who is unable to grasp the passing of time with his gaze. Perceiving the landscape through the window makes him 'sometimes [feel] as if [he were] in a museum, staring at this large, immobile painting [he has] in front of [him] without being able to take [his] eyes off it' (Toussaint, 2021, p.12). In Handke's novel *Langsame Heimkehr*, the perception of the various forces involved in the creation of the landscape, as well as 'the different movements and formations of the earth [... make Sorger's] head swim' (Handke, 1979, p.22), as the protagonist fails to 'capture this event in space and [to] hold it fast' (Handke, 1979, p.28). Instead, the Handkean character visualises 'no more space before him, only a gently rising openness without foreground or background', devoid of perspective (Handke, 1979, p.28). Similarly, in *Atlante Occidentale*, Del Giudice takes a critical stance towards the subject's field of vision, noting that 'what has been produced to be seen is not seen while it is happening: it is seen beforehand as an intention and afterwards as a result' (Del Giudice, 1980, p.52). Indeed, the inability of the subject's gaze to visualise space as a dimension intrinsic to time seems to be one of the main topics in the three authors' narratives.

Where, though, does this habit of fixing space, as if looking at a painting, originate? Since the Renaissance, art seems to have been under the influence of mathematical and geometric laws, as artificial means such as monocular perspective or Alberti's concept of total visibility served as the basis for spatial construction. In this case, the perspective view of space provides a reduced representation of things, as three-dimensional objects were mapped onto a two-dimensional surface according to the laws of descriptive geometry. Thus, the perspective image coincides with the one provided by direct vision when the viewer adopts the same position of the painter by looking at the painting from the same centre of vision (Panofsky, 1975, p.17). It must be noted that such a representation disregards the psychophysiological structure of the subject, as well as his or her spatio-temporal involvement, since 'the phenomenon is reduced to stable rules, mathematically exact but dependent on the individual. These rules refer to the psychophysical conditions of the visual impression, and the modalities of their effectiveness are tied to the arbitrary determination of a subjective point of view' (Panofsky, 1975, p.180). Besides the paradox of claiming to conceive of a universal image of the world while starting from a subjective point of view, the monocular perspective imposes a certain structure on space, which thus delimits the field of visibility. This visibility, moreover, is determined by the plenitude of forms that assign a function to space, implying a dualism between figure and background. In this case, reality is determined by a materialist idealism that measures the real via facts that are verified by the perception of visible things in space. Descartes also held this conception of space; he conceives of nature based on the separation of two distinct realities: *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, a trend that continues through the emergence of scientific positivism. Academic criticism maintained this attitude of an 'aestheticisation of science' (Latour, 2012, p.261) until the 19th century, until 'the concept of imitation as a fundamental aesthetic canon and the consistent affirmation of the formal and visual values of art works [were] the subject of a gradual decline' (Panofsky, 1975, p.20).

Defining reality with the help of a structure shaped by scientific language implies a spatial closure, in that 'objectification [is] the very act of perception that defuses sensing of its meaning' (Maldiney, 2010, p.131). Turning the emerging reality into an object thus means conceptualising the visible, enclosing time in an immutable form and imposing a circumscribed image of the world on the perceiving subject, at the expense of phenomenological diversity. It is thus by questioning an objectified image of the world that Del Giudice, Handke, and Toussaint intend to free narrative from a mode of representing the present that is incapable of taking account of time along with the places, in favour of an aesthetic form of narration that restores to the subject the sensation

of spatial belonging inscribed in duration. This study aims to show that space does not serve as a background for representing objects; rather, it becomes the constitutive principle of both the diegesis and exegesis of narrative.

2. Opening up Space, Breaking Free from Symbolic Meaning

The spaces depicted in the narratives of Del Giudice, Handke, and Toussaint are the subject of an emergent nature that unfolds from the subject's gaze. The subject then succeeds in grasping the ascending movement of visual phenomena, beyond the limits imposed by the perspectival view that conceptualises the perceived form. Thus, the subject undergoes a re-education of the gaze that allows them to break with a spatialised nature that is prone to the laws of optics. The narrative instrument thus assumes a space-creating function that can articulate the emergence of form at the moment of its manifestation.

The places described in *Atlante Occidentale* are part of a spatial poetics that involves form in a process of becoming. The protagonist Brahe, in his capacity as a physicist, explores space at the CERN research centre with the help of the particle accelerator, starting from the infinitesimal visual standpoint of matter, where objects lose the concreteness of their form:

A thin ray of sunlight, focused and constricted by the thin slats of the blinds, illuminates the dust in the air; floating grains that, although they are everywhere, seem to come from the semi-darkness, moving slowly in the light and then disappearing towards the ceiling or the floor, again beyond the threshold of shadow. Brahe, barely awake, around noon, contemplates them from his bed; he thinks that everything could be visible like this, of course, and that there might be no need for his work today if time, all the time that has passed since time began, had not been chosen as a standard measure of perception and sensation (Del Giudice, 1980, p.131).

The visualisation of objects in space occurs beyond their form, on the border between the visible and the invisible. The decentring of the gaze from a 'standard measure of perception and sensibility' invites us to reconsider the appearance of phenomena in the subject's field of vision as an act of presencing form beyond its contours.

The same is true for *Langsame Heimkehr*, when the Handkean character, '[being] imbued with the search for forms' (Handke, 1979, p.13), explores the Alaskan wilderness in search of a place that he can call his own and that consequently enables him to apprehend the newly emerging character of 'the river landscape of the Far North (which went on aging visibly, and the viewer with it)' (Handke, 1979, p.103). Similarly, in *La Disparition du Paysage*, the subject '[is immersed ...] in the living reality [...], in the sensual substance [of] the hours, [...] in the flow of [a] becoming day' (Toussaint, 2021, p.29). It follows that 'a form is not a structure: it does not have the constancy of a schema, but that of a constitutive transformation [...], since a form belongs to space before it belongs to the figure. It is not a contour, it is always opening' (Maldiney, 2007, p.23-24).

2.1. Narrative Emerging from Emptiness

In *L'espace vide. Phénoménologie et choréographie*, Ballanfat argues that 'the spacetime of the painting—this is the example Maldiney draws on—is not a framework within which the form of the artwork would unfold. Space and time emerge in the act of the appearance of the artwork itself, insofar as they are implied by it. To appear is to open a space-forming surface, the blending of the two being called "rhythm" in Maldiney's pen' (Ballanfat, 2021, p.99-100). It follows that the narrative instrument is not a projection surface in which form is represented, but rather the place in which and through which form unfolds. The space-creating surface to which Ballanfat refers is reminiscent of an opening in space that represents the principle of form creation. In contrast to any spatial hierarchisation, in which the background (empty space) plays only a subordinate role compared to the figure that makes the subject's field of vision visible, the aesthetic form of narrative is not predetermined by the content of a story, i.e., by the concept of a space-time that has already been designed before the story unfolds. Therefore, the openness of space must be grasped in terms of a spatio-temporal unfolding in which the work emerges and becomes precisely in and through this space-forming process. Only then can space be described as space-forming because it becomes a plastic, open, and thus dynamic dimension. It is then no

longer a matter of considering the background and the figure as two separate entities, as the character Epstein states in *Atlante Occidentale*: 'while looking, one sees only the background; in thinking, one thinks only the figure. Never the two together' (Del Giudice, 1980, p.73). If space-time emerges at the same time as the narrative, then 'nothing' precedes the latter's appearance. The physicist Brahe's experiments are subject to a process of dematerialisation of the objects, which appear as particles invisible to the eye. For this reason, Brahe repeatedly states that there is nothing to see in the experiments: 'What there was to see, we saw [...]. There is absolutely nothing' (Del Giudice, 1980, p.30). The same applies to the flow of particles that circulate in the accelerator and pass through the heart of the machine without making themselves visible. The subject's field of visibility is thus determined by a space devoid of material forms, as there is no image for the things Brahe seeks to see. He therefore uses sophisticated technical instruments to amplify the gaze, such as screens that can detect the movement of particles: 'on the control screen, a frame with the serial number, the time, the abbreviation of the experiment, first formed out of the darkness; then from the right and left came very rapid lines, some of which collided in the middle, where the impact produced further continuous or hatched lines' (Del Giudice, 1980, p.27). While the lines emerge from the black, darkness proves to be the first state from which the subject's field of vision takes shape.

Nothingness seems to be the necessary condition for re-educating the gaze beyond conceptual perception because the objects emerge from an empty space that destroys the conceptual character of form by setting in motion the dynamic forces involved in the construction of the subject's field of vision. Indeed, the objects consist of a morphogenetic materiality that leads to a new way of seeing and of relating to objects appearing in space, so that the subject can only resort to his intuition to imagine things for which there is no image.

In Toussaint's work, both darkness and semi-darkness constitute the triggering point for moments of inner withdrawal, in which the subject gives free rein to his imagination. The protagonist in *L'Appareil* photo sits in the semi-darkness of a photo booth, shielded from the outside world, and allows himself a meditative moment in which he projects himself into the flow of his thoughts:

All the conditions were now fulfilled, it seemed to me, to think. A few minutes ago [...] I had stopped to observe the rain in the cone of light of a spotlight, in this very definite space delimited by the light, closed and yet as free of material boundaries as the open trembling of an outline of Rothko, and by imagining the rain falling in this place of the world, which [...] now passed in my mind from the cone of light into the neighbouring darkness, without it having been possible to draw boundaries between light and darkness (Toussaint, 1988, p.93).

The photographic automaton, 'freed from material boundaries', becomes an open space situated between the light (the visible) and the darkness (the invisible). The semi-darkness is an intermediate space that functions as a transition from a space of total visibility, in which form is circumscribed, to a space that opens up the same boundaries and thereby destroys corporeality. The same is true for the protagonist in *La Disparition du Paysage*, who spends his convalescence in a room in Ostend after falling into a coma: an interstitial state between life and death, and more concretely, between material life and the death of the body. This experience is described as 'a great emptiness [and as a] numbness, slowing of the body, lethargy' (Toussaint, 2021, p.16-17). Nevertheless, emptiness is not meant as a radical opposition to corporeality; rather, it appears in the perspective of a change, as a possibility of unfolding that crosses the boundary between matter and emptiness such that the mental image and the image of reality merge. This is why the protagonist says several times that he can no longer distinguish between what happens in the external, material world and what emerges in his mind as the fruit of his imagination: 'I see [the doctors] moving away, slowly dissolving before my eyes, before they disappear, so that I do not know whether these tormenting mental images correspond to a reality I have experienced or whether they are only the result of the morbid imagination I have been rummaging through again and again for months here in Ostend' (Toussaint, 2021, p.18). In Handke's stories, too, the dematerialisation of objects is the triggering moment from which the imagination unfolds. For example, in *Langsame Heimkehr*, Sorger is in an almost empty house 'without curtains and carpets' (Handke, 1979, p.128) before his return to Europe. Again, a change is implied by a room

that Sorger has emptied, as he himself '[strives] to become immaterial; [while his colleague] Lauffer was heading for an excess of matter' (Handke, 1979, p.129). The return to Europe is not truly a return to the starting point, but rather an inner meditation of the protagonist, the subject of a re-education of the gaze that apprehends the void differently from the oppositional concepts of matter and nothingness.

The authors' narratives seek to harness the subterranean energies of the void and to understand the mechanisms involved in the creation of form and thus in the formation of narrative. In short, they are mechanisms that operate from within the sphere of the invisible and contribute to defining the field of visibility. Just as Del Giudice unfolds the power of narrative through images that are described as 'corpse-like'—be it the 'destruction of corporeality' in Toussaint's narrative or the 'destruction of matter' in *Atlante Occidentale* and the Handkean narrative—this notion of destruction is by no means intended as total annihilation, but rather announces the opening of the field of the visible.

2.2. Void as a Receptacle of Form

As the relationship between matter and emptiness is no longer considered dichotomous, there is no longer any question of regarding space as an empty background overlaid by the fullness of form. Similarly, the figure is not meant to lend function to space, as it emerges in and through the openness of the space. In *Atlante Occidentale*, Epstein thinks about how to conceive the story of a narrative and concludes that the environment surrounding the character involved in a particular experience is essential to grasping the sensation of space. Perception and sensation are inseparable entities, as the perception of the external world should reflect the subject's internal sensation of space. Epstein claims that 'he had never been able to imagine a character, a situation, or a feeling, except in a certain air and in a certain light, until he was convinced that the atmosphere was exactly what it was: the mass of air enveloping a story' (Del Giudice, 1980, p.120). Similarly, the scene on the airfield introduces a new notion of spatiality as Brahe is about to pilot the plane: 'From that moment on, the air was no longer the same: it sought the propeller, it sought the aeroplane, it clung to the wings and to the fuselage and to the tail surfaces, forming an immobile veil, a first layer on which other layers slid viscously and began to grow and resist; particles of air strung themselves into ever thicker webs of liquid, into ever more volatile veins of air, moving and forming a cavity that absorbed the full shape of the aeroplane' (Del Giudice, 1980, p.124). It is not the aeroplane that penetrates the air, but the air that takes the form of the aeroplane and envelops it by 'forming an immobile veil'. As the plane accelerates, more layers of air form around it, opening up space for a vacuum to take in 'the full shape of the plane'. Whether it is the way a story is conceived, like Epstein's reflections on the exegesis of a narrative, or an inherent element of the story, like the aeroplane, both have in common that they are embraced by a mass of air that turns into an interacting dimension with either the form of a story or the form of an object. As Ballanfat notes, 'Sensing space should not be understood in terms of intentionality. Sensing space [...] is [not] a matter of aiming an object by consciousness that the subject has of it. Sensing is fundamentally understood as an "opening up", "communicating"' (Ballanfat, 2021, p.89). In other words, it is not about making spatial experiencing an exclusively mental entity, and consequently, it is not about relating to the object through consciousness. Spatial openness is understood as a new possibility of sensing because it inverts the monocular perspective in that the point of view is projected into the object itself, 'opening it up'. The subject arrives at a sensation of the object when it is immersed in the object through this very opening, creating an immediate contact with the world that transcends the separation between subject and object.

Indeed, the opening of space in Handke occurs through the immersion of the subject in the landscape 'into [its] unexplored interior' (in German: 'ins Landesinnere'. Handke, 1980, p. 40). The author uses a wide range of terminology such as 'empty fields' or 'hinterland' to create a sense of space and openness. I would like to emphasise that the word 'hinterland' has several definitions, two of which I wish to highlight; the first is '[t]he remote areas of a country away from the coast or the banks of major rivers' [1]. This first definition evokes a notion of a vast landscape and could be interpreted as a space devoid of contours, as long as it is located far from coasts and

shores—in short, from natural elements that delimit this same space. The second definition is '[a]n area lying beyond what is visible or known' [1]. The second definition is more interesting, as it shows that this large area remains beyond the visible and, like the first definition, implies a space without borders.

I would like to point out that the term *Landesinnere* describes an explicitly penetrable space that can be traversed like an interior, whereas the word *hinterland* seems more implicit, since it evokes a notion of distance or a distant land rather than a vast space into which the subject can project himself. In this case, vastness in terms of distance does not necessarily imply a plastic space; it could be mistakenly grasped as a place of dispersion, which is not the meaning Handke intends. In his works, the sense of vastness is conveyed by the opening of the image and thus of the space that the subject can internalise by projecting himself into it. This same opening, metaphorically intended as a 'corridor' to be traversed, is the equivalent of emptiness embracing form. In *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire*, the 'empty' spaces do not serve as a backdrop, but form informal backgrounds that are transformed as soon as an object appears within this void.

Not long ago I was standing on the snow-covered summit of the Untersberg. Not far above me, almost within reach, a crow was gliding on the wind. I saw the characteristic bird yellow of the retracted claws, the golden brown of the wings shimmering in the sun, the blue of the sky. These three moved across the sky like the passing of a large, airy surface, in which at the same moment I saw a three-coloured flag. It was a flag that stood for nothing, a thing of pure colour. But through it I have at last become capable of looking at actual flags (which up until then had only cut off my view), because now their peaceful prototype exists in my imagination (Handke, 1980, p.11).

In this example, the shape of the bird is formed by the elements surrounding it. Thus, the wings appear only through the golden-brown rays of the sun; the claws clinging to the body appear not through their form, but through the colour yellow; and the crow appears for the first time by fluttering in the wind. It follows that the animal is received by an empty, formless space, forming itself through elements that are external to it and which engulf it in a form of spatial interiority. This immersion implies that the 'background', instead of being reduced to a pure function of the object that fills it, interacts with it, so that the 'vast air space' is transformed into a space full of colour, just as the object that has lost its material character emerges from an 'airy' spatial opening and becomes 'a simple object made of colour'. The descriptions of Handke's landscapes show a certain inclination towards the interior, for example, when the protagonist in *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire* projects himself into a 17th-century painting while contemplating it and walks through the landscape towards the 'interior' of the painting, or again when the appearance of the bird is conditioned by the envelopment of spatial emptiness that allows it to emerge from an interiority. This inwardness is described as *Inbild* (in-image). In a conversation with Herbert Gamper, Handke defined this concept as a faithful representation of the object through imagination because, according to Handke, imagination is not meant to be an additional colouring or distortion of reality (Handke, 2016). The *Inbild* is both the interior of the object and the interior image of the object that reflects its subjective side (Handke, 2016). It follows that the object must necessarily be involved in a process of constant mutation because emptiness intended in terms of a space-creating source destroys the object's conceptual form; its interior merges with the surrounding space-time, giving rise to a 'new' object that unfolds in duration.

However, form mutation is inherent to the subject's perception, and their subjectivity is projected onto the object, so that the in-image consists of both a form of interiority of the object itself—as a viewed object without material boundaries—and a form of subjectivity of the viewing subject, both of which contribute to the transformation of the object. Del Giudice also encourages conceiving of interiority as a concept that aims to merge inner and outer perception. The author emphasises this notion of interiority by stressing the need to conceive of form from within (Colummi Camerino, 2002). The same is true in *La Disparition du Paysage* during a moment of inner withdrawal in which the Toussaintian character '[manages] to escape into [his] inner world' (Toussaint, 2021, p.33). While the story initially seems to take place in a room in Ostend, where the subject convalesces, the memory of a past event emerges and overlaps onto the present: 'With an intense gaze and dreamy eyes, I continue to stare out of the window, not knowing now

whether I am still in Ostend or still on the bus in Brussels in the early hours of that March morning. The outside world gradually disappears around me, the backdrops blur' (Toussaint, 2021, p.34). As in Handke, the Toussaintian character 'penetrates into the hinterland' of his most intimate thoughts, leading into the depths of the narrative, which has several diegetic layers. The frame story—i.e., the recovery in Ostend, which determines the physical position of the protagonist—opens up by embracing another story in terms of a memory, juxtaposing a mental image and an image of reality. This *mise en abyme* leads to a progression towards the 'ground' of the narrative, for through this folding, the subject enters a sphere where diegesis and exegesis intersect. This place of intersection could also be defined as the place of origin and formation of the novel: 'my thoughts polarise on a distant point of my inner horizon, and I feel a novel scene emerging in my mind, still formless, not yet fully grown out of its chrysalis, from which I see it slowly emerging. I move in this developing, still formless, immaterial scene, which I let approach my consciousness. I cannot say what it means or who the protagonists are [...], but I am present in this invocation, I experience it from within' (Toussaint, 2021, p.35-36).

In general, spatial openness creates inwardness, which, however, does not contradict any outwardness: 'We are not only together in a container, but we are "between", and this "between" is not simply a "between us". It is we who are embedded in this "between" that floods us from all sides' (Maldiney, 2010, p.95). It is thus the subject that is contained in an empty interstitial space, as it participates in the formation of form while projecting themselves into the object by opening it up. In this sense, subject and object become one, as 'everything inside opens outwards' (Cheng, 1991, p.100); 'the subject [projects] outward in stages; and the outside [becomes] the inner landscape of the subject' (Cheng, 1991, p.105). Since the perspective is now reversed, it is no longer a matter of establishing an opposition between interiority and exteriority.

2.3. Void as a Place of Origin and Mutation of Form

Maldiney argues that '[a form] diffuses out of itself what it takes into itself. It generates a space whose dimensions impose themselves on figurative and non-figurative elements as their constitutive tensions' (Maldiney, 2010, p.24). As soon as the void embraces the form, now deprived of its material contours, it develops in a spatio-temporal continuity. This continuity evokes a spatial opening in which the form is simultaneously produced and involved in a process of becoming. 'The form radiates out of itself what it takes into itself' insofar as a circular movement is created between the open space in which the becoming form appears and the space that is 'external' to it. In *La Disparition du Paysage*, narrative 'opens up' through a *mise en abyme* of various diegetic layers. The formation of a novel scene occurs from a 'distant point [of the character's] inner horizon' (Toussaint, 2021, p.35) in the depths of his mind. The Toussaintian character thus claims to be both 'the substance and origin [of the flow of thought], [for] in [him] it wanders, subterranean, invisible, peaceful, inexhaustible' (Toussaint, 2021, p.32). He then becomes part in the process of form mutation from this spatial opening, which is meant to be an intimate and immediate process of internalisation that is parallel to the becoming of form, until a glaring light interrupts this process of transformation: '[The] outside world [then] crashes through this open breach into [his] thoughts, sweeping away the spiritual world [he is] [in the process of] building in a torrent of shards of glass and splinters of iron' (Toussaint, 2021, p.36). It follows that the external world takes the place of the mental universe to the point of eclipsing it. This juxtaposition of inner and outer world results in a process that produces shards that lead to the destruction of the subject's inner universe by shattering it 'like a flood of splinters'. After this inner destruction, there also follows an outer destruction, as 'the landscape [fades] before [the Toussaintian subject]', just as 'the sounds of the world gradually fall silent' (Toussaint, 2021, p.45). Since the mental image and the image of reality form an inseparable unity, the external world takes on the same form of the subject's consciousness. The merging of the outside world with the mental world ensures that the view outside also gradually fades: 'The room begins to shrink, the walls shake and move closer to me' (Toussaint, 2021, p.46). If 'form is always opening', it is involved in a process of ceaseless becoming in which, once inscribed in duration, form is made to evolve without ever being able to stagnate. This is what Epstein defines in *Atlante Occidentale* as 'fluid form' (Del Giudice, 1980, p.39), which is involved in the 'uninterrupted cycle of imagination' (Del Giudice, 1980, p.73) that makes the distinction between interiority and exteriority impossible. The juxtaposition

of mental image and reality must be grasped in terms of a circular movement that causes what the form absorbs into itself—in this case, the process of constructing a novel scene in Toussaint's work—to simultaneously diffuse out of the form, out of 'its chrysalis from which [the subject] sees form slowly emerging' (Toussaint, 2021, p.35). This process of mutating form eventually extinguishes the consciousness of the subject; similarly, the materiality of the external world is subject to a major mutation that changes the field of visibility until 'the last visible moment of [the subject's] life comes to an end' (Toussaint, 2021, p.47).

In Handke's work, emptiness also contributes to changing the materiality of the object with it, which affects the consistency of space. The chapter 'The Great Forest' in *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire* illustrates how the Handkean figure, by entering the forest depicted in Jacob van Ruisdael's painting, penetrates through the opening of the painting and carries its materiality into the void. The path into the forest conveys a sense of vastness and penetrable spaciousness; simultaneously, the painting begins to gain plasticity and grow beyond its form:

The trees are dark, intermeshing spruces; each tree—and consequently the whole forest—is about to start spinning. A wide, straight road—apparently the main entrance—leads into the forest. The threshold feeling is a calm that leads one onward without purpose. Once inside, you find that the forest, which looked level from outside, conceals a low chain of hills running eastward (visible from outside the forest only when there is snow on the ground and the rising ground shows through) (Handke, 1980, p.99-100).

While the forest appears from the outside as a dense mass that barely allows a glimpse of the details of the vegetation, the same dense mass of trees, as soon as the subject penetrates into its interior, opens up to a multitude of different shapes: 'From the road, you first glimpse the western foot of the hill and at the same time, like an enclave of colour in the mass of spruces, a lighter-coloured, almost parklike zone of acacias, alders, and hornbeams, through which a number of possible paths lead uphill' (Handke, 1980, p.101). Consequently, the void is intended to be a spatial opening that can create a plane of spatiality 'in excess'. This dimension transforms space into a place that can be entered. It also creates a certain sense of interiority, which, however, is not opposed to exteriority because 'what the form takes in' affects the consistency of space, which is indeed exterior.

However, form mutation only takes place in and through this opening. The relationship between interiority and exteriority in this case should be understood as a circularity in which the form constantly evolves, like a form without fixed structures. Thus, the void can be both container and interstice, for 'we [...] become integrated into this "in-between" [...] that floods us from all sides' (Maldiney, 2010, p.95).

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, emptiness is not to be equated with a nihilistic dimension that resists reality. On the contrary, it represents a fertile source from which the subject's field of visibility emerges. In fact, emptiness enables the experience of an amplified reality inscribed in duration. Space is enlarged through a process of dematerialisation in which corporeality is destroyed, and thus objects are 'opened up'. The destruction of matter in this case takes place through *mise en abyme*: through the virtual becoming of things in Del Giudice, through the contemplation of paintings that expand into penetrable landscapes in Handke, and through the diegetic ellipses in Toussaint's narrative. In all three cases, the gaze of the subject projects itself into the object, while the perspective is being reversed. In this sense, the field of vision enlarges as the focalisation of a detail is amplified into a panoramic view by a gaze beyond form. The subject's field of visibility thus stands under the sign of an open spatiality, as visual phenomena constantly unfold and are implicated in a process of becoming through which the fullness of form emerges, paradoxically, from a void.

Conflict of Interests

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Endnotes

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