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RITMO, CONTAGIO, “RAZA CÓSMICA”: NUEVOS CAMINOS DE LA MIMESIS EN EL MÉXICO POSCOLONIAL.

RHYTHM, CONTAGION, “COSMIC RACE”: NEW PATHS OF MIMESIS IN POST-COLONIAL MEXICO

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Resumen

En su texto *Pitágoras. Una teoría del ritmo* (1921), el filósofo mexicano José Vasconcelos lleva a cabo una interesante relectura del pitagorismo antiguo para reorientar la dirección simbólico-abstracta del pensamiento occidental, que parece allanar una nueva línea de exploración genealógica de la cuestión de la mimesis en un contexto poscolonial. La noción estética de ritmo, además de desplazar el discurso sobre la mimesis de la dimensión visual a la acústico-emocional, presenta no obstante las características y los riesgos de lo que Scheler denomina «unipatía» o contagio y adquiere una significación particularmente importante cuando se considera como la premisa teórica del famoso ensayo vasconceliano *La raza cósmica* (1925). Este artículo reconstruye el vínculo entre las nociones de ritmo, contagio y «raza cósmica» para reflexionar sobre la cuestión de la alteridad, sobre los procesos mimético-rítmicos del cuerpo individual y sociopolítico, y sobre el riesgo de «desimbolización» del pensamiento que tal proceso quizás oculte.

Palabras clave: ritmo, contagio; mestizaje; raza; mimesis; poscolonial.

Abstract

In his text *Pitágoras. Una teoría del ritmo* (1921), the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos carries out an interesting rereading of ancient Pythagoreanism to reorient the symbolic-abstract direction of Western thought, which seems to pave a new line of genealogical exploration of the question of mimesis in a postcolonial context. The aesthetic notion of rhythm, as well as shifting the discourse on mimesis from the visual to the acoustic-emotional dimension, nevertheless presents the characteristics and risks of what Scheler calls “unipathy” or contagion and acquires a particularly important significance when considered as the theoretical premise of the famous Vasconcelian essay *The Cosmic Race* (1925). This article reconstructs the link between the notions of rhythm, contagion and “cosmic race” to reflect on the question of otherness, on the mimetic-rhythmic processes of the individual and socio-political body, and on the risk of the “desymbolisation” of thought that such a process perhaps conceals.

Keywords: rhythm, contagion; mestizaje; race; mimesis; post-colonial.

1. 1920s and 2020s: resonances of a “mimetic turn”?

Philosophy’s interest in the question of mimesis seems to be somewhat inherent to it. In the panorama of current studies, as much in the philosophical as in the literary, scientific, and socio-political spheres, this theme has in fact acquired a different connotation, albeit with a precise genealogy, which makes it the protagonist of various social phenomena, artistic and literary dynamics, and cognitive processes in the perspective of neurosciences. This recent rehabilitation of mimesis has taken place within the framework of a resemanticization that no longer understands it in the logic of a “metaphysics of sameness”¹ but reinserts it into a plurality of disciplinary perspectives aimed at rethinking and synthesising this concept in its pre-Platonic meaning. The result is an oral, ritual, and embodied conception of mimesis, thus associated with the body in movement, dramatisation, and the affective dimension. This new sense of imitation finds in the rhapsode Ion of the Platonic dialogue with the same name a key figure. In fact, Ion can enchant his audience through the invisible medium of voice, metre, and rhythm, thereby generating a state of enthusiastic and contagious dispossession that Plato, paving the way for Nietzsche, compares to the Dionysian Maenads².

1. Lawtoo, N. (2022). *Homo Mimeticus. A new theory of imitation*. Leuven University Press, p. 12.

2. Id., p. 79.

This intensified interest in the mimetic question – framed as a “mimetic turn”, among the many “turns” of the 20th and 21st centuries – is certainly justified by at least two factors: on the one hand, the decades-long discovery, not without critical voices regarding its impact, of the so-called “mirror neurons”; on the other, the undisputed and pervasive power of the new media.

In the context of this “mimetic turn” intended to promote a conception of dramatic, affective, or behavioural mimesis that is often neglected in philosophical contexts and acts unconsciously in various aspects of human life, the focus does not fall on representation, and thus on the static nature of images and their reproduction. Rather, it is on action, movement, and the phenomena of embodiment: what Lawtoo also calls the “pathological” component of mimesis³. Through this formula, which is intended to indicate the dynamic interaction between affects and reason, body, and mind, he wishes to refer to both the mimetic affect (*pathos*) and the critical discourse (*logos*) that emerges precisely from exposure to this component and its pathologies. In this way, it is also possible to place discourses on mimesis beyond a purely epistemological perspective to refer to sociological and anthropological analyses capable, rather, of reflecting on the mimetic nature of the human, thus considering it from its pathic, unconscious, intersubjective, and necessarily relational component. Hence the debate on the concepts of sympathy (*sympathos* as “feeling with”) and affective contagion, which evidently concern individual as much as the collective and political bodies, and reflections that refer to the subtle historical-genealogical and conceptual link between the notion of *mimesis* and that of *méthexis* (participation).

This “re-turn” to mimesis has the merit of having created a solid bridge between disciplines that share a topical thematic and problematic horizon. However, it sometimes seems to lack the specificity of certain concepts and, despite the precise genealogy adopted, to fail to pay due attention to historical and philosophical phenomena that attest to the presence of the theme in this same meaning at key moments in history but outside and before the turning point it purports to affirm. This attention, on the contrary, can help us to understand the reasons for the reappearance of this meaning in certain epochs and to show, as we shall see, its significance in cultural and political circumstances subsequent to the colonial period but not yet affected by the use of decolonial categories, and therefore not ascribable to an authentically postcolonial perspective in which this “mimetic turn” is intended to be inserted.

In this perspective, this article intends to reflect on aspects that in some way resonate with the notion of mimesis affirmed in the context of this possible “turn” by focusing on the problematic of rhythmic contagion through an intellectual little known in the purely philosophical context: the Mexican thinker and politician José Vasconcelos.

3. Id., p. 21.

This important figure in the Latin American context began his intellectual journey as a member of the Ateneo de la Juventud, a diverse group of writers, philosophers, doctors, architects, and painters who promoted a profound development based on the humanities. However, the importance of Vasconcelos' philosophical and cultural proposal, which we intend to examine here from the point of view of a new approach to the concept of mimesis, emerges in a particular way when we place it in the specificity of the socio-political circumstances of Mexico at the time. In the aftermath of the end of Porfirio Díaz's ten-year dictatorship and torn apart by years of revolution and civil war, the Mexican reality presented itself around the 1920s as profoundly unstable and, in some ways, entirely to be reconstructed. The re-elaboration of the colonial past, the large indigenous component of the population and the positivist inheritance that played for years in favour of the regime's political structure, constituted a profound challenge for a thought that was up to the times, that is, capable of rethinking Mexican identity without losing sight of an even greater and more urgent appeal: that addressed to Latin American identity and its political role. In this sense, the answers and proposals that Vasconcelos promotes, particularly through the essay on the Cosmic Race, are situated, despite the limitations of its cultural and philosophical assumptions, on several levels and have represented a significant breakpoint in the panorama of theories on *mestizaje* while giving a strong impulse, albeit in some ways visionary, to the decolonial debate. Vasconcelos, actually, is best known for proposing the idea of the Cosmic Race, a concept of racial and cultural mixing that would lead to a new, superior human race. However, his philosophical, intellectual, and political trajectory is characterised first and foremost by the promotion of education to achieve social justice and of art and culture as instruments of national unification. He, in fact, sought to combine a philosophical reflection with a political and social project that was the manifestation and result of a reform of thought that was henceforth attentive to the rhythmic component of the human.

It is, therefore, with the reflections of one of the leading figures of 1920s Mexico that it is possible to trace such a redefinition of the concept of mimesis in the context of his aesthetic interpretation of Pythagoreanism. To this end, the article proposes to reflect on the central theme of "race", or *mestizaje*, as it develops in post-colonial (in the sense of after the declaration of independence) and post-revolutionary Mexico within the framework of Vasconcelos' reinterpretation of Pythagoreanism as a philosophical proposal that privileges the rhythmic and affective dimension of the human.

The reasons for this return to Pythagoreanism are significant and can contribute to enriching the genealogy of this conception of mimesis, rooted once again in "pre-Platonic" thought. In the last decades of the 19th century, in fact, Latin American Modernist writers and poets were inspired by motifs and symbols linked to the myth of Orpheus and the teachings of the Pythagorean school handed down by Neo-Platonism and imported

mainly through French symbolism. Although he did not belong to the ranks of literary Modernism, Vasconcelos inherited some of its suggestions and demands, making them the pivot of his philosophical theories and positions regarding the identity of Latin America. This perspective, at the same time profoundly influenced by Nietzschean thought, is functional to a re-appropriation of the emotional component against a single model of (Western) rationality unwilling to concede space to heterogeneity and otherness (also from a political point of view), and to the affirmation of a mystical vision of reality against the positivism prevailing in Mexico at the time.

In fact, the artistic metaphysics of the young Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* offers Vasconcelos the opportunity to address a profound critique of Western thought and the identification between *logos* and the visual-representational paradigm understood as responsible for a «metaphysics of the sameness» and a politics of homogeneity, aimed at the imposition of “one” model. Based on a binary logic that opposes the identification of sight-*logos* to that of hearing and *pathos*, Vasconcelos intends to promote a philosophy inspired by a hypothetical pre-Platonic Pythagoreanism. Indeed, in the more archaic notion of rhythm linked to it would reside the possibility of constructing a sort of *logos* of *pathos* (patho-logy) based on the primacy of hearing and essential for conceiving thought, the subject, and the political dimension differently as a space for the creation of heterogeneity and otherness.

Therefore, this article seeks to show how Pythagoreanism fits into a pre-“postcolonial perspective” – here understood as inherent to postcolonial theory – that aims to overcome the absolutist drifts of a rationalism, understood as the cultural horizon of the West, through the reintegration of *mousike* into the *polis*, as we shall see in the last paragraph. It is a question of showing how Vasconcelian thought seems to fit fruitfully into the precise genealogy of this embodied conception of mimesis, adding an essential aspect to it. Indeed, although the Mexican philosopher does not explicitly refer to either the Plato of the *Ion* or the Aristotle of the *Poetics* as sources of this “patho-logy”, he seems to inherit their reflections. Hence the reference to the figure of the poet-philosopher and the role that catharsis plays in his educational policy. However, by tracing in ancient Pythagoreanism the possibility of a redefinition of thought through rhythm and *pathos*, he makes a decisive contribution to the extension of this genealogical line. In this sense, it is possible to identify two significant aspects: firstly, he shows through his own intellectual filiation how this inheritance derives not so much from philosophers but from poets, from whom he in fact inherits it; and secondly, how a Pythagoreanism understood as a philosophy of rhythm, associated as we shall see with the alternative notion of mimesis in the sense indicated above, becomes relevant for postcolonial reflection. In so doing, this reflection intends not only to contribute to the genealogical exploration of the concept of

mimesis and what we might call its “poetic filiation”, but also to show how it fits decisively into the postcolonial debate here connected to the Latin American identity question.

The way in which the notion of rhythm fits fruitfully into postcolonial discourse is neither about the “mimicry” of the colonised subject and thus the strategies of colonial power (as shown by Homi Bhabha⁴) nor exactly about the notion of «post-colonial mimesis» theorised by Lawtoo⁵. The latter, in fact, is understood as a reformulation of colonial narratives by a post-colonial author. This is the case with Achebe and the tale of the collective frenzy, the musical and mimetic ritual of the Igbo people functional to the strengthening of community ties and the social body: a literary operation conceived by Lawtoo as a reversal of the image of Africa and that “primitive”, insidious, and contagious frenzy observed by the protagonist of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Although Vasconcelos cannot be understood as a decolonial author because of the racial and evolutionary legacies that his thought presents, it is equally true that his philosophical proposal, which recovers rhythm as the key notion of the pathetic and affective component of the human, becomes the essential tool for the realisation, by contagion, of an ideal and transracial community. The notion of «post-colonial mimesis», therefore, can be useful in identifying a theoretical core active within post-colonial thought and identified as other than the Western *ratio*. In this sense, is interesting to note how this Pythagorean inspiration is located both inside and outside the Western *logos*. Inside because it makes itself heir to a tradition of thought recognised as underpinning Western language and philosophical categories, outside because it appeals to a before, to an *incipit* of thought not yet touched by the “Western” sight-*logos* paradigm. In this way, the mimetic and musical *pathos* that animates Vasconcelian reflection contemplates the reconciliation between the acquisition of a philosophical language oriented against the *logos* itself and the experimentation of an embodied mimesis entrusted with the possibility of realising future unity and cohesion. From this perspective, the historical legacy of the colonial past converts Latin America into a fertile container of cultures and a possible transracial and transcultural laboratory. However, while Pythagoreanism is functional in shifting the discourse from the visual-representational dimension to the acoustic-emotional one, declining mimesis in the form of “rhythmic contagion”, it also reveals the ambivalence and even the threat inherent in this perspective. Indeed, the valorisation of rhythm is part of a postcolonial perspective that is critical of the Western *logos* but, at the same time, as we will show later, demonstrates once again how it, and more generally that operation aimed at reversing the Platonic act of ousting *mousike* from the *polis* (i.e. its

4. Homi Bhabha, K. (1994). *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*, in Id., *The Location of Culture*. Routledge: pp. 85-92.

5. Lawtoo, N. (2016). *Conrad’s Shadow. Catastrophe, Mimesis, Theory*. Michigan State University Press: pp. 199-200.

reintegration), is a harbinger of possible totalitarian drifts in the political sphere. More generally, it reveals the ever-looming threat represented by what can be seen as specific pathologies of mimesis, that is, linked to its affective potential and its enchanting power.

Finally, the focus on mimetic dynamics in the context of a new “mimetic turn” is not only necessary to reinterpret specific contemporary phenomena, but also allows us to trace a singular and significant correspondence between the decade of the new millennium (2020s) in which we find ourselves and the “glorious” 1920s of the last century; the short, roaring, authentically catastrophic one in which the other, unconscious side of reason would appear on the scene of History.

2. A place of painting: a Manifesto

It is difficult to reconstruct briefly the extraordinary time of Mexico in the 1920s, committed to a political and cultural programme centred on the construction of an identity that claims to move ambiguously between the national and post-colonial sphere, and universalist, trans-national, trans-cultural and trans-“racial” aspirations that have a decidedly utopian character. Among its protagonists, besides writers such as Alfonso Reyes and artists such as Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti, was José Vasconcelos. Based on his own philosophical reflections, he promoted an extraordinary reform programme, i.e. an enormous cultural and literacy campaign, and the development and reorganisation of the Fine Arts in Mexico.

From this perspective, it is interesting to begin this reflection from a famous “place” in Mexican painting (a pictorial representation as a classic example of mimesis) commissioned by the then president of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), José Vasconcelos, to the muralist Diego Rivera. A place of painting that sounds like a manifesto and allows us to approach the theoretical framework in which the notion of rhythm, thus a peculiar meaning of mimesis, fits. In the conclusion of his famous text *The Cosmic Race. The Mission of the Ibero-American Race* (1925) Vasconcelos explains the underlying themes and testifies to the model behind this representation. In these pages, he writes that a few years before elaborating his ideas on the “fusion” of the four main “races” (the white, red, black, and yellow) and civilisations, he assigned them symbols. In fact, the book was written a few years after the creation of these works, which are therefore described *ex-post*. The task of translating his reflections, symbols and allegories into images was given to a few artists who decorated the new Palace of Education of Mexico City, including Rivera. Spain, Mexico, Greece, and India thus appear in the form of sculptural allegories as the most significant civilisations in the formation of Latin America. However, based on his reconstruction, what is most striking are the missing elements in the current decorative configuration of the palace. In fact, four stone statues were to represent the four races, while a central monument would symbolise the union of the three states:

material, intellectual and aesthetic. In this way, the Mexican philosopher demonstrates that he is adopting a positivist perspective heir to Comtian laws to communicate an image of America that is generous and rich, insofar as it accommodates these all equally necessary cultural and “racial” diversities, and therefore capable more than any other of accommodating the creation of the final race: the Cosmic Race⁶. We started from a place in the painting, therefore, but also from a non-place, from the utopian shadow that this representation projects, suggesting, at the same time, a profound link between mimesis and u-topia.

The Cosmic Race is to be understood not only as an attempt to constitute a post-colonial identity but also in the horizon of a profound redefinition of Western philosophical thought aimed at affirming an acoustic and musical paradigm, and in this sense aesthetic-mystical, against the purely visual and representational paradigm, i.e. the empire of Reason. In this sense, it is a vision, or cosmovision, that cannot be interpreted correctly except by referring it to another essay in which Vasconcelos presents his own aesthetic reading of Pythagoreanism: *Pitágoras. Una teoría del ritmo* (1916; 1921)⁷. The 1925 text speaks of a real “mission” for Latin America: it should act as an exceptional laboratory for the creation of a fifth “race”, the Cosmic Race, within the temporal framework of an Aesthetic-Spiritual epoch. This phase, therefore, would be marked by an abandonment of Reason as the only legitimate instrument to grasp reality and by a universal *mestizaje*. However, these are not two simultaneous and independent transformations, but rather intrinsically connected events. In this sense, it is no coincidence that Vasconcelos, in addition to specifically referring to notions of musical derivation, such as “rhythm”, “melody” and “*scherzo*”, speaks of *mestizaje* as aesthetic *pathos*, “contagion” or “cordial fusion”. Moreover, it is the very etymology of “cordial”, from *cor-cordis*, that attests to the intimate link between “heart” and “chord”, between the affective and the musical.

In this sense, to fully understand murals such as those sponsored by the SEP, and thus commissioned by Vasconcelos, it is necessary not only to consider them in relation to the essay, fundamental to that era and the Latin American context, *The Cosmic Race*, but to think of them as deeply connected to his general philosophical framework and, specifically, to his short essay on Pythagoreanism.

6. Vasconcelos, J. (1997). *The Cosmic Race: a bilingual edition*. Translated, with an introduction, by Didier T. Jaén, Afterwork by Joseba Gabilondo. The Johns Hopkins University Press: p. 40.

7. The first edition was published in 1916 while a second, expanded edition came out in 1921, when Vasconcelos retrieved some notes in Mexico City after returning from his first exile in the United States.

3. Rhythm and Contagion: From Mimesis to Méthexis

To cement the link between these two texts, there is the initial frame of the 1925 essay in which Vasconcelos theorises the relationship between «periods of *mestizaje*» and a greater «creative capacity» in cultural terms. Indeed, Vasconcelos writes: «The most illustrious epochs of humanity have been, precisely, those in which several different peoples have come into contact and mixed with each other»⁸. Attempts have been made on several occasions in history to demonstrate a correlation between genetic characteristics and cultural performance; Vasconcelos' reflection fits into a similar horizon but reverses its objectives. It is no longer the ideal of “purity” that constitutes a possible goal, but rather *mestizaje*. In this perspective, Latin America lends itself to becoming the place of *assimilation* of the four races, because in fact it already includes them, and to converting them into a new human type. This possibility is not only due to the existence on the same territory of different ethnic groups and cultures, but, according to Vasconcelos, to their greater capacity for “sympathy”, for *sym-pathein*. It is interesting to note how the notion of sympathy, which is already in itself equivocally situated between the domain of nature and that of culture, is here related to a socio-political-cultural and spiritual precondition. Moreover, it is emblematically linked to the verb “assimilate” (from the Latin *assimilare* or *assimulare*, composed of *ad* plus *similis*), which means “to make similar” but which also refers to holding different components together at the same time (*simul*), hence the ambiguity of the term “simulate”. In this sense, “assimilate” here implies both a conversion capable of preserving a certain distance with the other, and a metabolic process capable of converting organisms into organic substances, i.e. a conversion that abolishes this distance by metabolising the other. The «Mission of the Latin American Race», therefore, lies, according to the author, in achieving this supreme synthesis, in opposition to the unchallenged dominance of the “white man” as it occurred in North America. The way through it would be possible to achieve this synthesis is to be searched in his reflexions on the rhythmic relationship between subject and object contained in his essay on *Pythagoras* (1921)⁹.

In this work, Vasconcelos offers a reinterpretation of Pythagoreanism, which does not claim to be a faithful reconstruction from a historical-philosophical point of view. Instead, it aims to identify in the investigation of rhythm the original theoretical nucleus of the ancient School. It would not be the number at the basis of the Pythagorean doctrine, but rather rhythm as a philosophical value, as an “experience of rhythm”, the experience of feeling pervaded by sound as if the body were endowed with the strings of a lyre that

8. Vasconcelos, J. (1997). *The Cosmic Race: a bilingual edition*, cit.: p. 32.

9. Vasconcelos, J. (1959). *Pitágoras. Una teoría del ritmo*. In Id., *Obras Completas*, vol. III. Libreros Mexicanos Unidos.

can resonate and produce pleasure but also dispossession. In fact, is this resonance, this rhythmic contagion, characteristic of rituals, that induces states of trance¹⁰.

The anecdote of Pythagoras and the blacksmith, which mythically recounts the origin of Pythagorean research on the musical scale, thus offers Vasconcelos the cue to show how it is based on an original intuition of rhythm, of which number is merely the symbol that expresses it. From this would derive an entire aesthetic-mystical tradition, in which Vasconcelos recognises the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Bergson. If this intuition was not preserved and deepened, according to the Mexican author, it is because of the absence of an already acquired language capable of expressing it. In this sense, Pythagoreanism, which the Mexican author associates with a certain Dionysism, would have undergone a sort of “Apollonisation” process.

It is in this shift from rhythm to symbol that there is an extraordinary passage from the qualitative dimension of rhythm, able of preserving the heterogeneous character of the real, to the mathematical order as the realm of identity, or of heterogeneity but conceived as a series. A shift that can be traced back to what has been defined as a process of rationalisation of rhythm that is fundamental for understanding the symbolic-abstract direction of Western thought and attested, for example, by Benveniste in the passage from the notion of “*rythmos*” to that of “rhythm”¹¹. In its first meaning, attested at least until the Attic period, “rhythm” is never applied to the regular movement of the waves and its constant sense coincides, rather, with that of «distinctive form». A form that is only in the instant in which it is assumed by what is moving, mobile, fluid. Only with Plato (*Philebus*, *Symposium*, *Laws*) does the term acquire a different meaning. It is here that the notion of *rythmos* is definitively associated with order (*taxis*), it is here that the rhythm of the body is definitively subjected to numbers, to the *metron*: «*rythmos kai metra*», writes Plato in the *Philebus*¹². From *rythmos*, understood as a «spatial configuration» defined by the arrangement (event) and «distinctive» proportion of the elements, we pass to *rhythm*, conceived as a «configuration of movements» ordered in duration. Clearly, the link between rhythm, *metron* and body is to be read in the pedagogical-political perspective of Platonic thought, where musical knowledge becomes the virtue of the political. It is in this perspective, that is, starting from this first meaning of the

10. Rouget, G. (1980). *La Musique et la transe. Esquisse d'une théorie générale des relations de la musique et de la possession*. Gallimard.

11. Benveniste, E. (1966). *La notion de rythme dans son expression linguistique*. In Id., *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (pp. 327-335). Gallimard: pp. 328-329.

12. Plato, (2000). *Filebo* (edited by M. Migliori). Bompiani, 17 d.

term, that Barthes, for example, analyses the phenomenon of *idiorhythmia*¹³, originally linked to religious communities that are separate from the rest, that follow their own rhythm and therefore constitute «counter-spaces» or «heterotopias», as Foucault and Lefebvre would say¹⁴. In this sense, not only is the spatial component of the original notion of rhythm confirmed, but also its constitutive being «differential»¹⁵ and even, in Vasconcelian terms, its producing difference. Rhythm, therefore, is associated with the notion of otherness, but this relationship, which concerns both the self and the political body, changes depending on whether one assumes the first or the second meaning of the term.

According to Vasconcelos, who recognises in the Pythagoreans' reflections an initial investigation into the question of "sympathy", there are a plurality of rhythms. These can be classified into a «Newtonian rhythm», relating to nature and governed by the law of causality, and a «Pythagorean rhythm», characteristic of man, which in the aesthetic process, in the act of grasping beauty, would operate a kind of redemption of matter from its own laws. It is evident how this conception is indebted to Bergson's work *Matter and Memory*. Such a process, however, which takes place when the «disinterested» subject perceives the rhythm of things and «sympathises» with them by vibrating in unison, thus through a mimetic process whose model is that of stringed instruments, consists fundamentally in an aesthetic-mystical experience that finds its apex in the constitution of a unique rhythm. Moreover, it is the very iteration of the rhythm that shows an imitative structure, and therefore immediately places the elements in a dialogical relationship. It is no coincidence that the Mexican thinker, deeply influenced by Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, associates Pythagoreanism with Dionysus rather than Apollo, as is traditional, and that he sees in it the promise of the transcendence of form, of figure, of transfiguration in a dynamic universe of openness to the divine¹⁶.

In this perspective, in which through rhythm it is possible to overcome the distinction between subject and object, the epistemological and ethical value of relation and otherness seems to be lost. Indeed, Vasconcelos, in line with his philosophical system, which can

13. Barthes, R. (2002). *Comment vivre ensemble. Cours au Collège de France 1976-1977*. Seuil.

14. Foucault, M. (2006). *Utopie. Eterotopie*. Translated by A. Moscati. Cronopio; Lefebvre, H. (1976). *La produzione dello spazio*. Translated by M. Galletti. Moizzi.

15. Lefebvre, H. *La produzione dello spazio*. Cit.: p. 377.

16. Vasconcelos, J., *Pitágoras. Una teoría del ritmo*, p. 46.

be described as an Aesthetic Monism¹⁷, very appropriately defines this process in terms of «rhythmic contagion», a mimetic process that would like to *syntonize* two rhythms, but which seems to be a sort of *subjection* of the rhythm of the other to his own. In this sense, Max Scheler's reflection in *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie* is illuminating, as he identifies a contradiction between the ethical value of «fellow-feeling» (*Mitfühlen*) and monistic metaphysics. In the latter, in fact, fellow-feeling can only be given as «unipathy» (*Einsföhlung*), as «contagion» or «emotional infection»¹⁸. *Einsföhlung*, in which we recognise the traits of sympathy and compassion in the sense of Darwin, Spencer, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche indicates an affective identification with the natural, vital, and social environment. It refers to the natural, vital/amoral character of states of mind and experiences ranging from primitive animism to the ecstasy of certain mystery religions, to phenomena of mass identification with the leader. «Rhythmic contagion», therefore, is a fully-fledged part of this sphere in which, not by chance, the aesthetic dimension is devoted to overcoming the ethical one. The Nietzschean case of the Danish king driven by a cantor's music to a terrible warlike exaltation in perfect peacetime adds to a series of anecdotes on the power of music dear to Neo-Platonism in particular¹⁹. Music, in fact, is the one that teaches us most clearly about man's ability to «feel in unison» while leaving the ethical question unresolved.

Such a process, at least in Vasconcelian *Pitágoras*, concerns the relationship with nature, and thus the non-human sphere. However, it seems to serve as a model for the dynamic described in the *Cosmic Race*, dragging with it underlying criticalities. Indeed, while the *mestizaje* envisaged here affirms a high ideal of love and brotherhood, it also seems to conceal a disturbing denial of the very notion of alterity. The rhythmic dynamic described in *Pitágoras* corresponds to the process of racial unification that finds in the Conquest by the «white man» of Latin America, undoubtedly criticised, the occasion to found, albeit ambiguously based on precise cultural values, the universal *mestizaje*, the ultimate race in which all others are destined to eclipse. The threat inherent in sympathy declined in the form of «rhythmic contagion» and in the overcoming of ethics in aesthetics, also seems to be confirmed in the short period of Vasconcelos' fascination with European

17. Vasconcelos, J. (1961). *Monismo estético*. In Id., *Obras Completas*, vol. IV. Libreros Mexicanos Unidos: p. 60. This text brings together essays of a different nature that nonetheless present an interpretation of the world in which the values of the spirit are reaffirmed, and which aims to overcome the dualism of modern philosophy and to rediscover that spiritual unity capable of overcoming the limitations of a positivist and objectivising perspective.

18. Scheler, M. (2017). *The Nature of Sympathy*. Translated by Peter Heath, with an introduction by Werner Stark, and a new introduction by Graham McAleer. Routledge: p. 15.

19. Nietzsche, F. (1997). *Daybreak. Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. Ed. by M. Clark and B. Leiter. Cambridge University Press: p. 89.

totalitarianism; an initial and brief fascination that nevertheless casts a disturbing shadow over his thought, demonstrating the ever-present risk of pathology being transformed into political pathology²⁰. This drift leads Vasconcelos to clarify his positions, namely, to express himself critically on the link between Darwinism and Nazism in the *Prologue* to the second edition of *The Cosmic Race* of 1948.

If Aristotle identified the origin of the Platonic conception of «icastic mimesis» in the Pythagorean doctrines – who regarded sensible things as copies that faithfully reproduced eternal numbers²¹ –, the aesthetic interpretation of Pythagoreanism goes far beyond this reading. In a horizon critical of rationalism and the predominance, so to speak, of sight over hearing as cognitive paradigms, it suggests the presence in the original Pythagorean investigation of an early mimesis paradigm based on rhythm that shifts the question of mimesis to that of *méthexis*, understood above all as the subject's tension towards collective participation in the intelligible world. In this sense, if Plato had replaced the concept of *méthexis* with that of mimesis in order to overcome the contradictions it implied, here a sort of inversion takes place. Moreover, as Jean-Luc Nancy points out, it is the very concept of mimesis that can be understood as participation or *méthexis*, because the latter is «intrinsic to the mimetic relation»²², to imitation that is never simply external but implies a profound, and therefore potentially dangerous, emotional participation. In this perspective, if Eros becomes the symbolic character of this ambiguous desire for participation, on the other hand it is once again the figure of the rhapsod Ion who shows the paradox of the mimetic complex. Indeed, he is not properly “himself” insofar as he is dispossessed by a divine power that converts him into an «improper mime» because he acts a «creative mimesis» that Nancy calls participation or *méthexis*²³.

Vasconcelos, therefore, performs a twofold operation: genealogical and conceptual. In fact, in a horizon critical of rationalism and the predominance of “sight” over “hearing” as cognitive paradigms, the Mexican thinker: firstly, recognises in the original Pythagorean investigation an early mimetic paradigm based on rhythm; secondly, he shifts the question of *mimesis* proper to this paradigm to that of *méthexis*, understood above all as the subject's tension towards collective participation in the intelligible world. In this

20. Lawtoo, N. (2013). *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious*. Michigan State University Press: pp. 126-127.

21. Aristotele (2010). *Metafisica*. Ed. by C.A. Viano. UTET: 987b 10.

22. Nancy J.-L. and Lawtoo, N. (2022), *The Counter Text Interview: Jean-Luc Nancy. Mimesis: A Singular-Plural Concept*. *Counter Text* (8.1), 23-45, p. 26; Nancy, J.-L. (2016), *The Image: Mimesis and Methexis*, in Id., *Nancy and Visual Culture*. Carrie Giunta and Adrienne Janus (eds). Edinburgh University Press.

23. Lawtoo, N., *Homo Mimeticus. A new theory of imitation*, p. 82.

sense in line with Aristotle, who identified the Pythagorean doctrines as the origin of the Platonic conception of *icastic mimesis*.

In this perspective, Vasconcelos not only traces Pythagoreanism back to an “experience of rhythm” but makes this rhythm and the mimetic principle the theoretical premise of *The Cosmic Race*, thus converting it into a veritable postcolonial operation aimed firstly at invalidating the Western *logos* and secondly at overturning the theories of race purism.

4. The Scientific T-Race

Rhythm is the basic notion through which Vasconcelos also explains the historical movement that would lead to this final phase of synthesis, which, as mentioned above, coincides with a new Aesthetic-Spiritual era. In fact, the author describes three states of evident Comtian heritage (material or warlike, intellectual or political, and spiritual or aesthetic), which show a gradual process of liberation from the law of necessity and force until the affirmation of higher norms such as emotion and fantasy. Only in the last phase, which coincides with the overcoming of Rationalism, can the most authentic *mestizaje* take place, since the union between individuals of different “races” will be dictated neither by violence nor by convenience, but by aesthetic taste, beauty, and “fantasy”.

In this part of the text, Vasconcelos forcefully and sincerely affirms the value of alterity, of dissimilarity, as the basis of the aesthetic process and which, however, is destined to be annulled, to become One following a dynamic of love, conceived as a *mania* or divine inspiration and which «infects»; «its dynamism is contagious»²⁴. These positions are deeply influenced by the reading of Platonic texts and the Neo-Platonic tradition, and it is even possible to discern an echo of the reflections contained in the dialogue *Ion* on the force that pervades the poet and spreads like a true contagion. It is clear, therefore, that this is theory does not merely present the union of two “races” or all the “races” of the world, but a dimension that goes far beyond that; in fact, biological mixing does not satisfy the idea of Cosmic Race. Vasconcelos’s intention, therefore, seems to go much further and consist essentially in the vision of an era of spiritual freedom based on the theories of Bergson and Boutroux²⁵, even if simulating a philosophical and scientific language that has caused many misunderstandings. Connected to anti-positivist instances, in fact, through the theory of hybridisation into a single and definitive race, Vasconcelos wants to counteract the social implications of Darwinian and Spencerian evolutionism, using

24. Vasconcelos, J. *The Cosmic Race: a bilingual edition*, p. 38.

25. Vasconcelos may have been inspired by the Canadian psychiatrist Richard Maurice Bucke’s *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*, which in turn inherited the idea of “cosmic consciousness” as an experience from the English scholar Edward Carpenter. A connection that attests his deep connection with Orientalism.

Mendelian theories on hybridisation in an arbitrary and fanciful way, i.e. on the basis of «aesthetic affinities», which would avert dangerous imperialist implications.

In this sense, if by “race” we are to mean not a genetic or biological datum, but, as Hall observes, the sign of a discourse, first and foremost a «floating signifier»²⁶, a “t-race” that invests the body understood as text and that makes it subject to an infinite process of re-signification, Vasconcelos’ is perhaps an attempt to a total liberation of the signifier from the meaning. An operation that seems in part to transpose and reformulate the experience of artistic avant-gardes such as Futurism and Dadaism. The signifiers, Hall observes, refer to the systems and concepts of a culture’s classification, to its practices of «making meaning»; meaning, therefore, is never essential but relational. Only when these differences are organised into a discourse do they take on meaning and regulate conduct. In this sense, culture «marks» and does so by relying on «nature» for its justifications, as if they were «metonyms» of each other, culture of nature and vice versa²⁷. On the other hand, if we speak of races, as Reid Miller observes²⁸, it is based on a presumed non-marked human model, without race. The Cosmic Race, then, is in a sense the point of arrival as much as the theoretical presupposition concealed by the discourse, the “neutral” model or presumed to be such, i.e. the non-race or race that denies itself.

In fact, in Vasconcelos, the liberation of the signifier, the joyful and imaginative mixture of *mestizo*, is oriented, or would like to be oriented, towards a de-construction of language: from the “race” to the “t-race”, to the oxymoronic formula “Cosmic Race”, on the one hand incapable of definitively getting rid of the positivist theoretical baggage, but on the other devoted to the enthusiasm of the sign that rebels against itself to become «extra-discursive», pure expression. In this perspective and in support of his own vision, against that theoretical framework that justified the domination of a single race, Vasconcelos sees in Bergson’s «creative evolution» and in von Uexküll’s biology a decisive step towards overcoming Darwinism and affirming the notions of “harmony”, “rhythm” (instinct) and teleology.

Therefore, it is necessary to recognise behind the use of a sometimes apparently scientific framework a discourse on “race” that, precisely because it is based on rhythm and thus on a pre-linguistic dimension, aims to unhinge the cultural discourses that develop and proliferate in languages.

26. Hall, S. (2021), *Selected writings on Race and Difference*. Ed. by P. Gilroy and R.W. Gilmore. Duke University Press: p. 412.

27. Id., p. 424.

28. Reid Miller, J. (2017). *Stain Removal. Ethics and Race*. Oxford University Press: p. 46.

5. The Visual Composition of the Place

The Cosmic Race, however, is first and foremost a book and should perhaps be more appropriately understood as a true literary experiment that seems to rely once again on the mimetic power of rhythm. Indeed, in this text as in various moments of his reflection, Vasconcelos assigns a decisive role to the function of fantasy as an instrument of transcendence, of the «transfiguration» of reality; a «liturgical» instrument, in the original sense of “action for the people”²⁹. It is not a question of fantasy conceived as mere invention, then, but as the supreme virtue of the poet-mystic, whose model seems to be Dante of the *Divine Comedy*: «Poi piovve dentro l’alta fantasia» («Then it rained within the high fantasy»), the Florentine poet writes, thus showing the revelatory and divine character that it assumes³⁰. But if fantasy has, essentially, a transformative power, to which it is ultimately entrusted with the task of realising the Aesthetic Era and the Cosmic Race, it is only through writing and the verbal images it creates that it can spread, infect, and be realised. In this sense, this text should perhaps be understood as a literary attempt to do so, offering the reader what we might call “performative images”, just as certain utterances are performative. Which means that if fantasy has transformative power, it is thanks to a rhythmic-mimetic capacity of literature that Vasconcelos does not make explicit, but which can be reconstructed in the following way.

Firstly, we can observe that Vasconcelos seems to grasp the lesson of Ignatius of Loyola. Although the Mexican author does not explicitly refer to the Spanish monk, the great influence of his *Spiritual Exercises* (*Ejercicios espirituales*, 1548) in the Spanish and Hispano-American basin of thought is undoubted. It is possible, therefore, to discern a similarity between Loyola’s method and the task that, according to Vasconcelos, the

29. As Vasconcelos writes in his work *Estética*: “La fantasía en cambio, crea el gran arte maduro como la *Comedia* de Dante, en que los objetos y los personajes se mueven firmemente en un mundo poético o celeste, que no es ficción, sino realidad superior a la física. Por eso el poema de Dante no es fantástico sino litúrgico. [...] la fantasía opera en el poeta cuando éste maneja con mano firme las realidades del mundo del espíritu, a diferencia de la simple imaginación que se entretiene en la fábula y el mito”. Vasconcelos J. (1959). *Estética*. In Id., *Obras completas*, vol. III. Libreros Mexicanos Unidos: pp. 1330-1331.

30. Vasconcelos, J. (1961). *Monismo estético*, in Id., *Obras completas*, vol. IV. Libreros Mexicanos Unidos: p. 95. For Vasconcelos, the distinction between imagination and fantasy lies in a difference that is not so much qualitative as quantitative. If the former is capable of constructing the world of fable and myth, the latter, which is more powerful, is capable of introducing the specifically spiritual space of the liturgy, in which images obey a synthesis purpose that is superior to the merely cognitive one and whereby a sort of simultaneous “transfiguration” of the human person takes place. In *Monismo estético*, in fact, within the framework of a distinction between poet, philosopher and mystic, Vasconcelos assigns to the latter rather the power of the imagination whose object is no longer images, but revelations themselves.

literary form, understood as an agent of transformation by “contagion”, should have. The *Spiritual Exercises*, in fact, consist in the production of images aimed at operating a transformation in the believer; i.e. operative images, true agents of transformation. Loyola’s is therefore a method of visualisation that always starts from the visual composition of the place («composición viendo el lugar») to situate and accompany the reader (through the imaginative view: «vista imaginativa») in the practice³¹. It is no coincidence that Eisenstein refers to it in his *Theory of Montage* and that Calvino in his *Lezioni americane* considers these exercises, a sort of “mental cinema”, as part of a reflection on the profound crisis of the imagination and the imaginary (above all political) which, paradoxically, is gripping our civilisation of the image³². If visualisation is an essential component of “practice”, in Loyola’s *Excercises*, it is because it is the tool for accessing the experience of God, for a kind of “embodiment” of the divine. The practice itself is embodiment, that is, experiencing a path to attaining God, of which the visualisation is only a useful tool. The goal, on the contrary, is the transformation of the believer through this very experience. The connection between visualisation and transformation can evidently take on many facets. Thus, if Calvino points out that Loyola’s method is akin to the cinematographic dynamic that emotionally pervades the subject and places him, so to speak, in an intimate elsewhere, Eisenstein refers to it in the context of his theories, adding to this analogy an essential aspect, of which Vasconcelos, although extraneous to this perspective, seems to be aware: the rhythm of the images. It is their rhythm, hence the montage, that affects the capacity for emotional subjection and transformation of the recipient of the images. It is no coincidence that montage becomes an exceptional and then unprecedented political tool in the context of Soviet propaganda. Although Vasconcelos is foreign to these references, it is possible to reread some of his operations and reflections in the light of these analyses. From this perspective, the kind of visual composition of place he invites in *The Cosmic Race*, together with some references to the rhythm of images and analyses of the literary form as «symphony», capable of emotionally capturing the reader by operating a transformation, seem to profitably place themselves in the perspective outlined above. In this way, instead of stopping at the obvious limits of Vasconcelian reflection, it is possible to reread his proposals on a new horizon, assuming them as the testimony of a sensitivity with respect to increasingly inescapable themes.

In the same way as Loyola, Vasconcelos seems to attach decisive importance to the visual composition of the place. Therefore, he dwells on the description of the future cosmopolis (*Universopolis*, located in the tropical belt) and imagines its architecture, which would present mainly spiral motifs, symbol of infinity, pyramids, and a landscape, so to speak, figural, which lies beyond the forms, rich in colours and «rhythms», and which would

31. Loyola, I. de (2015). *Ejercicios espirituales*. Passerino: p. 45.

32. Calvino, I. (2020). *Lezioni americane*. Mondadori: p. 85.

«emotionally» communicate its richness. In this sense, Vasconcelos's text resembles a kind of literary *capriccio* that, like painting, indulges in the imaginative combination of architectural, landscape and archaeological elements, but always with the aim of visually and rhythmically constructing future identity, i.e. the cosmic mestizo³³. For Vasconcelos, the image also has a sonorous, rhythmic, and contagious component that enables it to move, to infect³⁴. Indeed, in his essay on *La Sinfonía como forma literaria* (1921), he speaks of «rhythmic contagion»³⁵, as the process that the new literary form is supposed to achieve³⁶.

It is possible, hence, to identify in *The Cosmic Race* an experiment that would like to act by exploiting the mimetic process not between representation and reality, but at a more unconscious and pre-linguistic level, between the rhythmic nature of the reader and the rhythmicity intrinsic to the vision offered in the literary work.

The operation carried out through this “literary experiment” must therefore be considered as an integral part of a reform of thought that intends to philosophically rehabilitate rhythm as a deconstructive experience of the Western *logos*.

33. On the link between rhythm and identity, see: Garelli J. (1991). *Rythmes et mondes: au revers de l'identité et de l'altérité*. Editions Jérôme Millon. This is a question of fundamental importance in order to probe the Vasconcelian philosophical and cultural proposal while attempting to overcome its limitations and the ambiguity of certain passages. I limit myself here to mentioning the text as a hypothetical track to follow in the awareness of the need to investigate such an interrogative.

34. The reflections suggested here by Vasconcelos, rather than theorised, are exceptionally well reflected in contemporary theories concerning the dynamic interaction between literature and visual culture and, more generally, the relationship between words and images, and the mimetic power of the latter, included verbal images. In this sense, the description of Universopolis as a utopian place, i.e. as something “realised” (albeit imaginarily) and as something that can be described, would stand as having the mimetic power to inform the user of the text. Cometa, M. (2011). *La scrittura delle immagini. Letteratura e cultura visuale*. Raffaello Cortina; Moreau, P.-F. (1982). *Le récit utopique. Droit naturel et roman de l'État*. P.U.F.

35. J. Vasconcelos, *Monismo estético*, p. 20.

36. Joseba Gabilondo suggests understanding the Vasconcelian essay in terms of “mythical realism” or “utopian realism”, as it seems genealogically connected to other Latin American forms that contrast with modernity, including pre-Columbian discourses, travel accounts and fiction, and magic realism. Gabilondo's reading is interesting because it recognises a relationship not only between “magic realism” and “mythical realism”, but also a contrast between the openness of the latter, at least in the first part of the Vasconcelian essay, and the closure of the Latin American experience within precise boundaries (of the nation-state) that would have determined a certain dystopian component of the later manifestation of magic realism (see J. Gabilondo, *Afterword to the 1997 Edition*, 108-109). Mythical or utopian realism, in fact, are recognisable in the tension between the myth of Atlantis, which geographically would have developed in Latin America, and Universopolis, the cosmopolis in which the Cosmic Race would be realised.

6. The Political Rehabilitation of Mousike

As already pointed out, in Vasconcelian reflection the term “race” transcends the genetic or biological datum, so universal *mestizaje* as a kind of zootechnical artifice does not satisfy the idea of the Cosmic Race. Instead, as shown above, it can essentially be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, as a «floating signifier», as an attempt at a total liberation of the signifier from the meaning oriented towards a de-construction of language, on the one hand incapable of definitively ridding itself of the positivist theoretical “t-race”, but on the other hand devoted to the enthusiasm of the sign rebelling against itself to become «extra-discursive», pure expression. Secondly, as a literary experiment that proposes to act at a pre-linguistic level through the transfiguring power of the imagination, by means of images that we could define as “performative” and the method of visualisation or “mental cinema” to achieve a sort of “rhythmic contagion”.

But *The Cosmic Race* confronts us first and foremost with a political question that brings to light an ancient and thorny problem. As pointed out, the reflection on the «mission of the Ibero American race» does not only pose us a problem of ethnic assimilation, but first and foremost a political one that is not located exclusively in the horizon of anti-Americanism and a post-colonial and identity redefinition, but, more deeply, in a critique of Rationalism understood as the stigma of the West, since the *Ratio* would be defined historically in the exclusion of the pathic component of thought. The predominant role that sight plays in the West against the auditory system should be understood in this perspective. This contrast is explained on the basis of a binary logic, i.e. the equivalence of sight-*logos*: hearing-*pathos*, and has precise political reasons. As explained above about the semantic shift that the notion of rhythm would have undergone, with Plato we witness a deprivation of the «power of enchantment» of the *mousike*, which falls definitively under the dominion of the *logos* and, as Arendt pointed out, at the foundation of the videocentric criterion of politics³⁷. The *mousike*, in fact, which, insofar as it is capable of transforming men’s souls is in danger of escaping *paideia* and political control, as Plato well knows, must be regulated, i.e. subjected to the law of number and harmony, or banished.

Its rehabilitation in a philosophical and political horizon, which the aesthetic interpretation of Pythagoreanism legitimises, therefore, brings to light an old problem. If, on the one hand, the notion of rhythm seeks to invalidate the normative, identifying and subjugating power of number and of an entire tradition built on it, summarising through it the heterogeneous character of the real, the value of the dissimilar, of otherness and

37. Cavarero, A. (2005). *The Harmony of the Spheres; or, The Political Control of Mousike*. In Id., *For more than one voice: toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*. Translated and with an Introduction by Paul A. Kottman. Stanford University Press: pp. 152-161, p. 156.

of existence, on the other hand, it seems to show once again the dangers inherent in the free unfolding of its potential. In the 1920s, when he was at the height of his political and cultural life, Vasconcelos constructed not only a philosophical system but also an entire political programme based on the notions he had highlighted, which is reflected in the reorganisation of the Fine Arts and the central role assigned to music. At the apex of these reforms is the introduction of the *Festivales del Aire Libre*, veritable initiation ceremonies designed to create an upward movement in the soul of the people, a catharsis in the Aristotelian sense, in which rhythm reveals its mimetic and even identifying potential. Through the “participatory” dimension of the rite, as Nietzsche observed, one abandons the *principio individuationis* and the language that determines it. With it, one regresses to the original vital aggregation; it is the «delirium as knowledge of the Dionysian feast»³⁸.

A few years later, the world would witness unprecedented phenomena of mass and identification with the leader, the ever-identical rhythm of military marches, men reduced to numbers, but also the thrill of uniqueness and de-individualisation. Although Vasconcelos appears to be aware of this to some extent, as he does not limit himself to using the term rhythm but uses other notions of musical derivation that would like to preserve the heterogeneous nature of the real, his positions do not seem to be able to avoid the risks attached to it. Beyond the specific limits of Vasconcelian reflection, this impossibility is perhaps due to the equivalence, in some ways unjustified, between “rhythm” and “irrational” on the one hand, and the opposition between “rhythm” and “symbol” on the other.

Regarding this last aspect, rhythm belongs to the pre-linguistic sphere and, therefore, pre-symbolic. In this sense, as Vasconcelos observes, the shift from the investigation of rhythm to that of number would have occurred because of a poverty or impossibility of language. Of a fund of inexpressibility that the experience of rhythm reveals. Rhythm, as Kristeva analyses, precisely concerns this sphere, it concerns the child and its first emergence as a subject (its process of subjectification, of constitution of the subject), but on this side of the sphere of signification. It concerns the sphere of drive, it is the «semiotic chora»³⁹ in which the infant moves before the differentiation of bodies, before having a body proper. Such a process could occur because rhythm, which Vasconcelos does not define precisely but which is undoubtedly presented in the horizon of vitalism as an “instinctual” component, belongs to a philosophical-cultural discourse that characterises it from the outset as associated with the “natural” dimension. Its more technical aspect, in poetry and as a rhetorical tool, is certainly the fruit of a cultural process, but in its persuasive power it shows once again that its operation consists in leveraging or grasping

38. Colli, G. (1977). *La sapienza greca*, vol. I. Adelphi: p. 28.

39. Kristeva, J. (1974). *La révolution du langage poétique*. Seuil: p. 22.

a core presumably divorced from culture and concerning a component of the human being that claims to be extraneous to it. And yet, the concept of rhythm is decisively connoted from a cultural point of view, since it is immediately invested with precise values that, in fact, determine a sort of “rationalisation”.

The iteration, identity, and identification that rhythm seems to imply only occurs within the domain of the *logos*, within its discourse, its logic of non-contradiction and the distinction between “nature” and “culture” that it establishes. It is only by virtue of this rationalisation that rhythm emerges with this negative, irrational potential, because, paradoxically, it is already understood conceptually, linguistically, within the domain of the *logos* as defined in the West. It is only from within it that it shows its dangerously “pathological” character.

Only in this sense does it threaten to drag us out of every symbol, to submerge us in a universe of desymbolisation: rhythm, as observes Meschonnic, installs a «receptivity» that is inserted in the absence of the current understanding, that of the sign - the rationality of «the identical identified with reason»⁴⁰.

The enthusiasm placed in the sphere of rhythm, in its opposition to the symbol and by virtue of the equivalence between “rhythm” and the “irrational”, may therefore imply a process of “desymbolisation” of thought, the extent of which is perhaps still obscure to us, but it does so, paradoxically, by taking to extremes a concept that it itself has constructed.

If on one hand, therefore, the notion of rhythm is forged by the *logos*, on the other hand it presents itself as a “natural” component, recalling an idea of nature that, by virtue of the same iterative structure that characterizes rhythm, shows itself to be self-sufficient, self-governable. Here then, as in a sort of game of mirrors, rhythm becomes perhaps the secret dream of the symbolic-abstract thought, its utopia of emancipation from the mediation of the sign, which in fact not by chance nowadays finds its maximum expression in iteration and in its self-digesting and “self-sufficient” processuality in the algorithm. In this sense, technique and nature are perhaps not as distant as they seem. In fact, as Benjamin observed, while the first technique did indeed aim at domination over nature, the second is oriented towards a harmonious interplay between nature and humanity⁴¹. Modern man, according to Heidegger, has no need of symbols. In him, everything is reduced to an “entity”. It is the notion of rhythm, then, that imitates the self-processing character of nature, imitating it from the *logos*, thus creating a «palaeo-

40. Meschonnic, H. (1982). *Critique du rythme*. Verdier: p. 83.

41. Benjamin, W. (2008). *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*. Ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin. Translated by Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, Howard Eiland, and Others. Harvard University Press: p. 26.

logical» and «palaeo-symbolic» architecture that claims to give itself an alternative and that perhaps only describes the psychosis of the modern.

In any case, the question of rhythm seems to hide the problem of self-governability not only in the terms just highlighted, but also in a political horizon. It is no coincidence that at the basis of the reflection on the Cosmic Race, there is the idea of a “natural-instinctual” rhythmic process (in fact, we talk about aesthetic affinities and aesthetic-mystical era) that would like to avert dangerous imperialist implications. Barthes reflects on several occasions both on the “exit” from language, on the stages that precede or follow the “fall” into the world of signs, which indicate above all a lack, a reference to, a not being enough for oneself; a background, a depth and a transcendence. In this context, he reflected on the utopian destiny of socialism, the phenomenon of «idiorhythmia» and idiorhythmic communities, whose paradoxical *telos* was to perpetually destroy themselves as a group, the realisation of a world without social class and freed from the language, because from the moment there is language, from the moment there is enunciation, there is staging, putting in “place”, place, and power. Hence the link between *autarcheia*, rhythm and power⁴². Suggesting however, at the same time, a different way of understanding the subject and the political question starting from that first meaning of rhythm, *rythmos*, as apt to ward off the risks related to rhythm understood as an iterative structure and as a mimetic paradigm.

Therefore, in conclusion, even in the abysmal difference and distance that separates us from the text under examination here, it is interesting to reread *The Cosmic Race* from this perspective one hundred years after its publication, to find many resonances between those 1920s and our own, and to identify some unresolved questions that are still of great importance in the wake of the mimetic turn, or re-turn: what has happened to the ancient notion of *rythmos*? Is it an “anti-mimetic” concept? Is it possible to recover it in its most authentic sense, in its being first and foremost a «distinctive form» and «spatial configuration»? In its promise, neither utopian nor dystopian, but perhaps constitutively “heterotopic”?

These are undoubtedly considerations and questions that go well beyond the objectives of the Vasconcelian theoretical framework and, nevertheless, perhaps not beyond its deepest instances, not beyond the questions that these new paths of mimesis in postcolonial Mexico raises and claims. Questions, in the end, that can be traced back to the possibility of thinking differently and avoiding on several levels (philosophical, political, social, and cultural) dangerous implications of the *logos* as it has defined itself historically.

42. Barthes, R. (2002). *Comment vivre ensemble. Cours au Collège de France 1976-1977*. Seuil.

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