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The Adventures of the Thing: Mario Perniola’s Sex Appeal of the Inorganic

Abstract: This paper explores the concept of “inorganic sexuality” in the work of Italian writer and philosopher Mario Perniola. The main objective is to develop the controversial and original aspects of Perniola’s thought within his aesthetic theory of feeling. Perniola elaborates the so-called “thing that feels”, namely a feeling in which the neutral and impersonal dimensions of the things flow into organic life and vice versa. This perspective, as will be clarified, by dissolving the vitalist and spiritualist drives of the subject, enlarges the horizon of aesthetic feeling by welcoming what is commonly left outside of it: the inorganic and material world, in its surprising aspects, but also in its uncanny and disturbing ones. Therefore, the main goal of this paper is to show the significance and the value of neutral sexuality, which opens up a space of experiences beyond the traditional metaphysical oppositions such as masculine/feminine, organic/inorganic, alive/dead, real/virtual, gender/sex.

Keywords: Mario Perniola; aesthetics; feeling; inorganic sexuality; excitement; thingness.

Between things and objects

Mario Perniola (1941–2018) wrote extensively for more than 50 years on topics ranging from the theory of literature to aesthetics, from radical thinking to critique of Western society. Specifically, this paper will concentrate on his book entitled *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*, recently re-published by Bloomsbury.¹ This book contains several core themes of Perniola’s overall perspective and, at the same time, it allows the reader to understand better his developments over the so-called “neutral” and “thingly” sexuality.

To explain Perniola’s perspective on the relationship between thingness and sexuality, the first part of this paper clarifies the Italian philosopher’s understanding of the notion of “thing”, whereas the second deals with his theory of “inorganic sexuality”. My aim is to show that Perniola’s thought provides original and insightful

¹ Mario Perniola, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic* (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).

reflections on sexuality and thing theory within the current debates on these subjects.

The Oxford Dictionary of English defines the thing as “an inanimate material object as distinct from a sentient being”². According to this definition, tools, weapons, works of art, and artifacts – for instance – all fall within the “inanimate” realm of things (as opposed to the biological realm of animals and plants). Also, the Oxford Dictionary of English uses the term “object” as a synonym for “thing”. Interestingly enough, in fact, the same dictionary defines the object as a “material thing that can be seen and touched”. Therefore, the two terms appear to be interchangeable. In our everyday life, we indeed tend to use “thing” and “object” interchangeably. For example, we would not find it baffling to describe a hammer (or a ring, an amplifier, television and so on) either as a thing or an object; at the same time, we would be at ease in hearing someone saying: “I am not a thing/object, not a work of art to be cherished, I am a person”. In everyday life, not only are “thing” and “object” understood as interchangeable, they are also “debasement” terms. An individual designated as a “thing” – as suggested in the example – perceives it as a degradation of his/her dignity. Why is this so? And, in addition, should “thing” and “object” really be considered as synonyms or do they have a specificity?

One of the most enduring claims about the nature of things and objects was elaborated by the French philosopher and scientist René Descartes. His standpoint on the relationship between things and objects – as Paolo Bartoloni points out³ – has had, in fact, a tremendous influence in both scientific and philosophical Western thought.⁴ According to the French philosopher – Bartoloni agrees – “The relation between subject and object institutes an active agency (the subject) and a passive receiver (the object), to the extent of rendering the notion of relation null by reducing relation to possession.”⁵ In other words, the world for Descartes can be divided into subjects and objects: subjects analyze, objects are analyzed; subjects produce, objects are produced; subjects possess, objects are possessed. Ultimately, Descartes’ perspective conveys the idea that the world of things is owned by humans for their aims. In so doing, it is fundamentally anthropocentric. Things and objects would, in fact, merely be instrumental entities in service of human beings: a knife is useful in so far as it serves its purpose of – for instance – cutting bread; an optical microscope if it helps the scientist in seeing small objects invisible to the naked eye. And Descartes’ view does not account only for human relationship with inert entities. The essential condition of things and objects as tools and instruments can be extended to the ways in which humans today *use* forests, wild animals, and minerals as pure means to their ends.

² “Thing”, in *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. Angus Stevenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) ePub edition.

³ Paolo Bartoloni, *Objects in Italian Life and Culture: Fiction, Migration, and Artificiality* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 41.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

Scholars such as Latour,⁶ Callon,⁷ and Di Felice⁸ have elaborated on new theoretical frameworks in which the interactions between humans and non-human entities are re-shaped and re-thought in opposition to the enduring Cartesian model. Throughout the 20th century, in addition, several philosophers (such as Benjamin⁹ and Heidegger¹⁰), dissatisfied with the traditional Western approach to the world of things, have provided their own peculiar perspectives on the issue of “thingness”. More recently, other thinkers¹¹ have rekindled the attention on thing theory within the so-called Object-Oriented-Ontology (OOO) school of thought. Drawing from Heidegger’s dissatisfaction with the metaphysic understanding of things and objects as mere instrumental entities dependent upon humans, “Object-Oriented Ontology invites us to consider a philosophical shift away from relation and correlation, fluxes and encounters. The effort ought to be directed instead to the thing as such, and to thing’s ‘reality.’”¹² In other words, one of the main challenges of Object-Oriented Ontology’s theoretical framework consists of exploring and re-thinking the significance of things in themselves, in their autonomy and suchness.

In this paper, my aim is to explore Perniola’s perspective on the notion of the thing, a central theoretical category of his thought, specifically in relation to the idea of inorganic sexuality. Perniola, similarly to the OOO school (although writing in the early 1980s, almost two decades earlier), starts from Heidegger’s distinction between *das Ding* (the thing) and *die Sache* (the object).¹³ For the German philosopher, *Die Sache* corresponds to the “represented object”, or, to borrow Bartoloni’s words, “the result of a process of representational transformation of *das Ding*”¹⁴. Therefore, *das Ding* would enter – so to speak – the conceptual realm of *die Sache* every time the symbolic spell of language is cast upon it. On the one hand, the thing as such (*das Ding*) and on the other the thing transformed into an object of representation (*die Sache*). Perniola, as Bartoloni points out in another essay,¹⁵ maintains this distinction between things and objects. Bartoloni already provides a clue to it by entitling a section of his essay “Things and Objects: Mario Perniola” in order to underline that the

⁶ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁷ Michel Callon, “Some elements of a sociology of translation: domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St Brieuc Bay,” in J. Law, *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1986): 196–223.

⁸ Massimo Di Felice, *Paesaggi Post-Urbani* (Milan: Bevivino, 2017); Massimo Di Felice, *Net-attivismo* (Rome: Edizioni Estemporanee, 2017).

⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 2009).

¹⁰ Such as: Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1967).

¹¹ See for instance: Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28, 1 (2001), 1–22; Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002); Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2011); Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Continuum, 2008).

¹² Bartoloni, *Objects in Italian Life and Culture*, 44.

¹³ Mario Perniola, *Transiti* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1985), 223–29.

¹⁴ Bartoloni, *Objects in Italian Life and Culture*, 46.

¹⁵ Paolo Bartoloni, “Thinking Thingness: Agamben and Perniola,” *Annali D’Italianistica* 29 (2011): 141–62.

two concepts should not be merged and taken as one. The object, in this usage, is the thing “implacably transformed into an object of consumption”¹⁶. “Objectification” is thus understood as a perversion of the thing which gets spectacularized “in the context of a society of emotions”¹⁷. In other words, objects not only fall under the category of usability and presence-at-hand (Heidegger’s *Vorhandenheit*) but at the same time, are symbolic representations (in this case of the triumph of global consumerism and fetishism).

Nonetheless, as Bartoloni points out, this is not Perniola’s peculiar sphere of analysis. More specifically, Perniola does not focus on the critique of post-modern society that centers its forms of fetishism and commodification. Although the subject is presented at the crossroads of the organic and the inorganic, Perniola departs from Benjamin’s claims concerning the paradigm shift that occurred with the age of technical reproduction. In fact, even if one of Perniola’s most known books is named *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic* quoting Benjamin, the Italian philosopher does not emphasize the seductive aspect of commodities. On the contrary, as will be made clearer, he develops it in order to explore the significance of an “alliance” between the organic and the inorganic realms. But if Perniola does not follow or continue the theory of commodification within contemporary society, where is his analysis-oriented? For what reasons is the concept of the thing central in his philosophy? The overall aim of this paper is to answer these questions.

The excitement and neutral sensibility

According to this paper, the aim of Perniola’s main philosophical effort is to open, develop, and explore an alternative path to those of the Western metaphysical traditions. In pursuing it, Perniola builds his theoretical framework by linking figures, schools of thought, and experiences that – according to him – share an anti-metaphysical approach.

The volume, first published in Italian in 1994, represents the most complete investigation Perniola left into the notion of the thing. In fact, while other books published by the Italian philosopher, such as *Enigmas*,¹⁸ *Del sentire*¹⁹ and *Art and its Shadow*,²⁰ only have chapters and paragraphs dedicated to this theme, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic* is entirely devoted to it. The text, divided into 27 short chapters, explores the experience of the thing through critical dialogue between philosophy, sexuality, perversions, and contemporary experiences. From Descartes to Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, from fetishism to masochism, hardcore sonorities, radical fashion,

¹⁶ Bartoloni, “Thinking Thingness: Agamben and Perniola,” 158.

¹⁷ Ibid., 158.

¹⁸ Mario Perniola, *Enigmas. The Egyptian Moment in Society and Art* (London, New York: Verso, 1995).

¹⁹ Mario Perniola, *Del Sentire* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991).

²⁰ Mario Perniola, *Art and its Shadow* (London, New York: Continuum, 2004).

cybersex, artistic performances, and so on. Notwithstanding the heterogeneity of the fields investigated, the whole book is crossed by a common thread: the theorization of the individual as a thing that feels and the description of his/her experiences – mainly linked to inorganic sexuality.

As I will shortly clarify, inorganic sexuality, in contrast to its organic counterpart, is not guided by the pleasure principle for which the subject “feels” the sexual act in the first person. On the contrary, Perniola distinguishes between “pleasure” and “excitement” and privileges the second term. The Italian philosopher dedicated a short essay to this concept titled *Eccitazione (Excitement)*.²¹ The purpose of the essay is to investigate the experience of a “feeling from outside” or “impersonal feeling” through the notion of excitement. In order to explain the implications of the word excitement, Perniola does not focus on the Italian word but on the English one. Indeed, he continues, *eccitato* in Italian is too often translated and intended as “sexually aroused” or confounded with *inquieto*, *agitato*, *impaziente*, corresponding respectively with the English “restless”, “worked up” and “eager”. On the other hand, the English term excitement emphasizes much more the aspects of enthusiasm, stimulation, and physical emotionality. In Italian, thus, there is a critical prejudice about *eccitazione* rooted in spiritualistic or vitalistic assumptions. In other words, Perniola sees in *eccitazione* two polar meanings: sexual libido (vital) and moral assessment (spiritual). In response, his aim is to emancipate the concept of “*excitement* from the pleasure-displeasure problematic through which the Italian language imprisons *eccitazione*.”²² Excitement, thus, is not intended as a strong feeling of elevation, close to ecstasy, nor as a vitalistic descent into the realm of sexual libido, in which enjoyment and pleasure play an essential role. On the contrary, according to Perniola, excitement *accompanies* all those experiences related to the feeling from outside, that is, the experiences in which exterior and interior transmute into one another. Excitement “arises and is maintained when the boundaries between one’s own and the extraneous, between self and not-self fall: while pleasure keeps the ego closed in itself, in its intimate tact, in a feeling from the inside.”²³ And yet, neutral, epochistic sexuality does not mean the neutralization of feelings but an entrance into another realm, that of excitement: a feeling from outside that flows uninterrupted because it frees sexuality from the crescendo ending in the climax of coitus.

An example of the paradoxical “neutral sensibility”, which marks a shift from a natural and organically-oriented feeling to an artificial and inorganic one, can be found in the literature and in the experience of drug addiction. First of all, the addictive experience, according to Perniola, is characterized “by feeling one’s own body as a thing, by making the body extraneous like clothing”²⁴. Perniola suggests that the

²¹ Mario Perniola, “Eccitazione,” in *L'aria si fa tesa*, ed. Mario Perniola (Costa & Nolan: Genoa, 1994), 87–94.

²² Perniola, “Eccitazione,” 92. The word “excitement” is in English in the Italian text. In addition, all the translations from Italian editions are the author’s own.

²³ “Self” and “not-self” are in English in the Italian text.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

altered states of consciousness allow the individual to distance him/herself from his/her body and thus to experience it as a thing among other things, without a will, a subjectivity, or an identity, but just as an extension of textures, fabrics, patterns, almost a piece of cloth. In this sense, it is a process through which the body is felt not as personal but as impersonal; not one's own but autonomous; not as close but as distant. Addictions, Perniola underlines, devitalize bodies by removing them to the natural/vital cycle of tension, discharge, and reloading.

According to Perniola the addictive experience is paradigmatic for contemporary feelings. He even claims that drug addiction – or at least its main features – has shifted from pathology to the physiology of contemporary society.²⁵ In this regard, philosophy (intended as a speculative suspension) joins addictions more than poetry or art: “The union of philosophy and sexuality in the neutral experience of giving oneself as thing that feels and takes something that feels, creates a state similar to that created by drugs, because one is heedless of everything that is not one's own infinite continuation and repetition. Neutral sexuality sets up an infinite dependency because it is removed from biological rhythms and cycles. It is constituted by the radical movement of philosophy and is nourished by its excessive and uncompromising thrust.”²⁶ In other words, philosophical *epochè*, or suspension, abstraction, implies precisely a detached attitude similar to that produced in the experience of drug addiction. For this reason, Perniola affirms that philosophy and drugs have both assumed a paradigmatic, exemplary status since they can be considered the model of a radical contemporary feeling.

Beyond-gender sexuality

The complex issues emerging from *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic* are summarized in a letter²⁷ – worth reproducing in its entirety²⁸ – that Perniola sent to a reader in order to settle some of her doubts on the text:

Dear Madam,

[...]

A conception of sexuality linked to beautiful appearance, game, recreational fun, is too poor. It forgets, ignores, removes all the disturbing and perverse aspects from which excitement is born and maintained. It provides an idyllic and sweetened vision of the [sexual] experience. It is too tied to an ethical-aesthetic conception of sight, which was formulated

²⁵ Ibid., 17.

²⁶ Ibid., 16.

²⁷ I thank Ivelise Perniola for allowing me to reproduce this unpublished letter – in Italian in the original – for the first time.

²⁸ Only the name and contact details have been omitted.

by Plato and above all by neo-Platonism, for which sensitive beauty is appreciated as a moment, a step in the ascent towards transcendental, metaphysical and spiritual beauty.

From this conception a discrimination against the ugly, the sick, the old, the disabled arises, which has no foundation in the sexual experience! This discrimination is based on the neoplatonic ethical-aesthetic spiritualism.

My volume *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic* elaborates an alternative conception of sexuality: it does not step back scared before perversions (sadism, masochism, fetishism, vampirism ...), but crosses them: it questions the relationship between sexuality and pain, sexuality and reification, sexuality and death, sexuality and fear... It sees beyond desire and pleasure, looking for a bond between excitement and activities based on abstraction, such as philosophy, mathematics and music. It searches a way beyond the conflict between masculine and feminine, it seeks a cosmic experience regardless of beauty, age and generally form. Do we want to call it a conceptual sexuality (by analogy to conceptual art)? Yes, provided that we keep in mind that it is based on the idea of the human being as a “thing that feels”.

[...]

Many kind regards

Mario Perniola

This letter concisely clarifies the main thesis of *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic* by introducing several key notions. The concept of excitement appears again, specifically intended as an experience created and maintained by all the phenomena – perversions and uncanny feelings – left behind by natural sexuality. In fact, while the spiritualistic and transcendent conception understands sexuality as a straight line, almost one-dimensional, in which the only viable directions are ascent (sexual arousal until the coitus) and descent (the fall into a normality without tension after the brief climax), neutral sexuality is given in the horizon of complete availability and permanence (through excitement, similarly to an addicting practice).

Neutral sexuality is indicated as an alternative, “conceptual” because of its in-between status that places it next to perversions and abstraction. Organic sexuality, conversely, sees in perversions deviance from the traditional sexual act, which is oriented to pleasure and orgasm through conventional forms of sexual stimulation. It is no coincidence that Massimo Verdicchio, commenting on Perniola’s *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*, argued: “What is at stake is no longer the subject but the philosophical-sexual thing which triumphs over individual subjectivities and over the world of instrumentality and expectations.”²⁹ Moreover, I claim, Perniola’s goal as an inter-

²⁹ Massimo Verdicchio, “Reading Perniola Reading,” in *Ritual Thinking. Sexuality, Death, World*, ed. Mario Perniola (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2000), 36.

pretext of contemporary feeling is to challenge established clichés and prejudices of sexuality. From the letter, it emerges, in fact, that our daily and traditional perception of sexuality is heir to Platonic spiritualism, which has always considered sexuality according to partial terms such as ascent/fall, beauty/ugliness, male/female, youth/senescence and so on. This division represents and reproduces the metaphysical discourse inside the sexual field. The essential link between the erotic attraction and its object's bodily beauty, for example, usually taken for granted, was first established – in Western society – by the Platonic tradition. Plato, in fact, in his *Phaedrus*, asserted the essential unity between sexuality, attraction, love on the one hand, and beauty on the other. Consequently, in his theory of ideas,³⁰ love sparkles when seeing a body that reminds the subject of the ideal beauty contemplated by the soul beyond heaven (before being born and falling into the actual body). In doing so, sensitive beauty is appreciated as a moment, a step in the ascent towards a transcendental and metaphysical spiritual beauty. Perniola's position on sexuality could also be compared to that of Judith Butler, who, in the same years, was publishing her seminal volumes on gender theory³¹. Both Perniola and Butler, in fact, criticize sex and gender distinction. According to this distinction, on the one hand sex is understood as a pure natural/biological fact, and, on the other, gender would be the result of cultural inscription. For both Perniola and Butler, instead, the very way in which the idea of sex is conceived as an uncontaminated pre-cultural realm is already influenced by ideological motifs and beliefs. Nonetheless, they depart in their main aim: for Butler, one of the crucial goals consists of re-defining and re-shaping the very notion of gender by criticizing other gender theories (such as those of Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir). Butler deconstructs the dialectical, universalist, and essentialist conception of gender by claiming that gender should be understood in terms of performativity. In other words, through practices that the individuals perform in their everyday life, the very meanings, borders, and significance of the idea of gender change unceasingly. Conversely, Perniola does not wish to provide a contribution to gender theory but to provide the framework for a post-gender theory. In order to clarify this passage, the following interview, released by Elena Tavani and Giampaolo Gravina, might be useful: “The ‘sexuality’ of which I speak does not stand before the gender, but after it: it does not represent an originary fact, uncontaminated from the historical relations of power between men and women; it asserts itself beyond the historical conflict between the sexes. It is thus something artificial, linked with the opening of a new experiential horizon, not characterized by the relationship with the spirit, nor from that with life, but from the relationship with the ‘thing that feels.’”³² Perniola, therefore, is not interested in the significance of the notion of gender – as it is for Butler – but in stepping out from its very idea. Whereas for Butler there is a continuous exchange and flow

³⁰ Plato, *Fedro* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2010), 47.

³¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York, London: Routledge, 1999); Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York, London: Routledge, 2011).

³² Elena Tavani, Giampaolo Gravina, “Per una sessualità neutra. A colloquio con Mario Perniola,” *Almanacchi Nuovi*, 2/3, (March 1995), 108.

between the masculine and the feminine elements that people perform in their lives, that is, a transit which makes the notion of gender fluid and in never ending re-definition, Perniola directs his focus on the combination between the broader organic realm (of which masculine and feminine are two elements) with the inorganic one. In so doing, a feeling of “uncanny”, in the Freudian sense of the term (*Unheimliche*),³³ emerges from *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*. That is to say, through his writing style and his provocative conclusions, Perniola managed to make unfamiliar an everyday activity (sexuality commonly understood as the pursuit of pleasure-orgasm) by creating a distance within the reader, a displacement that takes him/her away from his/her ordinary experiences and conceptions. While sexuality is commonly associated with pleasure, eroticism, and hedonism, in Perniola’s book, it emerges as an extraneous and estranging practice, a subversive dimension:

When you realize the realization of the Cartesian thing that feels in the cunnilingus or in the fellatio of your partner, when you notice in the coherent and rigorous unfolding of philosophic prose the inexorable movement that brings you to lick the cunt, the cock or the arse of your partner who has become a neutral and limitless extension of cloth variously folded, when you yourself are able to offer your body as a desert or a heath so that it can be traversed by the detached and inexorable examination of the eye, the hands and the mouth of your lover, when nothing else interests you or excites you or attracts you besides repeating every night the ritual of the double metamorphosis of philosophy into sex and sex into philosophy, then, maybe [...] you have celebrated the triumph of the thing over everything, you have led the mind and the body to the extreme regions of the non-living, where, perhaps, they were always directed.³⁴

In this quote not only, so to speak, the familiar experience of sexuality is “distanced” by almost pornographic prose, but, in addition, an alternative conception of sexuality is brought “closer” through what is commonly understood as far from it: the philosophical, theoretical discourse. From the very table of contents of the book the reader might remain puzzled: “Descartes and the Thing that Feels”; “Kant and the Feeling of the Thing in Itself”; “Hegel and the Thing as ‘not this’”; “Wittgenstein and the Feeling of ‘This Thing’”, etc. Why a book on sexuality has so many chapters devoted to classics of speculative philosophy? How can the Heideggerian *Ding*, the Kantian thing in itself, or the Cartesian *Res extensa* open up the experience of neutral sexuality? The answer lies in the fact that, for Perniola, it is a prejudice claiming that philosophy – for its speculative orientation – leads away from the earthly features of sexuality. It is rather the opposite: sexuality is considered as a philosophical experience enabling

³³ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin, 2003).

³⁴ Perniola, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*, 16–17.

the exploration of “unknown lands”. In this regard, Perniola himself asserts that his philosophical style aims at making “unlawful matches and divorces of things”³⁵. Perniola borrows this “method” – taken from Bacon’s remarks on imagination – and reproduces it within philosophy, even though he does not consider his uncanny “matches and divorces” as “unlawful”, but as anti-metaphysic.

Considering the individual as a “thing that feels” implies precisely an entrance into a desubjectivated and suspended dimension, a neutral feeling. The sex appeal of the inorganic means being against the personal pronoun “I” by praising those feelings emerging from an impersonal “it is felt”. Perniola, in doing so, widens the sphere of affections, by including in it also artificial, neutral and cosmic/astrol “feelings”. Paradoxically, Perniola argues, the “I feel” is a narrow and partial aesthetic experience; only from the osmosis between “I” and the “world” it is possible to say “it is felt” without perceiving it as a reification or alienation. Now, even though the individual becomes smaller by turning into a thing in a world of things, at the same time, he/she experiences the same world according to an alternative, lateral and marginal with respect to classical Western metaphysics. Metaphysics, both in its spiritualistic and vitalistic ramifications, is considered by Perniola as a theoretical construction through which the individual experiences reality by privileging what is far and transcended (God-spiritualism) or what is close but only insofar as it is organic (animal-vitalism). Metaphysics, in other words, goes only upwards or downwards: what is organic remains separate from the inorganic. Perniola’s argument is instead lateral, marginal, moving *in-between*. The post-human philosophy developed by Perniola can be understood only if the classical polar oppositions and dualisms are left behind. The difference emerges if, within the same space, reality, human, thing, animal, or plant, the process of reciprocal osmosis takes place. Perniola, through his researches, demonstrates how it has always existed alongside metaphysical dichotomies – in the specific case those of organic/inorganic, life/death, exterior/interior – a less common way of thinking and acting, an alternative feeling and experiencing of reality that has never polarized the things of the world but that have always kept them together. By not focusing only on one of the two sides of the supposed polarity, the neutral dimension does not imply a neutralization of feeling. In fact, the metamorphosis of the human into a thing and of the thing in a feeling surface implies devitalization as well as revitalization; animation and inanimation; abstraction and concreteness; form and content; and, ultimately, life and death: “becoming a thing, just a thing [...] [means] venturing out in the open, having death behind one rather than before one, exiting from time as conceived as a straight line, little by little becoming space.”³⁶ As Steven Shavero claimed in an article concerning Perniola’s concept of thing: “Perniola invents a new ontological category, that of the ‘thing that feels’: something that is utterly apart from the duality of subjectivity (which we usually equate with sentience) on the one hand,

³⁵ Mario Perniola, *Sobre el pensar barroco* (Lima: Instituto Italiano de Cultura de Lima, 2014), 6.

³⁶ Perniola, *Enigmas*, 46.

and of insentient objects on the other.”³⁷ The neutral dimension implies the awareness that polar oppositions are entangled within a logic of false conflicts: turning oneself into a thing means understanding how dichotomies (even masculine-feminine) are actually interpenetrating, *transiting*, flowing into one another unceasingly. Thus, the neutral is the third term between organic and inorganic that allows oneself not to fix unduly on one of the two poles and, at the same time, keeps them both active.

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³⁷ Steven Shaviro, “On The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic,” in *The Pinocchio Theory*, 2005, <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=440>, acc. June 1, 2020.

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Article received: April 28, 2020
Article accepted: June 23, 2020
Original scholarly paper