

Editorial

In Praise of Superficiality

Santiago Verhelst Hoyos*

Universidad Nacional de Colombia

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Oh, these Greeks! They knew how to live:
for that, one must bravely remain standing before the surface,
the fold, the skin, venerating appearance, believing in forms, in
sounds, in words, in the entire Olympus of appearance.
The Greeks were superficial — precisely because they were pro-
found!

— Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

The matter is already implicated; it is tangled, diffuse. One cannot clearly tell where it ends or where it begins. Always at the edge, at the limit, dwelling upon shells, neighboring coastlines and lying near plains and tangents. The only possible horizon—and here horizon means boundary—is the body: the surface. A limit is not merely the place against which all virtuality comes to a halt. Quite the contrary: a limit is also, and preeminently, a first step, a point of departure, an initial moment. Lodged among the things that differ from one another, within the things that we ourselves are, the mass attributable to everything insofar as it is surface demarcates distance and proximity, the disposable and the welcoming, the light and the heavy, the obtuse and the comforting, the possible itself. The possible must be enacted, and its enactment consists in touching and being touched: touching with the eyes, touching with the voice, touching with hearing, touching with taste, touching with thought, and, of course, touching with the skin.

Of the world, we know only its surface. No matter the path we take or the efforts to which we stubbornly commit ourselves, we are always circling around and inhabiting the surface of everything that we are not; we remain forever in contact only with limits. Appearance—image,

* Master's degree in Political Studies, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Medellín Campus. Contact: sverhelst@unal.edu.co; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2198-4166>

likeness, contour—is the fundamental datum. The essence of everything insofar as it presents itself to us is its appearance. The only thing common to everything we know is that it appears; all is mediated by superficiality: Being and Appearance coincide (Arendt, 2002). Everything that affects us—whether animate or inanimate, technical or political, living or dead, sweet or bitter—depends upon its fundamental constitution: its appearance, its surface. There exists nothing and no one in this world whose existence does not imply either beholding or being beheld. Therefore, nothing can occur in singularity; this is the sermon of all mute things. We are not alone, nor can we conceive of ourselves as isolated enclosures entirely detached from everything else; we are always among all that surrounds us. Never, not even in sleep, do we cease to be in contact with the things of the world. Appearance is what qualifies that “between”: above or below, to one side or another, near or far away—everything is mediated by the absence or presence of objects, that is, beings that appear, things possessing volume. There is no subject, if such a thing is to be maintained, that is not simultaneously an object, since it is destined to appear within another’s perceptual field. To perceive and to be perceived constitute the two functions under which every creature must unfold itself in the world—a world in which being and appearance coincide.

The great events or heroic narratives that have organized the horizon of expectations and the distribution of what is imaginable—such as the future—have always been circumscribed by great surfaces. One of the privileged surfaces, geometrically and politically speaking, is the city. The metropolis, the *civitas*, has always played a preponderant role in the production of knowledge, economic concentration, and the structuring of politics, among many other things. One may consider the close relationship thought—especially philosophy—has maintained with the city. It has often been repeated that philosophy was born in Athens, port and polis alike; the Academy and the Lyceum correspond to the places in which they are situated: great surfaces. This idea may also be considered in light of medieval monasteries and the formation of universities. Nevertheless, life may also be understood, more radically—radical here meaning related to the root—from smaller and more minute spaces: the house, the *oikos*, the historical invention of bedrooms, the forms laid upon the table, the kitchen, the spatial organization of neighborhoods, or classrooms. These represent liminal surfaces, both private and public, in which foundational experiences of relation, contact, and modes of perception are configured. Together, these smaller spaces allow the structures of everyday life to materialize in acts of contact. From them emerge the habits, inscriptions, and dispositions that sustain the relational fabric that is the world—not the world of any single subject, but of all beings capable of appearing insofar as they are surfaces.

To advocate for surfaces and appearances places us in what W. Benjamin (2018), in his *Theologico-Political Fragment*, describes as a profane condition. There are no higher realms nor any messianic breath capable of redeeming all events. Thought, in its infinite superficiality—as intentionality itself—is confined to the surfaces it is capable of indicating; it exists in and through the world. In this sense, thought possesses texture, weight, size, and extension, insofar as

it belongs to everything outside, everything beyond the threshold. To celebrate superficiality is to urge us to think the world—and the things inhabiting it, whether moving or resting in immutable stillness, whether mute or not—from the place from which we situate ourselves in order to refer to them. It means not assuming that there is something hidden behind or beneath things, but rather embracing the beautiful multiplicity through which everything presents and unfolds itself. From this perspective, it becomes urgent to situate all possibility as act amid surfaces. This displaces any notion of futurity as mere virtuality or as a logic of waiting and instead pushes us toward what the present offers and shelters within itself. To position this as an act is to affirm that every gesture, every centimeter, every exteriority, every form, and every spatial nuance participates in the effective configuration of reality. Surface is not limited to a boundary or frontier that must be crossed; rather, it is the anticipatory and active sphere where the eventual becomes world.

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