

In my End is my Beginning
Dialectical Images in Times of Crisis
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Suspending the Crisis: *die Ewige Wippe* in the Eighteenth Century

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Abstract In his 1935 work, Paul Hazard identifies the period between 1680 and 1715 as the occurrence of a crisis in the European consciousness, marked by a transition from a prior belief system to the formulation of new sensitive frameworks for perceiving and interpreting reality. The 'oscillation' of the European mind finds a parallel in the artistic production of the time, notably French, which returns to display the previously disappeared image of the seesaw. Within three principal case studies, this paper questions the eighteenth century representation of the swing as a possible visual metaphor for the suspension of the European mind, deferring the consequences of inaction while preserving the latent potential for a playful renewal.

Keywords Eighteenth-century art. France. Swing. Hazard. 1715.

Summary 1 Hazard's 'European Crisis' Between 1680 and 1715. – 2 The Suspended Oscillating Thread of the Swing: From Object to Images. – 3 Beyond the Dangers of Inertia: The Renewal of the Artist's Identity. – 4 Conclusion: The *Ewige Wippe*. From the Eighteenth Century to the Contemporary.

1 Hazard's 'European Crisis' Between 1680 and 1715

In his 1935 volume *La crise de la conscience européenne*, translated into English as *The Crisis of the European mind*, French historian Paul Hazard (1878-1944) explores a crisis that emerged in the 'European consciousness' between 1680 and 1715, notably within the



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cultural and economic spheres of France. Hazard's thesis addresses the 'European consciousness' not in a geographical strictest sense, but as an intricate psychological construct, composed of prevailing ideas, beliefs, and convictions.

By the late seventeenth century, global exploration and transnational exchanges had intensified, fostering an unprecedented fluidity in economic, social, and intellectual boundaries across Western nations. This newfound and previously unobtainable ability to travel, accompanied by a new flurry of curiosity, led many of the personalities of the century to embark on far-reaching journeys, also pursuing the teachings promoted to become a "galant homme" (Hazard 1935, 1: 6). According to Hazard, these movements served as catalysts for a shift and a put into relativity of the European mind's own identity. As individuals traversed distant lands and encountered diverse cultures, they began to challenge the entrenched worldview that had previously been perceived as unique and absolute. The 'European mind', through its exposure to the Other, grapples with the relativity of its own values and belief, questioning the once-unassailable singularity of its intellectual and moral framework. These confrontations, Hazard suggests, destabilized the certainties of early modern Europe, setting the stage for a re-evaluation of its identity and bringing a period of transformation. Moreover, Western countries were not shaped only by physical voyages beyond the borders of one's homeland, but also influenced by the forces of global trade and imperial expansion. Through these channels, Europe was infused with objects from distant and foreign worlds.¹ Travel literature achieved remarkable prominence during the century. According to Hazard, among the most significant cultural exchanges of the time was the introduction of stories and fables from the Orient, most notably through the translation of *One Thousand and One Nights* from a Persian manuscript by Antoine Galland. Moreover, different experiences from regions such as China, Persia and Turkey provided proofs that contested the dogma of a singular, homogenous reality. They illuminated the existence of a rich plurality of perspectives, undermining the notion of an absolute or universal truth.

The crisis that Hazard detects, manifests as a profound disequilibrium, a space of stirred tension which rather ended in the construction of new values, founded in a different imaginative and sensitive conscience. Indeed, the second part of Hazard's analysis shifts focus to the 'reconstruction attempts' of the century. The historian interprets how various philosophical currents of the eighteenth century sought

1 For recent insights into the exchanges between Western eighteenth art and non-European countries, as well as for the historiography of these global studies, see Nebahat 2015; Étienne 2018; Guichard, Van Damne 2022; Kobi, Smentek 2024; Tillerot 2024.

to restore a degree of stability, to mitigate the pervasive doubts and uncertainties, and to steer European thought away from the extremes of Pyrrhonism, an uncompromising form of skepticism. For instance, Locke's theory tried to reinstate confidence in the significance of the human spirit. The advance of scientific knowledge and the *esprit géométrique*, which was then imparted to ladies and gentlemen of the time through the circulation of manuals, further supported the endeavour towards intellectual renewal. Central to this reconstruction was the work of Isaac Newton, whose theories bestowed a newfound solidity and empirical reliability upon the understanding of natural phenomena. By the century's end, the scientific method provided a framework through which reality – once destabilized by the relativity of values – could acquire the gravitational weight as a proof of a stable and measurable existence. Moreover, from a literary perspective, texts like Fenelon's *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1699) contributed to the pursuit of happiness by advocating for a domain rooted in the earthly realm, lived with tolerance and joy.

The crisis delineates the transition from one intellectual system to a different emotional and cognitive framework. According to Hazard's reconstruction, eighteenth-century consciousness wanders between two poles of thoughts: from stability to change, from the ancient to the modern, from Catholic dogmas to the thoughts of the Protestant North, from the doctrine of divine providence to the secular ideals of progress, towards an intellectual development in the direction of experimental science, Lockean empiricism and Newton's theory, all of which are predicated on a trust in natural law and the empirical study of physical phenomena. The years that capture Hazard's attention mark a period of oscillation between these opposing systems, through the persistence, resistance and abandonment of past and future intellectual and moral forces. In this movement, the European mind discerns reality not as a harmonious integration of ideas, but as a dynamic interplay of contradictory forces which, rather than converging, reveal through their oscillation the terrain for a future resurgence of thought.

Despite its enthusiastic and novelistic tone, Hazard's analysis remains a model for reflecting on these centuries and discerning a moment of transition between historical antitheses. While certain refinements may be warranted – for instance, regarding Hazard's assertion of the eighteenth century's alleged incapacity to produce poetry – one of the essay's most profound contributions lies in its exploration of travel as a catalyst for psychological transformation. Paul Hazard does not recount the mobility adventures in terms of physical trajectory followed; he excavates within them the emergence of a radically altered conception of reality and emotional sensibility,

shaped by encounters with the Other.² Finally, the volume itself bears the symptoms of a European crisis, having been written in the looming shadow of rising fascism and authoritarian regimes in the 1930s. On one level, the text grapples with the formally unspoken question of what Europe, as the central figure of the work, profoundly signifies. With a measured optimism, it turns its focus towards the spiritual and intellectual forces that perpetuate the renewal of a shared European consciousness, even amidst its internal fractures. The efforts of otherwise anonymous journalists, translators, publishers, are depicted as essential in promoting and preserving evolving values. At the same time, the volume, published on the heels of Ernst Cassirer *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* (1932), engages with the broader question of how to comprehend the intellectual legacy of Europe's eighteenth century and the revolutions that unfolded within the liminal space identified by Hazard. Finally, in Italy, *La crise de la conscience européenne* has been taken on and translated by Giuseppe Ricuperati, who discerned in Hazard's work an original as well as a critical source for recasting "the identity of Italian spaces in terms of circulation, reception, exchange, within a European reality" (Ricuperati 2006, 4).³

In addition to the causes that Hazard attributes to the fundamental rupture in the eighteenth century, several other events destabilized the increasingly fragile geopolitical order of the time. This contribution thus adopts a long-chronological frame of the eighteenth century, extending beyond 1715. In France, the collapse of John Law's experiment in bank credit between 1716 and 1720 marked one of the most dramatic steps toward the unveiling of a public debt whose insurmountable gasps in repayment would later be exposed with revolutionary consequences. Law's economic system relied on speculative investments in Louisiana and Est Indies - precisely rooted in the border expansions identified by Hazard, which also lay at the origins of the European colonial market and the transatlantic slave trades. Moreover, within the French context, the nation's ongoing internal conflict against adherents of Jansenist morality, driven by a persistent conservative agenda, ignited a fresh surge of anti-clerical and anti-dogmatic sentiment. Additionally, during the period Hazard examines, particularly between March and April of 1714, the Treaty of Utrecht temporarily halted hostilities in the War of the Spanish Succession.

² Furthermore, the volume showcases an alternative chronology of the eighteenth-century, tracing the roots of the ideas "that appeared revolutionary in 1760" (Hazard 1935, 1: IV), back to the 1680s. This revised periodization resonates with more recent scholarly undertakings, for instance those of Gustave Lanson (1857-1934), who emphasized the intellectual groundwork laid in the French collective consciousness well before the era conventionally attributed to the Enlightenment.

³ Unless otherwise specified, all translations are by the Author.

2 The Suspended Oscillating Thread of the Swing: From Object to Images

Between 1680 and 1715, and broadly through the years leading up to 1798, the games of the swing and of the seesaw gained a total new popularity within the social habits and courtly amusements of the time. Initially constructed between two trees before their eventual mechanization, they became a core of leisure in private gardens and communal parks. The term coincides in the French language of the eighteenth century with the “*escarpolette*” described, for example, by the *Dictionnaire universel* di Antoine Furetière, as an

exercice où on se brandille était assis sur un baston attaché de travers à une corde qui est pendue en quelque lieu haut. Les écolier et les laquais prennent grand plaisir au jeu de l’escarpolette. (Furetière 1690, 1: n.d.)

According to the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* of 1695, the swing is defined as “une espèce de siège suspendu par des cordes sur lequel on se met pour être poussé et repoussé dans l’air” (Académie française 1695, 233). The *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* states more precisely the object as “un siège ou planchette que l’on suspend par deux cordes, et où l’on se place pour se balancer” (Larousse 1866, 849). The term also comes to designate a state of mind: “*fam.* Tête à l’escarpolette, tête folle; caractère léger, étourdi”, to further indicate “*fig.* état. d’indécision” (7). As Larousse (1866) further explains, the mechanism of the swing requires that the same amount of force be applied both to move forward and to return: two opposite extremes are brought together, united by the equal effort of the *joueur*.

As the century progressed, the swing began to draw attention also from the burgeoning field of science. Medical treaties on physical education advocated swinging as a beneficial exercise for alleviating melancholic moods. In Joseph Raulin’s *Traité des affections vaporeuses du sexe*, published in 1769, swinging is recommended as an exercise to restore from melancholic moods, while Samuel Tissot, in his *Gymnastique médicinale et chirurgicale* (1780), echoes this therapeutic advice, further reinforcing the notion that this seemingly innocuous pastime held tangible physical and emotional benefits.

The motif of the oscillating swing emerges not only in the gardens of grand estates, such as the Domaine de Marly built by Louis XIV en route to the Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye (see Denis, Klein, Nickler 1990), but also permeates the artistic production of eighteenth-century visual culture. An iconographic survey (Wentzel 1964) of swinging scenes in Western art underscored the disappearance of this image, during the Medieval and Renaissance periods. It first

appears in the genre of grotesques and in prints.⁴ Furthermore, initially present in small easel paintings, such images frequently decorate eighteenth-century interiors.⁵ In this genre, however, the swing does not function as a literal representation of the popular game, constructed between the trunks of a tree and in the open air. Rather, the image manifests as delicate figures, as acrobats, puttis, playing amid the gracefully suspended lines of finely decorative grotesques, adorning parietal spaces.

In a different way, as thus representing a widespread game in the social customs of the period, the swing becomes from an object to an artistic motif. In France, it achieves full resonance as a reflection of societal custom, particularly within the pictorial genre *fêtes galantes* – a term introduced in 1717 by the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris to designate Antoine Watteau (1684-1721)'s *morceau de réception*. Indeed, the motif of the swing circulates fluidly across a variety of media imbuing these works with a dynamic practical mobility.⁶ As also Posner stated: “It was at the beginning of the eighteenth century in France that the woman on a swing started to appear regularly in painting” (1982, 75). More specifically, “women swinging are almost the rule [...] and at no time they so much or so brilliantly depicted as in eighteenth-century France” (73). In these depictions, the scene typically portrays a female figure suspended in motion, propelled into oscillations by a male counterpart.⁷ Far from a delicate expression of ‘galanterie’ this imagery is inextricably rooted in a libertine context, catering to a commercialized, sensual, and predominantly male gaze, laden with erotic undertones. As a result, these portrayals have attracted critical attention, particularly regarding the underlying power dynamics and entrenched gender hierarchies they reinforce.⁸ A softened interpretation of this oscillation light-hearted play motif needs instead to be reappropriated, in the light of a deeper questioning of

⁴ In 1704, the artist Jacques van Shuppen (1670-1751) exhibited a painting the Parisian Salon, depicting a *Woman on a Swing* (oil on panel, 58 × 43 cm, Chateau de Parentignac, Georges de Lastic collection).

⁵ For instance, the oil oval panel of Pierre-Jacques Cazez (1676-1754), *La Balançoire* (1732), which decorated the Petit cabinet du Roi in Versailles (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Inv. 3177).

⁶ For a recent insight on the mobility of the image in eighteenth century production, derived from the shift in art-historical study from the reception to the production of images as objects: Pullins 2024.

⁷ See Faroult 2020; 2023. For a recent study at the crossroads of pornographic and visual studies, and for a bibliographical insight on erotic images in the eighteenth century, see Tauziède-Espariat 2022. For another analysis into the erotic body in Rococo space, and the male gaze in eighteenth-century French paintings, see Bryson 1981, 98.

⁸ For instance, Hubert Robert's watercolor *The Seesaw (La Bascule)* eventually forecasts gender and political tensions, although many of its formal aspects remain elusive.

the moral implications of this motif, as well as for the erotic atmosphere in which it unfolds.

In the particular instance of the swing as it emerges from set Watteau's atelier, the object does not fully realize its potential for motions. On the contrary, it remains firmly suspended; the woman appears poised in a state of immobility, with some imminent accident threatening to disrupt the delicate dance of amorous courtship. Within the suspended tension of the courtship moment, the image encapsulates an exuberance of life in stark contrast to the military conflicts just finished, echoing the historical suspension of crisis during the regency of Philippe II d'Orléans (1674-1723) between 1715 and 1723.

In an early known version of the motif, the artist from Valenciennes depicts the image of the *Escarpolette*, likely rendered as an arabesque motif, in a portion now preserved in the Sinebrychoff Art Museum of Helsinki. Rendered in delicate hues and framed by a perspective defined by two tree trunks, extending toward a temple adorned with caryatids, the composition portrays a female figure seated with ease between taut ropes. Behind her, a male figure prepares to initiate the swing's motion. A drawing of the woman, associated with this scene, is conserved as the National Museum of Stockholm.⁹ According to the larger part of the artistic historiography,¹⁰ the swing conveys the amorous atmosphere of the composition, its inconstant and erratic movement symbolizing the notion of fickleness traditionally attributed to women's desires in the cultural framework of the eighteenth century (Posner 1982, 76). The inscription beneath the printed image further elucidates the association between the seesaw's oscillation and the fleeting whims characteristic of courtship. Moreover, in its repetitive and wavering motion, the swing is transfigured into an explicit erotic metaphor.

This pleasure activity was depicted by Watteau in several scenes, as *Le Plaisir Pastoral* (Chantilly, Musée Condé) and *Les Agréments de l'été*. In *Les Bergers*, a painting now in Berlin (Grasselli, Rosenberg 1984, 375-8) the woman's is turned. This image was also engraved by François Bucher (1703-1770) in the second volume of the *Figure des différents caractères, de Paysages, et d'Études* (1728). From these early cases, the swing as a symbolic image moves into the intermediality of the eighteenth-century art market practices,¹¹ also by virtue of the publishing activity promulgated by Jean de Julienne from 1721.¹² Indeed, the motif is extensively re-adopted by his successors such as Jean-Baptiste Pater (1695-1736) (*La balançoire*, 1695-1736,

⁹ Rosenberg, Prat 1996, cat. 131.

¹⁰ In particular: Posner 1982; Cusset 1999; Faroult 2020; Milam 2006.

¹¹ For updated scholarship on the subject, see Voghterr et al. 2021; Pullins 2024.

¹² In particular: Dacier 1922; Tillerot 2010.

oil on canvas, 46.3 × 56.5 cm, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, no. PD.22-1977) and Nicolas Lancret (1690-1743) (*L'Escarpolette*, 1735, oil on canvas, 70 × 89 cm, London, Victorian and Albert Museum, no. 515-1882).¹³ Within the economic genre of the *fêtes galantes*, the swing generates and amplifies amorous tension between a couple of lovers. In the ephemeral, erotic and social ritual of courting, its movement exemplifies a perpetually excited equilibrium. In the fragmented composition between different images evoking the chronological moments of courting, it summons consequential temporalities.

3 Beyond the Dangers of Inertia: The Renewal of the Artist's Identity

time she stopped
going to and fro
all eyes
all sides
high and low
for another
another like herself
[...] another living soul
(Samuel Beckett, *Rockaby and Other Short Pieces*,
1981, 9-10)

In 1980, Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) composed a short play titled *Rockaby* for the director Alan Schneider, evoking the motion of rocking an infant back and forth, to calm and soothe them to sleep. The motif of oscillation, and its suspended time is reimagined in the form of a poetic mediation of an elderly woman - akin to a child cradled by a lullaby - seated in a rocking chair. Through the play, the woman's pre-recorded voice recounts fragments of her past. Meanwhile, the woman on the stage utters the word 'still'. This refrain, alongside with the motion, sustains a liminal space of introspective exploration. The rocking chair evokes the rhythm of a cradle: its movement instills reassurance, creating a space of comfort, reminiscent of childhood. By the play's conclusion, the woman fails to synchronize with the pre-recorded voice: the chair ceases its movement, the female voice pronounces the end of life. In Beckett's poem, the rocking motion embodies a rhythm of renewed activity. As long as the voice persists, as long as the woman continues to speak, and as long as the oscillating chair sways, life remains open to potential renewal. Against the dramatic static of inaction, the rocking motion enables the vitality of generational continuity and the ongoing quest for self-identity.

¹³ Posner 1982.

Prominent within the visual imagery of the eighteenth century, the seesaw can be interpreted as a metaphor for the dynamics of personal self-exploration and renewal. The present inquiry thus seeks to probe whether the moral implications of this ostensibly playful motif can be extended beyond its immediate social connotations and understood within the broader framework of Hazard's notion of the eighteenth-century crisis. Such a crisis is conceived as a period of oscillation between opposing forces, wherein the remnants of a prior intellectual or moral position are not fully relinquished but remain in a state of tension with emergent ideas. Moreover, this interpretation avowedly takes into account the situational contributions of modern codes developed since the 1960s. More specifically, among the interpretive lenses through which the symbolic form of the swing can be examined, it remains valid to mention Roger Caillois' (1913-1978) sociology of games and the understanding of the swing as a movement that conceals the intimate motion of an inner tension that opposes stasis and, in an abrupt moment of violent flinching, releases its hidden desire for disorder. As Caillois wrote:

Il s'agit d'une tentative de détruire pour un instant la stabilité de la perception et d'infliger à la conscience ludique une sorte de panique voluptueuse. [...] il s'agit d'accéder à une sorte de spasme, de transe ou d'étourdissement qui anéantit la réalité avec une souveraine brusquerie. (1967, 67-8)

From Caillois's perspective, the act of swinging incites an ephemeral yet exhilarating disruption of sensory perception. As a motion propelled by human agency, the equilibrium and disequilibrium inherent in the swing's arc are actively pursued by the participant. Not a static game, this oscillatory movement functions as a deliberate exertion of willpower in opposition to primal fear, whereby the individual manipulates their own corporeal mass to invoke the euphoric sensation of vertigo. The resultant dizziness, induced by physical exertion, finds its moral analogue in the individual's subconscious yearning for flux and dynamism, symbolizing a latent desire for chaos and destruction. It reveals itself as a sudden, all-consuming frenzy that overtakes both children and adults alike, serving ultimately as an assertion of personal identity and agency:

Des traitements physiques variés les provoquent: la voltige, la chute ou la projection dans l'espace, la rotation rapide, la glissade, la vitesse [...]. Parallèlement, il existe un vertige d'ordre moral, un emportement qui saisit soudain l'individu. Ce vertige s'apparie volontiers avec le goût normalement réprimé du désordre et de la destruction. Il traduit de formes frustes et brutales de l'affirmation de la personnalité. (1967, 70)

An emblematic painting engages the imaginary of the swing through an artistic consciousness aware of its own underlying crisis. Shifting from secure positions to the disorientation induced by the sense of relativity, the artistic sensibility dissolves the perils of immobility by rediscovering the creative vertigo of ideas.

Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *The Swing* (1767-69) was realized under this creative tension. The recent restoration of the painting, undertaken by the Wallace Collection in 2021, has shed new light on the work with technical insight, allowing for the examination of documents pertaining to the work. The consequently recent analysis has advanced new hypotheses about the origin of the painting and identity-laden significance it holds within Fragonard's biographical and artistic trajectory.¹⁴

When realizing the work, Fragonard was facing difficulties with the Royal Academy and the 1767 Salon.¹⁵ This ultimately led to a formal rupture between the painter and the institutional commissions.¹⁶ However, this separation proved advantageous, as Fragonard consciously sought commissions in a private market. Within this context, the history of *The Swing* intertwines with the artist's tension in demonstrating his ability to fulfil the new patron's desire. Despite the work has been considered as a creation strictly aligned with the libertine preferences of the committee Charles Collé (1709-1783), recent scholarship by Jackall suggests that the patron's expectations failed to be entirely met (Jackall 2024, 456). A divergence occurred as Fragonard metaphorically pulled the string toward a more personal assertion of his artistic identity, thereby diminishing the patron's original intentions. This analysis therefore moves from the motif of the swing, present in Watteau and his followers as a representation of a moment of social pleasure, in the search for a suspension of the tension of desire and a present without destruction. The present interpretation actually moves to identifying how this heightened even formal dynamism, ignited by Fragonard's swing, serves as a catalyst for a reflection on the resilient identity of artistic individuality.

Firstly, the painting can be situated along the social rituals depicted by Watteau, his followers, and later Boucher, all of which engage with the imagery of the oscillating woman as seen through the lens of male erotic desire. However, Fragonard's painting introduces an enhanced degree of verisimilitude into this artistic lineage, primarily due to the inclusion of realistic portraits among the figures, a requirement explicitly stipulated by the patron. While Fragonard adheres to

¹⁴ The analysis is published in Jackall 2024.

¹⁵ See Sheriff 1990; Lajer-Burcharth 2018.

¹⁶ See Sheriff 1989; Catala 2002.

many of the compositional elements wanted by Collé, who sought to integrate religious and romantic elements, incorporating recognizable figures into the compositions and maintaining the iconographic codes of the swinging scene, the convergence between Collé's intentions and Fragonard's final work falters when Fragonard deliberately strips the figure initially intended to represent a bishop of all recognizable features. Also the young man on the left, supposed to be the patron, reclines awkwardly on the bare earth. The passivity of the male figure stands out in relation to the women adding a grotesque tone to the image. Furthermore, he reinterprets the traditional iconography of Cupid, drawing from Falconet's (1716-1791) *Seated Cupid (L'amour menaçant, 1757, marble and copper, 185 × 47.5 × 68.5 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, no. BK-1963-101)*, transforming it into playful and almost grotesque allusions. Fragonard thus intensifies the erotic and mischievous undertones of the work.

This understanding can also be further enriched with Ewa Lajer-Bucharch's analysis of the eroticism expressed by Fragonard's works as more explicit and modern than that of earlier artists.

As Lajer-Burcharth (2018, 180, 181) notes, drawing upon Michel Foucault's history of sexuality (Foucault 1978, 53-73), the eighteenth century witnessed an increase cultural linkage between the 'true self' and sexuality, ultimately culminating to what Lajer-Burcharth describes as "the cultural individuation and personalization of sex" (2018, 180). As a result,

Fragonard's œuvre formulates a new sexual imaginary in which erotic experience is redefined in individual, privatized, and through physical terms. (181)

More specifically, Fragonard subtly subverts Collé's commission by employing the compositional features of history painting as advocated by the very Academy, which has dismissed his previous work, *Groupe d'enfant dans le ciel* (1767, oil on canvas, 65 × 56 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre, no. 144),¹⁷ as insufficiently respectful of the institutional genre. Through his "reliance of citations from established artistic sources, the use of eloquence gesture, and a clear central narrative intended to instruct the viewer" (Jackall 2024, 457), Fragonard demonstrates his capacity to function as a history painter - while Gabriel-François Doyen (1726-1806), who initially declined the commission, has implicitly suggested Fragonard's lower status. Moreover, the artist's signature on the painting, inscribed as 'FPinxit', forecasts a declaration of this artistic individuality.¹⁸

¹⁷ Cuzin 1987, 92-3.

¹⁸ For the implications of Fragonard's particular signatures, see Guichard 2012.

Fragonard imbued *The Swing* with a degree of satire and melodrama, elements that Collé ultimately considered excessive and unsuitable (Jackall 2024, 545-6). In this divergence from the academic institutions and commissions, the motif of the swing acquires the significant weight of the artist's ambitions. Like a taut thread in the conflict over the misaligned expectations with the patron, the artist himself metaphorically ascends it. *The Swing* thus captures the "momentary fortuity" (Kavanagh 1996, 224) of this tension, balancing between artistic renewal and the patrons' demand. In doing so, Fragonard not only injects new layers of meaning into a narrative market by eroticism, but also reasserts his reinvention, the strength of his 'touch' and pictorial achievements, the refusals of the constraints imposed. Indeed, in considering the formal features of Fragonard's painting, Milam (2015, 192-209) further emphasized the work's significations. Fragonard's painting thus resists to only evoke women's inconsistent desire. The image, which Fragonard represented at least two other times,¹⁹ engages in a visual interplay of distortion that challenges the viewer's perception. It combines the beholder's experience towards the "relativity of vision" (Milam 2006, 66), while simultaneously showcasing a dizzying manipulation of painterly materials. Fragonard thus "transformed emblematic conventions in order to muse on the vertiginous experience occasioned by a playful application of paint" (Milam 2015, 129). In terms of the painter's distinctive 'touch' (Lajer-Burchart 2018, 216), the oscillating image of the swing becomes a sinuous object through which he vividly displays the dynamic movement of his brushwork. As the motif revolves, it undergoes a seamless transformation akin to the reconfigurations of artists operating within a shifting art market. Ultimately, the dizzying choices of Fragonard ultimately proved to be, as the title of the painting suggests, as fortunate coincidences (*hasards heureux*).

During the years concurrent with the challenges faced by Fragonard, another artist incorporated the swing oscillation into a pictorial testament that does not conceal the drama of a present in crisis. Between 1793 and 1797, Giandomenico Tiepolo (1727-1804) decorates his personal countryside villa in Zianigo.²⁰

The project is undertaken on his own initiative. The act has been largely recognized as one of a revolutionary freedom (Pedrocco 2000) and it is not much dissimilar to that considered for the history of Fragonard's swing. Indeed, Mariuz's analysis of Giandomenico Tiepolo's frescoes (Mariuz 1971, 81-9) shed light on the artist's ability

19 Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The See-Saw*, 1750-52, oil on canvas, 120 × 94.5 cm, Madrid, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, no. 148; and *The Swing*, 1775-80, oil on canvas, 215.9 × 185.5 cm, Washington, National Gallery of Art, no. 1961.9.17.

20 The frescoes are now preserved in Venice, Museo di Ca' Rezzonico.

to renew his own visual language beyond a patronage system which favoured neoclassical tendencies, detracting from the splendours Giandomenico had learned from his father (Mariuz 1971, 87). As the art historian interpreted, the Tiepolo's Pulcinella mocked the pretended vision of history as a series of heroes who accomplished sublime events; in his ambiguous figure, between laughing and crying, Pulcinella signified the relativity of every value (81-9). Additionally, in an historical proximity with French Revolution events and their impacts on Venetian political status, Tiepolo animates carnival figures, satyrs, acrobats, as protagonists of a moment of critical destruction of precedent orders. He shapes and embodies in his villa the contemporary surrounding world. The narrative unfolds with a rhythm that expands and contracts, characterized by increasingly lively tonal progressions, culminating in the emergence of the figure of Pulcinella among the depicted characters, a representation that evokes the "popular soul" (85) of mankind. In the final room, Pulcinella mounts a rope tied as a rudimentary swing. Might this scene be interpreted not only within the framework of the grotesque genre to which Tiepolo's fresco is inherently connected, but also as a contemplative reflection by the artist on the nature of his art and the existential condition of humanity?

Indeed, the placing of the swing's image in Giandomenico's house increases its significance. The rope is stretched on the ceiling of the room: the human gaze of the beholder has itself to twirl to endure a movement of vertigo, thus, to explore with a physical movement of the neck and the head the visual motion results of the swing itself. While a 'new world' approaches, this game is imbued with significant resonances with the nobles' figures that Giandomenico's father had made soar in his painted skies, alongside putti and mythical personifications. At present, rather the man wears a mask and can no longer ascend to the heavens. The vertiginous motion of the oscillating game provides a renewed impetus to endure movement. But rather than choosing stasis, in the aphasia of despair for a world in crisis, springing from the void of the scepticism (Mariuz 1971, 86) Pulcinella chooses to continue playing.

4 Conclusion: The *Ewige Wippe*. From the Eighteenth Century to the Contemporary

Giandomenico Tiepolo's satirical characters inhabit a suspended temporality, wherein the light of the past casts impenetrable shadows upon the future and glimpses of potential revolutionary outcomes. The space of history almost dissolves, yet the swing's movement articulates a temporal passage. In the interpretation of this seesawing tension, time assumes the rhythmic cadence of a rope stretched

between two poles: the extreme of stability, its relinquishment, and the opening to a hypothetical new beginning. The symbolic resonance of the swing understood as a moment of ascension relative to one's surroundings, on an elevated position in which one is propelled from one extreme to the other, in suspended air, as part of a broader reflection on both the response of the artist in times of crisis as well as the temporalities of images and their survivals, is also explored by the German cultural art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929). The idea is addressed in Didi-Huberman's study of Warburg's conception of artistic survivals (Didi-Huberman 2002).

Among Warburg's original sketches, *die ewige Wippe* (the perpetual swing) is illustrated (Didi-Huberman 2002, 185, no. 25).²¹ The small sketch depicts two figures balanced on a seesaw. At the centre stands a figure and the letter K as in *Kunstler* identifies it as the artist. On either side, the weights of the painter (M as in *Maler*) and the beholders (Z as in *Zuschauer*) sustain the oscillation. Thus interpreted, this *Dynamogram* visually conceptualizes the oscillating temporalities of images, a non-linear rise and fall determined by the engagement between the artist and the audience. The 'perpetual swing' encapsulates a rhythmic conception of time, wherein the artist, like a tightrope walker, channels the energy to resist stasis. Positioned in an elevated yet intermediate state - neither on the ground, nor in the open sky - the artist's movements on the tightrope governs the ascendent and descendant of the two poles (Nicastro 2022, 29). The rocking mechanism installs duration between two reactionary forces, maintaining the movement in perpetual tension.

In accordance with the historical framework advanced by Hazard, this period of crisis in European consciousness is marked by an oscillation between two diametrically opposed conceptual realms. It vacillates between the past and the emergent future, inhabiting both poles simultaneously, and navigating the tensions inherent in these contrasting mentalities. Before progresses in temporality, it lingers in a fleeting yet euphoric experience of equilibrium. The metaphor of the 'perpetual swing' - from its role as an object of cultural fascination inducing a pleasing and salvific vertigo, to its depiction as a recurring visual motif in eighteenth-century French art - encapsulates the convergence of multiple forces. Much like the social resonance of Giandomenico's *Pulcinella*, the swing becomes a possible modern metaphor for the individual's existential pursuit of self-awareness amidst tumultuous conditions. Finally, the artist metaphorically mounts the swing, chose the highest position beneath the ceiling sky. The circular motion of the swing enables a continuous metamorphosis of forms

²¹ The small sketch is taken from Warburg's unpublished project for the *Monistic Psychology of Art*. See Didi-Huberman 2002, 177.

and ideas, defining permanence while suspending escape routes toward a final revolutionary destruction. In a moment of stasis, the swing introduces a moment of radical vitality, realized through acts of “transgressions, subversions, and reversals” (Kavanagh 1996, 237), where the boundaries of thought are tested. In this image, the challenges of thought are negotiated, seeking to resolve conflicts through the interplay of a balance, pleasant in its sensation of suspension and promising continuous exhilaration.

Finally, even in contemporary times, the swing serves as a chosen object not only to challenge hierarchies but also to provide a suspended space between two forces conceived as opposites, waiting oppressive conditions and political tensions. In June 2019, Ronald Rael, Virginia San Fratello and the *Colectivo Chopeke* constructed the temporary installation entitled *Teeter Totter Wall*. It featured three pink swings along the wall erected in the desert between Juárez and El Paso as part of Trump’s anti-migration policy to divide the United States with Mexico (Harris 2019; Ludel 2021). Despite some criticisms levelled to the artistic intervention (Pearl 2021), the installation employed the swing as a symbolic medium, engaging with the concept of borders and the opposition of two entities defines as the opposite. It offered a playful solution for addressing tension, using suspension to achieve a balance of forces and envisioning possibilities for renewal.

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