

## **Senses**

The following case study I wrote as a contribution to a Swiss research project in 2021/2022.

### **Abstract**

Subject matter of the study and the project is a research into "Traversing Topologies: Imagining worlds and knowledge with/through artistic research". In this paper, written during the pandemic period, I concentrated on connecting my idea of topological theory with the name of my hometown Assen and other associative places, like in Switzerland, by means of a three-way operation. This process resulted in three material types that should be inspired locally:

1. A framework: in this case a triangle was drawn on a map, of which documentation was shown. The triangle or "the large, relatively stable trihedron which traverses and orients us". (Serres 1985/2016)
2. The recipe of a characteristic odor. The odor or olfactory fluid consists of herbs and plants.
3. The recording of sound, an ambient noise or environmental sensitivity.

As a conclusion I make a plea for creativity, esthetics and the knowledge-oriented use of the senses to get to know more of 'the world'. Realizing at the same time that there is always the problem of how to share this knowledge, if this is the topic of language, translations, and the solution by poetic practice.

Gert Wijlage, March 14, 2024

## **Senses**

A conceptual elucidation in three steps, about how to imagine places in this world, like in The Netherlands and Switzerland.\*

But first: some questions and answers

1. Is the topological method we proclaim up to his transversal task? (yes, maybe)
2. Can we be objective in the sense of discriminating between work, play and social disposition? (no)
3. Is there more substantial to tell than what we picture in this case (maybe, yes)

The whole story

- 1, Toponymic - what 's in a name
- 2, Topolocal - material sensitivity
- 3, Topological - intellectual accordance

Toponymic - what 's in a name

As from the point of an artists' initiative, in this case DeFKA based in Assen NL, we could start from an analysis of the origin of the name 'Assen'. It probably stems from the word 'es' plural 'essen' which means an agricultural elevation in the landschap. It also may mean a tree, a deciduous tree from the olive family Oleaceae or a musical note, the tone "e"

lowered by a semitone, or the abbreviation of the countryname Spain. The Latin root of Es even points to the basic notion of 'essence'. (1) Next to these historical toponymic references, there is a more topical explanation which places Assen even more in the center of a dynamic conversation: the translation of Assen in English is Axis, in Italian it is Asse. From there it is just a one-way to our attention concerning axiology. (2)

This analytic procedure is more than just an associative way of combining corresponding vocabularies. It points to a geographic interest, a soundscape particle and an international aspect. We claim the persuasion that from our point of view the concept of Assen as a centrifugal force operates in different parts of the world with similar drives and effects, probably recognizable by the following criteria: being a safeguarded nucleus, somehow slightly more accentuated than the surrounding immediacy. But each axis has a special local ring to it. For example, the closest corresponding geographies to Assen are the axis of Haus Assen in Germany and the town of Assens in Switzerland.

Acting conform to the symposium's call, I quote: "- the relationships between positions of geo objects", we propose to draw a relation between the different environments which come close to the concept of Axis-denomination. And further we suggest as a hypothesis to transpose this concept to Luzern as a temporary derivative and nucleus in an active geographical triangle, tying in with Valois and Ticino as vertices of the artificial legs.

#### Topolocal - material sensitivity

All things are material. Perception is the way we connect to the world. The phenomenal sensations we acquire provide for the experiences which lead to a general discourse about esthetics. We choose three types of esthetic debate: the tactile, the hearing and smelling. You have noticed by now that we assumed the function of the visual already present. True, but the aspiration of a complete inner picture by tactile, hearing and smelling could be considered valid. We try anyway to communicate sensations that will activate you in experiencing our topological scenario of the triangle LVT -Luzern, Valois, Ticino- compared to the triangle AME -Assen, Meppel, Emmen- we encounter in Drenthe, the Netherlands, where we come about the small forest of Klein Zwitserland, i.e. Small Switzerland. Of course we offer you on these three levels the peculiar, local, nuances we found during our research on these premises. This process resulted in three material types: the recipe of odor, the sound, the triangle, of which documentation is hereby shown.

1. The triangle or "the large, relatively stable trihedron which traverses and orients us"  
(Serres 1985/2016)



2. The odor or olfactory fluid consists of herbs and plants or Plantae: Crataegus or Hawthorn (Meidoorn) as the main influence and toptone, next to seconds Anthriscus sylvestris or Cow parsley (Fluitenkruid), Convallaria majalis (Lelietjes-van-dalen) and basic tones Juniperus communis (Jeneverbes), Eucalyptus, Salvia rosmarinus (rozemarijn), Laurus nobilis (Laurier).

3.The sound, an ambient noise or environmental sensitivity combining auditory shreds of forest sounds typical of this peatland region and highway N48 which connects directly Klein Zwitserland with Assen.

#### Topological - intellectual accordance

As we continue our conversation it might clear the ground to comment beforehand the obvious: that the word 'triangle' contains the idea of "to try" which comes close to the literary form of "es-say". We perform research 'to say it', to identify observations which we collect via hearing, osmosis and tactile information.

These sensations of material substance are empirically detectable. We have to combine them with an intellectual effort to create meaning. To give a substance that can be a contribution to cultural communication and knowledge development. Nevertheless not forgetting that each part of the information has a local denomination, has a topological background or, in other words, comes into focus of a topological format or methodology. Therefore we jump from the classic Aristotelian topologica to the modern interpretations and math applications. First of all there is L.E.J. Brouwer (1881-1966), who within the logics of topologica accentuated the role of intuition, becoming a subjective intuitionism, and philosophy of mind. (3) Even to the extent that his views border at a spiritual level and the mystical. It is on the one hand incongruous with a scientific attitude but, as in our case as artistic researchers, a broadening of methodology. His way transcends the paradigmatic pitfall and demands an open eye for unexpected experiences. On top of that his interference with 'meaning' and the theory of significs and semiotics, turn his insights into fertile ones to compare with other topologists like Michel Serres and Eugenio d'Ors.

Of course we must mention the two lines of discourse which were dominant in modern philosophical discourse around the turn of the 20th century: the positivist scientific one and the individualist intuitionist one. (4)

Serres (1930-2019) took a different road from all his previous knowledge supplies and choose a radical, topological individual, path. Via mathematics and philosophy he finally chooses to make his research public in a literary way. Explicitly ignoring all his former academic punctuation he writes about anything topical in a very subjective way without using the usual references. It is his topological method, constantly relating different aspects to find a unity of speech. Thereby discarding explicit unbridgeable dialectics and ever aiming at synthetic reasoning. His method is possibly to be defined more by his interest in contextual information than just his preference for a literary style. A context which is a metalevel from that of pure science, it is the urge to think and to draw a complete picture of cultural development that is an esthetic collection of scientific and mythological objectives. In fact he is combining social practice - pragmatics - mathematical scrutiny and philosophical discipline. In his essential book *Les cinq sens*, a volume that is very instructive in our story, he demonstrates via the five senses his topological method of gaining knowledge. One of his latest publications, *Petite Poucette*, conforms his moral guideline of promoting creative communication that is his fascination since the *Hermès triologie*. (5)

Communication is one of the vital topoi on which Serres and D'Ors share common ground. Eugenio D'Ors (1881-1954) has had a lifelong career as a columnist for periodicals and magazines. He is the inventor of the so-called Glosas, short commentaries about topical issues which are published on a daily basis.(6) As Serres he choose a literary style to release his views on society. His philosophical publications show a strong tendency to pragmatism, a theoretical current that especially in psychology circles seems to have been rising in popularity. The interesting thing is that he was aware of the necessity to overcome bold pragmatic conservatism to be able to innovate. (7)

Characteristic of his view is the pleading for a mutual influence of philosophy and daily life, or what could become 'a philosophy of practice' which comes close to the dual concept of 'art&life'. And because of its basic flexible, reflexive, nature, may also approach a practice of artistic research. The most pregnant of his early hypotheses is the idea of proclaiming a philosophy of work and play: "Ha de ser una filosofía humilde, cotidiana, usual. Viva, vivaz, vivible y vividera."(8)

#### History.

Both Serres and D'Ors were at some time educated by Bergson. Both have a kind of vitalism in their philosophical genes. Both share this competence of stressing the complexity of meaning in the use of a language that must offer comprehensibility. Both have as Brouwer a penchant for the incongruity of science, humanities and metaphysical matter and are happy with it to make it work, to handle it as plausible unity. All three theoreticians connect rational, scientific epistemology to subjective interventions by means of what generally falls under 'intuition'. Aiming at truth and what supposedly is 'reality'.

Of course one must regard the intellectual background of the cultural era. The rising and emancipation of the individual around 1900 brings next to a lot of subjective theorizing - psychology and psychoanalysis - a social dynamic that brings theory and art in close contact to social movements. Like to-day. Historically the emancipation of the senses, personal feelings and interpretations, equates the rise and radical awareness in politics. Brouwer is in his inner circle of signifiants acquainted with people who have sympathies for communistic alternatives. Serres is admittedly a loner, but nevertheless 'un pacifiste engagé'. Eugenio D'Ors has consecutively very much sympathy for Catalanismo and Nationalism. The intrusion or acknowledgement of social involvement is predominant, then and nowadays.

These three people resourcefully inform us about how the sensory trajectory integrates with our intellectual and intuitive reasoning giving a special attention to what could be common or communal in 'common sense'. That which could and should easily be communicated by artistic research with its audience. The effectivity of the topological method and its successful transfer lies in the sharing of the knowledge of the topoi by agreeing on its essence and contextual significance. Thereby needing input from a variety of artistic and scientific disciplines including sociology and anthropology. Not forgetting the wisdom one finds in nature and streetwise, in daily life.

#### Topology today's 'to do': extension of topical modes

Summarizing we have to consider how fluctuating our topological research as a method is. Is it more a research in a spatial sense, sensational and all that, more than deep investigations into a specific area? More associative than primary empiricism?

Our aim in this particular project is to transfer possibly relations and similitudes between certain environments in Switzerland and the Netherlands via the *topos* of a triangle which is definable by the senses and supported by topological theory. The result is a process containing smell, hearing and tactile/visual information. The triangle as a sensual format can be added and raised with different levels up to a pyramidal point, like the tip of a graphic pencil. The triangle is also a scheme which connects the project as a 1)the trihedronic sign with the 2)geographic triangle as the object and 3)you, our audience and interpreter. Extensions of the tripod concentrate on axis, landscape, meaning. On top of these we put the triad: id, Switzerland, common sense. (9)

#### Background theses: counterparts

Part of the essence of our project is the idea of creativity and esthetics as necessary to conquer a more complete view of the world. According to D'Ors view about esthetics: it is always the result of our actions.

The issue of the topologies as a methodology encounters an ambiguity which can be a nuisance as well as profitable. According to Serres it leans on a theory of knowledge that is defined by mixture, confusion and fluidity. But as such its information is also hard to knock down: a method is intrinsic a vast territorium. Same goes for the concept of axis, es and centrifugal forces. Essentialism is, philosophically speaking, discarding important side effects just as an overstressed use of analytics. The essentialism that we wish to make relatively prone is what has been known as 'the affective turn'. In other words the combined effort of rationalizations and sensational experiences, including bodily and political sensualities, to gain knowledge during artistic research. Research that cannot ignore the axiological incorporation of esthetical and ethical values.

The topological frame – we realize - within our triangle concerns as essentialia the presence of a fixed centre, like Assen and Luzern. Maybe we should be aware that the topological also offers possibilities to look at the margins for new experiences within its deformations. In sofar our project has a cultural denomination, it is of course linking art and society but not expressively politics. Nevertheless one could probably always find something social incorrect or historically uncanny. Any methodology, when exposed, could be interpreted wrongly or *au contraire* its sincere meaning and supposed application.

If we cite Eugenio D'Ors, it is because of his cultural valuable, literary and philosophical, contribution to our topological research. We must however mention, as part of a decentralized fringe reasoning, that D'Ors occasionally has been qualified as a franquist citoyen or collaborator, especially during his service as Director of Fine Arts during the 1940-ties.

Personal information about the theorists of topological research we like to separate from their actual given content. But if it contributes to the geographical formation in the local background, one finds that Brouwer has been living and tutoring in Groningen, close to Assen. Serres grew up in the Cathar region in the South of France and D'Ors has been very active in Catalonië and Madrid. As for names dropping we left out very influential conceptualists like Mannoury, Whitehead, James and Peirce and limited as much as possible references to Bergson and Latour. Serres would have liked that, we presume.

Other counterparts: Welby, Weil, Zambrano

As a historic relating counterpart there is a different triangle of epistemological practice in stock. As mentioned in the beginning about Brouwer: “his interference with ‘meaning’ and the theory of significs and semiotics, turn his insights into fertile ones to compare with other topologists like Michel Serres and Eugenio d’Ors.”

We suggest another triad to add to the pyramidal scheme, a scheme that is intrinsic to the theories involved, especially as published by Victoria Welby and her semiotic circle. (10) To put the insights of Brouwer, Serres and D’Ors in a broader cultural format we need next to Welby to refer to Simone Weil and Maria Zambrano. It is Welby who is the source of the Dutch Signific Circle from which Brouwer got his influences. Victoria Welby inspired Brouwer as she had been the main influence on the Signifische Beweging. As a result of her profound interest in language, in what we intentionally mean with what has been said, she designed a method called Significs which uses a triad-formula to explain the workings of speech and might be honoured as a precursor of the more modern semiotic theories.

It is Simone Weil who inspired Serres as he confessed in the interviews with Latour. Her political activism seemed to have contributed to his own choice of pacifism. Also her esteem of beauty and mysticism as essential values became part of his vocabulary.

It is Maria Zambrano who is very consequent and standing out in her social engagement as well as in her formidable plea for a Poetic Rationalism as a methodical option concerning ‘translation’. “Maria Zambrano’s philosophy is poetic not only in style but also in content: She believes that poetic thinking is necessary in order to understand the deeper aspects of human existence. Her work can therefore be described as poetic philosophy”. (10)

### Common ground

That leaves as almost last item and reprise the item of language and how to relate to audiences assuming an adequate conceptual framework or at least a common sense. It is well known that results of artistic research are not restricted to talks and paperwork, it is mostly the visual, hearing and performing which contribute to knowledge of the object. However how to communicate this kind of sensuous, sensational, sensible, accordingly embodied relations in its original affections? One probably needs always a transfer of information into another linguistic domain. A domain maybe yet unknown. It is thus not too farfetched to recapture the first questions and point again to the issue of ‘translation’ and what do we mean or suggest by naming things, calling up images, putting values on the spot. The interest in the presence of a common sense understood as a form of mutual understanding, is therefore an assumption that needs to be confirmed in its meanings. (11) What is ‘common’ might be called a priority to find out in its concern about: “what is our common ground?”

And finally the 100.000 euro question:

“What do we gain, what do we lose, in transferring information, in global transition”.

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Assen, March 14, 2021

\*DeFKA Research contribution to SARN's Call to Conference 2021 – 2022 about 'Traversing Topologies: Imagining worlds and knowledge with/through artistic research'.

Our contribution is 'not considered'. As such we declare this, our research document, as a case study between souvenir and residue. The conference is introduced on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and the conference is postponed to May 2022.

### **Notes**

1)History and Etymology for esse, Medieval Latin, from Latin, to be, exist. Entry "Esse", at Merriam-Webster.com, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/esse>. Accessed 27 Apr. 2021. Also, A) in scholastic philosophy 1: actual being, Existence 2 : essential nature : Essence. In Spanish and German es means it or it is. B) de word 'Es' is a homonym with, and used in modern Latin and the Freudian 'Id', or I.D., identification, idea. That is what makes research robust but at the same time might be its weakness: hard to leave alone and change views.

2)in French: Axe, in German: Achse.

3)L.E.J.Brouwer in Stanford Encycl. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/brouwer/> "Dutch mathematician and philosopher who lived from 1881 to 1966. He is traditionally referred to as "L.E.J. Brouwer", with full initials, but was called "Bertus" by his friends. In classical mathematics, he founded modern topology by establishing, for example, the topological invariance of dimension and the fixpoint theorem. He also gave the first correct definition of dimension." Also: L.E.J. Brouwer – van Mystiek tot Wiskunde, Dirk van Dalen, 2013.

4)for an extensive conversation about these intellectual currents, read the famous interview/paper between Serres and Bruno Latour (1998), see list below: Literature

5)Michel Serres, The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies, 1985/2008; a film portrait: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYcN4Q6yy-k>; Steven Connor, Topologies, Michel Serres and the Shapes of Thought, 2002:"In Serres's work, topology is also connected with aspects of 'projective space', or space centred in the phenomenology of the subject, which typically involve questions of right and left, before and behind, above and below. Thus a triangle is topologically equivalent to a circle, a cube is topologically equivalent to a sphere and, less intuitively, perhaps, a doughnut is equivalent to a teacup and a two-holed doughnut to a teapot. Because topology is concerned with what remains invariant as a result of transformation, it may be thought of as geometry plus time, geometry given body by motion."(...)"But, no matter how abstract it may become, topology remains fundamentally bodily. One of the reasons for the persistence of topological thinking in Serres's writing may be that topology marks and maintains the meeting of abstract and concrete, the activities of analysis and the primary operations of touch and moulding."

General information: <https://christopherwatkin.com/2020/02/27/so-you-want-to-read-michel-serres-start-here/>

6) Joan Cabó, review of Josep-Maria Terricabras (ed.), El pensament d'Eugenio d'Ors, Girona, Documenta Universitaria, 2010, in Journal of Catalan Intellectual history, Issue 3, 2012

Marta Torregrosa Puig, Biography and bibliography of Eugenio d'Ors:

<http://dbe.rah.es/biografias/7365/eugenio-d-ors-y-rovira>

7)Eugenio d'Ors, El secreto de la filosofía, 73-74. Geciteerd in Nubiola, 1997; In 1914 publiceerde D'Ors een compilatie van Glosas onder de titel La filosofía del hombre que trabaja y que juega.

8)Jaime Nubiola, 1997, La revolución de la filosofía en Eugenio d'Ors:  
[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jaime-Nubiola/publication/39657200\\_La\\_revolucion\\_de\\_la\\_filosofia\\_en\\_Eugenio\\_d%27Ors/links/0c960519efe5536cc5000000/La-revolucion-de-la-filosofia-en-Eugenio-dOrs.pdf?origin=publication\\_detail](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jaime-Nubiola/publication/39657200_La_revolucion_de_la_filosofia_en_Eugenio_d%27Ors/links/0c960519efe5536cc5000000/La-revolucion-de-la-filosofia-en-Eugenio-dOrs.pdf?origin=publication_detail)

9) Pieter Wisse made the signific Welby-triangle into a linguistic meta triadmodel. Zie ook noot 10) hieronder.

10) Pirjo Kukkonen, Welby's Significs and Translation as Meaning in Process and Progress, Three modes of meaning-Sense, Meaning and Signification, 2012; Pieter Wisse, Victoria Welby's Significs meet the semiotic ennead, 2003. If we had to reconsider our contribution to the Sarn Conference concerning topological methodology, we certainly would start out by focussing on this new triangle Welby, Weil, Zambrano. Zambrano citaat: philopractice.org/web/zambrano. She lived for a while in Switzerland.

11)Again it is D'Ors who provocatively boost this kind of sense, naming it 'seny'. Besides, there is the term 'commons', which refers to a public use and even in a political function aiming at a bottom-up movement to improve democratic decision making. For further research check Serres 1985/2016, pag.70-80, mentioning 'sensorium commune' as incorporating a healthy public opinion and identity extrapolating into shared geographies, communal feelings, embodiments. And of course Thomas Paine's Common Sense, 1776, about (American) independence and civic emancipation.

11bis) mores D'Ors.

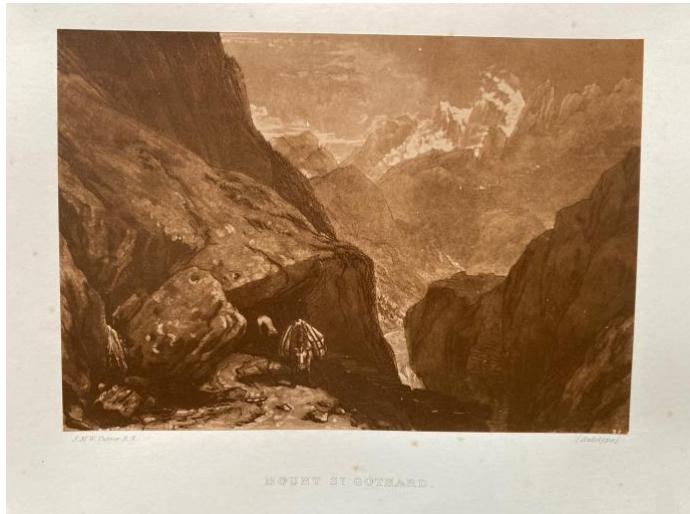
Indeed, more D'Ors means mores. The fascination about research is its tempting winks into further corners of history to cover truths and its sources. When looking into D'Ors oeuvre it is unavoidable one confronts a relation between his Catalan endeavors, his Castillian career, his influence on franquist/fascist ideology and european ambitions. It is more than tempting, it is topical considering the political and moral issues of today. Is it possible to separate and to filter the ideas we find sensible, prolific and morally sane from its neighbouring concepts we despise, when they come with the same voice? From artists it is not unusual to honour them or as 'artist' or as 'a person', a person who makes mistakes. Concerning D'Ors it is quite difficult but his work is definitely interesting when we overlook the thematic relations in all kinds of directions that concerns us. If however one adheres to the aspect of common sense, seny, including healthy ethics, the estimation turns critical and negative. Meaning that it is still recommendable to read and investigate his publications but his social attitude and choices in the light of his presumably positive meanted literature, is very dubious and rejectable.

Naturally we have to consider in this picture the particular atmosphere in these days and the specific historic constellation of countries cruising around uncertainties before, during and after the first worldwar. It seems that everybody was looking for a way out, for regeneration, a new renaissance, for a national identity. An atmosphere that gave an enormous rise to subjective interpretations of reality as against the scientific positivism of the 19th century, resulting in intuitionism, mystic theorie and utopianism. Movements that were intellectual forces and supporting factors to the research of Brouwer, D'Ors and Serres.

Encores (3)

A visual encore in case of lecture: Showing and elucidation of a print by Turner of the Gothard pass plus the comments of Serres about Turners' interpretation of clouds, scenery

and such (1985). In this essay he stresses the change of a mechanical age into a new period of thermodynamics which Turner was the first to visually introduce and make imaginable.



As an extra informative claim to relational as well as utopian aspirations may serve a coherent comparison between the Walden Colony which Frederik van Eeden started in 1898-1907 in Bussum, the Netherlands, and the adventures known as the 'Cooperative vegetarian colony around Monte Verità, in Ticino, Switzerland, since 1900 and yet a conference site. Van Eeden is significant as intermediair between Welby and the Dutch Circle including Brouwer.

As another illustration of topological fact a photograph of the Mathematical Congress in Zürich in 1932 with Brouwer present with Harald Böhr at his left. Thanks to commons.wikimedia.org



## Literature

Michel Serres, *Hermes, literature, science, philosophy*, ed. J.V.Harari & D.F.Bell, 1981, including ch.5, Turner Translates Carnot, p. 54-65.

Michel Serres, Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time*, translation Roxanne Lapidus, Ann Arbor, 1990/1995

Steve Brown, *A topology of the 5 senses*, Michel Serres, *New Formations*, 2011

Maria Zambrano, *Philosophy and Poetry*, 1939, translation D.Ohmans, 2008

Thomas de Groot, Sophie Bloemen, Jens Kimmel, Lysbet Dekker, *Leren van de toekomst: Commons en bestaanszekerheid in theorie en praktijk*, Stichting Commons Network/Novum, Amsterdam, 2021

Eugenio D'Ors, "Le résidu dans la mesure de la science par l'action", in Theodor Elsenhans (ed.), *Bericht Über den III Internationalen Kongress für Philosophie zu Heidelberg 1 bis 5 september 1908, 1909*, pp. 751-757 (Kraus reprint, Nendeln, Liechtenstein, 1974)

Nelson Orringer, *Intuition and Intelligence: On Bergson in Eugenio d'Ors*, in *Catalan Review*, December 1986

Sebastiaan Faber, interview with Andreu Navarra: "Eugenio d'Ors era fascista, Ortega y Gasset, no", ctxt.es, 2/9/2019 (orig. 19/12/2018)

Antonino González y Jaime Nubiola, *William James en Eugenio d'Ors*, *Anuario Filosófico XL/2* (2007), pp. 413-433

José Ignacio Gracia Noriega, *Eugenio en portafil*, Filosofía ligera al alcance de todos:  
<https://www.revistadelibros.com/articulos/eugenio-dors-diccionario-filosofico-portatil>  
"Pudiéramos decir, pues, que D'Ors intentó una suerte de «novela filosófica», aunque para hacerla carecía de la ligereza, también del humor, de Voltaire; y cuando la «novela filosófica» se toma demasiado en serio a sí misma, no es novela y la filosofía que expone suele ser, más bien, material de contrabando. Aunque la narrativa de D'Ors, bastante explícita por lo demás, distaba mucho de ser «novela intelectual» a la manera de Aldous Huxley o Ramón Pérez de Ayala. D'Ors era un excelente ensayista y cuando se pueden escribir ensayos tan buenos como los suyos, no veo yo la necesidad de disfrazarlos de novelas o cuentos". 01/08/2000