

PATOČKA'S INTERPRETATIONS OF HEGEL'S THESIS ON THE PAST CHARACTER OF ART

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In his article 'Art and Time' (1966) Patočka argues that Hegel rightly recognized a fundamental difference between classical and contemporary art. In developing Hegel's insight he offers a conception of two eras of art, the 'artistic' era and the era of 'aesthetic culture'. Patočka supposes that artworks of both the artistic era and the aesthetic era always open up a certain 'meaning' that gives human existence its fundamental points of reference. The status of this world, however, radically changed from one era to the next. The art of the artistic era offered objective and binding meaning, whereas aesthetic art offers personal or individual meaning. The current article points to an important discrepancy in Patočka's treatment of the relation between the two eras, and presents Patočka's later reading of Hegel's notion of the past character of art. From the perspective of this interpretation, art reveals temporality as such, that is, as the ontological basis of the revelation of meaning. The article emphasizes that such an interpretation demonstrates the ontological relevance of the artwork in greater detail. Yet Patočka continued to use the concepts of the artistic era and the aesthetic era, without sufficiently clarifying the relationship between the two eras. Finally, the author argues that the discrepancy in the concept can be resolved with the help of Patočka's later reflections on the 'problematic nature' of meaning. The article argues that in classical art such a nature is concealed, whereas in modern art it is revealed again.

I. THE ARTISTIC AND THE AESTHETIC ERA

Jan Patočka¹ considers questions of art in many of his essays from the 1930s through the 1970s, but the essay 'Art and Time' is the most comprehensive

¹ Jan Patočka (1907–1977), generally regarded as the most influential Czech philosopher of the twentieth century and an important contributor to post-Husserlian phenomenology, studied with Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger at Freiburg and taught philosophy at the University of Prague both before and after the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia. He was forced to leave his job at the university after the Communist takeover in 1948 and, except for a brief time in the 1960s, was mostly prevented from teaching and publishing in Czechoslovakia for the rest of his life. He died after a stroke following an exhausting secret-police interrogation. On Patočka's philosophy, see Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Edward F. Findlay, *Caring for the Soul in a Postmodern Age: Politics and Phenomenology in the Thought of Jan Patočka* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002); Renaud Barbaras, *Le mouvement de l'existence: Etudes sur la phénoménologie de Jan Patočka* (Paris: La transparence, 2007) and *L'ouverture du monde:*

expression of his general opinions on art.² In this essay, he offers a concept of the development of art and highlights the difference between the two eras in the history of art. In this article, we shall consider some of the themes of this Patočka essay and their position in the wider context of his considerations on art, temporality, and history. From a certain point of view, 'Art and Time' is mainly an attempt to test whether Hegel's claim that art is a thing of the past is still relevant. Patočka points out that in a certain sense the claim remains valid, even though we can no longer accept Hegel's justification of the past character of art from the viewpoint of his system of metaphysics. Patočka recalls Hegel's well-known notion from *Aesthetics* that art has now become a 'wide Pantheon', a 'magnificent museum', which, however, no longer represents the supreme and truly relevant way of knowing.³ Patočka concurs with Hegel's view that although art is 'forever a source of delight', we do not expect it to communicate truth to us.⁴ In our times, we relegate the task of 'revelation of the absolute' to faith and, above all, to science.⁵ And that is why art 'remains for us a thing of the past'.⁶ In this context, Patočka emphasizes that Hegel recognized the basic difference between classical and contemporary art, that is, the difference between art that is 'imperative, binding' and art that is 'subjective, private, non-binding'.⁷ Hegel thus prophetically managed to capture a basic change in the character of art at

Lecture de Jan Patočka (Paris: La transparence, 2011); Emilie Tardivel, *La liberté au principe: Essai sur la philosophie de Patočka* (Paris: Vrin, 2011); Philippe Merlier, *Autour de Jan Patočka* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010); Erika Abrams and Ivan Chvatík, eds., *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011); Ivan Chvatík, ed., 'Jan Patočka and the European Heritage', *Studia Phaenomenologica* 7 (2007); Matthias Gatzemeier, ed., *Jan Patočka: Ästhetik – Phänomenologie – Pädagogik – Geschichts- und Politiktheorie* (Aachen: Alano, 1994); Marc Richir and Étienne Tassin, eds., *Jan Patočka: Philosophie, phénoménologie, politique* (Grenoble: Millon, 1992).

- ² Jan Patočka, 'Umění a čas', in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky* [Collected works of Jan Patočka], vol. 4, *Umění a čas I* [Art and time I], ed. Ivan Chvatík and Daniel Vojtěch (Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2004), 303–18. First published as 'Umění a čas', *Orientace* 1 (1966): 12–22. The text was initially written in French and this version appeared as 'L'art et le temps', in *Kunst und Erziehung: Bericht über den XVIII. Weltkongress der INSEA; Prag 1966*, ed. Igor Zhoř (Prague: SPN, 1968), 105–13. The modern French edition is Jan Patočka, 'L'art et le temps', in *L'art et le temps*, ed. and trans. Erika Abrams (Paris: P.O.L, 1990), 344–68. German trans. Jan Patočka, 'Kunst und Zeit', trans. Ilja Šrubař and Věra Šrubařová, in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 1, *Kunst und Zeit: Kulturphilosophische Schriften*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Ilja Šrubař (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), 49–69. Translated from Czech as 'Art and Time' in this issue of *Estetika*.
- ³ Patočka, 'Art and Time', 101; G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, vol. 1, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 90.
- ⁴ Patočka, 'Art and Time', 101; Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 11.
- ⁵ Patočka, 'Art and Time', 101; Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 9–12, 103–4.
- ⁶ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 11.
- ⁷ Patočka, 'Art and Time', 101.

a time that still had 'no inkling' of any such shift, a full century before the outbreak of the modern revolution in art, which completed the gradual change art had been going through.⁸

Patočka, however, also shows that Hegel did not fully appreciate the real contribution of this subjective, non-binding art. The fact that art was no longer able to communicate the absolute does not mean that it could not play an important or even a crucial role in the spiritual life of current times. Rather, one can see art's inability to communicate binding truth as a sign of the arrival of the 'era of *subjective style*' in the arts.⁹ With regard to style, we can thus speak of two major eras with a 'transition in the middle'.¹⁰ In particular, we can distinguish two major eras in the development of mankind's spiritual life, namely, the 'artistic era', meaning the time when art was the main 'method of all spiritual life',¹¹ and the 'aesthetic era', where abstract, scientific terms are seen as the chief instruments of arriving at an understanding of truth. Classical art, that is, the art of the artistic era, reveals the 'solemn, extraordinary, decisive, divine' aspect of reality.¹² It brings to light the 'festive and superhuman aspect of the world'.¹³ A work of art is the means by which certain religious and ritual matters can be felt and contemplated.¹⁴ When art dominates spiritual life, an artwork reveals reality, a world independent of the spectator or the maker of that work. Contemporary art, that is, the art of the aesthetic era, on the other hand, reveals only the 'world' of a particular work of art, reality seen subjectively, privately by the maker and eventually also by the artwork's observer.¹⁵

According to Patočka, one could, in earlier times, as if step through a work of art, as if it were 'translucent and transitable',¹⁶ into reality itself. Yet part of this understanding of art was also the implicit understanding that art as such is not

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 102.

¹⁰ Ibid., 103.

¹¹ Ibid., 103, 112.

¹² Ibid., 104.

¹³ Ibid., 110.

¹⁴ Ibid., 103–4.

¹⁵ In this context, it should be noted that Patočka's thoughts on classical and modern art clearly follow the direction taken by Martin Heidegger in his considerations on the nature of a work of art, as expressed in the essay 'The Origin of a Work of Art' (1935–36). Heidegger shows that a work of art always opens a 'world', which shows to the members of a particular historical community the basic options of their lives, a world that determines what reality is. In a work of art, the world is a 'unity of [...] paths and relations', which helps orient a 'historical people'. Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of a Work of Art', in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Kenneth Haynes and Julian Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 20, 21.

¹⁶ Patočka, 'Art and Time', 102.

a subject, that it is an 'environment invisible in itself'.¹⁷ It was only later that art started being understood as a special activity, something different from technical occupations. Only at the beginning of the nineteenth century did a work of art become an object of special attention, something that has its own independent existence which a person can reflect upon. Only then did a work of art become visible, an object on which the 'intention' of a gaze can stop and rest.¹⁸ That, however, happened at a time when a work of art was no longer the main instrument with which to grasp reality. This role now has now fallen to scientific terminology, which describes mainly abstract, non-phenomenal entities and relations. The environment to which art now belongs is radically different from the one in which classical art existed. Whereas previously a work of art was viewed as something that revealed truth, in modern times it is the artwork itself that is studied scientifically. A work of art is analysed from the perspective of the newly established scientific or scholarly disciplines, mainly from the viewpoint of aesthetics and the history of art, since these areas of study are thought to be the only ones entitled to 'take [...] apart and to control' objects of art, that is, to reveal the true nature of these artefacts.¹⁹ Patočka emphasizes that these new academic disciplines of the aesthetic era can approach the questions of artistic creativity only 'on the basis of an analysis of the facts, on the basis of laws and finding out what the abstract relations are'.²⁰

Patočka describes the process of the change in function and character of art between the artistic and the aesthetic eras, using theories developed by Arnold Gehlen and Roman Ingarden. Gehlen claims that in a picture, there are three layers of meaning: a layer of formal elements, a layer of primary objects, and a layer of secondary objects.²¹ Patočka refers to Gehlen's idea that visual art develops towards the simplification of its layers. In the nineteenth century, art lost the layer of secondary objects, that is, the layer of mythological or religious ideas. In the course of the twentieth century, it gradually also lost the layer of primary objects, that is, the layer of depicted natural objects. And though the layer of secondary objects was partly restored in the abstract painting of the twentieth century (as many abstract painters like Mondrian had advocated), this layer now exists only as parts of the paintings themselves. Viewers are in no way bound by or committed to any philosophical or religious ideas expressed in a work of art. In this context, Patočka points out that this reduction in the number

¹⁷ Ibid., 112.

¹⁸ Ibid., 102.

¹⁹ Ibid., 103.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Arnold Gehlen, *Zeit-Bilder: Zur Soziologie und Ästhetik der modernen Malerei* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1960).

of layers in the visual arts enabled the creation of a painting style within the basic layer of a painting, that is, within the layer of the formal instruments.

Similarly, Patočka employs Ingarden's idea of metaphysical quality, that is, the notion of a certain atmosphere which surrounds objects and persons depicted in a painting.²² In the past, the metaphysical quality of a work of art referred mainly to the mystery of divinity. In a modern artwork, however, it relates exclusively to the atmosphere of the work itself. The metaphysical aspect has lost its former persuasiveness and is no longer binding.²³ All metaphysical qualities are now equally permissible, 'no matter how diverse and divergent; all are basically on the same level'.²⁴ Patočka claims that a modern work of art lacks the 'harmonic dominance', which in earlier times followed from a religious faith.²⁵ In this connection, he also turns to Hegel and refers to his distinction between formal and material harmony. Patočka believes that in former times, the harmony of a work of art was based on the concord between its formal elements and its general meaning. Harmony was thus part of the meaning of a work of art, a metaphysical quality it exhibited. In modern art, harmony is based exclusively on the concord between the formal elements and the meaning expressed in the work. Whereas in earlier times, harmony was based mainly on content or 'material', now it is an exclusively 'formal' feature.²⁶

Patočka emphasizes that a modern work of art relinquishes all claims to the binding validity of all religious and metaphysical meaning. It no longer shows the principles by which the world operates. It is just an expression of a meaning 'locked in the artwork'. In a modern work of art, the world 'crystallizes into a world of meaning' that exists solely 'in the work of art and by its grace'. Modern art, Patočka states, thus 'lets burgeon' various 'worlds of meaning' which are highly varied and 'remote' from each other.²⁷ Modern art 'does not *denote* or describe the usual world'. But that, Patočka notes, does not mean that it does not 'express' such a world.²⁸ Modern art implies a 'claim' about a shared meaning, but this claim, this postulate, is by its very nature 'negative', that is to say, there exists no positively given meaning shared by all.²⁹ The plurality of meaning in works of modern art, however, also necessarily implies 'disharmony, unrest, even pain'. A modern artwork no longer

²² Roman Ingarden, *O budowie obrazu: Szkic z teorii sztuki* [On the structure of a painting: A sketch in the theory of art] (1946), in *Studia z estetyki* [Studies in aesthetics], vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Warsaw: PWN, 1966), 5–115.

²³ Patočka, 'Art and Time', 104–5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

offers attractive reassurance in the form of a generally valid, binding metaphysical quality. On the contrary, it requires that spectators make a 'considerable intellectual effort' to penetrate the mood and meaning of such an artwork.³⁰

II. ART AS EVIDENCE OF HUMAN FREEDOM

Patočka points out that this character of a modern work of art necessarily reflects the character of the times in which it was created. And these are basically intellectual times: after all, as Patočka claims, scientific concepts are thought to be the only relevant means by which truth can be grasped. Nature is understood through a system of abstract scientific formulae and human beings themselves do not escape this understanding of reality. Scientific description is applied to the whole of human society, but, above all, a scientific worldview is the starting point for the technological manipulation of reality, once again including human beings. Nature is seen as a huge reservoir of energy and the human being is viewed as the means to accumulate and release this energy,³¹ as an 'accumulator', 'transformer', or 'relay' in the transition 'from a potentiality into actuality'.³²

On the one hand, Patočka believes that a modern work of art, by its nature, clearly reflects the intellectual, abstract character of the times because it is usually non-illustrative and requires a highly intellectual approach.³³ On the other hand, he points out as well that a modern work of art is also a protest against the alienation of the times, a protest against submission to the impersonal process of the accumulation of energy and riches. Whereas in all other activities, a human being serves the intentions of these impersonal processes, in art, human creativity is not a 'pretext for something else', that is, it opposes its being abused by instrumental reason. While it is true that even works of art are now becoming mere items in the process of dissociated production, their 'inner meaning' is untouched by this exploitation in the circle of production, demand, and consumption.³⁴

³⁰ Ibid., 106.

³¹ Ibid., 108–9.

³² Ibid., 112; Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák (1975; Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 72, 125. Originally published in samizdat as *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin* (Prague: Petlice, 1975); modern edition in *Sebrané spisy* [Collected works], vol. 3, *Péče o duši III* [Care for the soul III], ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2002), 11–144. French trans. *Essais hérétiques sur la philosophie de l'histoire*, trans. Erika Abrams, 2nd ed. (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1988); German trans. *Ketzerische Essays zur Philosophie der Geschichte*, trans. Joachim Bruss and Peter Sacher, in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 2, *Ketzerische Essays zur Philosophie der Geschichte und ergänzende Schriften*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Jiří Němec (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988), 21–164.

³³ Patočka, 'Art and Time', 105. See also his 'Arnold Gehlen o moderním výtvarnictví' [Gehlen on modern visual art], in *Sebrané spisy*, vol. 4, 214–15. This review of Gehlen, *Zeit-Bilder* first appeared as 'A. Gehlen o moderním výtvarnictví', *Divadlo* 16 (1965): 77–79.

³⁴ Patočka, 'Art and Time', 110.

Let us, however, consider the way in which Patočka describes the meaning of modern art. According to Patočka, modern art is unquestionable proof of human autonomy.³⁵ As we have learned, modern works of art, unlike the works of the earlier era, do not communicate indubitable meaning. Rather, they enable experience in which a personally seen, individual world reveals itself. In the abstract intellectual environment of our times, art amounts to the creation of objects that show the world of 'comprehensible' meanings, of objects that reveal 'the world of concrete meanings which can be not only thought of but also lived'. Such meaningful units can be understood, we can agree with them, but they are not binding, which means that they can be considered subjective. The world expressed in a modern work of art is 'in no way binding' and is thus 'subjective'.³⁶ Patočka points out that this presentation of meaning contained in the artwork is also an 'assertion of inwardness' and thus also of freedom, whereby the two are the 'original source of humanity'.³⁷ Freedom is asserted because an artwork manifests itself as something not governed by abstract external processes independent of individual human wills and desires.

In these considerations, one can discern a considerable degree of the influence of Hegel's thinking about the 'inwardness' and 'subjectivity' of contemporary art.³⁸ Patočka, however, is also influenced by Gehlen's formulations, though his understanding of modern art substantially differs from Gehlen's.³⁹ As we have seen, Patočka adopts Gehlen's notion of removing higher layers of pictorial

³⁵ Ibid., 113.

³⁶ Ibid., 111.

³⁷ Ibid., 112.

³⁸ See Jan Patočka, 'K vývoji Hegelových estetických názorů' [On the development of Hegel's aesthetic views], in *Sebrané spisy*, vol. 4, 223. Originally published in *Filosofický časopis* 13 (1965): 382–86. An earlier version appeared as 'Zur Entwicklung der ästhetischen Auffassung Hegels', in *Hegel-Jahrbuch*, ed. Wilhelm R. Beyer (Meisenheim: Hein, 1964), 49–59. In a number of places Hegel emphasizes that 'inwardness' is the basic principle of contemporary, that is, romantic art. Romantic inwardness means an 'elevation of the Spirit to *itself*' and a departure from the 'external and sensory aspect of being', through which the Spirit gains 'in itself' its own subjectivity. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 518. The proper 'element' of romantic art is thus '*the inwardness of self-consciousness*' (ibid., 80). In Hegel's view, the growing emphasis on subjectivity as opposed to sensory aspects is, in the development of romantic art, part of the necessary evolution of the absolute, but, at the same time, it also leads to the eventual disintegration of romantic art (ibid., 602–11). Given that this self-conscious internality leads to the separation of subjectivity from sensory depiction, in romantic art, art as such is being transcended (ibid., 80). And that implies that romantic art reveals the past nature of art.

³⁹ This difference results from the very nature of the two approaches. Gehlen's theory of modern art is a psychological and sociological theory, while Patočka's conception is philosophical and oriented mainly ontologically. It is interesting, however, that although Patočka clearly sees the differences between his own approach and Gehlen's, he also recognizes in Gehlen numerous presuppositions he could agree with, at least on a theoretical level. See Patočka, 'Arnold Gehlen', 213.

rationality in modern art, that is, the idea that modern painting is reduced to the layer of formal elements. But Patočka's view that modern art uses means which are irrational and non-descriptive, that is, derived from the character of instruments of modern science,⁴⁰ is also clearly indebted to Gehlen's considerations. And like Gehlen, Patočka, too, calls these elements of modern art 'mute' because they have no meaning outside the work itself.⁴¹ In Patočka's view, too, in a modern work of art these irrational instruments are rationalized⁴² and become the means of expression of human inwardness⁴³ and freedom.

Patočka thus shows that in a modern work of art an expression of understandable meaning is not tied to represented objects or even religious or mythological notions handed down from one generation to the next. The work of art has freed itself from the metaphysical narrated layer, that is, from the 'signified' layer, and focused on the 'signifying' layer instead.⁴⁴ A work of art is a signifying layer that does not refer to any concrete referent. But this also means that a work of art is an 'autonomous sign'. The modern work of art has freed itself from previously existing conventions of depiction. It no longer reveals a meaning given in advance – it shows a meaning that is opened in and by the work itself. Patočka understands this opening of meaning by which a work of art exists as 'being in its outpouring', that is, as an ontological fact, not as a semiotic one.

In this way, Patočka shows that in a modern work of art human freedom is not attested by and through the subjectivity of meaning expressed in the work as such but rather by the fact that a work of art manifests how a person can participate in the 'pure creation' of meaning. The meaning of a modern work of art arises out of an immediate relation to being. Thanks to this relation, modern art is free of narrated, metaphysical meaning. Freedom is attested because a modern work of art demonstrates 'human creative power', which takes the form of the 'ability to allow being to manifest itself'.⁴⁵ To sum up, Patočka believes that the revolution in art which started in the nineteenth century and intensified in the twentieth century – a revolution which meant a radical departure from

⁴⁰ See Gehlen, *Zeit-Bilder*, 16.

⁴¹ Gehlen emphasizes that a realistic picture is always 'eloquent' whereas an abstract picture is 'incapable of speech' (ibid., 187). A 'translation' of an abstract painting into 'speech' is impossible (ibid., 9). An abstract picture is a 'pantomimic symphony' and we can imagine it being 'mute' (ibid., 187).

⁴² In Gehlen's writings, we encounter various notes on 'rationality of vision', 'optic intelligence', and 'base rationality', which modern painting appeals to (ibid., 9, 16). This ground rationality is the rationality of 'preconceptual levels of consciousness' (ibid., 17).

⁴³ Gehlen claims that all modern painting focuses on the 'soul' and is 'reflexive' in relation to various aspects of human 'subjectivity' (ibid., 17).

⁴⁴ Patočka, 'Art and Time', 112.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

artistic traditions and conventions, a thorough break with the existing way of understanding the role of an artwork – has led artists to an immediate relation to being.

III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO ERAS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ART

Patočka's statements on the relationship between classical and modern art are to some degree ambiguous. Some of his formulations in 'Art and Time' describe the difference between classical and modern art as the difference between metaphysically oriented art and art that expresses a 'subjective', personal meaning. But can we, indeed, understand the meaning of modern art as individual or personal, given that it is supposed to follow from an immediate relation to being? A modern work of art is, after all, an 'outpouring of being', that is, a result of an ontological movement. Is the art of the two eras really so separate, or are there links between the two? After all, Patočka himself remarks that modern art has a character which attests to freedom 'to the greatest extent'.⁴⁶ Can we thus suppose that even earlier art somehow attests to our freedom, but perhaps to a lesser degree? Such a conclusion is likely to be justified since Patočka also states that modern art is a confirmation of inwardness as much as 'art in general' is.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, however, in 'Art and Time' Patočka does not offer any explanation of the nature of 'art in general'. I believe that the ambiguity of these formulations later motivated his doubts about the inner coherence of the conception proposed in 'Art and Time'. He expresses these doubts in a remark entitled 'Concerning "Art and Time"'.⁴⁸ Here, he notes that the conception of the two eras in the development of art appears to be internally 'contradictory' since it seems that when art dominated spiritual life it was not understood as art, whereas when it came to be understood, it necessarily lost its prior 'dominance'. Patočka asks himself how one should explain this basic shift in the position of art. Is it a consequence of a change in the very 'substance of a work of art' or does it follow from a change just in the way it is 'understood'? Does the status of a work of art therefore change due to a change in the 'creating of art' or just in consequence of the way this is 'reflected'? If it is part of the substance of a work of art that it is not viewed as a work of art, that its nature consists in its being hidden as a work

⁴⁶ Ibid., 109.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Jan Patočka, 'Ad "Umění a čas"', in *Sebrané spisy*, vol. 5, *Umění a čas II* [Art and Time II], ed. Ivan Chvatík and Daniel Vojtěch (Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2004), 214–15. Patočka's note dated 1968, first published in the samizdat edition of Patočka's writings, *Umění a filosofie* [Art and philosophy], ed. Jiří Němec and Pavel Rezek, vol. 3 (Prague: Archivní soubor, 1977), 531.

of art, then it would be misrepresenting its nature if we were to understand such artwork as 'autonomous'. If a work of art does indeed reveal truth, then seeing a work of art as autonomous would appear to be the 'decadence of a work of art'. Patočka points out that one should thus either accept that a work of art truly is a gate to reality (and when this gate is open, art exists) or accept that a work of art is an 'autonomous sign' and all its 'metaphysical qualification' is merely an illusion. In other words, it would be wrong to suppose that there exist two eras in the development of art. One should either accept that there exists just one era which gradually experiences a 'decline' of art, or accept the opposite, that is, that within this era '*all* metaphysical function of art is an illusion'. But, Patočka continues, one can also see the difference between modern and classical art from the perspective of the difference in the meaning offered, as a difference between the 'collectively binding objective metaphysical meaning in the early era' and the 'personal – existential meaning' in the new era.⁴⁹

Patočka concludes his self-critical note by referring to the past dimension of temporality. He seems to suggest that if the past is understood not as something already gone but as a fundamental dimension of temporality, the radical contrast between classical and modern art can be reconciled. He says that if we accept the 'truth that a work of art is *Vergangenes*', a question arises whether 'the past thus conceived is really a temporal past, and not just a derived past'. In other words, the question arises whether the concept of the past character of art should not be deepened, whether it should not be conceived of as an expression of art's ability to disclose the fundamental dimension of temporality. Patočka also notes that given the past character of art, the whole of reality is 'marked by the *past* dimension of temporality'. He thus seems to believe that Hegel's inspiring claim about the past character of art needs to be approached from the perspective of the formation of temporality as such. Here, we can already see that the temporal interpretation Patočka presents in two other articles, written at about the same time, will enable us to elaborate on the question of the ontological basis of the work of art, a question that Patočka only marginally considers in 'Art and Time'.

IV. THE DERIALIZATION OF THE PROCESS OF DERIALIZATION AS THE REVELATION OF BEING IN A WORK OF ART

Patočka first attempts a new interpretation of the role of time in Hegel's considerations on art, especially on the past nature of art, in his essay 'Hegel's

⁴⁹ Patočka, 'Ad "Umění a čas"', 214.

Philosophical and Aesthetic Development'.⁵⁰ Here he notes that in Hegel's approach the 'first symptom' of the past nature of art is art's inability to reflect the character of today. Art, Patočka observes, seems no longer capable of drawing its subject matter 'from our rationalist, prosaic times', and that is why it cannot solve 'the most pressing problems particular to our times'.⁵¹ He mentions this thought of Hegel's in his earlier essay 'On the Development of Hegel's Aesthetic Views', noting that, according to Hegel, artists cannot choose their subject matter from the present, which Hegel believed to be prosaic, but must instead seek 'refuge in other times and lands'.⁵² In the essay 'Hegel's Philosophical and Aesthetic Development', Patočka notes that all the while we do not know 'whether this situation is a sign of the impotence of our times or of the impotence of art'. It is striking, however, that 'art, this absolute truth' is in its manifestation 'limited, dependent on time, on the era' in which the artist works. Patočka says that Hegel's remarks on art's inability to use contemporary subject matter raises the question of 'the deeper connection' between art and time, and, in particular, the question of the deeper connection between art and the 'past dimension' of time.⁵³

That is why Patočka turns to Hegel's notion of time as the 'derealization' of the given, according to which a person projects the future and this projection leads to a transformation of the present, that is, to a derealization of the given and its displacement into the past. Patočka also reminds us of Hegel's idea that the force of 'negativity', which is at work in this displacement, is 'death'.⁵⁴ Patočka also repeatedly turns to Hegel's *Jenaer Realphilosophie* lectures. He mentions a passage where Hegel calls art the 'Indian Bacchus', which 'envelops itself in sensation and image, wherein the fearsome is hidden'.⁵⁵ This 'fearsome' aspect is probably to be identified with the 'death of finite things', Patočka says, of things which are forcefully drawn into, entangled in, an 'intoxicating maenadic' dance where they lose their individuality without reaching the 'higher element

⁵⁰ Jan Patočka, 'Hegelův filosofický a estetický vývoj', in *Sebrané spisy*, vol. 4, 227–302. Originally published in *Eстетika* [Aesthetics], vol. 1, by G. W. F. Hegel, trans. Jan Patočka (Prague: Odeon, 1966), 9–56. German trans. 'Hegels philosophische und ästhetische Entwicklung', trans. Joachim Bruss, in Patočka, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 1, 234–324; French trans. 'L'évolution philosophique et esthétique de Hegel', in Patočka, *L'art et le temps*, 177–304.

⁵¹ Patočka, 'Hegelův filosofický vývoj', 287.

⁵² Patočka, 'K vývoji', 223.

⁵³ Patočka, 'Hegelův filosofický vývoj', 287.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 291; G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 19.

⁵⁵ Patočka, 'Hegelův filosofický vývoj', 280, 291; G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel and the Human Spirit: A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805–6) with Commentary*, ed. and trans. Leo Rauch (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 174, translation amended.

of existence', the 'element of thought'.⁵⁶ Patočka thus emphasizes that, according to Hegel, art does not conceive of the negativity of displacement in the lucid realm of thinking, but displays it in the suggestive realm of sensation. In Hegel's view as presented in the *Jenaer Realphilosophie*, art thus amounts to the 'need for this disappearance' and 'disappearance itself', it represents not death but the 'dying, the fading of finite things and views'.⁵⁷ Art, Patočka emphasizes, that disguises the fearsome, the existing death, under a veil of sentiment and image, must thus have some relation to the fearsome. It relates to it by covering the sharp edge of death, by not 'letting it work, function', by not 'letting derealization happen'. This edge does not work, Patočka goes on to say, when 'it is *seen and observed* as a sharp edge', that is, when instead of adopting a practical stance 'in time' in which we 'derealize the given', we adopt a stance to time itself, that is, when we assume a stance where the 'abysmal nature' of time reveals itself. This nature of time is revealed in the 'aesthetic attitude'.⁵⁸ The negativity of time is presented in the suggestive realm of sensation, which is displayed by art. Art thus enables us to approach time thematically, that is, not indirectly, only in the results of its negativity. The revelation of the nature of time and its dimensions is, however, also the revelation of our nature as finite beings struggling with particulars. In this way, the whole context of such a struggle, such a derealization of particulars, is finally revealed. What human beings rely on in this struggle, what gives them a sense of direction, becomes apparent. Patočka emphasizes that in an aesthetic viewpoint, a 'world' surfaces, but it is now not just a 'collection of things' but a 'harmony of meaning', which appeared from the depths of the abyss 'aided by the participation of a finite, mortal being'. The aim of this participation and help of a finite being is, however, to aid a 'magnificent occurrence', which, as the 'birthplace' of all meaning, also raises a 'question about another, deeper, ultimate meaning as its unalienable point of convergence'. That is why a work of art evokes 'awe', makes the 'impression of the revelation' and 'alienation' of art, and yet a work of art is not a departure from reality into 'another realm' but rather a disclosure of its 'innermost meaning'. Beyond existence, a work of art enables the emergence of that 'which makes the existent'.⁵⁹ We can thus say that Patočka shows that the meaning towards which a work of art aims is the being of the existent. Patočka understands Hegel's claim about the past nature of art as a statement

⁵⁶ Patočka, 'Hegelův filosofický vývoj', 280.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ In Hegel's formulations, however, one encounters not the term 'aesthetic attitude' but the formulation 'attitude to objects as beautiful'. See Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 113–14.

⁵⁹ Patočka, 'Hegelův filosofický vývoj', 291–92.

that can be radically re-interpreted⁶⁰ as a reference to a work of art revealing temporality itself and the being of the existent which lets a world emerge.⁶¹

V. THE PAST CHARACTER OF ART DISCLOSING THE FUNDAMENTS OF TIME

Also in 'A Theory of the Past Nature of Art', Patočka interprets Hegel's thesis about the past nature of art in a manner completely different from the explicit statements on this subject found in Hegel's *Aesthetics*. Again, to that purpose, he uses Hegel's remarks on time which appear in the *Jenaer Realphilosophie*. Patočka points out that Hegel understands time as an 'internal negation' or *punctum saliens*, that is, as a 'jumping, gushing point'.⁶² Patočka notes that Hegel's analysis of the nature of time ultimately points to the claim that this jumping, gushing point, this living presence, is absolute negativity, or the perpetual cancelling of the present. And, above of all, it is the past. The past as 'cancelledness' essentially belongs to time; it is a definitive result of the movement of time, the 'ultimate result and overall character of time'.⁶³ Whatever is 'temporal is also given to

⁶⁰ Major points out that Patočka 'magnanimously' takes various ideas of Hegel's ideas out of their original context and composes them into a 'new unity'. At the same time, Major adds, the final result is 'meaningful and credible'. Ladislav Major, 'Sebeuvědomění a čas: K Patočkově interpretaci Hegelovy estetiky' [Self-consciousness and time: Concerning Patočka's interpretation of Hegel's aesthetics], *Filosoфіcký časopis* 15 (1967): 626. Major mainly emphasizes that Patočka reveals in Hegel's system – which denies modern art any part in the 'search for truth and freedom' – hitherto 'unsuspected' directions in interpreting the past character of art. In contrast with Hegel's explicit notion of the past character of art, this 'hidden and intuited' understanding recognizes the lasting contribution of art in 'discovering truth and setting mankind free' (p. 627).

⁶¹ Patočka ('K vývoji', 225) believes that these views of Hegel's come rather close to Heidegger's idea that a work of art reveals a 'world', which, however, should not be conceived of as a 'finite object'. Patočka notes that this revealing, which happens because of the 'aesthetic stance', can indeed be called truth but this truth is distinct from 'correctness'. See Heidegger's remarks about the truth of a work of art as 'unconcealedness' in his 'Origin', 31. Major notes that Patočka discovers in Hegel's approach a notion of the truth of art that is close to Heidegger's notion of truth as 'revealing guise', pointing to Heidegger's statements on the nature of truth in 'Origin' (See Major, 'Sebeuvědomění', 634). Legros even claims that Patočka sees in Hegel's statements on the past character of art the 'birth of a true phenomenology of art'. Robert Legros, 'Patočka et Hegel', in *Jan Patočka: Philosophie, phénoménologie, politique*, ed. Marc Richir and Étienne Tassin (Grenoble: Millon, 1992), 53. The similarity of Heidegger's and Patočka's respective positions on art and truth are also apparent in Patočka's 'Hegelův filosofický vývoj' and 'Učení o minulém rázu umění [A theory of the past nature of art]', in *Sebrané spisy*, vol. 4, 319–47. The latter, first published in Patočka, *Umění a filosofie*, 74–97, is based on an earlier German version, 'Die Lehre von der Vergangenheit der Kunst', in *Beispiele: Festschrift für E. Fink zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Ludwig Landgrebe (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1965), 46–61, reprinted in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 217–33. For a French trans. of the Czech version, see 'La théorie de l'art comme chose du passé', in *L'art et le temps*, 305–43.

⁶² Patočka, 'Učení', 333. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenaer Realphilosophie: Vorlesungen zur Philosophie der Natur und des Geistes von 1805–1806* (Berlin: Akademie, 1969), 10–13.

⁶³ Patočka, 'Učení', 334.

the past; in other words, it is itself, in a sense, 'past'. Aesthetic behaviour is behaviour tending towards this negativity, towards the past, which is the ultimate result and the very character of time.⁶⁴ What is lacking in aesthetic behaviour is seriousness in its relation to the present, which is assumed in both practical and theoretical behaviour, seriousness in relation to individual present particulars, which, due to the force of negativity, recede into the past. From this point of view, aesthetic behaviour is a game, Patočka says, but it is an 'absolute game', that is, one that does not presuppose any given, present existents. It is a game of being itself, a game of 'appearing, phenomenalization, manifestation'. Sensory things lose the gravitas of things present and become an opportunity, a medium of 'appearance of appearing itself'. This is manifest especially in art.⁶⁵ Art overcomes 'finite, real presence', manages to make the present 'glow in a special light, the light of what is essential, in the light of being'.⁶⁶ At the same time, art is a way of presenting 'meaning that is born in the senses'. Patočka shows that a work of art presents things before they are 'appropriated, processed, flattened, and alienated', that it presents the 'wild perception' which Maurice Merleau-Ponty discusses.⁶⁷ A work of art thus represents the 'capturing of meaning' at its birth and, at the same time, it is the sensory 'capturing of a pure phenomenon, pure appearance'. Patočka adds that 'appearance' itself, that is, 'the essential, truth, and being itself', thus 'comes to the fore'. Together with a certain meaning, what thus appears is the 'ultimate basis of appearance', that is, the very character of time.⁶⁸

In 'A Theory of the Past Nature of Art', Patočka thus shows that Hegel's notion of the past nature of art can be explained as a consequence of the very basis of Hegel's metaphysical system. He believes that Hegel's formulation 'regarding the Indian Bacchus from his Jena years and the analysis of the aesthetic stance in *Aesthetics*' also demonstrate that Hegel finds an 'approach to the truth of art from the viewpoint of the question of time in the form of temporality' to be appropriate. The past nature of art should be 'addressed from the perspective

⁶⁴ Major states that the 'dissolution' of time 'into the past' is the core of the 'hidden theory' of the past character of art discovered by Patočka. Major, 'Sebeuvědomění', 633.

⁶⁵ If, however, it serves the purpose of revealing, a sensory object ceases to function as a present object and becomes rather a manner of the present revealing, a singular sensory modality of revealing. Patočka says that a 'pure phenomenon' in a work of art shows itself as 'singular and present, thereby sensory'. But that also means that a pure phenomenon is both presence and absence since a sensory presence of a work of art, a work of art as an object, is 'neutralized', 'passes into a picture' and appearance, on the other hand, in a work of art it becomes being, existent, present to the senses. Patočka, 'Učení', 344.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 347, 345.

⁶⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 212–13.

⁶⁸ Patočka, 'Učení', 344.

of a formulation in the *Jenaer Realphilosophie*, which shows that the past is 'the entire basis of time'. In general, Patočka thus notes that one can speak of two distinct theories of the past nature of art in Hegel. On the one hand, there is the metaphysical, explicit approach of *Aesthetics*; on the other hand, there is a conception contained in this metaphysical approach, which 'pulses' within it. This conception is 'fundamentally temporal': it views art as past because art reveals the past to be the very 'basis of time' and it also sees the past as the basis of all appearing. This nature of time and the appearance of all meaning, that is, of the being of everything that exists, is presented concretely in a work of art; it is given in a sensory object.⁶⁹ Unlike the metaphysical approach, this temporal conception does not favour 'any particular historical period'; it is not linked with any 'historical world, regardless of how [such a world was] formed'. This historical approach thus shows that an artwork 'does not narrate', 'does not bow down', and does not demand that we revere it. A work of art shows itself as that which reveals being and at the same time enables a 'wholeness' of meaning, frees it from the gravitas of the relation to the present, that is, from the eternal struggles which accompany this gravitas. But, clearly, a work of art presents itself this way only from our perspective, that is, from the perspective not of an artistic but of an aesthetic culture. From this point of view, however, we can also see that a work of art is and always has been an appearance of appearing, a disclosure of meaning that is 'identical to its appearance'.⁷⁰ Patočka emphasizes that only now, that is, within what he previously called aesthetic culture, can one see that this characterizes the 'art of all eras including ours', and that art of all eras and 'especially ours' reveals the 'world in its totality and mystery'. This means that art is the revelation both of a certain meaning and of the 'ultimate basis of the appearance' of meaning, that is, of the ultimate, deepest point of convergence, to which the appearance of meaning refers.⁷¹

I believe that Patočka's temporal interpretation of Hegel's thesis on the past character of art, as discussed above, in comparison with the conception of two distinct cultures – where art plays two completely different roles and presents itself as something completely different – is a basic precondition for a more

⁶⁹ Patočka's temporal interpretation of Hegel's thesis of the past character of art is also treated by Wolandt, who points out that Patočka poses the questions 'Why is there art?' and 'What is art for?'. Gerd Wolandt, 'Jan Patočka und Hegels Ästhetik', in Gatzemeier, *Jan Patočka*, 34. Wolandt emphasizes that in Patočka's thought these questions about the 'substantial meaning' of art are inseparably linked to the question of the temporal meaning of art (p. 35). Lastly, Wolandt also claims that in contrast to Hegel's thesis on the end of art, Patočka voices his conviction about the 'indispensable and matchless temporality of art' (pp. 36–37).

⁷⁰ Patočka, 'Učení', 347.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 347, 345, 344.

coherent conception of the nature of a work of art. Unlike the conception of artistic culture and aesthetic culture, the temporal interpretation emphasizes the irreplaceable role of a work of art in the revealing of meaning and the disclosure of the process of this revealing. This interpretation indicates that all art discloses a certain world and also reveals the being from which a particular world is released. And yet, even in this clearly ontologically oriented interpretation, the distinction between the binding, objective meaning in earlier art and the personal or individual meaning in modern art remains valid. Indeed, Patočka continues to use the distinction between artistic and aesthetic culture; he sees Hegel as a thinker on the boundary of two eras; and he believes that the past character of art becomes apparent only during the aesthetic era, not during the artistic one. Patočka also explicitly refers to Hegel when claiming that contemporary art is a 'subjective spirituality' and a 'speciality'.⁷² The question of the relationship between earlier art and modern art, however, remains unsolved even in Patočka's temporal interpretation of Hegel's thesis about the past character of art. Though in this interpretation Patočka emphasizes that art is the disclosure of meaning, of the general context of the existent based on the disclosure of being, and even notes that this revelation of being is accomplished in the art of both the artistic era and the aesthetic era, he does not address the differences in the 'ways of relating to [...] being';⁷³ differences one encounters in the art of these eras.

VI. THE PROBLEMATIC NATURE OF MEANING AND ITS PUTATIVE SECURITY

I believe that Patočka fully explains the whole question of meaning only in *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. There, he claims that in history the general meaning of life and things – that is, the 'intelligible coherence' or 'understanding' of reality – is always 'problematic'.⁷⁴ This problematic nature of meaning, its 'shaken' status,⁷⁵ results from an explicit relationship between a person and the state of being, which is at the basis of history. The explicit nature of being stirs and shakes the yet unproblematic meaning of life as a mythical human being perceived it, while, at the same time, it raises the possibility of a deliberate and therefore free search for meaning, thanks to which things and actions gain meaning.⁷⁶ Later, this problematic nature of meaning is veiled by a putatively secure, definitive meaning of a metaphysical or religious nature.⁷⁷

⁷² Ibid., 345.

⁷³ Patočka, 'Art and Time', 102.

⁷⁴ Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 56, 57, 76.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 63, 77.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 39–40, 62–63, 54.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 64–67.

By the early nineteenth century, however, the religious meaning – that is, meaning that is binding, undoubted, and collectively shared – is shown to be untrustworthy.⁷⁸ In Patočka's understanding, the perceived illusiveness of this meaning leads to a substantial disharmony, basic discrepancies in modern times, but it also brings hope in the renewal of an explicit relation to being, that is, a relation to the problematic nature of meaning.

Even though Patočka in *Heretical Essays* treats the question of art only marginally, based on the reflections we have been looking at, the basis of the relationship between modern or contemporary art and classical art can be clearly demonstrated even here. A work of art always 'lets the world stand out as world,' though the world of a work of art changes in the course of history.⁷⁹ Earlier art doubtless presents allegedly secured, chiefly religious meaning. In the nineteenth century, however, what occurred was a 'catastrophe of religious and artistic man' and religiously conceived meaning is now seen as illusory.⁸⁰ That, naturally, corresponds with Patočka's view that art at that time ceases to reveal religiously understood meaning. In these essays, Patočka also emphasizes that in the nineteenth century metaphysical or religious meaning was replaced by a desire to dominate all accessible reality, that is, by the dominance of the 'Force' in viewing reality. This manifests itself in a general emphasis on the importance of science, technology, and industry. The increasingly strong European and eventually also non-European political adversaries started showing their might in highly destructive mutual conflicts. This growing destructiveness of the Force, however, was also instrumental in starting to create the conditions for overcoming this fascination with mastering, dominating reality, conditions for the creation of a 'solidarity of the shaken,'⁸¹ of those who see the need to limit the domination of the Force.⁸² Patočka demonstrates that by their participation in the huge armed conflicts of the twentieth century human beings started freeing themselves from the dictates of the Force and gradually stopped succumbing to the threats and enticements by means of which the Force dominates people.⁸³ Consequently, people have again started to relate to being in an immediate way – and that makes them see all meaning as problematic.⁸⁴ Patočka's view on modern art can usefully be placed in this context without much difficulty.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 92–93.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁰ Patočka, *Kacířské eseje*, 78. The quoted passage does not appear in the version of *Heretical Essays* translated into English.

⁸¹ Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 135.

⁸² Ibid., 134–36.

⁸³ Ibid., 129–31.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 131, 136.

The meaning of this art is neither binding nor generally shared; instead, it is problematic, shaken. Modern art also turns out to be a protest against the subjugation of human beings to the impersonal process of dissociated production, that is, against one of the manifestations of the domination of the Force. Modern art liberates human beings from this domination in general because it shows them how to relate expressly to being and meaning. From this point of view, one could even say that artists thus join the nascent solidarity of the shaken. Lastly, therefore, we can return to interpreting Hegel's statement about the past character of art and to Patočka's reading of it using the ideas from *Heretical Essays*. Hegel's claim is doubtless clear-sighted and inspiring since one sees in it the substantial difference between classical and modern art. The question is how to interpret the difference. My reading of Patočka suggests the following: A substantial difference exists between classical and modern art because the meaning of modern art is problematic, whereas the meaning of earlier art is, supposedly, secure. But in both cases, meaning is drawn from a relationship with being. Yet, whereas the meaning of classical art was handed down through generations, the meaning of modern art derives from an immediate relationship with being. Meaning that is shown in a work of art of the earlier era is meaning that is not created in that work of art but rather meaning that is incorporated in it as already existent. Meaning that is expressed in a modern work of art, on the other hand, is not formulated in advance: it is expressed only by means of the artwork. Yet it would also be fair to say that the meaning of modern art is the disclosure of temporality itself which releases from itself all particulars and links them in an overall context. The meaning of earlier art, on the other hand, is one that is presumed to be definitive and unquestionable – yet it only veils this disclosure of meaning.

VII. CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have sought to present Patočka's views on Hegel's thesis about the past nature of art. I pointed out that in Patočka's writings one finds two interpretations of Hegel's claim. He first notes that Hegel was clear-sighted in revealing the thoroughgoing change that art was undergoing in his lifetime. In this context, Patočka presents a conception of two fundamentally different historical eras in which art played completely different roles. During the era of artistic culture, a work of art was transparent and showed a world that was independent of the artwork as such. Art communicated truth, which was a divinity. During the era of aesthetic culture, art has expressed a world that is exclusively the world of that artwork. Eyes thus stop at the work itself, stopping at an individual, personal meaning. Later, however, Patočka also offers a temporal

interpretation of the thesis about the past nature of art. A work of art is past because it shows the past as a fundamental dimension of temporality. Nonetheless, in connection with these considerations a question arises about the relationship between the art of the artistic culture and the art of the aesthetic culture. Patočka's conception of the two eras of art necessarily leads to the idea that artworks of the past and artworks of the present may be viewed as realities so vastly different that they in fact have nothing in common with each other. Patočka then notes the inner contradiction in his conception of the two eras in the development of art: if we accept that art is fundamentally metaphysical, modern art appears as a decline, a degeneration, of earlier art. If, on the other hand, we accept that art is in fact an expression of a personal meaning, then in comparison with modern art, earlier art seems illusory. I have ultimately pointed out that the question of the relationship between the two eras that Patočka considers can be solved using his later reflections in *Heretical Essays* on the subject of meaning, difference, and the mutual relationship between problematic meaning and putatively secure meaning. In this context, I pointed out that the meaning of earlier art can reasonably be seen as a supposedly definitive meaning, religious in nature, which disguises the disclosed problematic nature of meaning. The meaning of modern art, on the other hand, can be seen as meaning that is problematic but stems from an explicit relation to being.

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JAN PATOČKA: ART AND TIME

If the ultimate aim of our work in education is to teach people to understand works of art, then for professionals of our kind reflections on the essence of the work of art and the possible approaches to it are not only theoretically justified, but also promise certain practical results. Such reflections would be only theoretical if both art making and its results did not require us to take certain decisions, to take a position; but the universe of artworks is not a quiet museum in which masterpieces would lead a life of peaceful coexistence like artistic atoms; it is a universe of searching and struggles. These conflicts are a result of the way in which humanity has throughout history understood the essence and function of art, and it is clear that an educator is not indifferent to art either, nor can he be. The immediate taking up of a militant position, instinctive taste, or a sense of the essential are not the solution here; only an account that stems at the same time from philosophical, historical, and aesthetic positions is able, in combining these viewpoints, to pose the question in a somehow adequate way. I will be excused, then, if in this opening address I attempt to talk to you about these somewhat abstract and certainly difficult questions.

I shall try to expound my topic using the example of the plastic arts. In the twentieth century these arts underwent a true revolution that turned against everything that had been considered the norm in art from the fifteenth century to the nineteenth. Like it or not, whether we consider it a valuable achievement or a scandal, the phenomenon of this revolution exists together with the fact that this revolution, long considered by many people to have been an abnormal, fleeting phenomenon, was able in a whole range of countries to persuade an expert public. On the other hand, the organized opposition of certain social milieux to this revolution is also a phenomenon worth considering. Just as the phenomenon that it opposes cannot properly be described by calling it a fashion, a perversion, decadence, or by using other psycho-sociological categories, nor can the opposition be reduced to mere conservatism or

[Jan Patočka, 'Umění a čas', *Orientace 1* (1966): 12–22. This translation is of the version published in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky* [Collected works of Jan Patočka], vol. 4, *Umění a čas I* [Art and time I], ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2004), 303–18. The editorial footnotes without square brackets are taken from that edition. The text was initially written in French and this version appeared as 'L'art et le temps', in *Kunst und Erziehung: Bericht über den XVIII. Weltkongress der INSEA; Prag 1966*, ed. Igor Zhoř (Prague: SPN, 1968), 105–13. The modern French edition is Jan Patočka, 'L'art et le temps', in *L'art et le temps*, ed. and trans. Erika Abrams (Paris: P.O.L, 1990), 344–68. For a German translation, see Jan Patočka, 'Kunst und Zeit', trans. Ilja Šrubař and Věra Šrubařová, in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 1, *Kunst und Zeit: Kulturphilosophische Schriften*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Ilja Šrubař (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), 49–69.]

a supposedly healthy instinct for social equilibrium. I believe that this whole set of phenomena cannot be understood unless we realize that the very purpose of a work of art, the way we understand that work, changes in the course of history and that we have reached a turning point on this path. This is not only an interesting sociological phenomenon, but also a substantial aesthetic development. In the interpretation that follows I shall try to define this change. It need not be added that parallel events occurred in the fields of music and poetry and that we could just as well start from there too. But the plastic arts have the advantage that they let us know more clearly the actual nature of these modern developments, what they have in common with the attitudes of the past, and what separates the former from the latter.

That is what made possible the explanation of the modern plastic arts in terms of a return to *style*, after the centuries-long episode in which the primary role was imitation, beginning with the works of Leonardo da Vinci. Style – that is, a set of forms created with an expressive purpose without an equivalent in reality – dominates over imitation, for example, in primitive, Assyrian and Babylonian, Romanesque, and early Gothic art; it is subordinated to imitation in the period that began with the Renaissance; it returns to its supremacy in the twentieth century. Though this view allows us to understand what modern art has in common with the great tendencies of the past, it does not emphasize a difference that seems no less important to me. We shall endeavour to clarify this difference in such a way that, in doing so, we shall base ourselves on certain ideas from Hegel's aesthetics. It may at first seem paradoxical that we are trying to cast light on the meaning of the modern attitude to art by referring to a thinker for whom the whole conception, no matter how grand, revolves around the classical ideal, an ideal which modern art vehemently rejects. Indeed, we shall only indirectly base ourselves on Hegel. His aesthetics is the first modern discussion about art to have been founded on a consideration of the artistic universe. Although this universe is very incomplete, turning on the 'Greco-Roman antiquity–Renaissance' axis, Hegel's discussion is nevertheless historically orientated. The main topic of Hegel's considerations is Greek art and so-called Romantic art – art that is Christian in the broad sense, while accenting the strongly rationalized Christianity of the modern age. And yet, below the surface of the shared humanist ideal, Hegel discovers opposition, and this opposition, it seems to him, resides in the function that art has in the overall development of the spirit. Like religion and science, art too is a *mode* of spirit's self-expression, and at the same time it represents a *stage* of spirit's general development towards itself. The essential function of art is therefore to express the truth. The truth of art is truth in general or the spirit as the substance of being. But art expresses this truth by placing the ideal in front

of the spiritual view into objectivity, the ideal expressing the absolute, the infinity of the spirit in a finite, sensuous form. Art is that contradictory miracle of reconciling the infinite with the finite, the comprehensible with the sensuous. This reconciliation, however, is itself only an inconstant and preliminary equilibrium. The depth and wealth of the spirit cannot be exhausted by means of art; the spiritual, pure spirit as spirit, cannot be expressed by something external, the way art does it. But there is a certain period in the historical development when mankind achieved the decisive, most fundamental, spiritual content only by means of art: at that time, art discovered the world, captured truth with depth, which, for example, conceptual science, just then beginning, was not yet capable of. For this reason, Greek sculpture is not merely sculpture; it is a religion, just like the epics of Homer, the tragedies of Aeschylus, and the Olympic Games. True, after the fall of Greek antiquity, art was still able to continue; in modern painting and modern music, art turns inward, to increasingly emphasized spirituality. But art did not invent this spirituality as it invented the Olympian gods – if art goes beyond balancing the finite and the infinite, it has already lost the role of spiritual leader of humankind. It is now a faith; it will soon be a science to which will fall the task of formulating a purer revelation of the absolute. This whole development is supposed to culminate in what Hegel calls the past character of art; when art exhausts all the fields of sensuous and finite expression, and no longer has anything substantial to say, then it ceases to be a problem of the living spirit, which struggles for its expression – it is a magnificent museum of the efforts that were ours; we understand them, and we can enjoy them for ever, but we do not expect art making to offer us new enlightenment either about the world or about ourselves.

This view, completely devoted to the classical ideal, contains something extremely daring and radical – an understanding of the limited nature of this ideal and the inability to continue in it; a hundred years before the revolution in art, Hegel saw a crisis of the art of times that had no inkling of it. This view also shows us that a certain manner of negating the traditional attitude to art can be recognized even with a very conservative approach to it, if art is judged historically. The revolution in art is not, then, an inorganic event, without any relationship to the motives of previous times. Hegel is aware of the profound difference between art that creates gods and discovers the world, the imperative, binding art of ancient times, and, on the other hand, art that no longer obligates anyone, which revolves around itself and culminates in itself, as made by his contemporaries. His mistake is only that he identifies 'humanist' art – which seeks to express beauty and idealized, transformed imitation – with art in general. Consequently, he does not see that the subjective, private, non-binding nature

of modern art could result not in pushing the making of art into the past, but in the arrival of the era of *subjective style*.

We certainly no longer share the premises of Hegel's system. No one today dares to defend Hegel's main theses. The absolute spirit, which understands itself and whose dialectics not only reflects but also creates being, art as a contradictory matching of the finite and the infinite – none of that concerns us here. We will concentrate our reflections on the contrast between traditional art, which points to something outside art, where the work of art is translucent and transitable, so that its function is to reveal something different from art, and modern art, whose ultimate consequences were drawn by the revolution of the twentieth century, where the work is seen as such, as a *work of art*, where it is rather the world that points to the work that is therefore an object which in itself is finished, in which the artist's and the viewer's intentions achieve their ultimate aim. And we also agree with Hegel that we can have different ways of relating not only to things but also to being and these ways can be called various forms of truth, and that all these forms are in relation to each other at each particular time. Thus, for example, conceptual knowledge as presented by the mathematical natural sciences, themselves a radical objectification of reality, has become absolutely dominant in our culture, the school system is permeated by it from the first grade, and with the help of technology it penetrates everywhere. It is impossible for its methods and procedures not to influence somehow even such a radically different activity as artistic activity. Whereas art was once a kind of incubator for nascent science and philosophy, artistic activity must now be reconquered from abstract conceptuality by the often considerably intense weapon of intellectual reflection. And thus the approach to a work of art is not the same in each period; it largely depends on the constellation of spiritual activities in a given period, on their respective dominance or subordination – it is simply not independent of time. We can therefore modify Hegel's thesis that the function of art depends on time, in the sense that we leave absolute knowledge aside, and shall consider only the ultimate truth in the form of science, philosophy, and art. Obviously, we cannot with the necessary depth and detail expand here on their relations. We shall illustrate rather than analyse them. Thus, for example, it seems to us that humanity originally knew only a single spiritual expression of being, that is, a ritual act, which was later expressed by art, and that this development achieved an incomparable wealth and force at the very moment when religion, science, and philosophy had developed as much as art's possibilities of expression allowed them, without their completely breaking its predominance; by contrast, the absolute predominance of truth as a true proposition in modern times forces us to come to art by an indirect, mediated path; art is no longer the air we breathe, as

it once was for Greek science, which *saw* ideas, and to which works of architecture served as evidence; for us, abstraction is a natural state of mind, and that can certainly be seen in the art of our times. It would perhaps be possible to divide the spiritual history of humankind into two great eras with a transition in the middle – into the era of dominant art and the era of the dominant abstract and formal concept. In the first of the two, art, that is to say, thinking by means of making art, is seeing and imagining concrete forms, a natural milieu from which to approach the world, that is, to approach something different from art; the work of art is not in itself seen; intention goes through it and moves towards the essence of all things; the caveman in Lascaux, the citizen of Athens in front of the Parthenon, or the medieval Christian in front of a Romanesque tympanum does not see works of art in them; consequently, there is an artistic rather than aesthetic culture. In the second era, culture is essentially intellectual and volitional; it seizes all objects in order to take them apart and to control them; among other objects it discovers artistic ones, works of art, and directs at them a special way of thinking, a historical and aesthetic way. Here we see a culture part of which is certainly the aesthetic attitude, but which in itself is not of an artistic nature. Aesthetic culture is illustrated by the discovery of art as a special activity, which is different from purely technical activity, and of collecting art for a purely theoretical purpose; the museum, art history, and literary history (if they are not purely philological), aesthetics as a separate field of philosophy, which seeks to be scientific, these are characteristic creations of this era. This aesthetic culture is spreading throughout the world; it is conducting extensive research everywhere, making one discovery after another. But when faced with specific questions about the making of art, for example, applied art, it can answer them only on the basis of an analysis of the facts, on the basis of laws and finding out what the abstract relations are.¹

A striking characteristic of this first system, the system of dominant art, is that art here refers to something different, for it is a method of experiencing, feeling,

¹ At this place in the French original appears the sentence: 'On connaît bien la fameuse histoire de Gottfried Semper, critique de l'exposition mondiale de Londres en 1850: il reconnaît loyalement que les peuples européens, supérieurs aux autres par le savoir et la technique, sont absolument aveugles en ce qui concerne les principes du style de leurs produits, et sont battus dans tout ce domaine par ceux qu'ils osent appeler des sous-développés ou primitifs – qui manifestent au contraire un sentiment infaillible de ce qu'il faut faire.' – 'There is a famous story about Gottfried Semper, a critic of the Great Exhibition, London, in 1850: he honestly admitted that the nations of Europe, superior to others in matters of science and technology, were completely blind when it came to the principles of the style of their products, and were defeated in this whole area by those whom they dared to call underdeveloped or primitive – who, by contrast, manifested an infallible sense of what must be done.' [The Great Exhibition actually took place in 1851.]

and contemplating certain religious, ritual, and other questions; it is an approach to a solemn, extraordinary, decisive, divine element, or aspect, of the world. That is why, no matter how stylized, no matter how great the split between its formal language and ordinary reality, this kind of art is necessarily an interpretation of an independent world. If we employ the useful distinction made by Arnold Gehlen, who acknowledges three layers of meaning in a work of art – namely, the layer of elements of form, the layer of primary objects, which these elements represent, and, lastly, the layer of ideal representations which we achieve by these first two layers – we must say that art of this kind cannot lack any of these layers.² Particularly the third layer, the last in the hierarchy, completes the structure; it is the most important layer, and its existence is conceived as independent from art and a work of art; its existence is in no way the existence of a work, nor is it inseparably linked with it. The special fascination that grips us when looking at these creations is possible only in this way. The case is completely different in the works of the period we are considering. During the nineteenth century, we observe, for example, that the importance of the ideological layer decreases, first to the benefit of the layer of primary objects, and eventually to the benefit of the layer of formal elements. For example, one can hardly talk about three layers in modern landscapes; even there, the centre of gravity has shifted; in the works of Cézanne, for example, the object layer is now merely a pretext for the creation of a grand style of painting, which takes place entirely in the base layer. And even if the ideal layer exists here, as, for example, in the abstract works of Kandinsky or Mondrian, it makes no claim to a different existence from the one the painting gives it; and if the artist makes a different claim, then we need not believe him at all, yet the picture preserves its whole meaning, depth, and content.

Another very important point: when it dominates, the art of the period communicates to the viewer a 'metaphysical quality' comporting with the essential transcendence of the work of art that aims at something else, that lets the festive, ceremonial aspect of the world shine through. The metaphysical quality of the work of art is a term used by the renowned Polish philosopher Roman Ingarden to characterize the 'guiding idea' of the work.³ The metaphysical quality is not identical with the layer of the ideal content of the painting. The metaphysical quality is not in the fact that the male and female figures around a well 'represent' the meeting of Jacob and Rebecca. It is the emotional peak of the work of art, which functions as the unifying factor around which all

² [Arnold Gehlen, *Zeit-Bilder: Zur Soziologie und Ästhetik der modernen Malerei* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1960).]

³ Roman Ingarden, *Das literarische Kunstwerk: Eine Untersuchung aus dem Grenzgebiet der Ontologie* (1931; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1972).

its other elements crystallize. One could say that the metaphysical quality is its whole meaning, which is explicated or developed in all its parts, as in Bergson, where the simple act of movement is externalized, and is projected into the space in an immeasurable number of physical positions. The metaphysical quality thus, in the period of dominant art, relates to what is numinous, divine, miraculous. It changes according to the manner in which this numinosity is expressed; it is often a *mysterium tremendum*, a fascinating horror or alien, haughty, unapproachable majesty; yet there are special elements of the work, its formal and material components, to which it relates as their total general meaning, which are necessarily in harmony with this metaphysical quality. With Greece and its artistic tradition, however, it became clear that this numinous metaphysical element had changed, on Mount Olympus in Greece, into *harmonic majesty*, and this tradition of harmony lasts wherever the harmonizing influence of Greek art is felt. The harmony between the elements of the work, on the one hand, and its overall meaning, on the other, creates what Hegel calls beauty – in the formal sense; the Greek discovery consists in the fact that the essential metaphysical quality is also *concord*, harmoniousness, sublime and noble proportionality, that it is beauty therefore in the sense of material and content; we can therefore to some extent claim that in works of the period of dominant art the tendency to material beauty made itself at least partly felt. That, after all, creates a bridge between the periods of stylization and the period of imitation; in mimetic art the absolute transcendence of the era of ardent faith and religious ecstasy is substituted for by the ‘idealizing’; ennobling transubstantiation of sensuality. But it is logical that art of dominant intellectuality loses this harmonic dominance. All metaphysical qualities in it are allowed equally, no matter how diverse and divergent; all are basically on the same level. The ‘beauty’ of a work returns to that formalness, to the concord between the elements and the overall meaning. It consists in the fact that these metaphysical qualities are now themselves dealt with differently. It is no longer a work of art whose intention is somehow to say, to communicate, what controls its inner world – rather, the world then crystallizes into a world of meaning, which exists only in the work of art and by its grace. To characterize this difference, we could use the words of Mallarmé, when he claimed that the meaning of the world is to be closed in a ‘beautiful’ book.⁴ Modern art lets worlds of meaning burgeon, worlds that are highly diverse, remote from each other; and because there is only one harmony in a zone of multiplicity leading to the infinite, this multiplicity of meaning in modern art is necessarily disharmony,

⁴ ‘Tout, au monde, existe pour aboutir à un livre’ (everything in the world exists in order to come out as a book). Stéphane Mallarmé, ‘Le livre, instrument spirituel’, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: La Pléiade, 1945), 378.

unrest, even pain. And so the more it finds its own essence, the less accessible it is for the general public. But if art is not attractive owing to its metaphysical quality, if it requires, instead, a considerable intellectual effort in order to submerge us in a mood that is the exact opposite of harmony, of attractiveness, and of calming down, then naive consciousness will easily ask what it is good for.

But this characteristic of modern art is closely linked with the relationship that unites a modern work of art with the historical reality from which it stems, with our contemporary era. After all, we started from the thesis that it is the art of the times whose dominant spiritual characteristic is abstract intellectual knowledge; we have its most perfect model before us in our mathematical natural sciences, which are today merging with technology. For today's society this kind of knowledge is now necessary for its very existence. Industrial society, whose production has to be based on artificial, ever-growing sources of energy, cannot get by without knowledge that anticipates and constructs. Scientific and technical knowledge constructs 'phenomena', starting from present data, with the help of formulae allowing formal transformations that we interpret as prediction. This consciousness is superbly adapted to the tasks not only of the objectification of the experienced in general, but also to the kind of objectification that is highly formalized, in order to use it to the highest degree in practice. Such knowledge is a correlate of the reality that becomes the 'natural' environment of mankind searching for a great source of energy for production that can be maintained only by expansion. It is no coincidence that soon after the first industrial revolution had got under way, the physical discovery of the law of conservation of energy was made, which in essence means that energy is the very basis of nature, in other words, it is nature in its ever-lasting essence. If we agree with some sociologists that the human 'environment' has changed in the course of history, that the great partner of human beings at the time when they were living mainly by hunting was, however, the animal environment, whereupon human beings based their life on plant life, determined by the great astronomic rhythms, which thus corresponds to the settled farmer, the creator of great civilizations and histories in the true sense of the word, then we must also admit that modern human beings are making yet another transition – to inorganic nature, and not just to inorganic nature in general, but to its abstract, non-demonstrative form. It is a nature of formulae rather than of 'forces' – the word 'force' still evokes physiological associations, which would not be appropriate here. Humankind today is increasingly under the pressure of this fact, though in the subtle rhythm of private life this influence does not appear at every step of the way, it is more obvious in what determines this rhythm of privacy: in phenomena like nuclear energy and the influence of its consequences for the life of society, in astronautics,

in the mass production of energy and its impact on the landscape and the overall environment, we are faced with some of these phenomena which demonstrate the growing effect of this new 'environment' on the details of the circumstances or our lives and interests. The great environment that ultimately determines how our lives are played out is thus ultimately accessible only to the most abstract, formalized, calculating, and constructive thinking.

The initial stages of this transformation of the basic human environment can be traced back to the beginning of the industrial age. A production that exists and can only exist if it increases is of course capitalist production. The inevitable meeting of modern capitalism and rationality, both abstract and formal, leads to developments that later transform the very nature of this production in our day. A phenomenon emerges, which one contemporary thinker has called 'unfettered production'. It is production whose main result is this production itself, its actual productivity, organization, the possibility of modernizing and perfecting the actual equipping and supplying.

That determines a new basis for the concept of wealth: it is no longer wealth consisting in individual products, but the wealth of a general product, which is production capacity itself. That is why for someone to seize wealth produced by labour it is not enough to seize its ossified reified products. It even becomes impossible to seize this wealth once and for all; one can only organize the production process, and that cannot be done except by participating in it. Power and work are therefore under the influence of the tendency to merge into one reality; production swallows up distribution; governments and politics increasingly intervene in economics; and organized labour becomes a power factor. The traditional shackles of production drop one after the other: the opposites of labour and those in power and with time on their hands, the opposition between active labour and passive consumption. But, in particular, production no longer finds an external boundary in 'nature' capable only of transformations which are enabled by nature's ever-lasting essence. One no longer reckons on this sort of ever-lasting essence, presumed to be expressed in the laws of nature; instead, the transformations that we need are invented and we have science to search for and find increasingly new degrees of latitude for the creative will. The nature of modern scientific technology has an unprecedented flexibility. Neither in the object nor in the human subject does one run up against any definitive 'given'. A possibility is no longer something that *precedes* reality; rather, it merges with reality itself in its creative process.

Such a perspective is at first sight something highly attractive and evokes enthusiasm. All the shackles of traditional humankind seem broken or on the way to being broken. But upon closer inspection, we see that the liberation we have

thus described relates not so much to human beings as it does to human production. Production is not a human being; it is an objective process in the third person, and if human beings are necessary to it, then they are necessary only as a productive force, as an essential cog in the machine. If we look at the matter thus, then 'unfettered production' becomes, by contrast, the imprisonment of humanity, if we consider the human being the original subjective source of activity. One of today's great phenomena is evidence of this, because it is an expression of that new binding of today's Prometheus – namely, the phenomenon of the consumer. Unfettered production, which, with the invention of new products, runs ahead of demand which is determined by the already constituted needs of human beings, and holds them under the fascinating impression of the offered goods, stimulating all their strength in order to be able to use those goods and substitute newer and newer products for them – and it thus changes them into instruments of the objective process of unfettered production, that is, ever-growing power.

It is perhaps now possible to define here what we would dare to call the crisis of civilization on our planet or – if we wish to reserve the term 'civilization' for the lasting and comprehensive historical-cultural aggregates, which none the less lack an all-inclusive character – the crisis of our rational metacivilization. This metacivilization is certainly rational in that it is based on the human ability to contemplate with efficient rationality. It is, however, fair to doubt that this is still rationality in the traditional sense, where reason was a mark of human freedom, transforming the world from alien to human. Or, better said: the pressing question is now asked whether our scientific-technological reason is still of this character. Did reason not become a prisoner of this efficiency, when, in comparison with classical antiquity and the Middle Ages, it acquired the efficiency it had lacked at the time? It seems that it no longer knows anything absolute, nothing of the kind that would be able to govern all of life, nothing that surpasses the process of creative operations creating a bad infinity, because they are still relative. This reason is, rather, contemplative ability of an immanent character. It is an immanent part of the productive process – it is an instrument of power that is continuously growing. A very strange teleology, a kind of purposeful anti-purposefulness, is manifested in that: the sole being about which we know that it can consciously transform things and processes into means for ends, and can thus give things meaning becomes part of the process in the third person, the process of power, which accumulates more and more and where all human meaning then falls flat and changes into nonsense. It is tempting even to interpret the rift in today's world, its division into two systems, which began with the ardent desire for human emancipation, as the workings of the demonic skills of this

inverted finality. Two or even more worlds which stand against each other and threaten each other with destruction, which live in anxiety about a situation where partners are always able to surpass us – what an unrivalled instrument for the accumulation of power!

And that is also the reason why the ability to contemplate scientifically, no matter how brilliant its achievements, no matter how unprecedented its inventions, can be no argument in the dispute about freedom, about the autonomy of the human being. Concerning philosophy, which endeavours to go beyond the viewpoint of the technical way of thinking, one must consider, first, that philosophy is internally divided – how many philosophers put themselves at the service of this idea of power, of efficiency! –, second, that philosophy is forced to think about its categories under the impression of the new facts we have already mentioned, and, third, that it has so far not mastered the task. True, great minds have thought hard about the state of our world; one of them analysed, as the origin of its crisis, the state of European science, which has been able to convince itself and us that certain methodical approaches used by this science – abstraction, idealization, formalization, and construction with the help of idealized concepts – define the reality of things; other great minds have, on the other hand, felt that our scientific technology has been informed by the profound transformation in the attitude to being, that is, forgetfulness of the essential, which itself is a possible preparation for its new manifestation, by radically separating being from all kinds of relative content which always relates to individual existing things. But all of that shows only that philosophy has barely made the first few steps towards defining the problem, and that it still is unable to determine with convincing clarity where freedom, autonomy, and the original source of humanity reside. But there exists one essential activity of contemporary human beings, the whole of which, we dare to claim, is evidence of our spiritual freedom, authentic evidence *ex definitione*. And that activity is art – if art is the making of works whose observation *contains its meaning in itself as in an experience that refers to nothing but itself*. It is precisely the art of the *aesthetic era*, in the sense we have tried to define, which has this character to the greatest extent, even when it is a matter of ‘engagé’ art – for even then art incorporates this value, which it is meant to ‘serve’ and around which it crystallizes, and puts it into the frame of what it gives us to experience, which it lays out before us. And thus contemporary art, like art in general, is an assertion of inwardness, and thus also of freedom. In art, human creativity is not a pretext for something else. As soon as a human being sets out on the adventure that is art, he also asserts about himself that he is a fundamentally inalienable being, who protests against attack from outside. It is surely true that each kind of art, just like other

human activities of our times, could be exploited by unfettered production and by the consumption of artistic creations (which is one of its signs); art as a social reality is powerless against the social forces that seize it in its reality; but its sense, its inner meaning, is left untouched. Contemporary art surely sticks as close as possible to the sources of contemporary life, but not so that it can provoke us to lose our way in its labyrinths, but, on the contrary, to rouse us to feel and see what we can no longer see and feel in our everyday lives, which have been penetrated to the core by forces that lead us into conflict with ourselves.

Not that the art of our day lacks its own inner tension or that no rifts requiring a solution exist here. The main such rift is the legacy of the past in its confrontation with current problems. The legacy of the past is a partial solution, a compromise. It intends to continue in the ways of the nineteenth century, without submitting them to new deliberation. In the times before the Renaissance, art created an artificial style of expression, which allowed the festive and superhuman aspect of the world to shine through. The last great styles, the Renaissance and the Baroque, endeavoured to achieve the same result by means where imitation prevailed over style. The nineteenth century is aware that art is a universe of self-enclosed meaning, independent and self-sufficient; but it preserves imitation, description, and analysis of the given as an essential element of the work of art. It is the nineteenth century that created the concept of subjective art, or, rather, let tendencies develop which since time immemorial had been moving towards it. One of the consequences that had been in preparation since the Renaissance is that the layer of ideal representations, the so-called 'contents' of art, is becoming fictitious, and the imitation of forms given by the senses is thus losing its original meaning. Here, one can try to substitute new contents for the old ideal ones, but these contents, drawn from everyday life and not from an area that surpasses it and gives it the fullness of being, show themselves to be something alien to art, a kind of addition of external utilitarianism. Or, by contrast, one can deal with all fictions and conventions which have been kept for external reasons; one can conceive of the artist's undertakings as his or her attempt to achieve a radical establishment of concretely experienced meaning – and then we are on the way to the art of our times.

As is clear from the preceding discussion, there is a continuity between the nineteenth century and current developments. It is fair even to claim that the great artistic breakthroughs of the nineteenth century prepared the twentieth century. Painting at that time did not merely part ways with architecture once and for all – that had already been done by Dutch painting. Rather, it gradually rid itself of ideological conventions. The painting has become a window onto a world that is merely a world of the painting. Instrumental music has created

a closed musical space able to conceive imaginary events, instead of it being merely a part of the real spatial process. The placing of the Wagnerian orchestra into the pit, so that it no longer creates a bridge between reality and theatrical illusion, is in that sense symbolic. In all fields of art at that time, similar phenomena appeared, stemming from the same prerequisite: art is a universe of special, concretely experienced, meaningful entities, which one can agree with and understand, but which are in no way binding, and can in this sense be considered 'subjective'. Many participants in the subjective, romantic era thought that from there they could draw the consequence that rightly belongs in the framework of this era: art is not only a universe of its own; it is something more as well – it is redemption, deliverance from the usual world, it is a landscape in which one can live in safety, undisturbed by crude reality.

And it is precisely on this point that the art of our times draws the boundary between itself and the nineteenth century. The art of our times does not seek to be any artificial paradise, which human beings create in order not to have to live anymore. The fact that the art of our times does not *denote* or describe the usual world in no way denies that it *expresses* it. It does so by means of the artist. And it is here that it separates itself from all attempts at art for art's sake. We can even go further and admit that the attitude of the artists of our times does, after all, imply certain propositions about the shared, usual world, even though of a negative character. There is no 'salvation', no single, ultimate, central point of meaning to which everything can be related. In fact, our art, even by its formal approaches, does not deny that a work of art can also be looked at from the viewpoint of the usual reality. That is why modern drama goes beyond the stage, and tries to go beyond the antithesis of 'theatre' and 'audience'; and that is why sculpture does not want to have a pedestal and painting is giving back to the surface of the picture the visibility that has vanished since the days of Giotto. The art of our times is part of our reality; in its scope it performs a function that cannot be substituted for, or fulfilled by, anything else; it demands to be looked at not only as itself, but also in this function, which is not a function of escape. For, as we have seen, art is an irrefutable expression of human freedom, carrying in itself the indestructible seal of this freedom in times of unfettered production, which, by means of the ideal of man the consumer, subjects the human condition to an objective process. By its inner meaning, art is therefore a powerful protest against such self-renunciation. For the very reason that it does not stand outside its times, that it is not an artificial paradise, it can express the inner misery and suffering of the times better than any other form of spiritual activity. The critics who believe that this art leads logically to reconciliation with the present, with its prevailing tendencies, that it accustoms us to feel good and

at home in it, are wrong, I think, about what this art wants to be and is. The profound sense of freedom which is expressed by modern art comes through precisely in the formal means it uses: concentrating on the basic semantic *signifying* layer, surely sacrificing the metaphysical layer of the *signified* in the sense of what is narrated, but it does so in order to concentrate not on the layer that is narrated by the work of art, but on the layer that it *is*. Art in its current simplification is the world; it is being in its outpouring; it is the concrete meaning that arises on the basis of elements that are in themselves mute; it is pure creation, which we participate in by participating in the work of art; but, at the same time, it is practical evidence that a human being is not a mere transformer and accumulator of energy created by the play of cosmic forces, but is a true creative source – freedom.

Here I conclude my tentative deliberations about art and time. Perhaps we have seen that in its historical development art was first a method of all spiritual life, an environment invisible in itself, but making visible the festive, ceremonial, superhuman aspect of the universe. In the essentially intellectual world, it became a special activity, the creation of certain objects, which are definable, among other things, by definite characteristics that are proper only to them, objects that manifest the world of concrete meanings which can be not only thought of but also lived, and are organized according to the principles of spiritual, intelligible meaning, which, however, is in no way binding and in that sense is ‘subjective’. Today, we have to look at all creations, as well as the creations of past times that looked at them completely differently, from the viewpoint of what we have just defined. And that is of prime importance to the educator, who is meant to teach people to understand works of art. I believe that from what we have sought to demonstrate, categorically follow certain consequences – namely, the primary importance of contemporary art for the whole task that is set for someone who teaches people to understand art; it is impossible to understand the art of the past if we do not see it in the light of our contemporary art; art, for us, cannot be a method and a part of a ritual or magical act; it cannot be an expression of religion; for us, it is a style, a language, which is also both formal and concrete, and in which human creative power is manifested, that is, an ability to allow being to manifest itself. If, however, a human being is the site of the action, he is not a cybernetic machine with cosmic fuel. Art educators, in the current crisis of the human condition, have therefore been assigned an essential, unique task, which they will be able to perform only if they are attentive to the importance of the moment we are living in.

In the past, several great ideas about the meaning of art education appeared. First and foremost, Shaftesbury’s idea, adopted by Herder, that art, the only

human activity that refines feeling, is an essential instrument for humanization; another idea, particularly emphasized by Konrad Fiedler, that art – the intuitive knowledge that by this intuitive character differentiates itself from all merely intellectual knowledge – is an indispensable investigation of the world of the senses, which human beings dwell in, and true human education is therefore unimaginable without such exploration. Even more profound is Schiller's idea that the educational meaning of art consists in the fact that it prepares us for the historical era when a truly human, humane freedom, without arbitrariness, but also without cruelty, will prevail. Lastly, let us once again mention Hegel, who claimed, as opposed to all that, that the essential role of art education is education in *aesthetics* turned towards the past, that art had undergone a profound change in its historical meaning and no longer represented the living apex of the spirit. Each of these ideas contains a certain amount of truth, which can be maintained without prejudice. We have tried to achieve something of this sort – for us, art is also research into the visible world (we consider visibility here in the broad sense of being that which is sensorily or immediately accessible in general), which processes our emotional life, the life that expands horizons; though Fiedler is surely wrong when he overly emphasizes sensuous *knowledge* to the detriment of the active *creation* of style.

Concerning Hegel, we would say, it is probably true that in the radically intellectualized world the meaning of art has changed; despite this profound change, however, art has not ceased to be the most eloquent, least ambiguous testimony about free creative power, about the profound autonomy of the spirit. Educators who are able firmly to anchor and deepen our understanding of a work of art will therefore be carrying out a unique task: basing themselves on true art as on a firm rock, they will prepare that which, together with Hegel, one could call a new thrust of the spirit.

Translated by Derek and Marzia Paton