

THE AESTHETIC IN GLOBALIZED AGE

Giuliano Ladolfi



GIULIANO LADOLFI EDITORE

Translation in English: Sarah Elizabeth Cree

© Giuliano Ladolfi Editore
Corso Roma 168 - 28021 Borgomanero, No
www.ladolfieditore.it

I edizione gennaio 2016

INDEX

Forward

Methodological Considerations

The problem of “militant criticism”

Methodological Principles

The Problem of Interpretation

Hermeneutics

An Interpretive Model

The hermeneutical arc

Art from Modernity to Postmodernity

The Divorce between Art and Reality

The Epistemological Debate in the Twentieth Century

Art in Postmodernity

The artist today

A Period of “Extraordinary” Aesthetics

A New Conception of Art

The artist: an Isolated Prophetic Position

An “Organic” Art

Artistic Creation as Ritual

The Recovery of the Totality of the Real

The Ontology of the Real

Art in Globalized Society

The Re-Enchantment of Art

Biographical notes

FORWARD

Aesthetic creation exists because creation exists.
George Steiner

A scholar must take account of many different levels of criticism at the moment in which he or she prepares to present the physiognomy of an artist: one can take a single artwork into consideration, one can examine a current within the artist's work overall, or one can attempt a general interpretation. The distinction presents itself as a tool and a goal, the difficulty of which increases in direct relation to the choice.

And so, it appears proper to dedicate a section to the methodological and historical examination of the whole aesthetic question, towards the end of rendering complete a study which presents itself demanding and engrossing to begin from the position of he who undertakes the work.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

But poetry that thinks is, in truth, the topology of Being.
Martin Heidegger

The problem of “militant criticism”

Critical militancy presents enormous difficulties for a series of reasons. Whereas the past is perfect and takes advantage of the “history of effects”, *Wirkungsgeschichte* (in fact, “time is a gentleman”, as affirmed by the famous proverb), the present is changeable, variable, indefinable. Whereas the past enjoys a simplified result, the present must deal with a tremendously large quantity of situations. Whereas the past has established philosophical, sociological, artistic, historical, and cultural interpretive models, the present “must create itself”.

And yet, militancy constitutes a *conditio sine qua non*, an unavoidable exigency without which one would not be able to present posterity with an artistic period, condemning it to oblivion and obscurity. Therefore, militancy constitutes an indispensable necessity since culture can construct itself in “history”, despite the inevitable margins of error.

Now, in recent decades, the idea has become widespread that the militant critic should not possess his own aesthetic conception, but must commit himself exclusively to the right “taste”, as criteria of evaluation. Failing that, one says, he would marginalize artworks that are not in-line with his own conceptions, he would tend to find his own thinking in the works, he would stagnate on theoretical

conceptions. Such a position is unacceptable and hermeneutical thought justifies it: pre-comprehension, far from constructing an obstacle, if conscious, becomes a formidable tool for evaluation. In reality, the critic who commits himself to “taste” has recourse to categories unconsciously in his possession and used, whereas the “militant theoretical critic” has recourse to categories about which he is aware and which he intends to refer to. To what extent then these would exclude, *a priori*, works that are not aligned with their own categories depends on the categories themselves: if they are analytical, then the danger exists; if they are broad, then no artistic phenomenon can elude a vivid, critical, and open mind.

According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, for the limited and finite human being, every interpretation requires an “anticipatory movement” that traces the work within pre-established frameworks provided by studies and traditions that not only do not construct an obstacle but represent a rich basis that cannot be eliminated¹. Subjectivity is only a fragmentary mirror: the individual’s self-reflection is nothing more than a glimmer of the dense flow of history”². And the anticipation of sense

is not a subjective act, but is determined on the basis of the commonality that ties us to tradition. The commonality in our relationship with tradition is, however, in a continuous state of becoming. It is not simply an always already given presupposition; it is we who institute it insofar as we understand it, insofar as we actively participate in the survival of and freeing ourselves from tradition and in this way we move ourselves forward³.

In this sense, the work of criticism and the adoption of particular paradigms needs to be understood as a “revelation” of the epoch in which said operation is carried out.

Interpretation, therefore, is an absolutely legitimate operation and this legitimacy is sanctified by the “historical nature” of the human being, who receives a tradition and then, inserting himself within it, recreates it and changes it.

This work, therefore, configures itself like an endless task that requires one to continually put one's judgments to the test using the Gademerian "fusion of horizons", which constrains the interpreter to continuously change his thought. To interpret therefore means to open oneself to otherness, to bridge the gap that distances the author, making the possibilities implicit in the work emerge, and to engage in continuous dialog with other positions towards the end of enriching oneself with the cognitive contribution of others.

From this perspective, Gademerian hermeneutics proposes itself as concrete, privileged experience for which no real event is understood as something that occurred once and for all, but rather as an offer of meaning that is up to the conscience to make occur in all of its richness⁴.

But, in order to overcome the distance between the interpreter and the work, whether past or present, it is necessary for him to put his prejudices "between parentheses" and open himself to the inclinations of meaning, recovering the concepts that "include within themselves our own way of thinking"⁵.

Methodological Principles

If it is true that every person is similar to and at the same time different from everyone else, then each individual, but especially each talented individual, interprets the same human nature in an original way. In my view it is precisely the search for this peculiarity that constitutes the criterion for the understanding and judgment of any given artist. From this premise it follows that every universally valid artistic expression becomes a communication of the individual behavior that was used to interpret the common human reality. The universal and the particular find their synthesis and their most authentic, most complete expression in the work.

If one accepts the principle according to which no human being is an island, one must deduce that each person finds his or her identity only through his or her relationship to society, the period in which he or she lives, the logical coordinates provided by contemporary philosophical thought, the models tied to culture, taste, and tradition through which art takes on significance within a specific historical context. But I would add that, if no island is equal to another, some individuals are better suited than others to pass down to posterity the way in which a given epoch has interpreted life and existence.

These considerations open the field to practically unlimited investigations, since they would include every aspect of the endless sea that constitutes the individual and social being and of that multiplicity of forms and contradictoriness of appearances that constitute human life. For this reason, no research project can claim to exhaust all of the possibilities of knowing: one only reserves a “corner” of observation, in order to throw a ray of light on the shadows that envelop human mystery.

The interpretive perspective taken by the present project does not concern, if not instrumentally, the technical problems tied to the painter’s development of artistic research, nor biographical investigation, nor the problems of hermeneutics posited by the individual artworks.

Before presenting the results of this study, it seems necessary to review the methodological system under which the work of interpretation was carried out. As one will see, the journey undertaken by the mind is made concrete by a tenacious and “dogged” search for the fact, the work, and by the meticulous investigation of meaning and technique in order to avoid the danger of casting a “net of ideas” onto the painter, which could distort the general meaning in a preconceived way. In fact, the interpretive framework was not planned from the beginning, it was sketched out bit by bit, little by

little, as the investigation became a concrete reality through information, evaluations, critical analyses, and only at the end was a convincing clarity and transparency found, sanctified by the internal coherence of the discourse.

The Problem of Interpretation

Presentation of the methodological path is meant to provide the reader with all of the information necessary not only for a deeper and more precise understanding of the conclusions but above all to involve him or her in criticism of the interpretation itself, through constructive dialog in which the reader becomes an active interlocutor in a process that, one hopes, will continue even after the reading.

This journey is based on the reworking of some of the principles treated by phenomenological philosophy and hermeneutics, which, epistemologically speaking, represents an attempt to “offer our culture the possibility of sense” that disappeared after the seventeenth century and was tragically disclosed in the second-half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century with Nietzsche and Existentialism and in literature with Decadentism. It is indispensable to draw on this line of thought in order to overcome the gnosiological relativism that would paralyze every attempt at artistic intelligibility.

Hermeneutics

The term hermeneutics derives from the Greek ἐρμηνεύω, which means to interpret, express, translate, and explain.

Modern hermeneutic thought originates in the Romantic conception of language, supplied not only with an expressive function, but also a cognitive one. For Schleiermacher, hermeneutics should

not limit itself to explaining the individual passages of a text, but should also understand them in their totality through the psychological study of the author. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Wilhelm Dilthey proposed this technique as a fundamental method for the science of the spirit, understood in the historical sense and directed toward the understanding of the interpretation of meaning.

In the twentieth century, this conceptual nucleus reached a fundamental systematization with Martin Heidegger. In his work *Being and Time*, the philosopher held that the explanation of “actuality” (that which happens) does not solely represent a way of understanding reality but

the constitutive and primary phenomenon of human existence, which understands itself precisely as “comprehension” and “interpretation”. Comprehension is no longer one act of thought among many, the neutral learning of something given or a behavior that needs to be organized in a methodical or scientifically structured way, but rather constitutes the essential feature, the character most proper to existence, it is the fundamental ontological character of human life itself. The primary way of Being, which is to say of that unique entity who sets the problem of Being as being in the world, namely, mankind, is comprehension, so interpretation is “the expression of comprehension” which constitutes us as beings⁶.

Hans-Georg Gadamer emphasizes the linguistic aspects of the Heideggerian position, underlining the characteristics “listening” and “announcement” of the language of being: “The being that can be understood is language”⁷ in the sense that this language is not a detached description, but a “dialogic event” that engages all of the interlocutors.

From this premise come two fundamental consequences: a) he who enters in this relationship brings into play all of his assumptions; b) the process of interpretation is held at a distance both

from arbitrary subjective reconstructions, which assume the text as “pre-text” for entirely free discourse, and from the impossible claim of pursuing absolutely objective judgments. The interpretive process “configures itself as a mediation between the present being of the interpreter, with his horizon of pre-comprehension, and the traces, the meanings of the work that tradition delivers to us”⁸. Gadamer speaks of a “fusion of horizons” in which a fundamental role is played by tradition which, through language, renders man comprehensible and interpretable in his ontological, intellectual, and practical experience.

Paul Ricoeur returned to the problem of interpretation conceived as an unveiling of hidden meanings (in the etymological sense of removing the veil that impedes the vision of reality, of “tearing away the veil of Maya”, to quote Schopenhauer). The scholar must, therefore, find an “overdetermination” of those signs that offer themselves to interpretation and that are symbols.

Such a perspective offers literary criticism ample spaces for development, but, as held by Gianni Vattimo, it also serves to rebuild the system of knowledge, in which hermeneutics becomes a *koiné* of philosophy and of current culture, capable of proposing, after the dissolution of Marxism and Structuralism, a powerful system in view of a new phase of western thought.

An Interpretive Model

The current of hermeneutic thought is articulated on two distinct synergetic levels:

a) It aims to explain, to give meaning to precise data, such as a text, a word, an expression, a metaphor, a painting, or a sculpture. This realm includes the centuries-old effort to interpret the Old Testament, written in a language and according to a mentality rather different from western thought.

b) It conducts research on man, “that unique entity who sets the problem of Being as being in the world”, in all of his individual, social, and historical aspects. The study of the phenomenon becomes research on the totality and complexity of the human condition “through the explication of the meaning implicit in the relationship between man with the products of symbolic activity, it becomes a question about the reason for this constitutive transcending of the sign in a new way⁹.”

Three important consequences derive from this position in terms of critical methodology:

a) Hermeneutics means the explanation of a text, a painting, a sculpture, a film, or any work of art according to philological, formal, linguistic, and structural perspectives relevant to the object under examination. This work provides an early and substantial point of reference for successive analyses, but could also serve for an autonomous study.

b) Hermeneutics means going back from the text to the fantastic and human world of the author, to his *Weltanschauung*, to his unique and unrepeatable vision of life, to his unique and unrepeatable way (always filtered by art) of living or of having living on the earth at a specific historical and cultural moment, to the integrality of his individual and social human experience. And, from the moment in which man is simultaneously a unique and unrepeatable individual and an integral part of society, a doubling of tools is required: on the one hand, the awareness of biographical, environmental, pedagogical, and psychological aspects of the author¹⁰, and on the other hand, the study of the historical period, of the social situations, of the cultural and artistic models, of the religious conventions, and, above all, of the epoch’s way of seeing. These are two closely correlated, interactive moments, separable only during definition.

c) Finally, from the moment in which the individual is immersed in historical-cultural becoming, it is the duty of the author to trace

back to the characteristics of the epoch, of which the artwork becomes testimony through the combination of all of the knowledge gathered, knowledge that helps to clarify the phenomenon and that, through a dense network of interdisciplinary correspondences, reciprocally assumes and confers meaning, and tests the validity of the interpretive model. In this way, the study of the cultural characteristics of a given epoch inserts itself into the most extensive sketch of the comprehension of the evolution of thought and human civilization.

This is the only way to make it possible for meaning to emerge, the only means for conferring intelligibility to art.

The Hermeneutical Arc

One could object that all interpretations are subjective and inseparable from the personality of the scholar, since “history is inseparable from the historian”¹¹. On the other hand, the relationship between past and present is constituted by an adventure of the human spirit, which only ever knows partial, and always relative, success. But it is through precisely this struggle, as with every conflict, “that one engages with the disconcerting profundities of being, and man comes out of it with an acute awareness of his limitations, his weakness, and his humility”¹². And the scholar, knowing of these inevitable limitations, rather than withdrawing in a disdainful inertia, accepts the situation, refining his critical spirit to conduct rigorous research on the documents, in the conviction that

there are no brute, isolated facts on the one hand and then, on the other hand, theories; a fact is always a fact framed in a theory; an observation almost cannot not be pro or con a theory; we “look” only from well-defined perspectives; we only see that which our own perspective, interest, or theory permits us to see, each time; our perception is oriented; our gaze is “guided”¹³.

But, since interpretive discourse does not constitute a pre-text, that is a theoretical treatment that departs from the artwork to reach preconceived conclusions, it is indispensable to close the hermeneutical arc spoken of by Ricoeur, a true *experimentum crucis*, and namely the circular operation that, within the three moments of interpretation, depends on precise “data” or, better, “assumptions” and finds confirmation in a whole series of internal and external references through an “encounter” between the paradigm and other artistic expressions and other fields of knowledge that take the same object into consideration. If the hypothesis is correct, it must find confirmation elsewhere.

I will clarify this concept through reference to Galilean scientific method: when confronted with a problem, one formulates a hypothesis, this is then verified in a lab and, in the case of success, one codifies the law. This procedure, *mutatis mutandis*, can also be used for the interpretation of art: confronted with an artistic path, having analyzed the philological elements, one formulates a hypothesis, as Gadamer affirms; one proceeds, afterward or at the same time, to a different artwork for verification and, in the case of confirmation, one goes on to sketch an interpretation¹⁴.

But every kind of interpretation, at whatever level, entails a “gap” between the elements examined and the conclusions made. Confronted with a work of art, one either limits oneself to “listing” the formal, chromatic, structural, historical elements, and etc. — a most assuredly moot fact — or one carries out the work of “mental reconstruction”, conferring sense to that which is in and of itself empty of meaning, making a necessary logical jump.

As one can see, it is a delicate problem, but in this regard, Martin Heidegger observed: “The circle of comprehension is not a simple sphere within which any ordinary form of awareness can move, but rather it is the expression of the pre-structure proper to Being itself”. The important thing, however, “is not in leaving the circle but staying within it in the proper way”¹⁵.

According to Gadamer, “subjectivity is only a fragmentary mirror: the individual’s self-reflection is nothing more than a glimmer of the dense flow of history”¹⁶ and in this sense a given work of art can become the “meaning” of an epoch. And the anticipation of sense

is not a subjective act, but is determined on the basis of the commonality that ties us to tradition. The commonality in our relationship with tradition is, however, in a continuous state of becoming. It is not simply an always already given presupposition; it is we who institute it insofar as we understand it, insofar as we actively participate in the survival of and freeing ourselves from tradition and in this way we move ourselves forward¹⁷.

Interpretation, therefore, is not only a legitimate operation, but is also the only way of understanding and this legitimacy is sanctified by the “historical nature” of the human being, who not only receives a tradition but, inserting himself within it, recreates it and modifies it. Comprehension is a work, therefore, that configures itself as an endless hermeneutical task, prepared to continually test the judgments that constrain the interpreter to continually modify his thought. To interpret therefore means to open oneself to otherness, to be open to placing oneself within the work (Francesco De Sanctis asserted that the critic must submit himself to the work), to bridge the gap that distances the author, making the possibilities implicit in the work emerge, and to engage in continuous dialog with other positions towards the end of enriching oneself with the cognitive contribution of others.

The methodological articulation that we have described also permits the overcoming of an aporia of contemporary criticism. Starting with Romanticism, when aesthetics went through a true revolution relative to classicism, statements of poetics have increased to the point that the majority of artists today justify their own way of making art. This is an absolutely positive phenome-

non, for the fact that it constrains the work of reflection, which then reverberates positively on practical implementation and should spark dialog, discussion, and debate. This hides, nevertheless, a grave danger, heeded by few, which underpins the uncertainty and confusion of contemporary criticism.

In this situation, every kind of poetics lays claim to the statute of artistic quality on the sole condition of self-justification. If an artist justifies (and it is not in fact difficult to find coherent motivations in the chaos of today's aesthetics) the flinging of colors, the cutting of canvas, the white panel, and similar banalities and finds a well-known critic who praises it, he comes to be considered a great artist and as a consequence, *quia nominor leo*, every kind of expression comes to be seen as a masterpiece. And so one creates a vicious circle that is configured in the art world as a theorization-criticism-market circle, which celebrates the ritual of "consecration" on the one hand energetically imposing precise choices and cultural, often also ideological, orientations, and on the other hand marginalizing ideas and artists who take contrary positions.

This kind of situation is only generated in the presence of a weakness of criticism unable to emerge, to use a formulation by Luigi Pareyson, from "expressive" thought to draw on "relative" thought. With the first concept one refers to a "historicist" situation that denies philosophy, and therefore aesthetics, any kind of value judgment, recognizing only the attribute of being "an expression of its own time". And it is precisely only in this sense that one can accept the artistic expressions about which one spoke. In reality, one does not realize that at the base of every critical exercise one sets recourse to a principle different from that criticized as *conditio sine qua non* (cf. Gödel's theorem), otherwise one falls (and has fallen) into tautological theories and "suicide": art is the mimetic registration of the unconscious; if the unconscious does not speak, art is silence. In judgment, "relative" thought, however,

appeals to aesthetic principles superior to the artwork itself. And so one overcomes a self-justifying position and proposes judgments that have value, according to the etymological meaning of the Greek verb κρίνω, “to judge”.

The Specificity of the Artwork

One can object that this model of criticism destroys the specificity of art: a musician, a painter, a novelist, a poet – in the end they all have equal value.

Doubtless, the distinction of single artistic expressions is only to be considered in the first phase, during the examination of the work, since different art forms can express the same aspects of a given historical period; it is not by chance that one requires every hypothesis of interpretation to be confirmed through reference to different cultural circles. It is not the same thing to find oneself before a poem or a novel, a symphony or a print, a painting or a work of architecture, a philosophical work or an anthropological summary, because these are all particular expressions and languages, but their “meaningfulness” does not depend on the cultural sector to which they are ascribed.

The work, therefore, continues to maintain its validity with all of the problems of hermeneutics, of origin, of formal structure, but “also” becomes the sign of a more general discourse, which finds its denominator, its meaning, and its final goal in the historicity of the human condition. The different moments of the study therefore do not propose themselves as *aut aut* but rather as *et et* in a convergence of intentions that safeguard the independence and at the same time the synergy of each level. They are three segments of the same interpretive arc.

From this point of view the value of the artwork will depend on the possibility of “closure of the hermeneutic arc”; if even just one

section falls, the whole edifice will be implicated. If the work does not correspond to criteria of artistic validity, it cannot represent an original way in which the artist has interpreted the period in which he or she lives and his or her reality as a unique and unrepeatable human being. Equally, if its formal perfection is not a sign of a general path, it remains sterile and will not be alive with meaning.

For this reason, there are great artists who, in their unique and unrepeatable individuality, were able to formulate works of art that became testimony to the path traveled by humanity.

In this sense, criticism is “hermeneutic” or explicative not only in terms of the single composition, but also of he who plans it out and who produces it, and in this way the critic becomes the *homo quaerens*, the tireless searcher for meaning and truth.

ART FROM MODERNITY TO POSTMODERNITY

“Put out the light”, and God’s light is put out.
Derek Walcott

The Divorce between Art and Reality

Until the age of Decadence, the substance of linguistic-conceptual discourse — and by the term “linguistic” I include not only verbal expression, but also, rightly, all artistic languages — was based on an act of “faith”, of correspondence between signifier and signified (Ferdinand de Saussure). Moreover, according to Charles Sanders Peirce, “all thought is in signs and participates in an essential way in the nature of language”. Without this “social pact”, religion, metaphysics, history, politics, the economy, aesthetics, science, geometry, painting, sculpture, and etc. would not exist as we know them. The relationship between word and world, between logos and cosmos, was never fundamentally denied, not even by skeptic or nominalist philosophies even if as social convention, as clarified by George Steiner:

The covenant between word and object, the presumption that being is, to a workable degree, ‘sayable’, and that the raw material of existentiality has its analogue in the structure of narrative [...] have been variously expressed. [...] in Adamic speech the fit is perfect: all things are as Adam names them. Predication and essence coincide seamlessly. In Platonic idealism, to which the main western metaphysics and epistemology have been satellite, the dialectical discourse, if critically and stringently pursued, will ele-

vate the human intellect towards those archetypes of pure form of which words are, as it were, the transparency. The correspondence between articulate consciousness and the matter of our perceptions and intellection, a correspondence indispensable correspondence to the very possibilities of rational thought and of social modes, is postulated in Descartes's Third *Meditation*. How else, asks Descartes, could we inhabit reason? The self-realization of "spirit" (Geist) in Hegel's *Phenomenology* is an Odyssey of consciousness, of human understanding and self-understanding via successive stages of conceptualization¹⁸.

That semantic inadequacies exist between human expression and reality is a problem that has already been examined by classical rhetoric, but "even the most astringent skepticism, even the most subversive of anti-rhetorics remained committed to language"¹⁹.

The situation changed radically with the advent of Decadentism: the contract between word and reality was "broken for the first time, in any thorough and consequent sense, in European, Central European and Russian culture and speculative consciousness during the decades from the 1870s to the 1930s. *It is this break of the covenant between word and world which constitutes one of the very few genuine revolutions of spirit in Western history and which defines modernity itself*"²⁰.

The causes are rooted in the seventeenth century, but only at the end of the nineteenth century did it arrive at complete awareness of the consequences produced by the dissolution of the Greco-Christian synthesis, one of the pillars of which was substantiated by the primacy of being over thought. *Ordo rerum* and *ordo idearum* coincided. Though Cartesian, introducing the net distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, it upset the situation determining the primacy of thought over being, of subjectivity over objectivity²¹, and even though the successive speculation was confined to exploring the limits of human reason (I. Kant), the instrument of such action was never put into doubt. Only with Decadentism, a histo-

rical-cultural moment during which western civilization arrived at the awareness of not being able “*to propose an acceptable interpretation of the real and, consequently, to identify a solution to existential questions*”, the crisis of western culture consumes the results of this process, eliminating the fundamental element, emptying the efficacy of the heuristic instrument itself, reason-word, pushing itself to the limit of aphasic nihilism.

The first step is represented by rejecting reason as a means to knowledge since incapable of proposing a meaning for existence. One therefore looks for other methods. Art proposes itself as *the most authentic form of gnosiological investigation*. Dependent on this position is the fundamental aesthetic canon of Decadentism: *art = knowledge*. As never before in history, this field of human activity took on the honor and the responsibility of discovering the mystery that conceals itself behind phenomenal reality:

So the poet is actually a thief of fire. He has taken responsibility for humanity, even for animals; he will have to make it so that his inventions are smelled, touched, and heard; if that which he brings back from down there has form, he gives it form; if it is formless, he gives it formlessness, finding a language [...]. This language will be of the soul and for the soul, covering everything: scents, sounds, colors; thought that grapples with thought and that pulls²².

Nevertheless, the artist is aware that in this operation, too, he or she can no longer set forth an organic and complete interpretation of the world, and so one limits oneself to partial aspects, details, and provisional elements, to bringing shreds of reality - “fragments”, “scraps”, “shavings”, “cuttlebones”, - back to light through fulgurations. The artist is obligated to abandon the ways of mimetic reproduction of the phenomenal world. In this phase, word, form, and color broaden, or rather, they change their scope: choices come to be made not on the basis of representative value but rather by virtue of a true evocative potential.

The next step signals a point of “no return”. The artist eliminates the traditional descriptive, structural, and space-time ties of reality and places him or herself in a dazed present where voice is given solely to the combination of phonic, chromatic sensations and personal psychic impressions. Now, the iconic word, freed from tradition’s support network, no longer plays a communicative role, but tries exclusively to evoke fantastical images, to bind him or herself according to unpredictable analogies, opening up entirely new, never seen, and never imagined views; *the artist creates a different reality* lacking in any kind of reference to that which is perceived by the senses.

Traditional logos, the pact between subject and verb, between he who represents and the community that looks to the artwork as the possibility of placing a middle term between representation and perceived reality, is shattered.

At the end of the nineteenth century, “ontological nihilism” was spent. The traditional bases for communication were completely tossed away:

Compared to this fragmentation, even the political revolutions and great wars in modern European history are, I would venture, of the surface.

The word rose has neither stem nor leaf nor thorn. It is neither pink nor red nor yellow. It exudes no odor. It is, per sé, a wholly arbitrary phonetic marker, an empty sign. Nothing whatever in its (minimal) sonority, in its graphical appearance, in its phonemic components, etymological history, or grammatical functions, has any correspondence whatever with what we believe or imagine to be the object of its purely conventional reference. Of that object ‘in itself’, of its ‘true’ existence or essence, we can, as Kant taught us, know strictly nothing. A fortiori the word rose cannot instruct us. The organization of our senses, the structures which generate intellection and expression are either beyond our cognition or self-referring, or both. Language is embedded in these organizations and structures. There is no external Archimedean point to give it referential autonomy and authority²³.

Steiner's observations in reference to poetry are also applicable to the totality of art, which from that moment is in conversation with only itself. Reason, having lost its fundamental instrument for trying to understand the world, declares "the decline of the West" (Oswald Spengler). The "death of God" announced by Nietzsche sanctions the elimination of all of those values, all of those postulates, all of those axioms that had founded the previous civilization, one loses every point of reference, because between language and moral activity there is no possibility for contact: "Whatever became of God? I will tell you. *We killed him*; you and I. We are his assassins"²⁴.

Moreover, even scientific linguistics, linked to semiotics, the science of sounds and of signs, excludes all contiguity with that which is represented: "Severed from their transcendental and mytho-poetic claims, the language-acts of man have now been identified as units in a conventional algorithm"²⁵.

The divorce between language and reality is a substantial part of nineteenth-century philosophy, so much so that Franca D'Agostini defines this process as *a passage from the question of metaphysics to the linguistic turn*²⁶. We are at the antipodes of the conception of the *adaequatio intellectus et rei* or the Gallilean coincidence of *ordo idearum* with *ordo rerum*; we find ourselves within the Copernican turn brought about by Heidegger, according to which language is the seat of the emergence of being and no longer being as the "seat" of language:

language is the seat of the emergence of being, both from the point of view of the individual, as we always see and understand things within, and thanks to, the determinations of our language, and from the historical point of view, as language is the place in which the individual visions of being express themselves in individual epochs (and latitudes)²⁷.

And in Habermas and Apel the nature of language is constituted

by a real “a priori”, a pure form, freed from relationships with experience. Gadamer, developing the Heideggerian conception of being and language, similarly reaches the conclusion of the autonomy and self-sufficiency of language itself.

Such “emancipation” is sustained, even if with arguments that differ from those of analytic philosophy. Frege, after having tried to determine the nature of “logical objects”, conjectured the existence of a “third reign next to the internal world of subjective experience and the external world of physical objects, in which logical objects would actually find their place”²⁸. According to Dummett, the philosopher at the beginning of the twentieth century anticipated the linguistic turn, using the analysis of language for the study of thought, to the point at which followers identified the “third reign” as the linguistic reign and elevated it to an object of research. Making the struggle against metaphysics coincide with linguistic corruption, they arrived at a kind of “totalization” of language. Criticism’s point of arrival at metaphysics coincides, therefore, with the absolutization of language, and not only because it is a tool for unmasking the errors of metaphysics, but also because “in a certain way, language ‘takes the place of being’, constituting itself as a privileged philosophical object”. And this choice is not limited to philosophy, but also involves epistemology, social anthropology, cognitive psychology, psychoanalysis, and, naturally, art.

Therefore, even the history of nineteenth-century philosophy demonstrates that the detachment of language from reality is an incontrovertible fact.

In painting, abstractionism, non-representational from Mirò to Kandinsky, to Fontana, to Pollock, refused every relationship with kinds of representation that were not research on the expressive tool: color, form, dimension. It was the same situation in sculpture and music. If with Decadentism rationality lost every possibility of finding a credible representation of reality, in the “twentieth cen-

ture”, art, too, no longer feeling suited to recovering “shreds” of knowledge, limits itself to working on tools.

What has been documented here must not lead to the conclusion that the entirety of twentieth-century culture produced such results; different expressions, which aimed to embrace the totality of the real, are not lacking. The presented outline should be considered as an interpretive tool inside of which the expressions were diverse, varied, and blurred, including those of total or partial opposition. “Complexity” should never be forgotten.

The Epistemological Debate in the Twentieth Century

The separation between art and reality constitutes the contemporary tragedy: art represents itself and is detached from life in a sterile self-sufficiency that, above all, justifies all kinds of expression, even the most banal. This is not a matter of opposing representational and non-representational art, nor a matter of opposing figurative art and abstractionism; what is at stake is the very survival of an important expression of the human spirit. No one can indicate the form of expression to the artist, we are not drafting a manifesto, but rather expressing basic reflections. If it is also that, acknowledged and not conceded, even Duchamp’s provocations and Lucio Fontana’s slicing of the canvas want to retain the work of art, then no one should doubt the possibility of formulating antithetical positions.

Unfortunately, it is precisely the incapacity to justify the epistemological bases – which is quite different from the justification of individualist and self-referential poetics, characteristic of the twentieth century – that persuaded the primacy of the practical sphere to place itself as a crisis of the theoretical system and be fulfilled in acquisitions of a “descriptive type”, self-justifying and self-legitimizing. Such a procedure carries with it a clear devaluing of theory and a few aporias on which it is important to reflect:

a) First of all, one cannot speak of the end of philosophy and of aesthetics by self-surmounting. In the essay, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, Heidegger submits the image of the “overcoming” of philosophy itself caused by the phenomenon of fragmenting into individual sciences and methods. Every kind of knowledge would found itself on “structural concepts”, valid only in their sphere of application, which translate into an organized plurality of technically framed operations. Instrumental reason, therefore, would have also destroyed art as a human product.

In reality, art became responsible for the fundamental task of opposing itself to instrumental reason toward the end of overcoming the technological “non-thought”.

b) The second aporia would reduce art to philosophy (Hegel), for which the idea would be enough to produce an artwork. This position was very widespread in the twentieth century: “Action is the start of things, certainly, but above it stands the idea. And from the moment at which the infinite has no precise beginning, or better still, has none at all, like a circle, the idea is to be considered primary”²⁹. Paul Klee testifies to how painting dissolved its ποιεῖν into intuition.

In this case a harmonious balance of human reality ended, in which being, thinking, speaking, and doing find fecund synergies of fulfillment. Therefore intention is not sufficient, nor argumentation, nor defense on the part of the author because a work is defined artistic.

c) The third aporia, on the contrary, would resolve philosophy into art. Heidegger held that the end of philosophy opens the path to poetry as the only form of knowledge: “But that which remains to be said will be intuited by the poets”³⁰. Before the suicide of logic nothing would remain but art. Nietzsche had already predicted the birth of the philosopher-artists. Derrida envisioned an “ar-

tistic” or “literary” philosophy and worked on texts from the philosophical tradition.

The end of classical metaphysics would delegate the task of gno-seology to art. But, even reintroducing the cognitive capacity of this superior human activity, it is indispensable to make precise distinctions between the two spheres.

There is no doubt that contemporary thought considers the relationship between art and philosophy to be very close, to the point that these fields end with the loss of their identity, as if there is no doubt that they are extremely entangled to the point that the destiny of one becomes the destiny of the other.

It is legitimate, or better still proper to the end of classical, romantic, and “twentieth-century” aesthetics, to reformulate an aesthetic, but is also opportune to underline its character of provisionality tied to the current situation. This is not a matter in the most absolute way of endorsing skeptical relativism, but rather of proposing a position of mindful *humility* that involves not only a single person, but a whole series of scholars who, on a common course, accept the human limits and do not absolutize any conquest.

Art in Postmodernity

If the complexity of our time, a time of ends and beginnings, a time of the conclusion of a parabola, the arc of which spans more than 2500 years, can be intuited almost exclusively in the “negativity” of described phenomena, it is necessary to ask ourselves why current work differs from that of Giotto or of Raphael. Or better still, how are we different from the people of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance?

The postmodern period is characterized by “complexity”, a phenomenon that favored the emergence and the affirmation of a systemic and transdisciplinary hermeneutical perspective. Only starting from the 1960s was criticism, at the simplification of know-

ledge and of its history – typical of modern and positivist culture, led by the founder of phenomenology, Edmond Husserl – acknowledged in methodological terms, leading to setting the problematics in a pluralistic and reticular way and spreading the complexity model throughout all fields of knowledge, which invites incessant, arduous multi-directional research and induces interpretation of the real according to a diversity of perspectives. The structures themselves are no longer led back to mere causality, but exposed to multifactorial and probabilistic angulations. We find ourselves in a decisively new situation: it is necessary, in fact, to identify original paths in order to build a new cognitive synthesis, never definitive however, overcoming the temptation to anchor ourselves to solid certainties, or better still, making provisionality the most stimulating tool for development. Totalizing ideologies of both political and scientific character demonstrated their inadequacy in dealing with the problematics of Postmodernity and the result is right before everyone's eyes: simplificatory reductionism, superficiality in diagnosis, and lack of gnoseological and interpretive perspectives.

Complexity, plurality of approaches, and diverse angulations of comprehension must not be confused with the relativism that proclaims the absence of any truth, the debatability and subjectivity of every personal judgment.

Of course the path from complexity to ethical relativism is very short; a great deal of caution is necessary, therefore, in distinguishing the diverse phases in the development of thought. Moreover, the entire twentieth century declared that the absence of shared horizons leads to lack of communication and of comprehension (Pirandello, the avant-garde, nihilism), to the triumph of violence in the political, social, and economic fields, to struggle between individuals each carrying their own "truth".

In the first place, it is fundamental to distinguish the content from the method of investigation and from the interpretive perspectives.

It is one thing to recognize the complexity of a situation, comparing, or better, seeking the integration of diverse methods of finding solutions, and another thing to be paralyzed by the lack of a single, universal, and necessary solution. The diverse angulations, when considered in their limits, can rise to be a fertilizing stimulus for knowledge, literary criticism, the sciences, philosophical, historical thought, etc. All constructive dialectics produce diverse models of knowledge.

In the second place, daily reality is testimony that basic values do exist in our society, that these are not at all “weak”, that they are shared by the majority of the people and that liberty, comprehension, wisdom, justice, and solidarity might actually be valorized by our precariousness.

And so, what sense does it have to inquire into phenomena of art, of poetry, and of literary criticism?

The scholar today feels the urgency to pose questions, to formulate provisional answers like a spring board for immediate overtaking; he or she feels the need to spread his or her own ideas because they are pushed by other investigations. The age of globalization, in fact, is the period in which humanity finds a more profound unity of intentions. Although with the necessary caution, today like never before, the scientific community can avail itself of discoveries all over the world, can communicate in real time with every corner of the globe, can establish professional collaborations from a distance. Paradoxically, the age of individualism is producing phenomena of political (the United Nations, the European Union), economic (the global market), social (the abolition of classes), cultural (widespread literacy), and ideal (peace and democracy) sharing never before tested. Certainly, all of this is still limited to the First World, but events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall or the attack of the Twin Towers or the economic crisis have led western civilization to full awareness of the interdependence of the whole planet.

According to the sociologist Jean Baudrillard, everything has been said, everything has been done, and we have nothing left to say; we can only mix, cite, allude, rewrite; take the materials from tradition to create our own game. Art has reached the point of no longer distinguishing the real from the virtual. During the Modern period, the artist wanted to scandalize and to provoke – it is enough to think of Marcel Duchamp. Today, this has completely ceased. Lucio Fontana produced a shock effect through the choice of uncommon situations. Only the idea counted: after his famous slashing of the canvas, everything else seemed like a vulgar imitation. Now, since similar found that they no longer astonish us, so it is necessary to raise the bar: Cattelan presents children hanging in the Sempione Park in Milan.

In order to understand the dependence of Postmodernism on citations, one can offer the example of Robert Venturi, who wrote a book called *Learning from Las Vegas* and who proposes reconstructing Venice or the Piazza d'Italia in New Orleans, in a decidedly false context; but it is precisely here that the characteristic lies: even the false possesses the artistic value of the authentic. Carlo Maria Mariani pursues a neoneoneoclassical style and paints two statues painting each other: the Postmodern, therefore, utilizes every idea in a perspective in which one no longer distinguishes that which has value, because, point being, the false has the same value as the authentic. Hu Jieming returns to *The Raft of the Medusa* by Géricault, but in place of the castaways he puts girls in bikinis and bottles of Coca Cola. The Postmodern, in fact, also cites the Modern and the Avant-gard. In 1977, a naked man and woman occupied a very narrow passageway, forcing visitors to rub against them to get by. Eva and Franco Mattes produced the same performance in a virtual world. Andy Warhol reproduces Marilyn Monroe, cites the photography and deforms it or embellishes it. Douglas Gordon reproduces the Warhol's action, but he tears it in an infinite sequence.

THE AESTHETIC IN GLOBALIZED AGE

Culture is a dream come true for administrators: an effective resistance to change.
Zygmunt Bauman

*And now after a drop in strength, here it is
that April eye it is the resurrection,
the resurrection is that fire of water, of emerald,
those eyelashes, that implacable transparency.*
Mario Luzi

A Period of “Extraordinary” Aesthetics

One would never be able to comprehend the extraordinary nature of artist’s personality limiting oneself to using descriptive and formal categories. It is absolutely necessary to go beyond the chronicler’s data to insert oneself in an epochal interpretive flow.

And here we come to the aesthetic situation of the twentieth century. Schematically, the philosophical tendencies divide themselves into two currents defined by the analytics and the continentalists, according to a model that is by now consolidated in language³¹, not without reciprocal connections and influences: schematically, as I was saying, for the fact that one cannot ignore other tendencies that do not rise to the speculative chronicle.

The distinction is precisely delineated at the theoretical level:

Two different ways of conceiving philosophical practice are involved: a “scientific philosophy” (the analytic current, practiced by the British and American schools), founded on the logic of results from the natural and hard sciences, and a “humanistic” phi-

osophy (the continental current, because widespread throughout continental Europe), which considers history to be determinant and thinks of logic as “the art of logos” or “conceptual discipline”, rather than as calculation or computation. Understood in this sense, the antithesis between the analytics and the continentalists reproduces within philosophy the antithesis between scientific culture and humanist culture (between logic and rhetoric [...]): an internal turbulence from which philosophy (understood as a first science or as meta-science or as a form of resigning rationality and in a state of perennial self-dismissal) has never been freed³².

In the period from the 1930s to the 1960s, the distinction appeared rather clear; after that, however, the positions approached one another in a few moments of convergence.

This situation also determines two different tendencies in the field of aesthetics: the analytical philosopher dedicates his reflection to the definition of the concept of art, whereas the continental philosopher examines art in its historical development, in its expressive methods, and in the complexity of its implementation. The positions have probably never been so far apart in the history of human thought: on one side, research moves from logical deductions modeled on the rigorous analysis of language, within which only propositions are accepted that have verifiable characteristics, and so the analyzed item is reduced to a logical, perfect discourse, but with the limit of being abstract; on the other side, the investigation moves from the “phenomenological world”, from the condition of the real in its “actuality” with the danger of falling into the impossibility of delineating an artistic conception and of accepting as such any work to which the label of art is more or less appropriately applied.

Just as “Philosophy does not exist but rather many philosophies, many methods and reasons for calling themselves philosophies”³³, nor does Aesthetics exist, but rather diverse kinds of aesthetics, different and sometimes antithetical from both the conceptual and the

practical points of view. One can only find a relative logical convergence within analytic thought. It is not by chance that the effort of self-comprehension of aesthetics turns in two directions: on the one hand, in harmony with the conception of the end of philosophy, where philosophy proclaims its own demise also involving connected fields such as aesthetics itself and criticism, and on the other hand, “living in the house of being”.

A like situation is to be framed within a more general consideration which concerns the very foundation of making art.

The history of western culture shows that periods of “normal” aesthetics alternate with periods of “extraordinary” aesthetics. In the first case, the community of artists accepts and works within a model for the interpretation of art, which, for a determinant period of time, supplies a “paradigm”, to use Thomas Kuhn’s term, for creation and critical instrumentation.

The “normal” period succeeds an “aesthetic revolution” and configures itself as an attempt to frame creativity within conceptual compartments developed by a theory, in which the community of artists identifies the capacity to construct the foundation of practice. This consists precisely in the making of artworks through writing, shape, color, sound, images, as well as interpretations and judgments, “the promises of the paradigm”, determining the choices (as happened with the concept of popular Romantic poetry), applying schemas (for example, Structuralism), comparing the present with the past (cf. Auerbach’s inquiry into mimesis in western literature), articulating the concepts of the theory (cf. naturalist painting), and extending the theory’s fields of application (for example, the popular subjects of Romantic production). In a “normal” aesthetic period, the artist resolves the problem of creativity by applying shared models, to the point that the failure of a work is not seen as a failure of the paradigm but as the failure of the artist who was unable to resolve a question for which the paradigm promises there is a solution.

Therefore, “normal” aesthetics is cumulative; it is enough to think of the infinity of paintings and sculpture produced under the paradigm of non-representational or abstract art. And, if we think it over, the “normal” artist does not search for real novelty, but only a new variant, which, under the influence of cultural change, increasing the informational content of the theory itself, comes to be exposed to anomalies, which a little at a time testify to the fact that the accepted paradigm is unable to interpret the change. The poet Ugo Foscolo, at the very moment in which he adopted a neoclassical paradigm to express the historical disillusion caused by the Enlightenment, “exposed” that aesthetic theory to a crisis which, united with other contributions, would produce Romanticism. The emergence of a different paradigm will then determine another “normal” period of art, destined to be surpassed by a successive revolution.

How and why does the passage from one paradigm to another occur?

I am convinced that every cultural period identifies and distinguishes itself through a particular *Weltanschauung*, which is to say through a particular way of interpreting the meaning (or what is not the meaning) of existence. To know which causes produced the change, the individual case must be analyzed; it involves a series of philosophical, economic, religious, biological interrelations, the priority of which, according to the interpretive models we have discussed, is not at all easy to establish. One would spend an eternity discussing it, producing different interpretations according to the paradigms developed each time on the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire or the dawn of the Middle Ages, accepting such historical divisions for the sake of argument.

If it is not possible to abstract generalizing and generalizable models from the reasons for change, we can do so, however, from the modalities. The passage from one aesthetic-philosophical paradigm

to another occurs between “incommensurable” models and, even considering anticipations (for example, Pre-Romanticism), it cannot be realized one step at a time, nor imposed via logic, nor in a neutral way. It happens in a relatively brief period of time, as happened at the end of the eighteenth century with Romanticism or at the beginning of the 1880s with Decadentism. And its success is absolutely not determined by the power of conviction exercised by the supporters of the previous model, so much as the capacity to throw rays of light that better illuminate the path taken by artists in their need to attribute meaning to their work. The acceptance of a new paradigm, therefore, depends on complex causes, which put forward the possibility for better interpreting the changes underway in society. There are no verifiable or falsifiable reasons according to which the a priori superiority of a new model can be established with respect to the previous one, it will be up to the “history of effects” to determine its success or failure.

Therefore, no interpretation, no matter how stringent, motivated, or articulated can be decisive. The changing of an aesthetic conception takes place through a progressive shift of the faith granted by the literati to one or another paradigm. And this is what we are seeing in the current cultural situation: we are living a moment of “aesthetic revolution”.

A New Conception of Art

Now the question naturally arises: What role is played by the artist within this process of the renewal of art, of this “turn”, to use a Heideggerian term?

The first step, taken by the painter, consists in the reattachment of painting to the human being, restoring its intrinsic dignity, and this is implemented not through the simple gesture of adopting this or that artistic theme — doubtless an activity of such significance

could not consist in that — but rather in the creation of works that express an original theoretical approach, as clarified by Luigi Pareyson's words about words:

There is much distrust of philosophy in art. One fears that the autonomy of art would become compromised and art would disappear. One thinks that the cold speculative rigor of philosophy is counter to the emotional vibration of poetry. It means ignoring the characters of philosophic thought. There are aspects of philosophy that, conveniently emphasized, make pure and authentic poetry out of a philosophical meditation, to the point that it is impossible to appreciate the speculative value of it through this reality of art. The search for and discussion of truth, thought as personal experience, the vivid imagination that must lie at the foundation of philosophical thought: these are some of the aspects of philosophy that, if carried to a certain force, can confer an artistic outcome and arrive at entrusting the truth more to the irreplaceable expression of poetry than to the precise enunciation of poetry or than to the precise enunciation of reason. [...]

Philosophy can be present as such in a literary work, and contribute to its artistic value with its explicit presence. Naturally there is then an implicit presence, no less effective or profound, and it is that for which everything in the work, even the smallest stylistic inflection, is meaningful and reveals the spirituality of the author, and therefore also his or her way of thinking, his or her *Weltanschauung*, his or her philosophy³⁴.

Without a doubt, this paradigm revalues the cognitive capacity of art, which permits the painter to escape the vicious circle of the self-justifying, relativist aesthetics of many twentieth-century artistic currents and discover the path for work that “reveals” a personal, historical, and, above all, existential situation. Therefore, The artist is not afraid of grafting his art with a way of thinking capable of overcoming relativist agnosia. In him we find, like an intrinsic requirement, not only the support of a way of thinking capable of revealing a new way of conceiving reality, but also ca-

pable of obtaining the “truth”. And the truth, with a lowercase “t”, is not a definition, it does not implicate an affirmation; today the truth is a work project, a research project, a dialog that one translates into the requirement that contemporaneity be traveled, explored, be presented, interpreted, represented in all of its dimensions, in its contradictions, in its expressions.

Truth, in any case, does not present itself like a dish prepared by an expert chef. It requires creative gifts, not those of the video camera placed outside the bank. It is found at the bottom of the researcher’s sieve, who has sifted through hundreds of kilograms of sand and in the end found the glimmer of a nugget. The artwork must link the world, imprisoning the devastating becoming and the multiplicity of forms of occurrence by means of tools that it himself forged and that bear witness to a love for truth, which reveals itself only after having been captured, precisely like the artistic greatness that cannot be planned, predetermined, “proceduralized”, and not even understood in advance.

It is necessary to persuade ourselves that ours is no longer the time of glory, no longer the time of memory. Today is the *καρπός* of doing, of making, of projecting. The world has changed, art is changing, must change. A white hand on the wall is not enough, however, to proclaim the new. The painting which changed appearance in the nineteenth and twentieth century continues to be subjected to a devastating effect: if the paradigm does not change, it is no longer capable of tracing the perimeter of complex phenomena such as multiculturalism, such as globalization, such as the necessity of a global governance capable of keeping the economic and financial powers in check.

It is therefore necessary to start talking about reality again, about truth, as many contemporaneous orientations testify, including American “internal realism”, which means opposing both traditional metaphysical realism, which postulates the existence of an ex-

ternal reality known to the human mind, typical of Aristotelianism and Positivism, and skeptical gnoseological relativism. According to Hilary Putnam, in agreement with common sense,

there are tables, seats, ice cubes. There are also electrons, and regions of space-time, prime numbers, people who are a threat to world peace, moments of beauty and transcendence, and many other things.

Therefore the human mind can arrive at a first and fundamental result: a world exists with which we correlate differently according to historical context and the assumed scientific perspective. In fact, according to Francesco Tomatis, an interpreter of Christian personalism, the human being presents himself in relation to the world not as an ontological model but as a un-related instrument and this permits the avoidance of both falling into classical or modern metaphysics and limiting oneself to the postmodern disjointedness of individual finite positions. The relationship with reality is an unavoidable condition for every human being under every profile, whether genetic, biological, psychic, linguistic, social, economic, existential, and, therefore, also gnoseological and, as such, also artistic.

Today is no longer the time for creating art with the sole end of representing beauty and procuring aesthetic pleasure, today one must propose the aim of producing a kind of “olocrematic” (ὅλος “which forms an entire whole” and χρῆμα «that which one uses, utensil”), omni-instrumental (not “omni-comprehensive” in the sense that it must comprehend everything) in the sense that it makes use of the totality of human gnoseological tools.

As a consequence, it is knowledge (the discovery of a new opening onto the real) that produces aesthetic pleasure, and not aesthetic pleasure that produces knowledge. Nothing forbids considering artistic harmony as a tool for understanding the complex, the multiple, and the chaotic, always remaining in the ambit

of a gnoseological approach. I spoke of “olocreumatic” art because in the artist one finds the sign of the whole human being, of his finding himself in the present, of his being history, individual, culture, and civilization, of his aptitude for planning the future, and above all of his need to interrogate himself on existential questions, on his relationship with himself, with others, and with the world. It is for this that art can be defined as organic, and not because, as one has said, it involves the organism, but because it is a total, integral, and complete sign and symbol of the whole individual, made true in an “object”.

This conception permits us to enter in the heart of the problem and to clarify, even if provisionally, the concept of art. While philosophy, science, historical criticism try to interpret/describe the real in an exclusively rational way, schematizing, “de-limiting” the data (or better, the “assumptions”) of experience, losing sight of the “complexity of the real”, art must become interested in the world in a complete way, involving the totality of the human being. The other forms of knowledge, in fact, place the individual in relation with the other in a logical and consistent way, determining the cause-effect connections, the time-space dislocations, as happens in the syntaxes of language; the art, however, tries to reproduce the complexity and the completeness of human experience in which the principle of non-contradiction is not valid, in which the space-time dislocations are absorbed in the magma of the unconscious, in returning the past to relevancy, in the anticipation of the future through hope and the willingness to read symbolic meaning in sensory data.

Before the real, science is mute, it “simplifies” experience, philosophy takes a contradictory position (as in Kant, between the world of Pure Reason and the world of Practical Reason), historical investigation loses sight of an innumerable quantity of expressions of the past. But it is precisely in this complexity (not only

plurality) of meaning where the *raison d'être* of art lies, which enriches itself with mythical, realistic, allegorical, descriptive, and interpretive input and makes use of languages that in their perhaps even common transparency take on inexhaustible meanings in a continuous relationship of meaning with the user.

From this simultaneously ethical and aesthetic perspective, we need to reconsider the position of the artist, who must refound art without being afraid to get his or his hands dirty, who must identify with the real, and who, like an artisan, must be content with the effort before the gratification of success. The artwork, therefore, presents itself like a model of “ethical”³⁵ perspective which leads along the path of a healthy, balanced realism and to the responsibility of he who is aware that his product must “dialog” with humanity, present and future, and unite the theoretical layout with the “actuality” of a work from which one must depart and to which one must always return. Artwork and artist are, therefore, indissolubly united in a bond that is either still or already anchored in the act that is historically, geographically, culturally, and relationally determined in the ποιεῖν. And, if the act of creation changes an “other”, it changes it not in a utilitarian sense, but cognitive, for the fact that even knowledge transforms the world, it does not leave it intact, it “plays” with it. Human relation and artistic product place themselves, therefore, in formative reciprocity.

Philosophy, like science, using rationality, defines reality, gives it shape, puts it in order, catalogs it, dissects it, and vivisects it; this kind of art, instead, is knowledge of formless, undefined reality, not chaotic however multiple, complex, multiform, contradictory in becoming.

The artist, therefore, is not a philosopher who organizes his or her own thought according to the principles of non-contradiction, of coherence, and of consequentiality, and does not even produce in an ineffable way almost as if inspired by a divinity, as the an-

cients believed. The process of artistic knowledge presents such and so many interconnections that it is truly arduous even just to think of describing precise procedures, since it is the result of the participation of the whole human being in all of its components: physical (the ποιεῖν), mental, perceptive, emotive, sentimental, conscious, unconscious, designing, memorial, individual, relational, and collective (man is history), for which every definition excludes sizable portions of this process.

The artist today

The prophet is not, as commonly believed, he who predicts the future, but simply he who, according to etymology, speaks in place of another. Without arriving at the position asserted by Plato in the *Ion*, according to which the poet composes through the inspiration of the Muses without any awareness of it, I would say that the artist possesses a *zuviel* eye, a “third” eye according to Eastern philosophy, capable of seeing that which common man does not see and perceiving that which is not usually perceived. Therefore, the artist writes, paints, and builds in the name of all of humanity, which finds those ideas in his or her work.

And what is a more important “mission” for a contemporary artist than that of tracing art back to its human component?

If the artist like the poet, according to Heidegger, must hold the lantern in his or her hand to guide those who follow. Who roots herself so deeply in actuality as to become a symbol of it, sees as extraneous to his work both dependence on citation and the experimental intellectualism incapable of finding artistic form consonant with the realization of artistic thought. He, on the other hand, does not fall into a mimetic and acritical reproduction of the real. He knows with extreme clarity that no human expression will ever reach objectivity, but neither tends toward this result. *His goal is*

very precise: to leave traces on this earth of a soul that tried to find sense in his own existence at a precise historical moment and namely when pictorial art found itself caught up in a self-injuring situation to the point of threatening its own survival.

Of course, it is impossible to ignore the lesion of the greats of the twentieth century, to begin with Picasso, Braque, and the whole array of artists who, if they contributed to renew pictorial language, on the other hand excavated an increasingly deep rift with reality. From their work, the language changed, but not the basic position, incapable of producing long-lasting results.

All of them suffered a painful misunderstanding and namely that of renewing painting limiting themselves only concerning the technical aspect. If our civilization has arrived at consumption, it will certainly not be the use of one technique rather than another to subvert the cultural direction; if “everything has been said”, it is necessary to renew not language, subject to tradition and therefore itself a carrier of preceding problematics, but rather the very conception of art and lead it back to its authentic source: life, humanity, the meaning of existence. And in this lies the “epistemological revolution”.

An “Organic” Art

In defining something new, one always runs into the danger of dragging on the linguistic dross of previous meanings. Therefore, it seems necessary to clarify the term “organic”, which is intended not in the sense that refers to an organism, but to an integral, complete, and above all interdependent, unrelated concept, as, for that matter, it presents the human being in the “personalistic” conception formulated by Mounier and by Maritain.

In the first place, it is necessary to stress the autonomy of art not in theoretical terms so much as in ethical terms,

not only in the sense that the reference to a given public or to its

representatives leads astray, but actually in the sense that the concept of the “ideal” user is damaging to every debate on the theory of art, since it is held to simply presuppose the essence and existence of mankind in general³⁶.

And today the user is none other than the market. Culture, unfortunately, has submitted itself to its directives and bases itself on the satisfaction of the customer, on the increase of fictitious needs, on commercials, on posters, on the making into a show of some media phenomena. And, if we investigate the issue more deeply, this is not autonomy, it is subjection. Art, in fact, is denied not only when it becomes common sense or a purely technical game, it is also denied when it prostitutes itself to every kind of power, whether political, economic, ideological, or media based, when it becomes used as a means and not an end.

And at the restoration of dignity it is implemented at the moment in which an artist produces an artwork in which, expressing his or her own original conception of existence, he or she synthesizes the *Weltanschauung* of the historical-cultural moment in which he or she lives.

But art is not only knowledge. If, as rightly affirmed by Dewey, art is always more than art, we conclude with Pareyson that art is always more than knowledge:

For the multiplicity of acts and intentions and aims of man, it is always whole profession of thought, act of faith, political aspiration, practical act, useful offer, both spiritual and material. In making art, the artist not only does not renounce his or her own conception of the world, moral convictions, utilitarian intentions, but in fact introduces them, implicitly or explicitly, into the artwork itself, in which these are assumed without being denied, and, if the work is successful, their same presence changes into an active and intentional contribution to its artistic value, and the same judgment of the work requires that it be considered. In fact, art is unable to be such without the confluence of other values in

itself, without their contribution and their support, so that a multiplicity of spiritual meanings emanates from it and it announces a range of human functions. The realization of artistic value is not possible if not through a human act, which condenses that fullness of meaning with which the work operates in the world and inspires resonances in the most diverse fields and in the most varied activities, and for which the interest aroused by art is not only a question of taste, but a complete gratification of the most diverse human needs³⁷.

The artiste therefore, does not limit herself to saying “how” it is the world in the most complete, authentic, and human way possible, but he also strives to project the world, because art is art not in spite of philosophy, theology, sociology, morality, rhetoric, science, linguistics, tradition, the literary genres, history, biology, physics, astronomy, etc., but because the diverse knowledges precisely in their particular “substantiality” are transformed by the artist into art. Just as human “actuality” cannot be dismantled into its physical, chemical, historical, psychic, social, cultural components and etc., so art makes converge within it all of life, the whole reality of the artist, a unique and unrepeatable subject and at the same time identical to the whole human species.

A fundamental moral dimension is therefore revealed by this kind of art:

We are all made of that which we are given by others: in the first place our parents and then those who are near to us; literature opens this possibility of interaction with others to infinity and enriches us, therefore, infinitely (Tzvetan Todorov),

that one translates in this historical moment into a giant task, that of proceeding to a work of “re-enchantment” of cultural values, starting from the restoration of the meaning of the real:

The postmodern soul seems to condemn everything and not propose

anything. Demolition is the only occupation for which the postmodern soul seemed suited. Destruction is the only construction that it recognizes. The demolition of coercive constructions and mental resistances is its ultimate goal and the aim of the effort of emancipation; truth and goodness, declared Rorty, take care of themselves as soon as we take the necessary care of liberty³⁸.

The *καρὸς destruens* used up, the artist inserts him or herself into the *καρὸς construens*:

While [the postmodern soul] simply refuses that which passes for truth, dismantling the presumptions, solidified versions past, present, and future, it discovers truth in its original form, which modern pretenses had mutilated and distorted beyond public admission. And still more: demolition discovers the truth in truth, the truth as residing in itself and not in the violent acts committed upon it; the truth that was masked under the dominion of legislative reason. The truth, the real one, is already there, before it started its laborious construction; it re-postulates precisely on the ground on which the artificial inventions were erected: seemingly to display it, in effect to hide it and suffocate it³⁹.

ARTISTIC CREATION

Artistic creation is like liturgical rite which on the one hand recalls the event and on the other hand recreates it in symbolic forms of presence.

George Steiner

Material, therefore, is for us the sum of the things, of the energies, of the creatures all around us, of the measure in which these present themselves to us as palpable, perceptible, "natural" (in the theological sense of the word). It is the common, universal, tangible environment, infinitely mobile and varied, and we are immersed in its bosom.

Pierre Teilhard de Cardin

The Recovery of the Totality of the Real

The roots of the crisis of western culture must be sought in a fragmented cultural formulation, inherited from Modernity, due to which every field of human activity was "emancipated" (Hans Jonas) searching within its own self for constitutive principles. The phenomenon could not and cannot not produce tensions, friction, contradictions between the diverse fields, causing results contrary to expectations, contrary in fact to the very goals that were proposed. Machiavelli was the first and authoritative witness: his "Prince", who places the affirmation of the State at the top of the hierarchy of human values, foretells the atrocities of twentieth-century dictatorships. And the consequences of the separation between politics and morality are only anticipations of the disasters that are taking place due to the rift between science and philosophy, between research and respect for life, between ecology and profit, between economics and respect for human dignity, between art and morality, between individual libertarianism and social coexistence, etc.

Such a formulation, promoting a contradictory cultural fragmentation, has inevitably led human action to a sort of substantial abstractionism, from the moment that it denies the completeness of the human person. No longer man, but *homo oeconomicus*, *homo politicus*, *homo consumens*, *homo ludens*, *homo ad sexum perti-nens*, *homo artifex*, and etc. have become the objects of inquiry and the objectives on which to set out plans and interventions at the personal and community levels.

Cultural and practical fragmentation causes an inevitable programmatic and planning myopia. The view of the present becomes entangled in continuous contradictions: uncontrolled free enterprise has not translated into general wellbeing, but rather into war with disastrous consequences for both winners and losers; the liberalization of drugs is causing the unhappiness of entire generations; the exasperation of individual rights in the defense of civil rights is undermining social security; abortion is legitimizing the refusal of every individual who does not correspond to the individual parameters of “normality”; euthanasia might justify the elimination of every non-productive human being; excessive indulgence in the educational sector is the reason for the psychological shambles to which many young people are exposed. It is not striking, therefore, to note that even he who fights for the abolition of the death penalty, takes sides for the death of one who is “differently able”.

Reality indeed possesses a total and totalizing, organic, and whole meaning:

- total because it includes the present, the past, the future, time, eternity, matter, and the spirit;
- totalizing because the path identified by his tends to the final objective of perfection;
- organic, because no part is ruled out, neither that which we see as good nor that which we see as bad, neither life nor death;
- integrated, because every part presents itself in a harmonious way.

It is not a matter of Cusano's *coincidentia oppositorum*, in which opposed elements coincide, but rather of a concurrence in which every one of these is also itself becoming a different substance.

The Ontology of the Real

One might ask whether you are not taking up the medieval conception of the symbol. The temptation to assimilate them is powerful, but limited.

According to the *Weltanschauung* of the Middle Ages, the material world postulates a different reality to which to refer. The word itself is testimony to it:

Symbolon in Greek originally meant part of a broken object, which served as a sign of recognition between guests or families. Just as the truncation of this card referred to the existence of another card, so the symbolic mentality postulates a different reality: next to presence is absence, to the past is the future, to material is the spirit, to expression is thought, to the "enigma" is the reality that hides itself behind "the mirror". The symbol is not only the trace of "other", but it also indicates that that "other" counts more. And only through the recovery of the dimension of the sacred is a type of art possible that becomes through the symbol the discovery of the totality of reality. The materialistic conception, in fact, permits, at maximum, the use of a linguistic or highly imaginative symbology, it is never a revealer⁴⁰.

On the other hand, as rightly asserted by Johan Huizinga, medieval symbolism could have been explained by the words of Saint Paul to the Corinthians: «*Videmus nunc per speculum et in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem*» (In earthly life we see reality as if in a mirror and in the form of an enigma, in eternity we will see it face to face). Earthly reality, therefore, was considered to be only a "mirror" of true reality, which was also *umbra* and *figura* (Erich Auerbach). The man of the Middle Ages was able to discover the

meaning of the world and of events through reference to classical or biblical texts. At the basis of this allegorical mentality one found a solid religious vision, which interpreted existence (*ex-sistere*) according to two conditions tied by a relationship of cause and effect, the temporal one and the eternal one.

The “symbolon” therefore that art needs to represent is the whole card, reconstructed in its integrity and restored to the original harmony that time and historical and cultural events had broken.

Not a “vital impulse” that comes to a standstill in material, not the call to a world beyond, not an irreconcilable split between traditional dualistic categories, not a materialistic reductionism, and not even the intuitive phenomenon of fragmentation characteristic of so much Decadent and twentieth-century art, but *instead a true recomposition of the unity of the real*.

And it is precisely this totalizing form that becomes real in the artistic creation, which cannot be limited to the material production of the painting, but involves the whole personality. When a artist selects the colors, delineates the forms, sketches figures, he allows the interaction between the diverse figurative elements to release an iconographic structure equipped with sense, involving not only the act but also thought, the past, the present, and the future in a creative tension that language, excessively descriptive and limiting, tries in vain to retrace.

It is for this reason that the composition and, as a consequence, the fruition, place themselves beyond the simple gesture arranged within a precise space-time dimension to transcend to an “absolute” dimension (*ab-soluta*, dissolved, released, autonomous), in a true ritualistic form that at the moment at which it ends recapitulates within itself the essence of the real.

This manner of creation draws on, in many ways, the sacrifice of the Mass in which the mystery of the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ is celebrated: the ritual performed by the priest,

anchored in a strictly present dimension, is also “memorial”, meaning that at that same moment one is actually performing the historical event as well, certainly no longer in the ephemeral dimension of becoming, but in the achievement of reality. Therefore, both the creation of paintings and the fruition, that which knows how to comprehend the profundity of the creative act of this painter, are, on the one hand, inserted into the disjointedness of time and space, but at the same time permit immersion in a totalized and totalizing reality.

And this takes place not through a voluntaristic or intellectual act, but through a precise philosophical position: art is the “contraction” of every being, whatever it may be, natural, vegetable, animal, or individual, for the fact that everything is present even if in a different way in every single being: the conscious reality of intelligence, the unconscious reality of nature, the reasonableness of a mind that orders the real and the social world and instinct, violence, and meekness, sensual attraction and self-control, the material and the spiritual. And the entire universe “lives” in this artistic production and, therefore, the painting, possessing the requirements of things, is itself reality, also because each being does not constitute an isolated reality but rather every entity is connected with the whole.

In order to fully comprehend the concept of “contraction”, it is necessary to refer to the ancient principle of Anaxagoras, according to which “every thing is in every thing”⁴¹, filtered through Renaissance Neoplatonism and, in a particular way, through the thought of Niccolò Cusano⁴², according to which “in every creature the universe is the being of that same creature”. Therefore, the being of every thing is the “contracted” being of all things. If, therefore, the problematics of the whole universe (finite and infinite, joy and pain, birth and death, liberty and determinism, conscious and unconscious, mechanism and teleologism) are present in every

creature, the artist sees, in animals, in plants, in things, the big questions and great doubts that assail humankind and of which artistic production becomes “epiphany” (manifestation). The space-time dimension is no longer nullified or transcended in the ideal world, it is gathered in its extension, or in fact in its “extendability” even beyond perceived reality, and within and by means of this, “things” acquire substance, meaning, and finality, because a “thought” vitalizes it, gives it the form captured by the artist. Reality finds the essence of its own being in the beauty and harmony of movement, in the intrinsic existential problematic, and in connection with the life of men.

But the artist does not come to a stop, as it were, at an ontological stage, he searches for the relationship between the diverse entities inclusive of a precise cognitive form. Every object, in fact, does not constitute an isolated reality, but is instead connected with everything, constituting, therefore, a totality of references: every entity refers to another and in this way shares in it and gives it significance. The whole chain of references puts a final term at the head, which is the Heideggerian “existence” or “being there” (*Dasein*), as a primary center of reference of references and meanings. And this totality of references and meanings is the world. And the expression “being in the world” that distinguishes the thought of the German philosopher does not designate a pure and simple relationship of space-time inclusion, but rather the participation in a chain of references and meanings which provides the artistic support for “epiphanies”, that is for artistic realizations, an instrument for “coming true” between being and becoming, between totality and individuality.

Art, therefore, places itself not only as a supreme instrument of knowledge of the human being, as “universal contraction” at a theoretical and intellectual level, but also as knowledge “materialized” in colors and shapes and, as such, representable and communicable

and, as such, usable and manipulable. It is not only a matter — it must be underlined — of a portrayal, but of a true “presence” of the whole of Reality in the painting itself and, as with Mario Luzi, the artist can “recognize sayings / and writings / everywhere in transparency / truth / silent beliefs”⁴³. And the work, reaching the “extreme point”⁴⁴ of human knowledge “through [...] the mystery”⁴⁵, with knowledge understood in a total physical and intellectual sense, “joyous liberty”⁴⁶ place that is traced in a never completely terminated pursuit⁴⁷ to the point that the artist is unable to understand whether he finds himself at the beginning or at the end of his path, “since everything is cause and unfathomable origin”⁴⁸.

The concept of presence within art can be understood through reference to the interpretive model of the problem proposed by George Steiner:

Western theology and the metaphysics, epistemology and aesthetics which have been its minor footnotes, are “logocentric”. This is to say that they axiomatize as fundamental and pre-eminent the concept of presence. It can be that of God (ultimately it must be); of Platonic “Ideas”; of Aristotelian and Thomistic essence. It can be that of Cartesian self-consciousness; of Kant’s transcendent logic or of Heidegger’s “Being”. It is to these pivots that spokes of meaning finally lead. They insure its plenitude. That presence, theological, ontological, or metaphysical, makes credible the assertion that “there is something in what we say”⁴⁹.

Applied to the artwork, the Neoplatonic doctrine of the “contraction” of being on the one hand makes reason of the “presence” of the object signified in the signifier and on the other hand saves the mystery of the composition and of the artistic reception. And it is precisely in this capacity to “read the world” that one configures the “constructive mission” of the artist: since the human being is *animal linguisticum et imaginem exprimens*, artists must create instruments for reading the exterior world and the interior world, it

must be they who are “re-legating” (according to the Latin meaning of *lego* of “to say” and “to gather”, “to put together”, from which comes *religio*, religion) universal multiplicity. Therefore the art leads to the tie with Being, absolute and eternal, where opposites find sense and harmony through a creative process that I defined “olocreumatic” and that takes on aspects that one can define as “mystical”.

According to Rudolf Otto⁵⁰, in fact, the characters that distinguish the sacred are to be looked for beyond the dimension of rationality, exactly as happens in art. Moreover, the artist’s inspiration appears to arrive from a sense of ineffability that eludes every conceptual dimension, defined as “numinous”, or rather, superior to human comprehension, capable of plunging the creature into nonentity to the point that it becomes impossible to track down the way of the *mysterium tremendum*. But, after this initial moment, the artist, precisely from this condition of wonder and of dependence, takes from the sacred a spring of energy that leads him to creation. The Other, the Real, the Total provoke (in the etymological sense of “calling forward) the person, Augustinianly troubled, and it requires an asceticism toward a union of finite and infinite. Whereas in the Christian mystic this union flows, as in Dionysius the Areopagite, into the silence, into apophatic theology, cognitive experience aspires to a form of knowledge that develops in a tension nourished by the totality of the person, which also comprises the love, intelligence, effectiveness, passion, desire, meaning, historicity, individuality, and sociality of every component, in sum, in which the human being is analyzed.

ART IN GLOBALIZED SOCIETY

The market is the god Kronos, generating and devouring art.
G. L.

With the phase of decadence that culminated in Postmodernity exhausted, humanity set out to live an age rightly defined as “globalized”. Only by considering this phenomenal reality can one propose some lines of comprehension of a phenomenon that we have already defined as complex. Only within this cultural frame can one judge the innovative capacity of the artist, who, through a solitary path, is “revealing” the face of it.

As Zygmunt Bauman argues, western society is characterized by a few peculiarities that make it original with respect to the past and, in a particular way, from the “passage from the ‘solid’ phase to the ‘liquid’ one” with the following consequences:

1. all social forms transform themselves so quickly that they do not have the time to serve as structure and reference for human action;

2. the divorce between planetary power and local politics provokes uncertainty, for the fact that the mechanisms and interrelations elude the possibility for control and, as a consequence, political institutions find themselves in the condition of no longer being able to respond to the needs of the citizens;

3. the weakening of political protection of the citizen and his exposure to the caprice of the market shakes the foundations of solidarity, strengthens competitive attitudes, and reduces collaboration between people, limiting it to a tool for achieving precise ends;

4. the disappearance of long-range thinking and planning crea-

tes the conception of both political history and individual relationships as the intertwining of episodes of short duration. The strategies of the past that have led to success do not absolutely guarantee future results in any area of human activity;

5. the future of the sector of hope, as it was in Modernity, presents itself as a source of anxiety even in affairs that do not directly concern it;

6. faced with the instability of the individual, knowing that universal solutions do not exist, it is always ready to change moral direction, to neglect commitments, and to seize occasions when they come about. The quality that best distinguishes this behavior is not coherence and not even responsibility, but rather flexibility.

I myself would add the predominance exercised by the laws of the market in all sectors of public and private life.

The so-called “flexibility” of the globalized age in the individual sector entails, as argued by the philosopher Francesco Botturi, the “splitting up of experience” which, if on the one hand permits adaptation to contradictory experiences, on the other hand generates suffering and disorientation. The impossibility of creating the shared experience of *Weltanschauung* and of a plan drives one to accept ideas and lifestyles that are juxtaposed and often in absolute contradiction. Accompanying a practice centered on the heightening of individualism, which manifests itself in the areas of affection, sexuality, consumerism and entertainment, is the sharing of the great values of public ethics, such as peace, democracy, justice, respect for the environment, and etc., without however noting of the inevitable conflicts. One associates faith in technology with relativism; the rationality with which one invokes the solution to problems goes hand in hand with an “emotionalism” governed by the logic of competition, which impedes the duration of relationships.

We find ourselves in the third stage of human development: from the primacy of agriculture it passed to the primacy of industry and

now we are seeing the primacy of the market. On a political plane, the agricultural system provided an “enlightened” monarchical model; the industrial system a democratic model, both liberal and communist, and now the commercial system provides a model that can be anarchic and, therefore, marked by conflict if lacking rules, or contractual and equal if supported by shared regulations. And, just as the Nazi, Fascist, and communist regimes considered the statist condition of the citizen to be natural, so are we now so immersed in the system of the market as to consider it innate to the very conception of man.

Now, to limit the significance of the work to pure “mirroring”, to use old Marxist categories, would mean not grasping his most original aspect, therefore, in light of the preceding analysis, one can legitimately deduce that the “liquidity” of the globalized age does not present itself in the painter as a turbulent substance, but as a phase of settling that helps to identify some specific features.

a) First of all, one cannot help but observe *the overcoming of nihilism and the consequential refusal of relativist skepticism*, because all of the authentic art is directed toward reality and truth. We are far removed from the agnosia, from the apraxia, and from the apathy that distinguish almost the entirety of contemporary production. Art is not dead; it is just sleeping due to the poison of self-referentiality that detached it from life. Art returns to saying that “we are” and that “we want” (to paraphrase the famous lines of Eugenio Montale).

b) Art returns to speaking with a will to present *a global interpretation of the real*, and this is not a secondary goal. Decadentism, too, proposed to trace the “other” reality beyond the senses, but reintroduced it in the form of partial and limited “illuminations”. Every attempt at synthesis was forbidden by the temporary character of the intuition. With the overcoming of fragmentism, the artist testifies that the decadent phase has by now reached its extreme

limit and that the cultural parabola has resumed a positive direction in part by merit of a renewed faith in the human possibility of knowledge.

c) Art takes back *the fundamental human breadth*: no one can indicate to the artist the ways, tools, or methods, but neither can one ignore the tragedies that are striking humanity and, above all, the new relationships between populations. Such a reality requires as a consequence a “globalized” cultural perspective and it is perceived the need to escape from Eurocentric schemes in order to put forward scenarios of a universal character: from here, recourse to visions of the real that embrace the whole history of humanity, from Egypt to India, to China, to Japan, to the Pre-Columbian civilizations, naturally without neglecting the western traditions, through a synthetic approach. It is not only a matter of finding “manners” of operating artistically, nor of painting according to “periods”, but of working conceptually on the way of interpreting the real that is proper to such populations.

For this precise reason, no contribution is seen as a pure relation of stylistic elements or of formalisms, we find ourselves before an artist who has taken pains to assimilate especially the spirit, the character, the *Weltanschauung* of these populations, which have tried to propose a meaning of existence through their writings and works of art. The artist therefore derives a result from it that is highly original in its formulations and solutions, in which the diverse elements are organic and integrated in a global interpretation of the real. It consistently achieves a *radical refusal of the self-referential and ludic conception of art*. It is proclaimed the indivisible need to unite painting and human problems in an art that intrinsically and intimately arises from experience, which reappropriates the task of investigating the themes of man. Painting, therefore, must also include a positive aspect: the condition of loss, characteristic of the “twentieth century”, is replaced by a condition of “edification” that

does not expect to find Truth, Poetry, and Valor but that seeks to propose a common humble work path.

d) It is fundamental, moreover, that one presents *awareness of the end of decadence*, understood as a way of creating art, as a necessity and difficulty of the “turn” and as a conviction that every “decisive” novelty emerges from tradition. And the novelty is fulfilled especially in the requirement for a new language, of clear and strong painting: clear in that it renews the relationship with the viewer; strong in that it renews the relationship with the world. Neither separation nor distinction between form and reality exists anymore. Moreover, the dryness and aridness of the style are to be interpreted as an undefinable line between representation and the white panel, between portrayal and world, between interior dimension and exterior dimension, through which the artist continually passes from the I to the “other-than-self” in a round-trip direction: the artist is neither canceled out nor romantically loaded by a “lawmaker and creator” centrality of the universe, maintaining instead a proper balance between involvement, projection, and autonomy. The “I-man”, the situation, the gesture, the visible and involving representation that overcomes the self-centered dimension replace the lyric “I” in order to take their place in a semantic plurality that multiplies meaning. It is not a matter of a poetic consecration of relativism, but rather of the “complexity” of reality and language, for which any overly-rigorous definition destroys and suppresses the true nature of “being” and of “dialog”.

THE RE-ENCHANTMENT OF ART

A thing of beauty is a joy forever.
John Keats

The most convincing result of an artistic production involves the overcoming of Modernity and Postmodernity in the gigantic work of “re-enchancing” values, starting from, as we have clarified, a conception of art that restored to the world that which Modernity had taken away: the meaning of the real.

It is precisely modern artifice to be dismantled; and it is precisely the modern concept of reason as legislator of meaning to be denounced, condemned, and exposed to censure. And precisely that artifice and that reason, the reason of artifice, to be incriminated in the law court of Postmodernity⁵¹.

The sociological model of Zygmunt Bauman permits us to bring the greatness of this operation to the fore. The war against the sacral interpretation of nature constituted for Modernity the declaration of independence from reason: the world needed to be deprived of “free will and capacity for resistance”. One aimed to acquire the right to “pronounce on meanings” and, to reach this goal, “the world needed to be de-spiritualized, de-animated: expropriated from its function as subject”⁵².

And this occurred not only in Romantic philosophy but especially in the scientific and scientistic conceptions in Enlightenment, positivist, and neo-positivist thinking, due to the fact that the “disenchantment” implicated the ideology of subordination: nature needed to be made “docile” towards he who proposed to avail himself

of the right and legitimization to consider it his “property”. Cartesian dualism had created an abyss between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* and the Kantian separation of the physical world from the one of morality had spread the conception that the world was “the object of willed action: a raw material in work that was inspired and that received form from human projects”⁵³. Nature in and of itself lost every meaning and only human exploitation conferred finality to it. The earth changed into a mine of “natural resources”, the forest into wood, and water into an energy source. The previous ties of the individual parts that constituted “nature” were dissolved and subjected to “productive” functions and goals. The fate that fell upon a “de-animated” world did not delay in extending itself to the human being who was “naturalized” and, therefore, susceptible to receiving “instrumental meanings”. Man ended by increasingly resembling wood and water.

And it is precisely against instrumentalizing behavior, the artist, one the one hand, re-ties the bonds that modern science had severed, through a holistic evolutive interpretive model and, on the other hand, proposes a process of “re-enchanting” the world that does not exclude even the human being. The disinterested concept of “beauty” does not aid the qualification of the foundations of this intuition, for the fact that one would end by falling into rhetorical argumentation, it is necessary to introduce the concept of “re-enchantment”, through which the artist prepares to interpret nature as the seat of being and epiphany of totality, “thingifying and thingified contraction” of a project that transcends it in immanence. Such a contribution crushes all ecological movements, too often motivated by a different logic of “possession” (of a landscape, of a myth, of un-confessed interests) and situates itself at the root of a question that invests the culture of an entire historical period: the world, existence, man need a redefinition of values.

And it is precisely the need for a redefinition of values that leads

one to try to reformulate the cultural and social models, reexamining the conflict between art and market.

It is a matter of a problem that provokes notable pessimism, as we can see in the chapter *Culture and Beauty* in the text *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* by Zygmunt Bauman⁵⁴. The renowned sociologist, after having thrown light on the fundamental war between art and consumerism, for the fact that the former aspires to permanence whereas the latter lives the cycle need-abandon-discard, argues that we find ourselves in the presence of “sibling rivalry”: art without the market could not survive and the market swallows up art in its own system. Without this interlacing art would fall into insignificance:

Cultural products are not made for being used/consumed in the moment or for dissolving themselves in a process of instant consumption, nor that which constitutes the criterion for establishing the value of it. [...] And object is “cultural” when it survives past any usefulness it might have had at its creation⁵⁵.

Although living in “dark times”, it is not necessary to undervalue the subversive charge of culture, of “true” culture, and as a consequence of art, especially at this moment in which power is not capable of “organizing” culture as an instrument of self-preservation or as a tool for “strengthening strengthened positions”. It is not by chance that substantial reductions are taking place in the production of culture; it is not by chance that, whereas the Renaissance princes financially backed artists in order to earn themselves immortality, the new “patrons” prefer football teams, basketball teams, and Formula One. With this I am not claiming any pretense; I am only trying to interpret a phenomenon. For that matter, the team acquires immediate fame and glory in disposable society, whereas a work of art “works” over very long periods of time. Now that art no longer performs the function of planning,

or construction, or maintenance of order, cultural goods should be exposed to the same standards as consumer goods.

But this position exposes the very survival of art to risk, which was conceived over the centuries, that is as free expression of human being, now placed at risk because submitted to the law of the brand: “one can affix a brand not only to sand, but also to flour, to beef, to bricks, to metals, to cement, to chemical products, to grain, and to an infinite variety of products usually not considered interesting to this process”⁵⁶ (Naomi Klein). Now is the time for beauty, for art to suffer the brand, independent of every aesthetic judgment and from every critical assessment. Bauman cites as examples Jacques Villegre, a passionate photographer and author of enormous canvases hung in all of the most prestigious Parisian salons, he thinks about a different kind of wall: a completely postmodern contrivance, one wall turned toward the street in which the action unfurls, and Manolo Valdés who repeats any message to infinity: he paints//collects/composes/pastes faces. Both artists reduce art to a performance, a happening, with a short interval between the inauguration and the dismantling of the show.

The sociologist, although denouncing the flimsiness of such manifestations, concludes that the freedom of the artist entails uncertainty, while subjection to power, security and cites Iosif Brodskij, according to whom “a liberated man is not a free man, [...] liberation is only a means to arrive at liberty”, but he does not identify a different way.

In my opinion, however, the problem is to be formulated in a different way.

At this historical moment two different conceptions of the human being clash with one another: the law on assisted fertility, the debate about biological testimony, marriage between homosexuals, the use of contraceptives, etc. are some of the areas within which

exist profound divergences between personalist thought and individualist vision.

The issue must be confronted at the roots and derives from a relentless contradiction inherent to the human being himself who is “unique and unrepeatable” and simultaneously “equal” to all those belonging to the same species. In the modern age the two elements expressed themselves in two opposing economic-political formulations: liberalism-free trade and socialism. The former highlighted the liberty of the individual; the latter, equality.

The distinction, which in reality obviously presents multiple shades of meaning, lends itself to clarifying a whole series of consequences at the practical level. For he who embraces the “individualist” conception, everyone is free to use himself, his own body, in the name of an unchallengeable “self-determination”; for he who shares the “personalist” position, man maintains a network of relationships and social obligations. For the individualist, the human being need not “answer” to anyone for his own decisions; the personalist is instead tied to society by a bond of “responsibility” (a word that derives precisely from the Latin *respondere*). Therefore abortion can be interpreted as the “individual” choice of the woman or as involving others (the future baby, the father, society); continuing to live or dying by turning to suicide can be judged as a decision about which no one can interfere or as the negation of a social value; the use of contraceptives in African countries as an effortless solution against a revision of the social concept of sexuality; homosexual matrimony as a personal choice against a conception of family as a micro-society oriented toward the preservation of the species, and so on.

Where to work then? In the first place, inside these implications of a political nature it is also necessary to consider the consequences on a practical level. He who accepts the personalist conception does not share in the exclusive self-referentiality of the individual

and works to restore the relational character of the human person on every level and to place the accent on needs above even rights. No one would doubt that these are safeguards; but, when one thinks about establishing the rules starting exclusively from rights, one can find major consensus, but one lays down the bases for the dissolution of social relations. Such a process, in fact, relieves the individual from responsibility and supports him in every decision he makes, whatever it may be. The damage caused by an excess of legislative “defense of civil rights” was not enough, an economic crisis, developed in the absence of global rules and of responsibility, was not enough, raise awareness of an inevitable drift, namely that the prevailing of rights over needs incites war, and in war the law of the strongest and most violent prevails.

An expansion of rights must correspond with a proportionate expansion of needs, of the awareness of responsibility at all levels, in whatever condition, role, or situation: from commitment within the family to commitment at work, in society, in politics, in education, in solidarity, in communication, etc.

Gandhi had no doubts about it: “The true source of rights is fulfilled need. If everyone fulfills our needs, rights will not need to be pursued very far. If, on the contrary, we leave our needs unfulfilled in order to run behind rights, these will escape us like fatuous fires. The more we pursue them, the more they move away. The same teaching was established by Krishna in the immortal words: ‘Only action belongs to you. Set its fruit aside’. Action is the need; its fruit is rights”.

The individualist conception fragments society in so many atoms, the personalist one interweaves a network of relations in which the educational principle of don Milani prevails, a principle that should be extended to every action toward others: “I take care of myself”. This is the revolution of the Evangelist, who exhorts to love enemies, to turn the other cheek, to give without expecting to

receive, to place in one's personal hierarchy the values of others (the next and God) over every personal advantage.

Secondly, it is made necessary to arrive at the awareness that we find ourselves before a cultural problem of enormous dimensions: the majority of the current contradictions and dangers derive from this formulation of individualist thought, incapable of developing synthetic conceptual models (in the etymological meaning of "putting together") capable of carrying out united, harmonious, hierarchical, and global interventions: unified, that they are always referred to the dignity of the human person; harmonious, in the sense that no sector should place itself at odds with another; hierarchical, in the sense that they need to be rooted in a shared scale of values centered on the dignity of every human being in his individual and social aspects; global in the sense that they need to involve the totality of the human being.

I am certainly not conjecturing something new. The lay thinker, who refuses a comparison with Christian thought, can accept a simple updating of the formulas of Kant's categorical imperative:

Act so that the maxim of your will can always have the value, at the same time, as a universal law.

Act so as to consider humanity, both in your own person and in another, always as an end, and never as a means.

Act so that the will with its maxim can consider itself as universally a lawmaker to its very self.

For that matter the thinking of the German philosopher was translated in the principles of the Charter of Rights voted in by O.N.U. in 1948, which recognized the centrality of the human person; they did not, however, find the force to create a shared cultural system in which economic, social, and cultural opportunities are equal for all citizens, in which they are guaranteed a decent existence, within which the ideal of solidarity, of gratuitousness, and of volunteerism dominates.

Every realistic, planning, and efficient action roots itself in adhesion to these principles, in the conviction that it is necessary to replace free enterprise, a generator of conflicts, with cooperation, which produces shared wellbeing; to replace the self-serving run for power with the disposition of spirit to aid he who is in difficulty; to replace the brutality of conflicts among populations with reciprocal faith and dialog; to replace the violent struggle against injustices with non-violent behavior; to replace hate and misunderstanding with the unshakable faith in slow work toward the improvement of the human race. This “cultural model” is not to be assimilated to the “goodness” that accepts everything and that is unable to transform reality, because every step taken by humanity depends on the work of the individual. And nor is it to be assimilated to utopia, a concept understood in the meaning of impossible fulfillment: that which is set forth is “realistic” and realizable” in proportion to how much each individual believes in it and wants to fulfill it.

India’s independence from foreign sovereignty achieved without use of arms was a utopia, but Gandhi succeeded. Of course, the price he paid was high. Nor is the position to be accepted held by those who consider the bad to be realistic and the good to be ideal. Both are components of reality, but man is permitted to choose and to improve himself and humanity. And then there are daily examples in the world of people who, despite the limitations, arrange their lives according to these principles. Certainly they do not rise to the chronicle in a world in which only blood, sex, money, sport, and entertainment make the news, but “a tree falling makes more noise than a whole forest growing.” And so it is precisely in this historical phase that intellectuals need to take a position of responsibility. The perspective is not to be left at the voluntary or moral level; it is to be dropped into daily political practice: replace the fight with planning skill, replace the career with culture.

I am convinced that the centrality of the person pays off more in the long run than one would think. Organizing work so that it is centered on man increases production, a consumer good packaged according to criteria that respect the environment earns trust, and honesty in the relation between vendor and client is the secret to success, an artistic product of broad range does not end in forgetfulness. There is a fear in the western world that when the underdeveloped populations arrive at affluence, its standard of living will drop because the energy sources will rise in price from the moment at which demand is raised. But, if for the sake of argument this is true, might not the value of humanity at pace pay back the current uncertainty a hundredfold? And, if our refrigerators were less jam-packed but there was more harmony among people, wouldn't this be an improvement of the quality of life? And, if military expenses, humanity's most scandalous sacrilege, were instead directed to scientific research, wouldn't man live better? The "centrality of the person" model needs to be reflected on and adapted to every field of knowledge and it leads us to conclude that the relationship between art and market needs to be set according to a hierarchical, not joint, scheme. Only with such clarity can one propose an intellectual light in the complexity of the phenomenon.

A thorough reflection on artistic questions cannot set aside considerations of a general character and these fatally lead us to the *petitio ad principia*, today, in a time of social "liquidity", more indispensable than ever, because only by refounding our culture can one legitimately claim to have all takes to enter the "globalized" age.

NOTES

- ¹ HANS GEORGE GADAMER, *Ermeneutica e metodica universale*, Torino, Einaudi 1980, pp. 80-81.
- ² HANS GEORGE GADAMER, *Verità e metodo*, trad. it. di G. Vattimo, Milano, Bompiani, 1983, p. 325.
- ³ *Ibidem*, p. 343.
- ⁴ ANTONIO PIERETTI, *Due scuole: Gadamer e Ricoeur*, «Nuova Secondaria», Brescia, La Scuola, 6, 1995/6, p. 36.
- ⁵ HANS GEORGE GADAMER, *Verità e metodo*, *op. cit.*, p. 432.
- ⁶ GIUSEPPE PATELLA, *Percorsi storici*, «Nuova Secondaria», *op. cit.*, p. 33.
- ⁷ HANS GEORGE GADAMER, *Verità e metodo*, *op. cit.*, p. 542.
- ⁸ GIUSEPPE PATELLA, *Percorsi storici*, *op. cit.* p. 34.
- ⁹ AUGUSTO RIGOBELLO, *Il concetto, la struttura interna, i problemi*, «Nuova Secondaria», Brescia, La Scuola, XIII, 6, p. 28.
- ¹⁰ Towards the end of clearing the field of any ambiguity, it is necessary to keep in mind that the material that presents itself to the scholar is only the work as a “given”, “consigned” element. For this reason, when one speaks of the author, of the artist, one is only referring to the personage presented within the artwork, not the historical individual.
- ¹¹ LÉON ERNEST HALKIN, *Initiation à la critique historique*, Paris, Colin 1953, p. 86.
- ¹² HENRI-IRENÉE MARROU, *La conoscenza storica*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1962, p. 56.
- ¹³ DARIO ANTISERI, *Epistemologia contemporanea e didattica della storia*, Roma, Armando, 1971, p. 59.
- ¹⁴ It is interesting to note that the reference to scientific method can be made from the perspective of procedure but also from the view point of epistemology. If one refuses the neo-positivist model based on the methodology of Schlick and Wiener Kreiss, according to which verifiability does not permit a multiplicity of outcomes, and adopts Thomas Kuhn’s theory of paradigms, one will see that a diversity of interpretations for a single phenomenon is also acceptable in the physical sciences.
- ¹⁵ MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Essere e tempo*, Torino, Utet, 1969, p.250.
- ¹⁶ HANS GEORGE GADAMER, *Verità e metodo*, *op. cit.* p. 325.
- ¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 343.
- ¹⁸ GEORGE STEINER, *Real Presences*, Chicago, University of Chicago, Press 1991, pp. 90-91.
- ²⁰ *Ibidem*.
- ²¹ Cfr. GIULIANO LADOLFI, *Per un’interpretazione del Decadentismo*, Novara, Interlinea 2001.
- ²² ARTHUR RIMBAUD, *Lettera, Charleville, 15 maggio 1871 a Paul Demeny*, in *Opere*, Milano, Mondadori 1992, pp. 455-456.
- ²³ GEORGE STEINER, *Real Presences*, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
- ²⁴ FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *La gaia scienza*, in *Opere 1882/1895*, Roma, Newton Compton 1993, p. 121.
- ²⁵ GEORGE STEINER, *Vere presenze*, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
- ²⁶ FRANCA D’AGOSTINI, *Analitici e continentali*, Milano, Cortina 1997, pp. 123-166.
- ²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 126.
- ²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 143.
- ²⁹ PAUL KLEE, *Teoria della forma della figurazione*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1959, p. 77.
- ³⁰ MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *La poesia di Holderlin*, Milano, Adelphi, 1988, p. 49.

- ³¹ FRANCA D'AGOSTINI, *Analitici e continentali - Guida alla filosofia degli ultimi trent'anni*, *op. cit.*, 1997.
- ³² *Ibidem*, p. 2
- ³³ *Ibidem*, p. 3
- ³⁴ LUIGI PAREYSON, *I problemi attuali dell'estetica*, in *Momenti e problemi di Storia dell'Estetica*, Milano, Marzorati 1987, vol. IV, pp.1833-1834-1835.
- ³⁵ The word "ethics" is understood not as moral precepts but in the etymological meaning of «qo\$, habit, made real, repeated, and accepted.
- ³⁶ WALTER BENJAMIN, *Charles Baudelaire, Tableaux parisiens*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp 1991, vol. IV-1, p. 9.
- ³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 1832.
- ³⁸ ZIGMUNT BAUMAN, *Il re-incantamento del mondo o come si può raccontare la postmodernità*, in ZIGMUNT BAUMAN, *Globalizzazione e glocalizzazione*, Roma, Armando 2005, p. 219.
- ³⁹ *Ibidem*.
- ⁴⁰ GIULIANO LADOLFI, *La poesia al bivio*, in AA.VV., *La poesia e il sacro alla fine del Secondo Millennio*, Milano, San Paolo, 1996, p. 30.
- ⁴¹ ANASSAGORA, fr. 1 Diels-Kranz.
- ⁴² Cfr. NICCOLÒ CUSANO, *La dotta ignoranza*, Milano, Rusconi 1988.
- ⁴³ MARIO LUZI, *Viaggio terrestre e celeste di Simone Martini*, in MARIO LUZI, *L'opera poetica*, Milano, Mondadori 1998, p. 1090.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 1091.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 1092.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 1093.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 1094.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 1095.
- ⁴⁹ GEORGE STEINER, *Real Presences*, *op. cit.*, pp. 121.
- ⁵⁰ Cfr. RUDOLF OTTO, *Il Sacro. L'irrazionale nell'idea del divino e la sua relazione al razionale*, Milano, Feltrinelli 1994.
- ⁵¹ ZIGMUNT BAUMAN, *Il re-incantamento del mondo o come si può raccontare la postmodernità*, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
- ⁵² *Ibidem*.
- ⁵³ *Ibidem*.
- ⁵⁴ ZYGMUNT BAUMAN, *L'etica in un mondo di consumatori*, Roma-Bari, Laterza 2010, pp. 162-192.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 168-169.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 178.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Giuliano Ladolfi (1949) took his degree in Literature at the *Università Cattolica* of Milan, with a thesis on pedagogy. He has been a Scuola Secondaria Superiore principal.

His has published four collections of poetry.

In 1996, he founded the poetry, criticism, and literature journal, “Atelier”, which quickly became the point of reference for national debate. His work particularly concerns twentieth-century poetry, with thirty five monographs that have changed Italian literary criticism. For the editions of “Atelier”, he edited *Opera Comune*, an anthology of seventeen poets born in the 1970s (1999); for Interlinea of Novara he published fifteen studies, including *Per un’interpretazione del Decadentismo* (2000), *Guido Gozzano Postmoderno* (2001) and an essay on aesthetics, *Per un nuovo umanesimo letterario* (2009), in which he expressed concepts that are revolutionizing the world of poetry and contemporary art.

His essays have appeared in almost all of the most important Italian and international journals.

In 2015 he collected his literary studies in a publication in five volumes: *La poesia italiana del Novecento: dalla fuga alla ricerca della realtà* (*The Italian poetry of the twentieth century: from escape to search of reality*).

He is a journalist, collaborating with the culture page of the national newspaper, “Avvenire”, and has managed the monthly “Noi”. For AltitaliaTV he was and has been in charge of many television programs.

He founded and directs the cultural center “Don Pietro Bernini” in Borgomanero (No) in 1988 and the University for Seniors in 1989. In October 2010 he founded the publishing house “Giuliano Ladolfi editore s.r.l.” with Giulio Greco.

He organizes and serves as the chairman of numerous literary conferences.

He was a tenured teacher at the *Scuola Interateneo di Specializzazione per la Formazione degli Insegnanti della Scuola Secondaria SIS* of the universities of Vercelli and Turin, where he taught Elements of Sociolinguistics and Dialectology and Dialettologia. He currently holds two university seats in *Pedagogy and Didactics of Art History* and of *Writing Methods* at the *Accademia delle Belle Arti* di Novara. His study on the *Capricci of Francisco Goya y Lucientes, prophet of the crisis of western culture* (1997), has caused a great stir in Spain.