

## **The Intellect of Art:**

Post- Auschwitz MA (Fine or Ugly Arts) or *We Should Talk Less  
and Draw More* (Goethe), Should we? *Wozu Dichter, What for Indeed* (Hölderin).  
*Nur lallen und lallen, immer-, immer- zuzu* (Celan).

Can we, after all the kaleidoscopic refractions of thousands of holocausts?

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses a fundamental question concerning not only the relationship between artistic technique and academic research but what role this relationship plays, if at all, during a period of genocides and a radical evolution towards a complete de-humanisation of mankind's existence.

The essay's corresponding sub-text deals with the iconic debate between Adorno and Benjamin around the character of the contemporary art scene during the fundamental and seemingly irreversible establishment of a consumerist-fetishistic society. The essay thus calls for a re-qualification of methods of artistic research and a re-definition of art academia taking into account a novel situation in which *techne* has become *poiesis* in a period of apocalyptic tragedy.

One of the central theses of the essay concerns the inability of philosophy and its corresponding conceptual language to articulate and to dig into the very meaning of a work of art, let alone the meaning and analysis of art history through art praxis. This reflects a deep paradox if one understands that art itself has today transformed itself into philosophy. We are therefore encountering a philosophy of man which cannot articulate its own meaning.

**Keywords:** art academy, research and praxis, art and philosophy

### **1.**

I hope that Walter Benjamin would forgive me if I start this essay by appropriating a quote from his *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*:

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“Our fine arts were developed, their types and uses were established, in times very different from the present, by men whose power of action upon things was insignificant in comparison with ours. But the amazing growth of our techniques, the adaptability and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they are creating, make it a certainty that profound changes are impending in the ancient craft of the Beautiful. In all the arts there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power. For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art.” (Paul Valéry in Benjamin 1999, p. 211)

I am convinced that consciousness is dialectically in relation with, and determined and defined by, the quality and definition of material production. Changes in material production determine the type and quality of our consciousness, which in its turn is qualitatively capable of radically changing and developing the very means of production that determine it. This is the central and fundamental meaning of the above quotation. Technique is research’s continuum.

I was debating the relationship which exists between technique/praxis and the idea of creativity, and how such a debate can fit within the complex evolution of the role of research in contemporary consumerist-fetishistic society when I was approached by Raphael Vella to contribute to this discussion.

On receiving this interesting invitation to participate in such a collective endeavour analysing the multi-relational aspects of art, creativity and research within an academic forum, which is itself passing through a turbulent turmoil, I found myself deliberating on many categories that were and still are central to debates at an international level.

To begin the discussion within the parameters of my essay I need to clarify the terms. It is vital to remember the object (many times forgotten) and meaning (many times rendered meaningless) of *research*, whatever that means. I still believe that the object of research is truth, again, whatever that means, and how this research for truth was rendered meaningless through the obdurate silence of the post-Auschwitz era.

Modernism in all its facets, together with its post-modernist aftermath, radically shifted and sifted the idea of research-for-truth, and separated this same research *substantia* from the genetic structure of research: the quest for truth. This quest lost its holy grail-ness, and research was emancipated from what Baudelaire calls experiences, thus bringing it close to nothingness and nonsense. One needs to put truth back into its historical *geschichtslos*.

The quest for truth which should form an integral aim of research brings me back to my Dürer experience. When I was studying art in Moscow under the tutorship of Prof. A.N. Ovchinnikov at the Moscow Grabar Institute of Icon Art, I had the privilege of being given the complex, lifelong task of copying Dürer and Rembrandt. My tutor still regarded copying as a fundamental point of departure for all art students, not only as a technical discipline, but also as a study of these masters' philosophy of research, as seen through their draughtsmanship. Today this discipline of copying still forms part of my daily artistic routine. This organic part of my studies makes me feel there is a profoundly integral spiritual relationship between Dürer's philosophy and his artistic style and technique. Dürer believed that order lay hidden in nature, and in order for truth to be revealed, it has to be unveiled. In Dürer's terminology, the unveiling of truth, the wresting of truth from nature, brings the stroke to light, tracks it down. This is related to Heidegger's interpretation of, meaning to wrest forth something out of the rift or stroke and to draw the design with the drawing-pen on the drawing board. *Faire sortir signifie ici faire apparaître le trait...mais...comment le trait peut-il être trace s'il n'apparaît pas comme trait de lumière...* Heidegger, 1986, p. 79).

Dürer stated that "...in truth, art lies hidden within nature: he who can wrest it from her has it". One must draw, that is, one must haul in, bring about, extract, reveal, and finally track down truth. This is in effect the essential meaning of Heidegger's later comments on Dürer's axiomatic artistic belief: it is only *Schöpfung*, a specific type of creation, which makes reality visible (Durfee & Rodier, 1989, p. 96).

Dürer's re-interpretation of the concept of the Platonic cave is directly reflected in his works, particularly in his *Engraved Passion*. He did not believe in what Nietzsche later called the nature of chaos, in which the individual's will imposes a fabricated form on nature. Like Heidegger, Dürer believed in the concept that "earth is a hidden outline of forms. Its apparent flux conceals an order, its nature is nature-performing ... it is from this obscure mass of potential, but not predetermined forms that the artist draws" (Durfee & Rodier, 1989, p. 65). How surprisingly and paradoxically close is this philosophy of line and drawing with Lyotard's interpretation of Adami's work (Lyotard, 2012, p. 17).

Whether we like it or not, we have to go back and reconstruct after a century of de-formation, de-memberisation and de-construction. Here a necessary re-evaluation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and the domino effect it provoked and is still provoking today has once again become vital. Unfortunately we have to re-visit and re-integrate Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, together with the Romantic Keatsian idea and its contradictory Heideggerean idea of truth and beauty with the post-Auschwitz heritage. Without such an

appraisal and re-appraisal one would be following on paths leading nowhere, *Holzwege*. In order to by-pass the abyss of *Holzwege*, we must understand why Leonardo da Vinci considered painting to be the supreme goal of research and knowledge, the ultimate demonstration of knowledge (Valéry, 1934, p. 191).

This is central to my idea of art-as-praxis and art-as-research, which I equate in a Proustian way: Proust's work *À la recherche du temps perdu* was an attempt to create an *experience*, as the philosopher Henri Bergson conceived it. In simpler words, Bergson's theory becomes Proust's creativity. Proust's creativity becomes Bergson's realisation. The Bergson-Proust dichotomy between theory and praxis can be appropriated in Deleuze's sense as the relationship between art praxis and research. Proust's work was a creative re-working of Bergson's theory, as much as Michelangelo's so-called *Unfinished Slaves* were a re-working of Platonic ideas, and probably more effective than many of the post-Platonic treatises. We could also reflect on Dürer's philosophy in relation to the act of drawing and its relationship to theory, defining drawing as the extraction of truth from imperceptibility.

During my artistic apprenticeship, and throughout my working experience, I found myself agreeing with W.L. Strauss in his description of Dürer's work as a "...tapestry of experimentation". I felt Dürer's perpetual interweaving lines, his tapestry-like texture, organically fusing philosophy and religion. This experimentation "...encompassed technique, color, perspective and proportion... Dürer's engravings represent the quintessence of his efforts and thoughts and most succinctly demonstrate the development of this profoundly intellectual artist..." (Strauss, 1973, p. viii). The more one works on Dürer, and the more one studies his technique, art and theory, the more one senses the profound meaning of his much discussed and debated *Vergleichlichkeit* (harmony) in art and nature. Each object, each movement, each force is, in an arabesque way, organically linked and integrated with the world and the forces around it. Dürer did not believe in the idea of empty space; in his art, one finds no statementless spacelessness. His works epitomise a theory of space and time. Images, within a confined cloistral space, are not independent from one another; nor are they incidental. There is one unified cathedral-like philosophy of unity and interdependence. "Figures and objects no longer suggest isolated, merely 'ornamental' three-dimensional forms ... the entire world of things is organically united..." (Knappe, 1965, p. xxxiv).

One senses the force of Dürer's arabesque path, in which everything not only exists in a harmonious relationship, but is so deeply intertwined that it is impossible for us to arrest the motion of the design. These irresistible dynamics, establishing a perfect balance between space and forms, give an elasticity to his work not found in earlier artists, an elasticity reflecting a

saturation of all the elements, Ruskin's 'redundance', an accumulation of the ornament (Ruskin, 2004, p. 54). By ornament I mean a representation of the infinite.

As in the arabesque, there is no beginning or end in Dürer's work. The line is a continuum of motion and conflicting forces. As Karl-Adolf Knappe states, in Dürer one finds "...pure polyphony of line..." (Knappe, 1965, p. liii). Although this mathematical or architectural arabesque is subtly hidden within the narrative, the former actually determines and defines the latter. These forces and tensions are directly related to *Vergleichlichkeit*, the harmony mentioned above. Dürer paradoxically creates a world of equality of actions and reactions through moderation, demonstrating the classical Aristotelian dictum that Beauty lies in the moderate and the proportioned.

Panofsky described Dürer as representing "the zenith in the history of proportion" (Tatarkiewicz et al., 2006, p. 92). Every form, every group, has its counterpoint, and is balanced in a tightly-knitted cobweb of centrifugal and centripetal forces. This tension creates a montage narrative so predominantly linear that it is as if Dürer has succeeded in physic-ising metaphysics. This relationship between physics and metaphysics informs his paradoxical and perplexing world. This world, although immediately apparent in the diamond structural clarity of the narrative, is shrouded in mystery and mysticism because of his cobwebbed artistry, and can be misinterpreted or misunderstood as artistic sophistry. As Panofsky stated, every scene in his engravings is "carefully worked out with architecture and furnishings, bizarre physiognomies, picturesque costumes and fanciful armor, and emphasis is placed on the refinements of lighting and surface texture" (Panofsky, 1955, p. 212). Dürer epitomises here what Ruskin termed the principle of perpetual variety in Gothic art (Ruskin, 2004, p. 28). The German artist's works cannot be confined to a narrow definition of artistic craft, because they encapsulate a whole diorama of research, theory and philosophy. How can such "diamond structural clarity" co-exist with Paul Celan's *Todtnauberg*? Theodor Adorno's equating the Enlightenment with twentieth-century atrocities can find a succinct reflection in Dürer's counterpoint to Celan's poetry on the unthinkable hopeless hope of a god in Auschwitz and post-Auschwitz creativity: Blanchot's "an event without an answer" (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1998, p. 31-37), or Benjamin's definition of silence as an "immoral avoidance of language as the only home of truth" (Eiland & Jennings, 2014, p. 185).

If Celan's *Todtnauberg* is a poem about the disappointment of poetry, what is the visual image epitomising the disappointment of art? Can we equate *Todtnauberg* with Manzoni's *Artist's Shit*? How is memory as *Gedächtnis* and *Erinnerung* to be re-integrated and re-constructed within art as research for the truth in the human?

## 2.

My discussion with Raphael Vella helped me recall Benjamin's quote of a nineteenth-century narrator who stated that "there is nothing more pleasant than to lie on a sofa and read a novel" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 36). I found myself confronting this with the famous enigmatic assertion made by Matisse that "What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject-matter, an art which could be for every mental worker, for the businessman as well as the man of letters, for example, a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue" (Harrison & Wood, 2000, p. 73).

Picasso's truculent attack on this has become legendary: art is not armchair philosophy but arms for struggle. Still more interestingly in the context of this essay is how Antoni Tàpies introduced an academic visual response to this armchair philosophy debate through his celebrated Barcelona *Homage to Picasso* (1983). Tàpies' work is a sublated madeleine.

Questions provoked by Vella during our discussion reflect the situation, a complex one surrounding us, not only the plight of art and art studies, but also more holistically when one thinks about the situation within academia and its changing definition, a Heraclitian river-in-change. In fact, a river-change erasing memory itself: one of the gods of Ancient Greece, Mnemosyne, mother of the nine muses. Her task was to counter attack the river Lethe, oblivion and forgetfulness. Here one must confront Penelope's action of remembering with her own action of forgetting. This slight correct digression into Greek mythology is justified by the terms of our discussion: art as research and art as praxis are the daughters of Mnemosyne struggling against Benjamin's *silence*.

At the same time my studies of ancient Greece and Rome, the Gothic-Byzantine experience ushering in the Renaissance/Baroque, Modernism and the Contemporary brought me to a fascinating conclusion: that the debate of today is the debate of yesterday. This awareness has greatly helped me in the formation of the arts programme within the History of Art Department, University of Malta. Curriculum experimentation and assessment analyses have brought out some rather interesting, albeit paradoxical, results and expectations that I will be trying to elucidate hereunder.

With all this baggage in my mind, I felt it vital to glean information from the historical, theoretical and practical foundation of various academies, schools of art and their corresponding philosophies. It was important to find a common denominator - if there was one - between the praxis, its theoretical research and the vital link with man's presence-here, *Dasein*. My

regular visits to the Royal Academy of Arts in London and exchanges with colleagues there, including meetings with Charles Saumarez Smith, Eliza Bonham Carter and RA Academicians like Michael Sandle and others, have greatly helped my practical analyses of the relationship between art-as-craft, art-as-research and the relationship between art and theory. This was further enriched with meetings at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Warburg Institute, meetings with Marjorie Trusted and Peter Mack. My time at Madrid's Carlo III University with Ilia Galan, coupled with knowledge gleaned from Eastern European Academies, especially in Moscow and Sofia, under the tutorship of Adolf Ovchinnikov, Vladimir Moroz and Khroum Damianov, amongst others, assisted my own philosophy of art, research and art practice.

The history of failures and successes envelopes instances such as the birth of the Royal Academy of Arts (Saumarez Smith, 2012), a process which included the aborted foundation of St. Martin's Lane in 1735 under William Hogarth. There were ripple effects for these actions, including Louis Chéron's rival Academy, Jonathan Richardson's 1719 attempt, and Sir Godfrey Kneller's short lived academy in 1711, together with William Shipley's Society of Arts. This evolution makes manifest the fascinating contemporary problems we find today. The theoretical foundations sustaining such failures and successes were already, and still are, questions related to the fundamental categories of art, the role of art and its relationship with man and being.

The conflicting and oxymoronic debate between art as contemplation and retreat (in fact etymologically this is exactly what academia means), or art as craft, which was at various times accorded the lowest level of human activity, was a constant in all formations of art institutions starting from the lesser known fifteenth-century Accademia founded by Leonardo da Vinci, to Vasari's 1563 Accademia, under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici, which also introduced the study of arithmetic, geometry and anatomy within the art curriculum.

Similar approaches mushroomed throughout Europe: Carracci's Perugia Accademia in 1582, Haarlem in 1600, Modena in 1637, Paris in 1648. The major debate constantly concerned art-as-philosophy, or art-as-craft. This was characterised by a deep uncompromising conflict between the contemporaries and the traditionalists, the latter opining for a direct linear relationship with the artistic and aesthetic values of Greece.

The French *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* founded in 1648 was created as an institution for pedagogy and training for excellence. It established a liberal status for artists and provided means for artists' professional and material advancement. With Philippe de Champaigne's notion of agreeable diversity of manners and reluctance to impose an

absolute artistic model we find the beginnings of relativist democracy in the arts. This opened up a whole tense atmosphere: Antoine de Ratabon's alliance with Charles Errard against Maîtrisel; the arrival of Colbert and ascendancy of Le Brun; Charles-Antoine Coypel's role; and not forgetting Abel-François Poisson de Vandières's reforms. All this was coupled with Voltaire's anti-academic rhetoric (Bailey, 2014, p. 72).

Beguilingly such debate was subtly, or probably not so subtly, fused into the modern twentieth-century era through the orthodox continuation of such principles in the Eastern sphere of European art establishments. The Cold War's antagonistic atmosphere rippled over not only onto the art praxis itself, but also onto the character of the Academy's philosophy. The rigidity of Socialist Realism, a direct result of the Enlightenment positivist (in Adorno's sense) approach, found itself confronted by its negation of the New York School of Art, in which absolute freedom and the category that anybody can be an artist, everything is art edged out the traditional craft *techne* principles to be replaced by the freedom of plasticity: artists became *plasticiens*: *techne* becomes *poiesis*.

Amidst this modernist/post-modernist tsunami of freedom, the fall of the Berlin wall glaringly showed a still living remnant of orthodox philosophy of art and art research. The German Democratic Republic *Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst* in Leipzig under Arno Rink was/is still based on the five year course of traditional methods even when the New Leipzig School was run by Neo Rauch, Tim Eitel, Tilo Baumgärtel, Matthias Weischer and others: basics of traditional drawing and copying, etching, lithography, woodcut, serigraphy, art history, anatomy, stretcher making, canvas mounting, pigment studies all still established the formation of artists and their development. The Russian Academy of Arts under the direction of Zurab Tsereteli, combining the programmes of the St Petersburg Repin State Academy and the Moscow Surikov Academy, is fighting to retain its dominant role in the formation of fully-fledged artists, intellectually and as-craft (Hewitt, 2014:16-17) in which technique, draughtsmanship, composition and craft skills still maintain their dominant position within the whole academic structure. Russian philosophy within its Humanistic-Renaissance heritage believes that more than in any other period of history, the contemporary art scene must be aware of the necessity that "one must pass on the skills of our ancestors ... in the West everything is clever and intellectual, but art students cannot draw" (Hewitt, 2014, p. 16-17).

### 3.

Art and Pedagogy, theory and practice, craft and creativity have always had a rather strange relationship, starting from a frontal gladiatorial struggle, and ending up as the most intimate of love relations. The strange thing is that the



very praxis of art is inherently and organically tied in with research, with the quest for answers, or better still with the quest for questions, questions which would remain unanswerable in their answerability.

The disintegration of *essence* into multi-molecular substrata and these molecular substrata's orthodox dominance over knowledge in a rather enlightenment scientific-positivist aura displaced the whole idea of *essence*. Nietzsche's and Wagner's ideas of centripetal *grundwerk* were finding roots at exactly the same time when all the arts were passing through the most violent centrifugal explosion, shattering all media into diverse paths, negating interdisciplinary-ness and complicating matters still more deeply.

Positivism paradoxically played an oxymoronic role in separating praxis from research, praxis from theory, praxis from the idea, praxis from philosophy, praxis from being, art from its own historicity, thus establishing the Kantian-Hegelian-Marxist grounding of alienation which in fact blurred and mystified the very idea of research. How this is going to configure within a global system in which artists are hurled and are hurling themselves in between fairs and biennales, "never discussing art" (Hewitt, 2014, p. 16) and "catching up with businessmen who pay for all their fun" (Hewitt, 2014, p. 17) is a debate that unfortunately is being side-tracked by the inherent character of today's global capitalist character of the market. "Why paint, and what to paint?" asks Lyotard aphoristically.

This excruciating seismic shift separating art and theory which led to its epic form of establishing an art of non-making is the origin of an evolutionary point that would and is leading it to its very negation. We are today witnessing an anti-dromatic development which leads us back to the equating of *techné* and art. The very separation leads us back to its symbiosis. So the *separation* of both activities is in fact going against the grain of the axiomatic idea underlined above, that is the qualification and meaning of research. The act of praxis is *ipso facto* an act of definition, definition of one's place and presence of one's existence and being: and as such the act of praxis is an act of research, not only on the narrow parameters of technique or painterliness, not only on the historicity of same but also on the transcendental position of man-in-this-world as can be seen in Cy Twombly on Poussin, Hockney's relationship to Caravaggio, on my own variations on Caravaggio, Picasso's to Manet, Delacroix, and others.

The BA History of Art and MA in Fine Arts programmes offered by the History of Art Department at the University of Malta is attempting to gauge students within such parameters trying to bring back the ritual, or at least Benjamin's debate on the ritual. Particular tasks involving methodologies stemming from the most diverse philosophies and theories from previous and modern parameters play an important role, if not a determining one. At the same time students are expected to have, and to continue having, a strong

relationship with the historical development of art, and of art theory throughout the ages. Praxis is here integrated with an intellectual awareness of *what is what*, in other words, reintroducing a discussion of the aims and object of art. This *what is what* confronting the baroque *je ne sais quoi* finds its conflicting existence within the whole idea of deconstruction, *différance*, Baudrillardism, and the whole *non-sense* of the contemporary art scene.

In fact it is intriguing to see how artists tackle such a situation in which they are embedded intellectually- the theoretical and philosophical and technique - preparation in an era which due to hegemonic reasons negates both.

Believing that one must eradicate the modernist schism between research/theory and praxis/craft, one must deeply consider returning back to the formal structure of all the history of academies: going back not to regress but to look back to the future. The immense wealth of theoretical and technical baggage which accumulated since Greek and Roman times ought not to be lost and wasted in Duchamp's *urinal*.

The visual arts as praxis-research are invited to confront the image-text dichotomy by a deep interdisciplinary approach which includes not only the material/technical aspect of craft, or the main principles of art theory and philosophy, but also must endeavour to create relationships between other spheres of art such as music, literature, theatre and dance, amongst others. A good interdisciplinary knowledge of this assists in the creation of an individual baggage of awareness that would increase the acuteness of one's mental and intellectual capacities thus enriching one's intuitiveness, so vital to artistic creativity.

My principle of going-back-to-the-future means the exploitation and appropriation of schools of thought that were born and active in previous eras, including the twentieth-century upheavals. The study and the inclusion of the complete disintegration of system reference points is in itself a task that has to be incorporated within a new wave of modern academies of art: composition, harmony, copying, perspective, drawing, and painting must regain their position within art schools together with video art, digital arts, modernist anti-art principles, nonsense art, installation, minimalism, conceptualism, together with post-modernist philosophies of kitsch and praxis: visuality and making must not confront written research, except dialectically.

It is within such parameters that I am trying to establish a link, which for me personally is one inherent within the very praxis of artistic creativity, between fine arts praxis and art historical research in spite of art works' *geschichtslos*, ahistoricity.

It is essential that artists are aware of the theoretical and historical presence of their own creativity. Creation is a historical action, and a political one. And not only: the very act of creation, praxis is in itself a form of theory. This is the basic reason why I believe that research propelled by creative practices although differing in form from university forms of academic research has in the contemporary period fused itself within the same ambiance of academic research. One cause of this fascinating development is paradoxical: the twentieth century's success in creating an abyss-like differentiation between praxis and theory provoked the development of theory-as-art which led to all the blurred *sfumatori* of conceptual modernist art. At the same time this same drift created its own antipode of materiality-as-art with the facetious Duchamp objet trouvé and all its a/revolutionary consequences that ultimately led to bricks, shit and metal joints being exhibited in art galleries.

The *idea* and the *material* evolved separately it seems as two different spheres of art praxis, with the terrible result so well illustrated by Furtwängler's idea that materiality separated from the human, from the spiritual would lead to genocide. Of course one cannot ostrich-like by pass this exciting and intriguing period in the development of history of art. One has to re-incorporate all this within a new modern twenty-first century academicism which would strive to re-fuse theory as practice, and practice as theory. The main and ambitious MA (Fine Art) project within the Department of History of Art, University of Malta is proposing an introduction to such a development.

Besides the usual work-shop and bottega approaches present in this programme, one is confronted to debate categories of art, the relationship between different spheres of art practice, theories of art and communication, art history, the relationship of art and power politics. This debate is furthermore intended to have the practical side. One must be able to debate these questions from the point of view of praxis and art creative process not only by the student's own practical creative proposals but also by studying how great masters debated and created within similar contexts.

#### 4.

The question relating to the oxymoronic relationship between research and praxis manifests its peculiarity due to a certain inability of language (language as *world essence*) articulation and due to the paradox when language becomes a lie. We constantly meet Adorno's question (and not only Adorno's) concerning the inability of philosophy and its corresponding conceptual language to articulate and to dig into the very meaning of a work of art, let alone the meaning and analyses of art history through art praxis.

Quite correctly, Arthur Danto, amongst others, believes that art in the contemporary scene has *itself* become philosophy, without whose aid art is blurred into nonsense. If this is correct then we are facing an unprecedented situation, where philosophy finds itself unable to articulate philosophy. We are encountering a philosophy of man which cannot articulate its own meaning neither through graphesis as the field of knowledge production embodied in visual expressions nor through historical - theoretical cataloguing. Art becomes philosophy, without however enhancing meaning in the process. The process starts to displace, and succeeds in displacing, essence, when confronting meaning. Any possible meaning is equated with the process, thus desiccating meaning out of essence.

Academic-research and praxis-research are obliged to take this fatal situation into consideration. One has to deliberate on the situation that if art praxis has itself become philosophy, if it is itself a philosophical action, the question of praxis as research attains a new level of qualitative change in our perception. One has to change gear. The seeing becomes thinking, the seeing becomes looking into (Berger, 2008; 2009), an action that fascinatingly brings the whole question quite close to Benjamin's analysis of Brecht's philosophy of epic theatre (Benjamin, 1999, p. 145) going against Matisse's idea of art as visual harmonious enjoyment, as so incorrectly interpreted, a palinodian act indeed. What is so paradoxical is the fact that art has become philosophy at a moment when it has succeeded in establishing its own independence from all other spheres of human creative action. When art liberates itself from all other spheres and becomes a self-reflecting action it changes and becomes philosophy. When art talks about art it is transformed into philosophy. Like Narcissus, the very act of self-reflection means death: an autotelic nothingness.

The evolved self-reflective stage of art has turned or better still back-fired into its own negation i.e. a self-reflection reflecting nothingness: a contradiction personified, for example, in the modernist Saatchi myth which should form an integral part of all research studies whether research-as-praxis or academic research.

How can one separate artistic practice from a form of theory when art itself has become or has been sublated into philosophy?

Many a time this death or the leap into nothing is linked with the philosophical concept of the fall: progress as fall, the Baudelairian inevitability of descent, Ricoeur's Fall, Heidegger's Second Fall into inauthenticity.

This inevitability-of-inauthenticity linked with Benjamin's "lack of the presence of the original" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 4) provokes us to re-integrate Adorno's philosophy of the culture industry/consumerist diktat with the

globalisation of banal reality virtualisation, a reality which subverts the very idea that truth is attained through some kind of intellectual energy. In spite of Bergson's *afterimage* rebuttal, intellectual energy is today appropriated thus neutralised by commercialised culture in the form of an industry monopolising both mind and thought, as implied by Benjamin's term galvanization.

Such Orwellian monopolisation of the mind confronts Baudelaire's and Stendhal's assertion that *le Beau n'est que la promesse du Bonheur*. Such confrontation reflects one of the multi-causal reasons of why the ugly has replaced aesthetics. This starts to make strange sense, and stranger still if one encapsulates this within a research programme. Dominant classes either co-opt (in the Gramscian idea of hegemonic relationships) the idea of beauty giving it a nostalgic or teleological swerve or replace it with the *ugly*. In both cases one has an act of political suppression.

The Baudelairan *Bonheur* is transformed into the realm of a promise by art, a promise very strongly implied by Adorno's *dream image*. However, promising happiness can be either feudal reactionary, revolutionary subversive or totalitarian Orwellian. Socialist Realism, for example together with Costumbrista Realism and Saatchi Realism harbor a similar objective: *la promesse du Bonheur*. A promise either given to give meaning to subversion or given to sustain the establishment and dominant powers, Auden's *hell*. A grave paradox: and this paradox leads us to more complications.

Thus, when this Baudelairan *promesse* is made to give meaning to subversion we will find the following development. Subversion against the establishment, against the order of things, against logic and positive knowledge would lead us to a Camus-ian struggle against the philosophy of the Enlightenment, a path which finds roots in Paul Feyerabend's recalcitrant philosophy of science. Georges Bataille went further still by defining positivist scientificity of the Enlightenment as another form of Christianity and religion which correspondingly would lead us to Adorno's definition of the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment, which was itself a subversive power militating against the power of myth and religion, if we agree with Adorno's and Horkheimer's assessment, evolved by means of its own mythologisation into becoming - evil itself. This evil itself is converted into the most radical subversion of all: de Sade, Bataille and Pasolini. Here we meet a philosophy of sadism/subversion which furthermore finds its antidromatic evolution into *l'informe*. And how can Dürer's crystallised tapestries discussed earlier deal with this evolution of evil?

When, on the other hand *la promesse* becomes a tool for the conservative sustainment of the established powers, the dominant powers succeed in transforming *la promesse* into a banal action of fetish.

Paradoxically this fetish and banality plays, according to Adorno, who in my opinion is mistaken, the determinant role in defining the truth content of art. According to Adorno, by distancing itself from its social labour base, art manifests truth through fetish. And the more art manifests its social labour base the more it borders on heresy, Maistre heresy (Meltzer, 2011, p. 32, 38, 43), which subverts its own artistic merits. My own contribution here in the Adorno debate is that both the social labour *façade* and the fetishistic distancing of the work are leading us away from the truth content of art. This alienation from the truth content makes the contemporary art philosophy of everything is art and everybody is an artist quite comprehensible.

Once this is accepted and recognised it is strange not to agree with Stockhausen that the attacks of 9/11 also constituted a work of art. As in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, once we recognise the possibility of turning into a cockroach (Meltzer, 2011, p. 62), and we have been robotised into recognising such a possibility, everything starts to recoil comprehensibly within a logical meaning. This is a form of interpreting the world by negating it, as in Adorno. This Stockhausen effect induced me to conclude that by negating the world so as to interpret the world art is constrained to reintroduce Beauty as its determining factor.

Beauty has thus today after 9/11 become a revolutionary and subversive act and as such it vibrates the silent call of the earth. Beauty is the silent call today. The contemporary era thus is nearing the point in which aesthetic beauty turns into an object of fear displacing the Kantian fear of nature with fear of art.

Adorno's pictorial reconciliation has to be deconstructed back to the position of man's fear of the sublime, this time not that of nature but of art. Modern contemporary art in its negating of the world reaches its Beckettian maximum height when the representative category is reduced to its lowest minimum: Cage's *4'33''* (1952). Listening to nothing, seeing nothing as in T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land* is achieved to perfection in Baudelaire's image that represents the loss of images as in his *À une passante* (1860).

## 5.

According to Adorno, the modern artwork is defined in terms of its refusal to make use of traditional aesthetic means. Such a refusal or acceptance is a statement that brings the aesthetic means within a deep theoretical and

philosophical aspect linking the praxis-choice directly with a historical avowal. The choice of aesthetic means is a subversive choice related to a political commitment in the widest sense of the word. The refusal to make use of traditional aesthetic means subverted the whole traditional system of perception and thought. This takes a deeper meaning if we remember that the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence (Benjamin, 1999, p. 216)

However this refusal takes various forms, and sometimes radical contradictory ones obfuscating any possible interpretation. For example, both the primitivist artist and the costumbrista are reacting against the Hausmann - tsunami of progress, the costumbrista by utilising precisely traditional aesthetic means, refuted by the primitive who dexterously proposes and introduces new radical aesthetic means as a counterforce against this very same progress. One cannot here but recall Benjamin - Klee's Janus angel of history. The angel who "looks at nothing but the expanse of ruins of the past, is blown backwards into the future by the storm of progress" (Arendt, 1999:19).

Such a contradiction sustains Benjamin's idea that Baudelaire the modernist could not accept the age he was living in: a situation which makes him rather paradoxically closer to the costumbrista tradition. Fascinatingly, as Manet, Baudelaire ushered in his modernist revolt in spite of his aversion to same. Did not Baudelaire exploit the traditional Belgian Baroque for his triumphant abundance in his works? Why did Baudelaire find what he was looking for, according to Meltzer, precisely in Baroque's exuberance (Meltzer, 2011:135)? Modernism for the philosopher of Modernism was nothing short of the vulgar descent of mankind, a descent manifested by Manet's mediocre and uneven creativity. Zola calls the French artist's works "imperfect and uneven" (Meltzer, 2011:131). Attacking, validly enough, Manet as "nothing more than the first in the decrepitude of [...] art" proves this rather paradoxical thesis. Manet was fighting *for* the traditional aesthetic means and failed, since his language, notwithstanding all his academic-Salon intentions, transcended his own subjective desires and will. Modernism was born out of Manet's excoriation of his Salon art. In spite of his Sisyphean albeit prescient struggle to conquer traditional aesthetics which he, fortunately enough for us and for history, was unable and not 'talented' enough to achieve.

*Zeitgeist*, reflecting a new mode of existence forced Manet into another path: Modernism. Manet's so-called imperfections and unevenness were in fact the new formal means of aesthetic production adjusted to an unprecedented violent structure which was in the process of successfully establishing a diverse and distinct social reality and the necessary tools for a new perception of same. The novel urban bustle, the constant flickering of constant new

artificial light, the demonic industrialised category of time and space, the apocalyptical globalisation and genocides commanded a new drawing.

This was Manet's mandate: to test our eyes' newly acquired faculties (Benjamin, 1999, p. 193) in other words, to test our preparedness in accepting a cockroach transformation within our new way of perception. In other words, Manet could not do otherwise.

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