

ART AS A SELF-DENIAL OF TECHNIQUE

*El arte como autonegación de la técnica*¹

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the question about the possibility of speaking about “art” in the context of a massive evolution of audiovisual technologies, and their comprehensive influence in a globalized world, is at stake. In this sense, contemporary art, despite its similarities with technique’s *modus operandi*, does not work with the goal to facilitate humankind access to natural and artificial resources. On the contrary, art fosters the viewing of the indisposition, opacity and retractability of those very same materials of which the works are made. In summary, while technique opens new spaces, designates places and creates networks of meaning, contemporary art however, shows how those opening processes are tangled with the creation of marginality, within and against the ideological investments on certain political axis of power.

Key words: Art, Technique, Nature, Public Space, readiness-to-hand, retractability, concealment.

RESUMEN

En la actualidad resulta cuestionable que sea sin más posible hablar de “arte” dentro del contexto de una evolución masiva de tecnologías audiovisuales,

1. Translation by Paula Martín Salván

así como de su extrema influencia en un mundo globalizado. En este sentido, el arte contemporáneo, a pesar de su innegable similitud con el *modus operandi* de la técnica, no tiene como función el facilitar a la humanidad un mejor acceso a recursos naturales o artificiales. Por el contrario, fomenta más bien la índole de indisposición, opacidad y refractariedad de los mismos materiales de que está hecha la obra. En definitiva, mientras que la técnica abre nuevos espacios, designa lugares y crea redes de significado, el arte contemporáneo muestra cómo esos procesos de apertura están entrelazados con la creación de márgenes, dentro del establecimiento ideológico en ciertos ejes políticos del poder, y contra ellos.

Palabras clave: Arte, técnica, naturaleza, espacio público, disponibilidad, retracción, ocultación.

1. A MODEST PROPOSAL FOR THE DELIMITATION OF ART

Nowadays, art critics and philosophy teachers certainly know *ad nauseam* that Hegel, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, reported art's stagnation and lack of strength to move men in the age of the *prose of the world*, even if he did not talk –as some people say– of art's "death". It is true that he took Greek Periclean art as paradigm, for it had reached a perfect understanding between form (meaning) and content (sensible medium). Hegel was thus returning to the old idea of *techne* as *sophia*: the bond between human "know how" (guided by an idea) and nature's "let do". And from that point of view, he is absolutely right when he says that today we can think only about art (as an aesthetics' branch) but are not capable at all to produce anew such a *primal* collaboration.

Indeed, if we take art to be after Hegel that intimate cohesion between an ideal meaning and its material content we must confess that, reducing and lessening at maximum the sensible load in typically modern arts, that is, in painting, music and poetry, why would we need art at all, always linked to immediate intuition and to the "annoying" presence of the material, when we have philosophy, in whose technical concepts, once "purified" by dialectics, pure meaning that shines without sensible mediation? As it can be seen, Hegel takes the modern program to its most brutal extreme: to end with materiality's apparent autonomy once and for all, to make it only useful, at most, as transparent medium for spiritual communication (as if Hegel already knew the Internet?).

Thus perceived, we should better talk about *violation* against earthly, "natural" things, rather than collaboration between nature and man. This

would be done without even trying to find pleasure in it; the reckless spirit of this age ruled by art would not have even tried to enjoy nature, but to “make it say its truths”. Artists and audience would not even be conscious of it (unfortunately, Phidias did not have Hegel beside him to tell him what he was really doing). That superior Truth would be that nature is just the appearance of the Idea, its pure shine or sensible glow (*Schein*). The Idea would be dispersed and paled across the face of nature, plastered in make-up, whose foundation would not be “natural” (and of course not “earthly”, in our sense) but deliciously *logical*. In this way, it seems clear that art (in Hegel’s terms) was doomed to disappear at the precise moment in which *thought* made its powerful appearance. According to Hegel, thinking is literally a *contra naturam* activity. It would be rather strange to consider, following that conception, that after the Greek miracle (or rather the mirage) art has managed to endure two thousand more years until finally it lies, tired, at Hegel’s feet, while he constrains all post-classic art (Christian-Medieval and Modern) under the unitary tag of “romantic art”.

On the other hand, Heidegger himself had some trouble with the definition of art in his 1964 lecture, when he got himself inside a “circle”: art would be –he says– what an important artist does, and he would be the one “who most purely satisfies art’s supreme requirements”². That is why he felt forced to follow an indirect path: that of space, whose elucidation followed so to say a *boomerang* course. He thus returns to art, understood as *poiesis* (calling forth Aristotle) and defined by Heidegger as a “bringing-forth (*her-vor-bringen*) of Truth; forth: to the unconcealed, and from the concealed, so that the concealment (*Verbergen*) is not left aside, but is thus precisely preserved”³.

I will rather focus here on the philosopher’s words themselves than on the meaning openly intended by him. By dismembering the German term *hervorbringen* (“to produce”), Heidegger is tacitly revealing a “lack” in Romance languages (later extended to Germanic languages through modern French: both Germans and Anglo-Saxons speak today about *Produktion* and *production*). The Latin *productio* names indeed the act of “bringing forth”, but it keeps concealed the provenance of the thing thus brought to light (that origin, however, was present in the prefix *her-*). What Heidegger claims *a sensu contrario* is that what is concealed in modern “production” is... the *concealment* itself. And the modern concealment of that concealing

2. HEIDEGGER, M., *Bemerkungen zu Kunst – Plastik – Raum*, St Gallen, Erker-Verlag, 1996, p. 8.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

would be the cause of current impoverishment: the forgetting of being. As it is well known, the essential feature of *being* is precisely that concealment, that withdrawal. We won't follow exactly that path, but will rather take a "mountain" track. Indeed, our path will be guided by the root of *Verbergen* ("to conceal"), where the word *Berg* comes from: "mountain", but also *Bergen*: "to lodge, to shelter".

What Heidegger does not say –neither here nor in any other place that I know of– is that the origin of the noun *Berg* refers to something made by armies endowed with *savoir-faire* –even if they do not know about art, they do know something about space– when they talk about the importance of, let's say, taking a hill. The German term refers to the Indo-European root **bharegh*, "high, elevated",⁴ from which the Latin *fortis* ("strong, vigorous", that is to say, able to repel an attack) also originates. This term will in turn influence the German and English languages through the introduction of the term *Fort* (a military fortress with a palisade and watchtowers, preferably built on high), the meaning of which is well known to us thanks to westerns. So those who find shelter in the mountains (natural or built ones), those who castle themselves there, do not hide inside them, but peer from their height at the surrounding plains below, in order to avoid being surprised by their enemies. Those who are thus "fortified" are concealed, that is to say: concealed from their enemies, who cannot see them from below. And the other way around: those who resist in the mountain dominating over a particular territory, a *chôra*, can surely have at their disposal that delimited space "below". It is not casual that gods' headquarters have always been mythically located on the top of a mountain (Olympus, Cithaeron, Parnassus, Sinai) or that the Acropolis ("city on high") dominates over Athens. Symbolically, then, castling in the mountain implies the dominion over fertile, cultivable land.

On the other hand, the Latin term which corresponds to *Bergen*, the verb *occultare*, comes from *ob-colo*, that is: actions made for the "cult's" sake–originally practiced on heights, and thus occult from pagan looks– which in turn develops later into "cultivation". "Conceal" is thus related to "occult", in which different important meanings in the military, strategic, and religious, cultic realms intersect in "concealed" ways. Where are we now? We wanted to provide a tentative definition of "art", using Heidegger's words on "concealment", and we find ourselves on the top of a mountain, or fort or watchtower, in order to advantageously repel a possible attack, or to safely appropriate a territory, or to celebrate cultic acts in a sacred place. What do

4. See *DUDEN Herkunftswörterbuch* (*sub voce: Berg*), Mannheim/Wien/Zürich, Bibliographisches Institut, 1963, p. 59.

these three actions have to do with art? Let's see. The first one means *violent exclusion*; the second one, *dominion and control*: govern; the third one, *delimitation* and (profane) space planning from a (sacred) elevated center. This is what was concealed in the term "concealment" (*das Verbergen*: "to persist in the concealment"). Therefore, let's use those three factors as "forts" to agglutinate around them the meanings of "art" which have appeared indirectly in the course of this essay.

2. ART EXISTS ONLY THROUGH TECHNICAL EFFICIENCY BUT TO THE SUBVERTING OF ITS GOALS.

It is obvious that art has a close relationship with technique, both linguistic and factual. According to the aforementioned definition, technique constitutes the collaboration between a conscious "know how" and an unconscious but effective "let do" on earth's part, the "telluric" element (and not simply of "natural" things!). But to understand this relationship, we must first investigate what is this strange "thing" called *earth*. For it seems to be not only what is *occult* par excellence, but also something that has always tried to conceal itself. Aristotle implicitly acknowledges this—he also begins by trying to reduce it, like Empedocles and so many others, to the status of an element, just as fire, air and water—when he says that "all the elements have their defendants, except earth"⁵. But earth, as I understand it here, is not an element; nor is it the other elements' foundation—something like their "raw matter"—and even less the abased "matter" of Modernity, seen as *mass*, defined in mathematical terms as the relation between volume and density (as much an exact as circular a definition). All those attempts at apprehension (at finding a definition that binds its object) had as their aim precisely the attempt to master the earth's resistance, to put it at human action's service through an operation much bolder and slyer than Prometheus' theft. What can earth be then, if we do not want to approach it through mystical fantasy? The answer I propose is that earth is *resistance*. But it is a resistance that (as one of the extremes of an essential relationship) never appears on its own, isolated, simply because it does not exist in an isolated way (and therefore, there is no concept or definition of "earth" as such).

The earth is not at the bottom of planet Earth, nor is it in the land's underground; it is not inside the mountain or hidden deep in water molecules, and neither is it darkly concealed behind the sky's blue. Summing up, the earth

5. ARISTOTLE, *De anima*, 405b8.

is not “natural” at all (nor the barbarous and wild side of nature). The earth only *shines* in technical or artistic works (where could it be but there?). It is the one which lends Doric temples’ the impenetrability of their groove, the one which shines in Titian’s canvases and the one which empties itself in the hollow of Duchamp’s urinal (about which we will talk in a while). It can be felt (but not measured!) in things’ weight, solidity and closure, but also in the words of a poem about the lovers’ embrace: “Is not the undeclared intent / of Earth, in urging lovers on, / to make creation thrill to/ the rhythms of their rapture?”⁶. The urge to make creation thrill –not of its own accord, but to the rhythms of the lovers’ rapture– means that it goes beyond itself. Where to? To its origin? Yes, understood as its *arché*. That origin is not concealed in the bowels of the earth, but it is evident on the surface of elaborated things, as the limit of that labor and the resistance to it. We are not allowed to say that earth *exists*, but that there *is* earth on the house floor –but too late: when the house is already built– on the armor’s polished surface, on the creased working table or in the gesture of pain for the death of a loved one. Earth always exists in a specific, *singularizing* way. It prevents *this* table from being just one more table, my friend from being one among others and even this old computer I’m working with (it is already five years old!) from being just a trademark product in a series, remorselessly disposable when it stops working. It exists in technique, but it cannot be reduced to technical production, because it marks the limit of man’s ecumenical *generalizing* action. Man is, after all, the animal with language capacity, who turns –like king Midas in an inverted way– everything he says into something general, subject to be manipulated by anyone; but the same true language, that of poetry, makes each word *repristined*, said *for the first and only time*:

Earth, is this your will?
An *invisible* resurrection (*erstehn*)
within ourselves?
Is it your desire
one day to vanish?
Earth! Invisible!
What do you demand
but transformation?⁷.

6. RILKE, R. M., *Duino Elegies*, trans. Robert Hunter, Eugene OR, Hugolosi, 1993, IX, vv. 35-37. For the original text, I recommend the handy and well-documented edition by KIPPENBERG, K., *Duineser Elegien. Die Sonette an Orpheus*, Zürich, Manesse, 1991; 8, 48.

7. *Ibid.*, vv. 67-70; 8, 50 in the original.

Earth is indeed invisible because it *allows to see*: it is made of contrasts and negations, as in the light and shade games of baroque façades. That is why it imposes technical transformation: only in it does the present's *un-availability* come to light, the limits of things' helpfulness. This explains human, too human attempts to erase that indelible trace, to turn earth into "nature", as if it were an inventory of things at hand, or at machine's disposal (the English talk about the *furniture of the world*), reducing it to matter or mass (the "dough" of which things are made) or making it just one more element. But earth cannot be reduced to that; it is not even sensible in itself, but rather it makes the sensible be so: the sensible's *essence*, guarantor of that *pure multiplicity* both needed and feared by Kant, which Hegel tried to eliminate with his *logic*. Earth is dispersion, dissemination, disagreement. It is the one which makes paths *that lead nowhere*. It is the negation of dimensions: there is earth in water's ungraspable fluidity, in fire's light and in air's clarity, but also, evidently, in the cultivated field's underground or inside a marble statue; but only after its "outside" has been sculpted. Or rather: earth is that game, that essential relation between outside and inside.

However, "earth" only appears as retractile inappearance when we try to bank water by means of dikes, to capture light in a torch or a halogen light bulb, or to distribute air in buildings' hollows and rooms, where walls raise with flying colors (a dialectic expression for a grave issue) *from* the foundation *towards* the skies. Earth only exists in technical production: the work's position is *at the same time, indivisibly*, the presupposition of earth⁸. Before human works there was no "earth". There could well be a deserted planet turning around the sun, but even the stable identification of the first as a "planet" and the second as the "sun" can only take place in a techno-scientific context, grounded in turn –although the "expert" does not care about it– not on *the Earth*, but on "earth".

What is technique then? If we put what has been said about Heidegger's *Verbergen* together with this brief meditation on the "telluric" *arche*, the answer is a simple one: technique is the collaboration between two attempts of reciprocal "concealment". Man acts *as if* there was no earth in him: he resists from the heights of his "know how" and tries, concealed, to tear things from the unavailable bosom of the earth to turn them into products that follow an

8. The Latin term *productio* refers only to what is put "forth": *pro-*, thus concealing the origin. The German *Hervorbringung*, instead, points to the origin as well thanks to the *pre-*fix *Her*: an always displaced origin, inserted in the work and only glimpsed through it. "Raw matter" is only such when we know, retrospectively through the finished product, *what to do* with it.

a priori law. His aim is to transform things into *Objekte*, that is to dominate and control them “from the outside”, so that there is no chance for frights. So that, as far as possible, it seems that there would be no destruction or death at all in the producer-consumer community and its members. The fact that technique has always been aggressive can be seen not only in the abstract terminological violence of its “coming through”, but on its first expressions such as flint axes or arrow points. Otherwise, what would explain the determination to erase every trace of *subjective* action over the things called “natural”, attributing their existence and shape to God, to Nature or, in the modern sphere, to a pure *objectivity* “discovered” by science, which is imagined to be running like the purest glass that allows us to see things *as they are*, “independent” from men? The determination to consider everything as a wide and alien “reality” is due to this concealed (and concealing) technical action, by means of which man conceal from himself his own shaping activity.

Why? Because otherwise he would have to admit that he *needs* things and that they are not mere “circumstances” of a central subject. Because man would then have to confess his *finitude*, his mortal status after all. However, it would be stupid to blame technique for numberless evils, current and past ones, because without technique there would be no man. He learns *malgré lui* about his mortal, finite condition when he *proves* himself in technical transformation, experimenting how much will his power stretch when dealing with earth. Wanting to last forever, by means of domination and control, means in turn to acknowledge that it is impossible. They are both aspects of the same process, in the same way as there is no mountain (what is concealed and safe) without valley and plain (the opening that lets life be, but at the same time shows it as needy, as needed of skills and abilities in order to survive).

Earth, in turn, “collaborates” in that technical activity by *concealing* in it (it would be absurd to talk about “concealment” in itself –as Heidegger seems to suggest at times with his *Seyn-Beyng*– as much as it is absurd to talk about the *absolute Other* –as it can be apparently read in Levinas–). Rilke briskly understood what the earth “wants”: *to rise (erstehen)* someday, invisible, in us. Why “someday”? Because for the time being we take it to be the sphere itself of *visibility*. What else can be as visible for common sense as the earth, vast and conquerable, as it can be seen in William Wyler’s film *The Big Country*, from the title itself to its very end, when the betrothed couple look *from above* the territory that will be theirs?

In this way, earth would be not concealment, but what is artificially *concealed* behind the shiny and varied mask –human, too human– of *virgin*

nature (and we all know what predator males want virgins for, in the same way as bread is meant – to be eaten). That is how we perform violence on *the earth's sense*. And that is also how we can solve the apparent difficulty of the term *erstehen*. We can approach the meaning it has for Rilke (which we will take advantage of *pro domo*) analyzing its most explicit synonym: *hervorkommen*, that is to say: “to come out from hiding”. Again, one feels tempted to refer to its closed origin (in the same way as in *hervorbringen*, “bringing forth...”, which seemed to refer to a deep, original closure, something similar to Kant’s “thing in itself”). The same thing happens to the corresponding English version, *to rise*, which also seems to refer to that sullen origin, always at the back of it (*hervorkommen* as “to come out from behind”). But it only seems, because, if we read carefully Rilke’s verses, we will realize that what the poet says is that the earth longs to rise *in us* as what it truly is, that is to say, as an *invisible entity*. The question is: where does it rise from? Obviously, it is not from an underlying origin in which it alone existed (something like a dark bosom or matrix of all things, previous to them and procreator of them all). This “theological” temptation (that of seeing earth as a “god” anterior to the world) is radically eliminated when we realize that earth is a *way of being*, a movement (not a “thing”) that takes place (not static but dynamic: that lends itself) always in the same *way*, having no separate consistency of its own. It is, if you like, a shipment, a “destination” of being. Therefore, earth rises as a radical negation of its numbed visible state, of its appearance (*Schein*); from the disguise technique has covered it with, concealing it as nature or as raw material. It will rise “in us” as what it really is: invisibility. The poet does not say that the earth was invisible in itself, *ab initio*. On the contrary, he says its dream is to be invisible *one day*, and not at all that it wants to be so *again*: because it was never so before. Its truth is in its *télos*, its destiny, not in its origin. And finally, who does the poet refer to with that “us”? Certainly, not to men in general, and even less to “concealing” technicians, but to those who go with Rilke: the *poets*. In them, in their poems, the earth will get to be invisible at last.

In this interpretation, we find a thread to disentangle the phenomenon we call art. Art commonly uses the same procedures as technique, even with much more refinement (this has been so from cave paintings to computer or video art). That is why both regions have been mixed for ages, taking the artist as a more exquisite *artifex*. But *we* see that the intentions of the artist and the technician are diametrically opposite. The technician, concealing his occupation in his mastery’s height, produces objects *as if* they were natural fruits, understood as “obliging”, fit for use or consumption. That is to say, as if they were not products, constructed by his wise art. That is

why the technician has been seen as creation's "collaborator". And that is also why, from Aristotle to Kant, the aim of *techne-ars* (in German: *Kunst*, from *können*: "to can make something") has been ideally identified as the quasi-spontaneous and effortless production of objects to be directly put in the user's or consumer's hands, taking into account that "natural" things do not lend themselves to human needs or pleasures as easily as elaborated objects do.

Contemporary technology still tends to this ideal, though it does so with more resources and success than it had in Antiquity. It allows us to understand the phenomenon of slavery, cynically defended by Aristotle in his *Politics*: "if every instrument could accomplish its own work, obeying or anticipating the will of others, like the statues of Daedalus, or the tripods of Hephaestus, which, says the poet, "of their own accord entered the assembly of the Gods"; if, in like manner, the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves"⁹. Beyond moral considerations (which would be both anachronistic and probably illicit) this long conditional clause is very revealing in the techno-natural context. As long as instruments –that is to say, the tools used to turn things into tools, transforming them– cannot work by themselves, as beings can do by *physis*, then it is necessary that other men –considered as *katà physin*, even if they are not *politai*– handle them, imposing a finality on them that is nevertheless subordinated, for the true finality is that of the slave-owner. There is an implicit (and anachronistic) prophecy in this, which would have been unthinkable for a Greek: when instruments (our machinery), erase every trace of *earth* (in the sense previously used) that is to say, of unavailability, then there will be no slaves any more. Such is the *program*: instruments, and the products made with them, have to be so artificial that they will spontaneously and suddenly turn into "natural" ones, and even more: into *hypernatural* ones, absolutely at man's hand. Man is like nature's "rosette", taking as his future role that of fully dominating his "mother". But "Mother Nature" did never exist: *physis* is the greatest and smartest invention of the Greek *technites*, whose progeny extends until the dawn of Modernity, and whose cunning ideology is still occasionally supported (usually without realizing the technical origin of such a fertile "technical invention") by the nostalgic and the reactionary.

It has already been said that art and technique have diametrically opposed intentions, even if they use the same media. It is time now to have a look at

9. ARISTOTLE, *Politics* I, 4, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, 1253b33-1254a1.

art, *technique's poisoned flower*. Most of our considerations had as their departure point the Greek world and we have seen over and over again that no one in it would call himself an "artist" nor was called thus. Are we supposed to conclude, then, that there is art, but not artists, in that "political space" (as in the Roman or the medieval one)? It may seem paradoxical, but it is so.

Following the usual terminology in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, we could say that there is art *for us* –or which amounts to the same thing: *in itself*– wherever a work "unconceals" the earth, even though the agent, *for himself* and *as it seems*, still considers himself to be a technician. On the contrary, a work tends to turn into *nothing but* a technical product when the mutual relationship "man-earth" in it is seeing *as if* it was external and it took place between two separate entities: on the one hand, man (owner and user) and on the other hand, nature (which resists being possessed, and must be then forced to, with delusion rather than violence). Both are thus integrated into the finished product, excluding from it both the maker and the earth, considered as "disposable rests".

Anyway, this concept of art entails a difficulty: we have to solve as soon as possible an absurd misunderstanding that is implied in the comparison of two divergent features: *helpfulness* and *unavailability*. Up to this point, we have insistently claimed that –*for* the classical man and *as it seems*– nature seems to have a *helpful* character (even when it do appear as a hostile element, the technician will find other "natural" forces to make it accomplish the role it has been attributed); but at the same time we have emphasized as an essential feature of the earth its opacity and *unavailability*. Someone could rightly point that a work of art would then be defective and wrongly done, while a technical product should be something accurate, appropriate and, at most, perfect. In order to solve the misunderstanding between these features, it suffices to ask: perfect, *for whom*? Who benefits from that perfection? Obviously, the user does. Therefore, this objection is circular: it says that something is right when it is useful to its user, and even more: when he possesses not only the thing itself but also the means to produce it.

From that answer, nevertheless, another possible, classical objection can rise. Taking the previous idea to its extreme, we could indeed argue that, a thing could be said to be perfect when it matches its own end and not another one's (for instance, those of the producer or the owner). According to this, the greatest perfection would be natural (as far as possible –a Greek would say–, as animals are the highest beings, for their capacity to *move*, so the best of animals –on earth– would not be man, but the *pólis*, that moves itself when trying to move everything around it) and not artificial; moreover: as nature has a *privative* root after all (*hyle*, that precludes the *morphe* from

fully, roundly and effortlessly developing), the Perfect Being would be the one who, beyond the stars, was literally *superhuman*, that is to say: *o theos*, the God, who has nothing to do at all with either art or technique. *For us*, this objection can be easily solved. What lies under that perfect circularity is nothing but the ideal of *autarchy*, of self-government and self-sufficiency, without need to produce or to consume anything, that is to say, free from care and death. Are not gods precisely called “immortal”? Does not man flee from the classic circuit that nevertheless constitutes him and every *mortal* essentially? The idea of a *self-sufficient* Nature and a *self-sufficient* God clearly and painfully underlines, *a sensu contrario*, human destitution and his need to lead a precarious subsistence by technical means.

The ideology of perfection leads to paroxysm the “humanist” (or what is the same, theological) concealment of the earth and its taming as nature (which, ideologically speaking, will be at last dominated when art works *as if* its products were natural and even *more natural* than what is phenomenically natural). It is uncanny that, in all cultivated languages, the *perfectum*, what is accurate and “finished”, also means what is fulfilled, what solely rests in its finality, and what is *dead*, “done” (*factum*), to such an extent that, due to its persistence on “being already finished” (*per-fectum*), it wears out to the point of exhaustion: it ends up *being finished*. That is why we should avoid considering art as “perfect” (or as “imperfect”). These features are perfectly valid instead for technical works (and also for so-called “natural things”, to which technique ideologically extends its ideal of finality). A work can be perfect without being artistic (for instance a nuclear power station or a *Pentium* laptop computer) or imperfect but highly artistic (as the babbling verses of some of Hölderlin’s hymns, or Novalis’ unfinished *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*). But it can also be perfect (that is to say, absolutely fit to its use) and artistic (like Chartres Cathedral) or imperfect and not artistic at all (as some plumber’s or electrician’s domestic odd jobs).

What do I mean to say with all this? To begin with, that art and technique do not need to be focused on realms or things different from technical ones (or from so-called natural ones). This explains an apparent mystery: the fact that *for us* or *in itself* there has been –especially in the pre-modern world, but nowadays as well– art in works that were not considered “works of art” by men of former times, and that we could not take to be an *exclusively* artistic one. There can be art in a work without its being consciously art as such (think again of Greek temples or Gothic cathedrals; but also of a humble “vaso de bon de vino”: “a glass of good wine”, as Juan Ruiz, the loose-tongued Archpriest of Hita used to say). It follows from this, in the second place, that art is an *overdetermination*, an addendum *we* project

(anachronistically, in the aforementioned examples) on particular works. Art is a way of seeing and a way of being, without need to be individualized or concentrated on a particular “thing”. A way of seeing what? The *conjunction* of man and earth’s collaboration, repeatedly concealed by technique. Seeing Michelangelo’s *I prigionieri*, the expert, the technician, will try to rightly point at the statue’s formal proportions, its “beauty”, and he will regret that the work is unfinished, or at least *seems* to be so. The real art lover, instead, will admire the stone’s might and the marble’s opacity behind the polished surface of its carved parts, *together with* the artist’s effort to *negotiate* with that telluric force, making it come forth in the work. This is not the perfect union between form (or meaning) and matter (or sensible content) Hegel sought, but a clash between opposing *forces* in which is “unconcealed”, following Heidegger’s terminology, that what hiddenly beats, both in nature (whose “phenomena” seem to be and say sincerely what they “really” are, without any artifice) and in technique (whose “works” seem to be pure hoaxes, tricks and artifacts imposed on nature to trap and dominate it) comes to light.

And yet what comes to light in this way *happens* in the work without *appearing* in it (otherwise there would be two “things”: the work and what is present in it). It happens *with a side-glance*, we would say, in an oblique way. On the one hand, a man’s (and hence a people’s) effort happens in the work, an attempt to leave a living trace of his ambitions and desires, of his fears and hopes, that is to say, of his past traditions and his future projects; the technical aspect of the same work, on the other hand, is only valid for the present, which once the work is finished –as a product or as use or exchange value– will be useless: it will be dead and valid only to rest in a museum as part of the past’s *cultural* stock. This means, moreover, that the artistic value of a work always comes *at the wrong moment*. Sometimes, it even presents as something *untimely*, as a real *dis-appointment*. Strictly speaking, there is art in the present, but not art *of* the present. That explains the temptation to explain art as a timeless thing, as the sensible image of eternity. On the contrary, that *byproduct* (*untimely* rather than timeless), that rest –maybe unnoticeable or despicable for the man or the people who produced the work– is what inaugurates art’s *ecstatic* character. We *read* in the work, *between the lines* (that is what “intelligible” means), that ecstatic quality, the artist’s “being out of himself”, thrown into what is *symbolized* (from *symbállein*: to throw one force against another until they mingle) in the work. It is precisely because of this that the ecstatic quality articulates in turn the artistic *conjunction*, as the artist’s activity works with the material “to make it say its truths”, to underline the *earth*’s unavailability at the very moment in which he wisely mixes his colors or skillfully carves the stone.

And the other way around, the earth is glimpsed in art through the brush's stroke or the chisel's blow, but also through urban planning or computer design. The earth *is* not: the earth *emerges* on the work's surface as an opacity or a dense bulk; in the work, it allows it to "coagulate" when it –the earth– *withdraws* from sensible contemplation, as the negation of pure formality and also as the rejection of mere materiality. To put it in negative terms: we feel, rather than see, how the earth acts its retraction through the sustained beat of the line or the chromatic gradation, through the earth's heavy weight or the ethereal levity or "air" in an *aria*. Summing up, and I hope this does not sound esoteric: two "concealments" meet in art, to be "unconcealed" in it:

- 1) that of human activity, endeavored to fight death, not in spite, but precisely because man knows he is mortal,
- 2) that of the earth's retraction, trying to escape what would constitute its "death" by consumption, that is, its staying calm, self-enclosed, with no relation to man.

It is always too *late* to appreciate that activity in art and as art. When we try to perceive it, technique conceals the earth and turns it into bland, available, insipid "matter". It is not late simply because the artist has already left his activity expressed in the work, but because silent mortality passes through his know-how, like an overwhelming bridge between past and future that rejects to *present* itself. It is also always too *early* to capture the earth's invisible retraction (remember Rilke's verses: the earth dreams this will come true one day, but not now, in the present). When we try to grasp that escape, the only thing that remains in our hands is "nature", something that apparently has nothing to do with man. That is why it is only in art that man is projected *in and towards* the earth, at the same time as, correspondingly, it retires, ejecting itself *in* human activity.

Art: a violent, loving mortal struggle of opposed movements, in which each one (projection and rejection) *is* only when it turns into the *other*, different from itself, when penetrating the other, who in turn can only become instantly *itself* through that movement, and not when it is in the other (this is where Hegelian dialectics stop, and he had to "license" art, as he did not know what to do with it). Art, man and earth are always *in partibus infidelium*: antithesis of the Brothers Grimm double hedgehog, art is only such when each movement is given to the other, ceasing to be itself to let the other be. Ephemeral identity, never present, crisscross of opposed alterities. Were it true that, according to Heidegger, metaphysics has been constantly governed by the ideal of *constant presence*, then there would be nothing as

anti-metaphysical as art. That is why it is not strange to find that philosophy (at least, traditional philosophy) and art have always been at loggerheads, on bad terms.

3. HOW ART DOES NOT GIVE A DAMN ABOUT LOSING ITS AURA

Remember that, when tracing the etymology of Latin *occultare*, we mentioned among the different meanings of “occult” that art –as revelation of the opposed movements of two forms of “concealment” or “occultation”– had primarily to do with the delimitation of two spaces: on the one hand, the –sacred– space, delimited in height (or at least far from the eyes of common people)¹⁰, where the *cultic* action takes place (the word “temple” comes from that “cutting” or delimitation: from the Greek *témmein*, to cut); on the other hand, a space excluded from that “enclosure” and at the same time produced, expelled and sent by it: the profane space. It is the *limes* what creates the world (the *kosmos* as ordering) according to its two faces or edges (the internal limit, with its centripetal attraction: concentration; the external limit, centrifugal, expels and dispels spaces towards the four cardinal points of the horizon at the same time).

Therefore, the ambivalence of the root *colo*, latent in *occultare*: on the one hand the celebration of the religious cult; on the other, the duties of cultivation. This ambiguity will extend to the progressively lay space of Modernity in every aspect of *culture*. As we know, technique is the one that traces the “limit” which engenders the world. But as we also know, we must refuse the (either theological or metaphysical) temptation of believing that art is in turn *concentrated* inside the sacred enclosure and even petrified in the statue of a god architectonically enclosed –and closed– inside the temple and poetically enclosed by any given myth or *creed*¹¹. According to such an easy division, technique would then be at profanity’s service, and art at holiness’.

10. It could also exist in the deepest and most inaccessible cavern, as in Altamira or Lascaux.

11. In German, poetry is *Dichtung*, and the corresponding verb (*dichten*) also means “to condense, to concentrate”. That is why Heidegger –and many others– has been often led to conclude (for instance in the conclusions of the aforementioned *Bermekungen*) that art is “poetry” (in the broad sense of the Greek *poiesis*), that is to say, concentration: all the elements should be gathered in the Thing (of thought or poetry: both aspects of the Same); all the words should be gathered in the Word. In this way, he dangerously and even mystically approaches the “metaphysical” ideal of *constant presence* that he had so brilliantly demystified elsewhere.

The only problem is that both technique and art *ontologically* pre-exist those two “enclosures”. Technique, we have already noted, is the one who traces the limit that “creates” them, thus feeling free to operate on both sides. And what about art? Art constantly reminds technique the *essence* from which it comes, that is: the original struggle between the earth (that invisibly “longs for” dispersion in the work) and humanity (that tends towards “concentration”, visible for all the members of the community in the city’s horizontality; a visibility which in the vertical, sacred enclosure of the temple is only accessible by some). Technique enunciates the collaboration between man and earth, while showing human activity’s desire for domination against a resistance considered to be “natural”; art means instead the *conjunction of exclusions*: it is the latent violent coupling in the technical collaboration between man and earth. Art enunciates indissolubly *concentration-and-dispersion*.

That is why it does not care about losing its aura¹². The term obviously comes from a religious sphere and its most well-known instance is in medieval saints’ *aureole* or halo. As we all know, Benjamin correctly states that, with the advent of the capacity to reproduce works of art mechanically, they have lost their *hic et nunc*, their unique and genuine character (*Echtheit*), and finally their privileged existence as *original* “things”. He certainly acknowledges that art has always been reproducible; in the Greek world, thanks to bronze casting (*Guss*) and ceramic molding (*Prägung*); he could have added the serial production of statues, textile manufacture, the reproduction of architectonic styles and procedures, etc.; in the medieval world, by means of woodcut; and in the modern age -in a continuous flow- by chalcography, the printing press, lithography (the origin of illustrated magazines), photography, phonograph records (origin of sound films), etc. But what Benjamin really claims is that the (mechanistic) modern technique has led to the loss of the artistic *original* (so that it would not even be accurate to talk about “reproducibility”, as there would be nothing to be reproduced), that is to say, of the work of art as such, of *this* thing here we call “art”). This would be

12. Walter Benjamin seems to regret this very much, instead. In his 1936 seminal essay “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit”, published in the book of the same title (The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction), when he criticizes fascism, he seems to confuse again “art” and “technique” at the people’s service. He says that society, devoted to imperialist war in a suicidal impulse, “instead of draining rivers, [...] directs a human stream into a bed of trenches; instead of dropping seeds from airplanes, it drops incendiary bombs over cities; and through gas warfare *the aura is abolished in a new way*”, BENJAMIN, W., *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 1963, p. 44; my italics.

the end of the 19th century's attempts of *l'art pour l'art* (lead by Mallarmé), which now is to be considered as an ideological reaction.

Now art is used for the ideological indoctrination of the masses, and it leads to fascism, which would promote the *aesthetization of politics*. On the contrary, Marxism proposes –as Benjamin notes at the end of his *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*– a different unction: “the *politization of art*”. In both cases, however, Benjamin is sure that art has ceased to be at religion's or prince's service, lacking any kind of “cultic value” (*Kultwert*), and that it has passed to be at politics' service, entirely exposed to the people's eyes, to the public eye (*Ausstellungswert*: “exposure value”). Apparently, of this general loss of “authenticity”, only one shelter remains: in fact, quoting as an example Pierre Duhamel's idea about the social function of cinema, Benjamin opposed it –as a sort of compensatory mechanism– to the lost religious *concentration* and he sees it (in the modern mass society) as a necessary –and sometime subversive– means of distraction and dispersion (*Zerstreuung*).

It seems to me that there is a *quid pro quo* here. I feel almost tempted to agree with the scholastic sentence: *concedo, sed distingo*. It is one thing how art is used, and quite a different one what art is. For a work of art can also be technically contemplated for its *helpfulness*; and this function changes: pyramids, whose bricks are kneaded with many slave's sweat and blood, are now a lucrative business (in spite of fundamentalist terrorism) for Egypt, and specially for *tour operators*; but still they are art *for us*. In the Plaza Mayor in Madrid, *sacramental plays* were represented, then bullfighting, and nowadays it is occasionally used for summer performances (a good example of public art), and it has always been a place for pedestrians and tourists (a good example of cultural industry).

Benjamin seems to take art for a set of “things” (either reproducible or not) that work as an instrument of power. That is true but banal: nothing escapes power, but this overused term is but the global abstraction of social workings. It all depends on the political organization which assumes that power. But, as we have seen, art is not a “thing”, but a function of technique's overdetermination (which is not a thing either). Benjamin still thinks like Aristotle: a work depends on its finality, and this belongs to the owner. If he is unique, original and unrepeatable (a god or tyrant, in its extreme forms), then it is logic to consider the work as original as its owner. If the ultimate end is in collectivity (either proletarian or fascist), it is equally logic that there are no originals, that each work of art is a “copy”. But a copy of what? Obviously, of the political diagram which, in turn, would determine the engram or technical project, ultimate responsible for the serial production of objects. This

would be the truly “original” diagram. The only different would then lie on the artist, rather than in the work of art.

In fascism, the supreme artist would be the *Führer* or the *Duce* and his clique of artists (for instance the Futurists, led by Marinetti, who was deeply hated by Benjamin). In communism (first guided by the Academy of the Arts), each man –individual and versatile– of the people would be the artist. The people would project a creative “light” over their works, bestowing on them a new *aura* (a “democratic” aura this time). If we believe Benjamin, simplifying things a lot, the first thing would be bad, and the second one would be good. It could be. But not for art. No one will deny that there is a fascist art of a high *artistic* quality (as the E.U.R. buildings in Rome and Speer’s works and projects testify), independently of its spurious use. In the same way, we cannot deny that there exists a very low quality communist art (“socialist realism”) and another, superb one –which was immediately stopped– (constructivism, Eisenstein’s or Djiga Vértov’s films, some of Shostakovich’s symphonies), even if we agreed, being really tolerant, that Soviet leaders had very good social intentions.

Therefore, any attempt to attribute artistic quality to religion or politics is barren. Where do *we* measure that quality from, instead? Obviously, from the perspective of the work’s capacity to *disseminate the earth*, to allow the sensible to show as such, that is, as unavailable for technical action which, nevertheless, lies at the work’s heart. The quality of a work of art depends on whether it makes things’ expiration and men’s mortality instantly shine, *together with* man’s effort to technically escape from that vertigo. The work of art is thus permanent, but it is not at all a copy or a sensible gleam of eternity (only God can know what that is). It is rather the *guardian of the ephemeral*, as Baudelaire already glimpsed, an artist who cheerfully rejected both artist’s and work’s “aura”. That aura was not, it was never properly artistic. It was a borrowed shine. And it is not very likely –and definitely undesirable– that it will be hung again on some genial artist’s eminent head (it is enough to see the famous pictures of Picasso in his underwear and to compare them with Lord Byron’s portrait wearing a Turkish turban).

But this lost welcome (not for art, for it had never an aura of its own) also encompasses the disappearance, from artistic consideration, of the work’s armor as *this* individual thing, *hic et nunc*, as an unrepeatable original. This assessment comes, all in all, from the Aristotelic exaltation of the Great Individual, of an unrepeatable and unique Lord (*kouranós*), that is to say, of the *prôte ousía*. According to this conception each single man, each *tóde ti*, longs in vain to truly become the First Substance: a God. What is unrepeatable is not the thing, the *feeling* that it produces on the audience, but the

underlining, *in each case*, of the ephemeral character of our space-temporal existence, spread along the chromatic scale of Monet's *Nymphéas* in the Orangerie Museum, but latent as well in the performance of *Parsifal* or, with greatest strength, in Joseph Beuys' *actions* or Bill Viola's video installations.

Of course, we can finish these controversies with a discordant voice, by asking what have all these considerations—bordering the realm of the mythic—on man and earth to do with the common idea of art as *aesthetic region*, or with its modern Kantian definition. Is it not art an *ad libitum* production of objects, according to rational laws? It certainly is. But we will have to analyze what that *means* to us, and not within the complex system of Kantian philosophy.

4. KANT'S FREE WILL AND DUCHAMP'S "FONTAINE"

It has been repeatedly said that, according to Kant, the *Kunst* operation ("art-technique" before being differentiated) can be defined as the arbitrary (*willkürliche*) production (*Hervorbringung*) of objects, according to reason. *Kur* used to mean "decision" (cf. *Kurfürst*) and *Wille* still corresponds to the English word "will", so that arbitration would be the act of *deciding* that something exists by the agent's will, that is, in a free way. In art, however, this must happen following the voice of reason (*Vernunft*, from *vernehmen*: "to perceive, to listen carefully"). We are now in a position to spell Kant's definition in the following way: *Kunst* is the free act on man's part to bring forth particular objects by cutting, tearing them *from* (that is what *de-cide* means: to cut, to separate something from something)—from what? Kant does not explicitly say it, but taking into account how carefully he usually distinguishes between production of *Objekte* and existence of *Gegenstände*¹³, we

13. Kant (and later idealists) uses the neologism *Objekt* (from the Latin *objectum*: what is thrown before us) to name something already understood and structured in the analytic's mind (e.g. the transcendental Object is the "thing in general": a kind of correlate of *construct* in which the subject's categorical and formal apparatuses are clearly projected, without attention to the "materiality" of things. We can thus say that the "Aesthetics" and the "Analytics" in the *Critique of Pure Judgement* deal with the attempt to reduce things, phenomena, to the status of mere Objects; while the "Dialectics" deals with the impossibility to reduce all of reason's Ideas—and therefore reason itself—to the status of Object). A car is a *Gegenstand*. The computational analysis of the car's design is an *Objekt*. A *Gegenstand* can produce fears and shaking (for instance, if a car runs over a pedestrian) because we are not sure yet what it is and, therefore, how to control it; instead, we dominate and control *Objekte* by means of philosophy, science, technique, politics and ethics (and art?).

understand that the decision is supposed to extract a thing (or parts of things) from another situation or realm, considered as “natural”, that is, immediate, thoughtlessly received and, therefore, imposed and opposed to man. This implies that, even if an “object” was not made to suffer a factual transformation, the very act of extracting it from its “phenomenical”, apparent bosom in order to put it in the free and reflective human realm would already be a techno-artistic action.

For instance, a urinal separated from the sanitary system (flushing tank, plumbing, sewer, recycling plants and transmitters), put in a museum’s room under the inscription *Fontaine de vie* and signed by R. Mutt (one of Marcel Duchamp’s heteronyms) is an artistic production, even if only because it makes us think (in an indirect way) about a function we all consider to be absolutely natural (that is: men urinating, hiding in a way, in spaces delimited according to sex inside public buildings); because of that reflection, the “urinal” *Gegenstand* becomes an *Objekt*: an object of reflection and understanding. Besides, that very same urinal, were it connected again to the sanitary system, excluding or erasing the inscription and the signature, would return to be part of what it *was* before: a technical product. But not always, not essentially. It was such product because some quartz mineral had been previously grinded –together with other materials– and torn from its “natural” bosom, vitrified, etc. As we can see, in a global system of exclusion from –and of inclusion in– a reference diagram (in a “meaningfulness net”) what is decisive, in order to know whether something is art, technical product or natural thing (if it were possible to get at “natural” things as such, which is questionable) is established according to the degree of proximity to the maker’s will. But simple will is not enough.

Many art lovers still think that what Duchamp (and his large artistic progeny) did was precisely an arbitrary oscillation between extravagance, farce and madness; an act which was only mitigated by the reverential awe imposed by the high valuation the “work” received and by its location in a museum. If prophet Isaiah cried out against the idolater who worshipped the carving he had made himself with cedar bark, we might imagine what he would have thought of a “urinal” like Duchamp’s, which had not undergone any physical transformation (and indeed, it is well known that Duchamp considered such works as *ready-mades*). But it has really undergone a transformation. And a powerful one indeed. Here is where Kant’s *caveat* intervenes: the arbitration in techno-artistic production should be subject to reason. For instance, the same people who make fun of Duchamp’s “artistic” production and who violently complain against its being put in a museum, with the consequent expenditure (a urinal, paid with taxpayers’ money!)

would find perfectly reasonable that the urinal was connected to the (first sanitary, then meaningful) net, because in this way the “thing” would be in its *place*. They grumble: is it reasonable at all that a museum should be the appropriate place to show a single urinal? The answer is: yes, it can get to be, in case we “reasonably” understood the system (the conscious and all-encompassing link) of all possible relational subsystems, and not only the system of mere utilitarian connections. That implies, in the first place, that in order for links to exist, it is necessary that there exists hierarchical exclusion and separation as well; in the second place, that this exclusion guarantees the –limited– dominion over the chosen reference diagram (here, the sanitary system stands before the fabrication of ceramics, using ovens, etc.); that this dominion will only be effective and enduring if it accepts being in turn subject to a superior diagram (public health, in this case), which is subject in turn to considerations of economic planning (ask any bathroom fittings manufacturer), space planning (toilet installation in public buildings)¹⁴, urban planning (connecting those spaces to the general plumbing system and sewers, and these in turn to recycling plants, underwater transmitters, etc.), political planning (waste and its transmission have to be hidden in every single city) and even ethical-religious planning (it is not acceptable to see adult men urinating in the streets as dogs; here, the *modesty* of Zeus’ law is still at work). This huge set-up of *exclusion* and separation, of *domination* and control and of the public “creation” of a private space constitutes a perfect example of what sociologists such as Nicklas Luhmann call “great technical systems”. And we all agree that such are *rational* systems, because they bring to light in the social realm *functional connections* rather than “things”.

After all this, what does Duchamp’s “artistic” operation with the urinal consist of? By violently tearing the basin from its techno-natural system, he connects it with equal violence to a subsystem (the museum’s) which is rationally connected as well to other superior systems (that of instructing and teaching the public to appreciate culture and lay and “humanist” patriotic values, thanks to the effort of abnegate and privileged individuals, artists, whose aspirations are clearly higher than those of bathroom fittings manufacturers). It is clear that the subsystem “museum” is considered to be superior to the subsystem “public toilets installation”, even if it is only because there are toilets in museums and not the other way around, and because a work of art (also Duchamp’s urinal, of course) is much more expensive than a toilet. What does Duchamp do? He *connects* those two subsystems against

14. In a broad sense, that is. Offices, factories and malls also have toilets with urinals to collect and drain male urine.

any of their normal uses, and with them, a “great technical system” and a similarly great “cultural” system, thus ridiculously *questioning* both, as if the artist looked at them from a *watchtower* or a *fort*, while at the same time allowing us to see *a sensu contrario* the totality of the modern “political space” in which those systems are joined.

From this (highly elevated) perspective, Kant’s definition of Kant¹⁵ is not only used for the production of the technical object “urinal” through a will subject to reason (to sum up, of the kind present in public health), but especially to bring to light (*hervorbringen*) through a free decision –by which something is excluded from a subsystem and connected to another one– an *Objekt*, that is: a conscious and lucid interpenetration of systemic functional connections and separations in the “work”, *actu* (thing plus title plus signature). In this way, the “previous” object (*Gegenstand*) arbitrarily invades another subsystem, “making it say its truths”, without fully abandoning its original subsystem (neither its form nor its matter have changed; but its function has changed). And all this happens according to reason’s superior dictate (superior, because it questions the so-called rationality of systems when they pretend to be meaningful and complete in themselves, in an isolated way, and because it connects and ridicules at the same time two “spatial” or “power relations” systems within the great supersystem “City”). The only thing that, in my opinion, would make the *Fontaine de vie* a total work of art, exquisitely rational, would be to put a toilet from which a urinal had been torn (naturally, it would have to be the exhibit one) beside the Museum’s room in Philadelphia, thus precluding the “normal” use of the item –in that place–.

In this way, not only Kant’s, but Heidegger’s definition would be right as well: a work has been brought to light (or “unconcealed”), brought “forth” (in the public room of a museum) in which *truth is actualized*, as in it are made clear several aspects for all the people:

1) the act of bringing (*bringen*) a thing into a “space-forth” (*vor*) –the *Being* of that room, which opens paths and places, which collects, selects

15. “By right we should not call anything art except a production through freedom, i.e., through a power of choice that bases its acts on reason”, KANT, I., *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, vol. V, in: *Kants Werke.*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1968, § 43, p. 303 (Translator’s note: I follow J.H. Bernard’s edition (*Critique of Judgment*, London, McMillan, 1914). I am not at all trying to attribute these meditations to Kant, but using –as I have done with Heidegger– the weight of his words to approach the phenomenon of art. What Kant intended to say is probably rather “modern”: We can arbitrarily produce objects because we have almost already reduced nature to a trustable set of laws (*natura formaliter spectata*); and the subjection of that will to reason consists in following its rules both in speculative and practical uses.

and arranges things—, and 2) the violent separation of the thing from its origin (*her*) which is, we could say, a meaningfulness net usually “concealed”: concealed, as it goes unnoticed precisely because it is permanently exhibited (such a concealment would be the sanitary net’s *Being*).

In this way, the “work-thing” *that actualizes truth* unconceals and at the same time preserves a yet more secret function’s concealment (especially if it takes place in public spaces): the necessary ejection of waste human fluids (an operation which obviously corresponds to the *Dasein* or “man-Being”). And it does indeed preserve the concealment (*bewahrt*, Heidegger says), because no one dares to urinate in Duchamp’s basin, even though its unconcealed vision reminds us (as in Platonic *anamnesis*) of a physiological need that has to be kept secret and retired, at least in public: this is the extraordinary crossing of public light and closed opacity underlined by Duchamp’s work of art¹⁶.

5. PRIVATE ART AND THE PUBLIC SPACE OF MODERNITY

In any case, an undeniable fact is to be established at the beginning of Modernity, that is the birth of a reflexive artistic conscience as an *author* of something that does not exist as merely a copy of an external thing, but as a new “creation” (taken to the extreme: not as a thing of the world, but as a thing which *makes world*), and the succeeding introduction of the word “art” in most European languages to refer to an ontological branch now torn from the old stem of technique (which will in turn be thus called from the nineteenth century onward, leaving craftsmanship aside)¹⁷. It is like a branch

16. There is no need to say that there is yet a more private sanitary item; so private that its name comes from withdrawal itself: the *privy* (Saint Teresa of Avila still spoke about “the soul’s privy”). Even if the choice of that item would have earned the work a higher charge of unconcealing concealment as such concealment, on the one hand, on the other hand it would have lost the suggestive strength of the urinal’s connection with a great female sexual organ (an analogy which is underlined by the way the urinal is placed in front of its user) and of urinating with male sexual organ’s ejaculation (thus the ironic title of the work: “The fountain of life”). This is a strong analogy we have prudishly overlooked before, when talking about systems subjected to reason. Anyway, Hegel had already connected urinating and genesis force in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

17. There are exceptions, of course. The uses related to old terms resist dying. Thus, we talk about Arts and Crafts Schools, or we say that a skilful person is “a real artist”. In general terms, “arts” still refers—although in an indirect way—to the whole field of manual work, from cooking to bullfighting. The same can be applied to the term “philosophy”, used to mean any theoretical project or calculus (some time ago there was much talk about “politics”: a firm’s politics, commercial politics, etc.; now—maybe because of the

office that separates from its old head office to work on its own, claiming its superiority and distinction over it. Even a venerable transcendental joined that branch: *pulchrum*, “the beautiful”, which had been used until then to name the way in which the supernatural is latent in the sensible. That is why *splendor entis* corresponded to *pulchrum*; the splendor came after all from the *ens summum*, from God, who covered beautiful things with his light (this is where the idea of the halo or nimbus comes from; and it also explains why natural beauty, or the one that emanates from saints and their actions, was considered to be highly superior to artificial beauty)¹⁸.

All in all, we have not been able until now to explain the reasons for this fundamental change, due to the way in which it altered all old distinctions and also because it was flanked by two other essential phenomena in Modernity, which were also in need of analysis: In the first place, the close connection from then on between science and technique, and in the second place, the very close connection between capitalism and the practical ethical-political sphere. We are ready now to investigate those reasons, once we have determined already the relationship between art and technique in general (something that is only possible for those who know themselves to be heirs of Modernity, even if they grumble against it).

After everything that has been said before, those reasons seem to appear on their own will. Modern science and technique tend to strip the varied sensible coat from old substances, both in the sense of a continuum (phoronomical or dynamical) or in discrete (i.e. atomist) units. Taking two plastic images from machinist industry, continuists would see phenomenic truth as a huge forest whose wood, pressed and mixed with water, would provide a dense and viscous “pulp” from which all kinds of goods would be produced *ad libitum* (in the same way as, in technical reality, paper and textile industries are born from that pulp). Atomists would instead grind apparent reality as if it were an immense granite quarry, turning it into fine gravel for roads or melting it into glass or porcelain.

This industrial simile is corroborated, moreover, by the all-embracing expansion of epistemology. In a methodical way, it first reduces secondary qualities (debased as “subjective” ones: flavors, colors, sounds, tactile feeling) to primary qualities (enhanced as “objective” ones: shape, size, extension,

common low regard for politics— it seems more elegant to talk about “philosophy” in those cases). What has disappeared from linguistic use (and it is not casual at all) is the denomination “fine arts”.

18. This goes as far as Kant, even in a dubitative form; this judgement will only be inverted in a decisive way by the powerful influence of Hegelian *Aesthetics*.

movement); then it “translates” them into mathematical entities, and finally it turns the old “true reality”, substance, into a colorless and almost useless frame (an *I don't know what*, Locke would say), an abstraction about to be lost in Hume's phenomenalism. The true frame now, what is “literally down there” holding up reality, is understanding. That superior ability of the “I” is in charge of both “conceiving” and “judging” (that is to say, of abstracting and generalizing, on the one hand, and of analyzing and discriminating, on the other hand) as well as of synthesizing, that is, of composing and (re)constructing objects from phenomenical things. The supreme faculty is located above understanding; reason, in charge of relating and organizing judgments by means of laws and principles until it turns reality into a gigantic composition, a sphere in which things do not have places of their own, but *sites*, locations that are unconditionally allotted by that Supreme Judge.

Nevertheless, it is possible that the modern mechanic entrepreneur had understood –lat.: *intel-lectum*, that is: “reading” between the lines of preserved old books– Democritus¹⁹. Galen provides us with two antithetic dictums from this skeptic and wary atomist that seem to have been deliberately written to preside over Modernity's whole epistemology: “After [Democritus] having said that ‘by convention there is color, by convention sweetness, by convention bitterness, but in reality there are only atoms and space’, he makes the senses address reason in this way: ‘Oh wretched mind, after you took your certainties from us you reject us? Our rejection is your collapse’”²⁰. Democritus, like Modern man, offers with one hand what he takes away with the other: on the one hand, science –and technique– can only progress by reducing the sensible to mathematical formulae that can in turn be expressed by the regular and rigid movements of machines; on the other hand, senses are not only at the beginning of the mechanical process, but also at its end, in empirical verification.

Modern science and philosophy noted Democritus' warning and tried to establish an armistice that satisfied both parts: sensibility and reason. The incipient modern art also took note of it, but it took to its extreme *sans le savoir* its function of symbolic dismantling technical arrogance. Its attempt to relate the two spheres of the modern soul–trying to make us see reason's

19. There is no need to insist that with Modernity there also begins an endless task of cleaning, polishing and clearing away, of ordering and translating the disordered and mostly fragmentary legacy of Antiquity, which would also be used as “raw matter” from which to extract examples and incitements for emulation, while the rest was kept in a scholarly way for later re-workings.

20. GALEN, *De medicina empirica*, Diels-Kranz, 68B125, fragment 8.

supremacy over “sensible flesh” itself—would literally end in a *catastrophe*²¹. For us, it is both a nihilist and a laughable catastrophe, if we remember Kant’s amazing definition of laugh: “an affection (*Affect*) arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing”²².

6. HOW SENSORY KNOWLEDGE, ALBEIT CONFUSED, IS STILL KNOWLEDGE

We can say, to begin with, that this scientific and philosophical operation obeyed an ideological principle which parallels one that had already succeeded in Rome. It seems interesting that it took place in the realm of epistemology, trying to close the wound opened, as we have seen, by the reception of Democritus’ work, with the fight between senses and reasons. It was decided that, in the *urbs*, all its inhabitants except slaves and foreigners—and later on, after Commodus, everyone that lived within the *limes* of Empire, no matter their origin or social condition—would be considered *civites romani* in legal and political terms. In a parallel way, science decided to give the right of “citizenship” to sensible impressions (though they had a lower status than mathematical “constructs”), thus establishing the basis for empirical psychology. As a consequence—mirroring social movements, what is not surprising at all—in the second half of the eighteenth century some radical authors related to English sensationalism, such as Condillac—who followed the trace of Hume, another “insurrect”, carrying his doctrine to its extreme consequences—proposed a conception of man as a “machine” made of sensations from outside to inside (so that the armistice would have truly been a pause for the sensible “plebs” to assimilate and subject its “rational” lords). Leibniz, on the other hand (especially in his *Meditationes de veritate, cognitione et ideis*) undertook a cannier and subtler operation which attempted to restore the *statu quo*, though it was less satisfactory at last than the sensationalist one (as it was later demonstrated in philosophy by Kant’s superiority, and in politics by the French Revolution). Leibniz accordingly conceived knowledge as a gradual *continuum*, in correspondence to a universe ontologically organized in a continuous *scala entium*. That is to say, senses (and even the highest strata of inferior understanding, such as imagination, fantasy or memory)²³ offer a *cognitio confusa* of external reality;

21. The original Greek term, *katastrophé*, means disturbance, inversion; to turn things “upside down”, so to say.

22. KANT, I., *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, ed. cit., § 54, p. 332.

23. This distinction was established by Christian Wolff, the great organizer of Leibniz’s philosophy (what we have called “fantasy” corresponds to the *facultas fingendi*, the capacity to combine images in an arbitrary way). See his *Psychologia empirica*, §§ 56-233.

if that cognition could be someday *–per impossibile–* analyzed, cleared away and organized by understanding, it would turn into *cognitio clara, distincta et bene ratione fundata*, as the one we already have of intelligible *realitates*. In Rome, there were no rights but for the *populus*. The high class was part of it, although actually they were the only ones who could access the *Senate* and therefore the government. In the same way here –bearing in mind the political space of Enlightened despotism in which this philosophy is born– there is a single universe (and not two worlds, a sensible one and an intelligible one); continuous, but hierarchically organized. Therefore, a true follower of Leibniz would say, both in philosophy as in politics: “really there are people with a touch of class”.

It can be easily seen that these “distraction maneuvers” would not content neither the sensible “plebs” nor the rational “elite”. The first, surer of its rights the less they were recognized, was therefore reluctant to be just an “occasion” for the “conceptual class” to show off; the second would not accept at all the fact that its lower strata (physical-mathematical concepts or formulae of phenomena) would be contiguous to the higher layers of the sensorial “common people” (remembrances, fixed, classified and ordered by memory). This was emphasized as the “aristocracy” suspected that this continuity was being established by the all-embracing Reason (represented by the *philosophie*), parallel to the “Reason of State” incarnated by the King, the “first server of the State”, as Frederick II of Prussia liked to call himself. This was the situation when Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, a well-meaning follower of Leibniz and Wolff with a touch of sensationalism, appeared. In order to calm down the plebs he inadvertently promoted (like a new Epimetheus) the insurrection of sensibility against logic which still goes on. No one questions his merits, however. Baumgarten is the founder of the “science” of aesthetics, and he was the first to use that term as a noun (*Aesthetica*), deriving it from the Greek *aisthetiké*: “what is related to *aesthesis* or sensation”²⁴.

7. THE AESTHETIC STRATAGEM

The aristocratic idea that a confused understanding corresponds to a confused thing is still Platonic (present, for instance, in the simile of the “line” in the *Republic*). It is unworthy of the Modern Age, presided by *method* (according to the famous dictum by Galileo: *mente concipio*); it is also unworthy

24. Cfr., CASULA, M., *La metafisica di A.G. Baumgarten*, Milano, Mursia, 1973 (especially section IV, A); CASSIRER, E., *The Philosophy of Enlightenment*, Princeton, UP, 1979, pp. 338-359.

of the 18th century State, in which the Enlightened King (*imago mentis* of Power) dominates over all his subjects, no matter how their hierarchy is scaled. That is why Baumgarten's simple and genial operation consists in distinguishing between sensible "understanding" (which belongs to animals) and *cognitio sensitiva*, which could be translated as "understanding of the sensible"²⁵. That the sensible is characteristically obscure does not mean in fact that we should perceive it as such; on the contrary, it urges us to penetrate the *perfectio phaenomenon* thanks to a *forma specialis*. It turns necessity into virtue by considering the *perceptio confusa* not as the chaotic presentation of mixed sensations, but as the ordered and articulated *representation* of everything that is accessible to the senses, thus keeping the original meaning of the term (*cum-fusio*: fusion, conjunct integration, *synopsis*). This knowledge constitutes an *analogon rationis*, and its field is that of *aesthetic intuition*, subjected of course to reason and legality. Another essential point follows from this, characteristic of the *subjective turn* of Modernity, that is: Nature's rights are *borrowed* (not discovered) by man. In concordance to the sphere ideal we have been tracing in different realms, *sensation* itself is now attributed to man's care. Indeed, sensation (already "translated" into a representation, and no longer as an external impression) is –Baumgarten says– promoted by the soul's *vis repraesentativa*, according to the human body's *central* position in the universe²⁶.

The fact that Aesthetics has contributed to a great extent –in spite of its manifest aim– to the "humanist" project of "cleaning up" the sensible does really sound like sarcasm or, using the Hegelian term, as the "cunning of reason". Aesthetics puts Man in the place of the naturally given, highlighting the *expression* of his genius in the *artist*; highlighting in the *public* (that is born at last with the new aesthetic consideration) the emotional –and ideological– *experience* that they, as individuals, will be "safe" for some time from the Machine's and the Market's tyranny when they enter the superior sphere of Art; and highlighting in *politicians* the *establishment* of their power as the Nation's representatives (or, in socialist revolutionaries, trying to attain power as Humanity's representatives).

25. In the same way, it is evident that there has never been an empirical science, but science *of* (that is to say, on behalf of) the empirical.

26. WOLFF, C., *Psychologia empirica*, in: *Metaphysica*, Halle/Saale, 1739, §534. Baumgarten's *Psychologia* (§§ 504-699) is reprinted (following the 1757 fourth edition) in the fifteenth volume –*Anthropologie*– of the academic edition of Kant's *Gesammelte Schriften*, as he used Baumgarten's work for his teaching.

8. WALKING ALONG THE WASHINGTON MALL

The fulfilment of these aesthetic and politic ideals will take place in *Neoclassicism*, triumphant in the 1776 American “revolution” (disguised as a colonial war) and, immediately after, in the 1789 French revolution. We attend here the “political geometrization” of the brand-new *Nation*, represented in colossal monuments (erected “from top to bottom”, so to say) in which the *citoyen* can “read” the republican greatness he is a part of and in which, in turn, he seems to be diminished: the Nation is everything, and the individual must be ready to self-sacrifice for the new collective Life.

This explains the “sublime” size of neoclassical buildings. The model for the great architectonic projects of this age (many of which remained just projects of layouts precisely because of their size and their costs, as it happened in the exemplary case of Boullée) will not be Rome, but rather Egypt (think of Schinkel’s scenery for *The Magic Flute*) and the stout –and a bit rough– pre-classical Greece²⁷, whose paradigm would be the temples of Paestum. They were brought to light by the good Spanish king Charles III (who was, at the same time, king of Naples) by draining the marshes and swamps in which they were sunk (again, *to grub up, to hew through!*). The discovery of Doric columns *without base* in Paestum was a revolution for the age’s architecture, which was endeavored to get rid²⁸ of the ornamentation and “vegetable” overload typical of the Baroque period and its monstrous heir, Rococo, in order to welcome the naked functionality of Laugier’s canon: column, architrave, frontispiece²⁹.

Maybe the most successful example of this “patriotic” colossalism is the Washington Mall, in which the US citizens see the cosmic order reflected here on earth. It is a long landscaped rectangle, in which we can see a –maybe unconscious– combination of the sacred avenues of Luxor or Teotihuacan³⁰

27. Which had little to do with Winckelmann’s ideals of *edle Einfalt* and *stille Grösse*: “noble simplicity and silent greatness”.

28. As it becomes the puritan austerity of American revolutionaries, as well as the Masonic severity of its rulers (think of Jefferson and the Dollar bill, with its pyramid and its sun eye) and German and French enlightened men (led by Fichte).

29. Nevertheless, some of the great baroque buildings would serve as models for the severe revolutionary simplicity. Think for instance of Bernini’s colonnade in the Vatican or of the Louvre’s façade, by Claude Perrault, in which paired columns hold a straight wainscoting. That is why the transparent pseudo-Egyptian pyramid by Ieoh Ming Pei fits that *cour* very well.

30. Nevertheless, Athanasius Kircher, in his extravagant but very influential *Oedipus aegyptiacus*, had already noted in the seventeenth century the close similarity between

and the royal gardens of Versailles or Schönburg, in Vienna. It is an adequate space for mass demonstrations and patriotic meetings, limited on the East by the Capitol (began in 1793: a great scale transformation of Bramante's *tempietto* in Rome, with two wings shaped like a Greek temple, sheltering the two Houses), on the West by the Lincoln Memorial (a Doric dodecastyle mausoleum –like the Parthenon– flanked by two votive vessels), on the North by the White House (a development of Palladian buildings' "Gregorian" style, with a Ionic tetrastyle portal; and before it, the usual equestrian statue, with cannons and all that) and on the South, by the Potomac, by the Jefferson Memorial, inspired by Augustus' or Adrian's mausoleums, by the Roman temple devoted to Vesta and, remotely, by the Greek *thólos*³¹.

This spatial distribution is not casual (as it happens instead with New York's skyline) but it expresses a great symbolic value. As we saw in Chartres cathedral, the location of a building or of its accesses according to the four cardinal points explains its function. In the Mall, the East is politically defined by the Capitol, the dawn of the new nation, Humanity's universal hope. The first sunbeams shine on the statue of Liberty that crowns the building. The West is the somber place for meditation on death, the announcement –perpetuated day after day– of the end of everything. That explains the Doric severity of the Lincoln Memorial, and Lincoln's own grave and thoughtful aspect, for he was the president who had to bear the only civil war in American land. The North condensates the energy of decision and perseverance in promises; that is why the White House points in that direction.

Finally, the South is the smiling realm of light (an obsession for any republic that deserves the name), equally spread over every citizen, as it corresponds to the Constitution, the nation's lighthouse and guide: the *Charta Magna* was written to a large extent by Jefferson, and that explains as well the graceful and gentle character of his Memorial, so opposed to Lincoln's.

The Washington monument rises in the center of this "sacred" –it does not matter how secularized it is– and "cosmic"³² area. The celebrated 555 feet

Egyptian and Precolumbian (especially Mexican) pyramids and sacred avenues. We cannot dismiss the idea that this influence might have reached Pierre-Charles L'Enfant, the French architect and landscape designer who projected Washington's layout in 1791, from different sources.

31. For further information, see great essay by GRISWOLD, CH. L., "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Washington Mall: Philosophical Thoughts on Political Iconography", in: SENEI H.F./WEBSTER S. (eds.), *Critical Issues in Public Art*, Washington and London, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998 (2), pp. 71-100.

32. The base on which the statue of Liberty which crowns the Capitol stands is surrounded by the legend *E pluribus unum* (that is, *uni-verse*). This legend would be

Obelisk was erected in –disproportionate– imitation of the Egyptian helio-centric icon: as if all the other monuments were planets turning around this petrified sunbeam. The huge obelisk –which was built quite late, between 1848 and 1884– is the only monument which is not oriented or pointed at any of the cardinal points in relation to the Mall (or to the rest of the city). It is the vertical axis of the city and the Empire, the lineal extension of the celestial zenithal point, stable, solid and superb in its nakedness. There is no writing in it telling the deeds of the hero on whose honor it was raised (in opposition to what happens in the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials), no inscription or drawing tears its marble skin. Precisely because it centers this new political space, the Washington Monument “expels” directions without absorbing any, in splendid isolation. It is very meaningful that hardly anyone approaches to have a close look at it (what for?) and that there are no demonstrations around its base³³.

All this vast extension collects and condensates in it the Neoclassical ideals in architecture and sculpture (think of the Lincoln and Jefferson statues), which are in turn a reflection of the new republican and, immediately afterwards, *imperial* –it does not matter that it is sheathed as democracy– order. It is consciously designed to amaze and *overwhelm*: there is no place in it for the quotidian. The buildings which flank it or are close to it are museums (like the different sections of the Smithsonian), libraries (as the exhaustive National Library of Congress, scattered in several buildings with white pilasters of an almost pre-fascist style) or official sites (like the Supreme Court, an octastyle lay temple of Corinthian style, thus completing all the classical orders).

There is no *housing* here, unless we consider as such the eternal dwelling of “demigods” Lincoln (thoughtful, as a suffering hero out of the Poems of Ossian) and Jefferson (the merry lay thinker, as Athena’s descendant); or unless we think, at the other extreme, of the homeless who establish –creating vivid postmodern contrasts– their nightly den in the sculptures at the sides of the avenue³⁴. Who is then the usufructuary of the Mall’s vast openness

read were it not *hidden* from simple mortals by its height. American “democracy”, nevertheless, in opposition to the Heideggerian *Verbergen*, grants that every citizen can comfortably ascend to the top in an elevator and patriotically enrapture with the “legend”.

33. Compare this centralizer function –and slightly *repulsive* and exclusive– with the “coquettish” obelisk (truly Egyptian, in this case) in the Place de la Concorde in Paris, around which people celebrates the arrival of the New Year.

34. Allow me a little personal anecdote: I saw, together with my *cicerone* in Washington, Ruth Pérez-Chaves, a homeless comfortably lying four meters high in a sort

(the Heideggerian *das Freie!*), that huge *void court* (cut by the line of buildings and trees) whose dimensions make walking impossible, in opposition to what happens in the *Tuileries* in Paris or in Berlin's *Unter den Linden* or—a long time ago—in the *Paseo del Prado* in Madrid? The whole set looks like an immense *catafalque*³⁵, as if it was the rectangular layout of a grave designed for a dead giant who will never rest in that place. As if it was a void sepulchre, devoted to air: pure surface, centered by the obelisk: a sun post ready to be nailed to the heart of the deceased, if he existed. This giant (who would prefer not to exist instead of occupying the grave devoted to him) is the medieval and even baroque *God*. There are no churches in the Washington Mall, which could be compared as well with the *cast* of a vast temple with a basilica ground plan, with no “walls” but the trees, with no “roof” but the sky, with no “nave” but the grass, with no “altar” but the Obelisk. Who will take its place now? *We, the People*: a collective and anonymous subject, that only exists when it gathers in mass concentrations. The whole Mall is then—allow me yet another comparison—like an aerial monument to the *Unknown citizen*. *The People* is not the “people”, well structured according to capitalist production relationships, but the “mob”, that is to say, *the Public*, a mobile incarnation (moved as it is by emotions and passions, rather than by reasons) of the “political space”, a *subjectivization* of the neuter term “the Public”.

Therefore, here and now (and not, as in the Baroque: *Neque hic neque illic*) the Mall's exterior, its vane, is *reflexively interiorized* in each of the individuals who make, in an amorphous way, the public. Politically taught by the Capitol they visit, fearful and *guided*, but in which they are not allowed to intervene (their legitimate representatives do it for them); bewildered by the stored knowledge in the Library they do not consult (scholars do it for them; they will lead their destinies or will reproduce the system ideologically through public education); warned by Jefferson of the Constitution's goodness and by Lincoln of the horrors of civil war; proud, at last, of the wonders the Empire, with millions of dollars (military plunder is no longer necessary; it belongs to the times of the *Musée Napoléon*, for instance), has stored in magnificent museums with no regular visitors but foreign tourists or students (for both, this visit is part of the “program”!). This *public*

of metallic vane graciously connecting two vertical triangular structures as a hammock (God only knows how he got there). The whole set seemed a funny minimalist mockery of the Obelisk: one of Alexander Calder's works, inhabited by a human “bird”! A sort of “primitive-postmodern cottage”!

35. Indeed, none of the two Memorials near the Mall keeps a grave inside it, in opposition to what would be the usual thing in baroque churches. Therefore, they are literally *in memoriam* monuments.

does not know much about laws or books, they have mechanically quoted at school a Constitution whose meaning escapes them, they hate civil war but they are ready to promote it obediently *ad majorem Imperii gloriam* in any other part of the planet; this public not only does not understand or enjoy the sculptures integrated in the Hirschhorn, but they would consider them –if they saw them– as a “witness for the prosecution” for the squandering of their taxes. They admit their accumulation, however, because they glimpse somehow that democratic Power is thus “treasured” in some sort of *potlatch* (is there a greater extravagance than ordering in a scientific, mortal way the so-called riches that have no use at all, separating them from capitalist accumulation?). This public, at last, what does it have to do with the People? Everything and nothing. It is the People’s ghostly abstraction, its *cognitio confuse*, a “spirit” that should appear when called forth by the public powers’ spell, as if the Mall –a new comparison to try to describe this vacuous and effective “political space”– was an enormous “table” (with no legs) in which a *seance* was performed.

What is truly meaningful about all this is that the whole political-artistic set-up has rarely been used. In opposition to what happens in French parties of *l’Humanité*, in opposition as well to what used to happen in fascist mass concentrations, the American ghostly “public” has very rarely (for instance, at the end of the Second World War) filled the space designed for that by public powers. The public is rather cast and organized as “tourism” by *tour operators* (without them, they would not know where to go) or either it bursts in tumultuous collective demonstrations (as in the Vietnam War or in “colored people” –let’s be politically correct– concentrations), addressed precisely against the abstract Power which prepared the political space to see its glory reflected in it, now fallen into its own trap (though maybe it is not so tragic: people must vent their feelings, there must be movement in order to introduce some wary *amendments* to the Constitution, a lay replacement of Newton’s clockmaker God).

Is this a *public art*? Certainly not. It is an art designed for public use, or better: *so that in the future exists something like an involved “public”*. The problem is that the public today refuses to occupy that “Procrustean bed”, unless it is to protest in that space opened and artistically arranged by democratic Power. The People has been ideologically displaced by a ghost. And we all know ghosts do not exist, *unless they scare us*, when they threaten to blow up the system.