

## AESTHETICS: PHILOSOPHY OF ART OR PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE?

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Throughout its multifarious history aesthetics in its various historical, cultural and theoretical frameworks has been concerned with issues of cognition, beauty, nature and art, and their mutual relations and relationships. Hence, aesthetics, as established by Baumgarten, was intended to establish the science of cognition as carried out by the senses (although not in opposition to scientific rationality); in Kant the notions of the beautiful and the sublime simultaneously relate to nature and to art, both in relation to the preconditions of human cognition and understanding, while in Hegel aesthetics firmly becomes philosophy of art, although it still retains the umbilical cord with the sensuous, for, by being the “sensuous appearance of the Idea,” by its very definition, art cannot exist without it. Although in Hegel art is an essential step in the development of the self-awareness of the Absolute Spirit, its specific sensuous features prevent it from attaining the ultimate position of the pure concept. This is reserved for philosophy, which deals, in Hegel’s view, with concepts only.

Hegel’s identification of aesthetics with philosophy of art and the turn away from nature to art as the fundamental object of aesthetic reflection represents a crucial historical moment, for it not only establishes aesthetics as philosophy of art but, consequently, also signals the demise of its relevance by eliminating the further historic importance of its subject, i.e. art.

As Peter Bürger notes in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, in Hegel can be found a sketch of a concept of postromantic art: “Using Dutch genre painting as his example, he writes that here the interest in the object turns into interest in the skill of presentation. ‘What should enchant us is not the subject of the painting and its lifelikeness, but the pure appearance (*interesseloses Scheinen*) which is wholly without the sort of interest that the subject has. The one thing certain about beauty is, as it were, appearance [semblance (*Scheinen*)] for its own sake, and art is mastery in the portrayal of all the secrets of this ever

profounder pure appearance (*Scheinen*) of external realities' (vol. I, p. 598). What Hegel alludes to here is nothing other than what we called the developing autonomy of the aesthetic. He says expressly 'that the artist's subjective skill and his application of the means of artistic procedure are raised to the status of an objective matter in works of art' (vol. I, p. 599). This announces the shift of the form-content dialectic in favor of form, a development that characterizes the further course of art."<sup>1</sup> Bürger draws from this passage the conclusion that Hegel himself foresaw the separation of the content and the form, or what he calls "the antithesis between art and the praxis of life."<sup>2</sup>

There exists another interpretation of the Hegelian thesis of the intermediate position of art in relation to philosophy, which can be found in Henri Lefebvre and more recently in Luc Ferry and which relates to contemporary dilemmas intrinsic to aesthetics. According to this second interpretation of Hegel (the similarities of which with that of Bürger, and hence indirectly with that of Adorno, Ferry disputes) contemporary art has lost its power of negation. It follows from Ferry's theses that, because it turned into philosophy, art became sublated and by this act or process it was transformed into its opposite, although at the same time retaining its name as its empty shell. In the words of Ferry, "if art is simply an incarnation of a conceptual truth in a sensible material, art is dead."<sup>3</sup> The art that is referred to here is conceptual art in its broadest sense and it is this art that increasingly appears as the art after modernism *par excellence*. It is also this art which is one of the causes for the present re-examination of the relation between art and culture and, therefore, of the relation between aesthetics as philosophy of art and aesthetics interpreted as philosophy of culture.

A dilemma which confronts us today is as follows: can we treat all contemporary art as a single entity, whether it is conceptual or other, or do we have to distinguish between (1) conceptual, (2) traditional (classical) art, and (3) predominantly commercial, commodified and, for the most part, visual art which is closely related to what used to be called mass and consumer culture? A step necessary for answering this dilemma may be in historically defining the initial object of our inquiry.

How can we define art historically? First, we may define it as a shifting function which gives a semblance of ontological stability simply because we don't view it from a long term historical perspective. From this viewpoint artworks are transient entities with ontological, cognitive, aesthetic, ideologi-

<sup>1</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93-4.

<sup>3</sup> Luc Ferry, *Le Sens du Beau* (Paris: Cercle d'Art, 1998), p. 200.



cal, and other functions, and artists and writers are appreciated and valued for a brief historical moment and then slip into oblivion to be, perhaps, resurrected years, decades or even centuries later. They may, in the meantime, become a part of the Canon, but even in this case it cannot be said that they are appreciated with the same intensity throughout history. The Czech structuralist aesthetician from the thirties, Jan Mukařovský furthermore suggested that each new artistic movement or trend – an avant-gardist, for example – first opposes and subverts the past artistic norms, but subsequently becomes itself a part of the tradition and hence itself a norm.

In this first historical definition, art is something that attains the function of art. Its essential feature could be defined in Nelson Goodman's manner: the question is not what is art, but when is it art? Mukařovský follows here in the footsteps of the Russian formalists, who have already claimed that artworks – they were concerned almost exclusively with poetry and prose and not with works of the visual arts – attained, lost and perhaps regained their artistic status through history. Or, quoting Danto from eight decades later, "We might define their historical moment as any time in which they could have been works of art."<sup>4</sup>

According to the second historical definition which is a historicist one, art follows a historically preexistent norm. In Hegel's case (and also, but to a lesser extent, in that of Heidegger) this is of course the Greek model. As Peter Szondi observes, "While in Hegel everything starts to move and everything has its specific place value in historical development ... the concept of art can hardly develop, for it bears the unique stamp of Greek art."<sup>5</sup> Romantic art does not fulfill those criteria and their ideal; to return to Bürger again, "For Hegel, romantic art is the product of the dissolution of the interpenetration of spirit and sensuousness (external appearance) characteristic of classical art. But beyond that, he conceives of a further stage where romantic art also dissolves. This is brought about by the radicalization of the opposites of inwardness and external reality that define romantic art. Art disintegrates into 'the subjective imitation of the given' (realism in detail) and 'subjective humor.' Hegel's aesthetic theory thus leads logically to the idea of the end of art where art is understood to be what Hegel meant by classicism, the perfect interpenetration of form and content."<sup>6</sup>

But does it necessarily follow that post-romantic art has lost the historic role it purportedly possessed in the past? While a positive answer is obligatory

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 196.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Bürger, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>6</sup> Bürger, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

if one follows Hegel's designation of the development of the Absolute Spirit, and may even be necessary if we follow Ferry's arguments, it is also true – as Adorno claims and, later, Bürger – that after romanticism, art, especially in the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, attained or retained a very privileged social and existential position, one that was left practically undisputed at least until the sixties, when the emergence of structuralism and later poststructuralism started to radically question and attack the previously sacrosanct notions of the artwork, the artist and artistic creativity – a process which coincided with the change from the modernist into the postmodernist paradigm. Within such a changed culturescape the contemporary alternative to the two historical definitions previously described would be that of Arthur Danto: “The picture then is this: there is a kind of transhistorical essence in art, everywhere and always the same, but it only discloses itself through history. ... Once brought to the level of self-consciousness, this truth reveals itself as present in all the art that ever mattered.”<sup>7</sup> This essence or truth cannot be identified with a particular style of art, continues Danto.

What is then disclosed through history is the historicized essence of art. And Danto continues much like Bürger and especially Ferry: “[T]he end of art consists in the coming to awareness of the true philosophical nature of art.”<sup>8</sup> The passage of art into philosophy, the emergence of intellectual reflection upon art, purportedly signals the final death knell to art proper, but while in Ferry or Lefebvre art has not only lost its historic role but has lost its role altogether, Danto sees in this change the emergence of a post-historical art which, although no longer historic, legitimately continues the tradition of its predecessor and is therefore a continuation of art as such. A correlate of the previous belief in the importance and the essential truth-revealing function of art are the nineteenth and twentieth century beliefs in creativity of which art was the paramount instance. The view that the role of art may have been diminishing for centuries at least, is obvious also from Heidegger's question in 1950: “[I]s art still an essential and necessary way in which truth that is decisive for our historical existence happens, or is art no longer of this character?”<sup>9</sup>

This same issue was picked up in the recent book, *The Work of Art* from 1997, by the French aesthetician Gérard Genette, who noted that Adorno and Heidegger “systematically overvalued art,”<sup>10</sup> thereby echoing Danto's views on posthistorical art. Truly, may we not say that art is but yet another master

<sup>7</sup> Danto, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> Danto, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Artwork,” quoted in Danto, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> Gérard Genette, *L'oeuvre de l'art. La relation esthétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), p. 11.



narrative of modernity and that modernism was its last and perhaps paramount historical instance? In other words, that the dominant contemporary art has lost its privileged social, political, cognitive, even ethical role and that it has been transformed into its opposite, this opposite being the visual arts and, especially, their commodified postmodern version? The essential difference appears to occur with the demise of the modernist paradigm in art. This description is, I think, generally accepted, for there seem today to be no contemporary defenders either of modernity as an incomplete project or of interpretations of postmodernism as yet another facet or instance of high modernism, as was frequently argued in the eighties. If, then, postmodernism appeared as a relatively homogenous phenomenon, which with its firm and distinct features could persuasively stand up to modernism, the latter being exemplified by its distinct, exclusive and easily recognizable properties, then in the nineties and thereafter we seem no longer capable of affirming such distinct properties in postmodernism. In other words, the current postmodernism increasingly appears as a series of localized artistic and cultural phenomena, existing as a series of local and transient events with no particular claims to universality and historic importance. Hence Heidegger's observation about the possible reduced importance of art and Genette's comment about the overevaluation of art in Adorno and Heidegger correctly announce or diagnose the current status of art. Nonetheless, such diagnoses are possible on the background of a specific and outstanding historical situation of the previous century, i.e. that of modernism. As Fredric Jameson notes, echoing Adorno from his *Aesthetic Theory*, "Whatever the validity of Hegel's feelings about Romanticism, those currents which led on into what has come to be called modernism are thereby surely to be identified with one of the most remarkable flourishings of the arts in all of human history."<sup>11</sup> It is hence probably also from the vantage point of modernism that the current diminishment of the importance and the relevance of art appears to be stark enough to cause a series of authors – some of whom I have mentioned – to question the current status of art altogether. Moreover, since the avant-garde project of art has been separated from the general project of life and society as an art project, as two instances of the same utopian process (the consequences of which were described well in the case of the Russian avant-garde by Boris Groys in his *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin* book from 1988), what we are confronted with are the consequences of what Achille Bonito Oliva, Charles Jencks and Jameson have at an early stage, i.e. in 1972, 1975 and 1984 respectively, diag-

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<sup>11</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn. Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 80-1.

nosed as trans-avant-garde, post-avant-garde and postmodernism. If, then, Duchamp's ready-mades appear today as an ever-recurrent issue of aesthetic and philosophical debates, this does not mean that this was the case also in the first half of the twentieth century when Duchamp was interpreted variously as a dadaist, a surrealist and a conceptualist. It was only when art created according to or resembling that made by him almost a century ago started to become the exclusive recognizable dominant trend of recent art that his work became an object of intense attention and was revealed as an early and paradigmatic instance of contemporary art. Marcel Duchamp has been instinctively resurrected as the proto-postmodernist, for postmodernism consists, to quote an insightful observation by Slavoj Žižek, "in displaying the object directly, allowing it to make visible its own indifferent and arbitrary character. The same object can function successively as a disgusting reject and as a sublime, charismatic apparition: the difference, strictly structural, does not pertain to the 'effective properties' of the object, but only to its place in the symbolic order."<sup>12</sup> Doesn't this observation perfectly fit the history of the early ready-mades? Of the "Fountain," for example, which turned, but in this instance from a less than a memorable object, restricted mostly to public toilets, into one of the most discussed works of art of the second half of the previous century, with the issue of how many holes the original had becoming one of the highlights of the discussions and disputes of art historians and critics? Isn't it also true that Duchamp, since he was a predecessor of postmodernism at least in this respect, fitted only with difficulty into the designations assigned to him by twentieth century art theory?

In a recent article in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Péter György argued that "the end of art history [which György posits around 1984] also signified the logical collapse of the border between high art and not-high art, and is accompanied by the rendering senseless of the distancing of art from not art." Furthermore, "Inasmuch as the reality of essentialism and institutionalism can be ordered into periods, we can state that the dominance of essentialism and functionalism was appropriate for the history of art, for the centuries of the great narrative. That era lasted from Vasari to Gombrich, or Danto, we might say from the Renaissance to abstract expressionism. What happened afterwards and what is happening now is none other than the preparation for the dethronement of high culture."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry. An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), p. 143.

<sup>13</sup> Péter György, "Between and After Essentialism and Institutionalism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 57, no. 4 (Fall 1999), p. 431.



Doesn't this periodization coincide with the passage from modernism into postmodernism, namely, with the advent of the visible demise of modernism, and of theories of Lyotard, Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of the changed roles of legislators and interpreters, as well as Jameson's seminal essay from 1984 – implicitly supported also by theses by Lyotard and Baudrillard – on postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism? It is unnecessary to mention a series of publications diagnosing the visual turn in culture published since the late eighties, and it is this same visual culture, or rather the general and all-pervading ocularcentrism, that exemplifies much, if not all, of contemporary culture, or is, at least, its dominant feature. What we are predominantly experiencing then are basically two related but relatively distinct forms of contemporary art: the first is the conceptual one, the paradigmatic case of which is Duchamp, and the second consists of the visual arts with their continuation in a predominantly visual culture.

It was, I think, at this point that the issue of culture and hence of the philosophy of culture had, after three decades, reentered contemporary discussions about art. For a long time – certainly because of the cultural shock experienced, and so persuasively and influentially expressed by some of the authors of the Frankfurt School, be it at the time when they were still in Germany (and experienced American culture, whether jazz or Hollywood) or later, during the stay of some of them in the US (which obviously only confirmed their previous denigrating views), the profound critique of mass and consumer culture severely blocked – until the proliferation of the so-called postmodern theories – any totalizing philosophical attempts at its analysis from a positive vantage point. When these critical ideas were transposed back into Europe in the sixties and seventies they helped cause culture to become an object of sociological research, but only occasionally of philosophical investigation, except in their more ideological and political forms, where culture was treated (and often still is) as a set of ideological emanations of various class, gender or racial issues and conflicts. At the same time, i.e. in modernism and high modernism, culture also signified a social realm devoid of normative designations so frequent in relation to art, wherein much of the institutionalization of art took place via the inclusion of non-art into the realm of art, very much in accordance with Mukařovský's notion of the artistic norm.

It was thus the visual turn of the eighties, the rise of postmodern culture and its globalization as depicted and analyzed by numerous authors in the eighties and, earlier, in the seventies, also by Jean Baudrillard in his analyses of the sign and its economy, that offered first a critical and then a resigned analysis and assessment of postmodern culture, on the one hand, and a

euphorical one on the other, with culture as such now being approached in an increasingly neutral manner.<sup>14</sup>

In his book on Adorno, Martin Jay writes: "To speak of culture means immediately to be confronted by the basic tension between its anthropological and elitist meanings. For the former, which in Germany can be traced back at least to Herder, culture signifies a whole way of life: practices, rituals, institutions and material artifacts, as well as texts, ideas and images. For the latter, which developed in Germany as an adjunct of a personal inwardness contrasted with the superficiality of courtly manners, culture is identified with art, philosophy, literature, scholarship, theatre, etc., the allegedly 'humanizing pursuits' of the 'cultivated' man. As a surrogate for religion, whose importance was steadily eroding, it emerged in the nineteenth century as a repository of man's most noble accomplishments and highest values, often in tension with either 'popular' or 'folk' culture, as well as with the more material achievements of 'civilization'. Because of its undeniably hierarchical and elitist connotations, culture in this more restricted sense has often aroused hostility from populist or radical critics, who allege its natural complicity with social stratification."<sup>15</sup>

In most other European countries (one would want here to say "cultures") culture carries a similar meaning, with a more distant one being the French, wherein the notion is probably less frequently used than elsewhere. Hence, according to *Larousse*, the term "culture" relates to (1) the action of cultivating: "the culture of flowers," for example; (2) the unity or the whole "of acquired knowledge;" (3) the unity or the whole social, religious and other structures characterizing a certain society; (4) "mass culture;" (5) "physical culture;" and (6) a culture in a biological sense, such as that of microbes. Another usage, similarly distant from the usual sense of culture, but with a difference arising from an even more different historical background, is a Russian interpretation of culture, wherein culture is, as the Russian philosopher Mikhail Epstein stated some years ago, designed "to liberate a person from the very society in which he is doomed to live. Culture is not a product of society, but a challenge and alternative to society."<sup>16</sup> Culture is a parallel world, in which art is "more true," in the words of the contemporary Russian

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<sup>14</sup> An outstanding example of symbolic commodification carried out by postmodernism is first the work and then the views of Jean Baudrillard, which started as an all-pervading critique of postmodern culture and in a single decade ended by being one of its main theoretical supports with him becoming one of its proponents.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Jay, *Adorno* (London: Fontana, 1984), p. 112.

<sup>16</sup> Mikhail Epstein, *After the Future* (Amherst: University of Mass. Press, 1995), p. 6.



painter Erik Bulatov, than real life. Culture thus offers a spiritual shelter from the mindless pursuits of everyday life and its chaos.

These different meanings of the term culture offer various inroads into the issue of a possible philosophy of culture. It is mostly the tradition of the Frankfurt School, combined with contemporary discussions of new technologies, alternative culture, postmodernism, postmodernity and, especially, contemporary visual culture, which are among the second group of reasons for present attempts to bring together philosophical aesthetics and the notion of culture. There is a certain antinomy in such an attempt, for culture was in the past either a normatively neutral term or, in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, often a negative one, for it was conceived as an opposite to the uncommodified avant-garde art. The views and theories of Walter Benjamin were in this regard exceptions which gained authority only when the tenets of Adorno or Marcuse became increasingly obsolete in relation to the recent developments in art and culture. The notion of culture appears to respond well to its recent neutral or at least non-normative notion, to “the dethronement of high culture,” to use Péter György’s phrasing, and to the implementation of the institutional or, to use Stephen Davies’s terminology,<sup>17</sup> the “procedural” definition and theory of art as theoretically and practically the ruling definition, offering a philosophical framework in aesthetic discourse on art. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to assume that no other definitions and understandings, for example, following Davies again, the “functional definitions of art,” exist any longer. The difficulty with the institutional or procedural definitions (and interpretations) of art today is that they disregard the historical changes that have occurred with the passage from modernism into postmodernism and treat art as if it was still functioning as it had in the time when modernism was vibrant and exclusive while, in fact, they mostly use as their examples conceptual art which often functions as Wittgenstein’s language games. If, on the other hand, the social and existential functions of art have apparently substantially diminished due to a series of reasons (these being analyzed in the last few decades by Henri Lefebvre, Lyotard, Jameson, Andreas Huyssen, David Harvey, Zygmunt Bauman, and Gianni Vattimo, among others), then we may possess a good reason to ask whether in the present time the very object of such theories and of the ensuing definitions is not flawed at its very outset and does not – and cannot – authentically represent their pertinent reference point and the subject of its definition. Moreover, even if such attempts remain legitimate, meaning that art still basically functions as it did in the past (although perhaps not to the same extent, or

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Stephen Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

with the same intensity, or equally frequently) the problem still remains how to establish the relation of such art to culture in the sense of mass and consumer culture – which today applies predominantly to the visual culture and its hybrid forms, these ranging from dress codes, design, and the aestheticization of everyday life to the ensuing anaestheticization and its retroactive consequences. Contemporary art in most cases obviously no longer strives to be partisan, subversive and radical. Even if authors such as Terry Eagleton (in his *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 1990) claim that postmodern art is both radical and conservative, most frequently its radical features are immediately commodified or carry and, especially, retain little weight if measured by their social consequences. Commodification is one of the essential common features of contemporary and past culture and of contemporary art and is the third cause for the question of how to relate the philosophy of art to a philosophy of culture so as to avoid separating these two realms of inquiry whose subjects increasingly appear to be merging or are revealing numerous similarities – for hasn't art, by losing or diminishing its truth-disclosing function, landed in the broad and normatively neutral realm of culture?

Modernist art tended to distance itself from culture: culture was ethnic, local, traditional or mass and consumer culture, while art was predominantly elitist (and a part of "high" culture), be it in the traditional modernist sense or the avant-garde one. One of its distinguishing characteristics was its subversive nature, be it in relation to previous art or to society, as well as its truth-disclosing role, defended by philosophers from Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger to Adorno, Merleau-Ponty and Althusser. It furthermore required an effort on the part of the audience to achieve aesthetic and artistic appreciation. Such modernist art is today often assimilated and integrated into the repository of cultural heritage and is modern in the Lyotard sense (as is the theory which supported it). One of the features of postmodern art and culture, related of course to their commodified nature, is their accessibility, their "user-friendly" nature which, on the one hand, allows both to be global and, on the other, to raise the question whether this is still art and not simply culture in its traditional commodified form. Such works are hence often hybrids between modernist art (from which they retain the notion of art) and culture under modernism (from which they have gained their accessibility and, therefore, what was then perceived as its commodified features). A paramount example of such art or culture is contemporary architecture, which is simultaneously artistic, aestheticized, market-oriented and represents a public space. It is therefore not surprising that the issue of postmodernism was first raised in architecture, in which the demarcation line between art and



culture is often extremely difficult to draw. In modern exhibition spaces the architectural environment often carries equal or similar importance to the works exhibited in it.

The reason why an attempt to designate aesthetics as philosophy of culture seems at first sight doomed to failure is that aesthetics, not only in its functionalist form, but also in its proceduralist or institutionalist variants, in spite of innumerable attempts to disrupt the institution or the realm of art, nonetheless contains an intrinsic normative feature. While contemporary art may be losing its real or imagined existential or truth disclosing function and value which it presumably possessed under modernism, the designation of “art” nonetheless at least potentially retains artifacts and other phenomena existing under such a designation within the unavoidably, i.e. by definition, normative realm of “art.” To be an artist today often designates primarily one’s self-designation and only secondly that of the audience. I may be an artist in my own eyes and for this I don’t require confirmation from others – a feature which radically distinguishes a contemporary artist from a modernist one, who required at least the appreciation of a narrow circle of similarly inclined individuals. But, on the other hand, such a designation does not eliminate, negate or replace its normative implications.

So, how would aesthetics, in spite of the aforementioned possible reservation, be possible as a philosophy of culture? I shall conclude my paper by discussing two such attempts.

The first is that of Heinz Paetzold who has developed his views in a series of articles and books published since 1990. (I am thinking particularly of his *Ästhetik der neueren Moderne* from 1990 and his more recent book *The Symbolic Language of Culture, Fine Arts and Architecture* from 1997.) The essential arguments from these two books have been presented and updated in a recent article entitled “Aesthetics And/As Philosophy of Culture” and published in the 1999 volume of the *IAA Yearbook*. I shall thus limit my discussion of Paetzold’s views to this essay.

Paetzold’s intention is to develop a critical philosophy of culture. In his words, “This undertaking finds a historical backing in the stance of the earlier critical theory, on the one hand, and in the project of the philosophy of symbolic forms, on the other. I am arguing – continues Paetzold – in favor of a synthesis between these two strands which moved historically along separate routes.”<sup>18</sup> What makes Paetzold’s project of a philosophy of culture inter-

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<sup>18</sup> Heinz Paetzold, “Aesthetics And/As Philosophy of Culture,” *The IAA Yearbook*, vol. 3 (1999); <<http://davinci.ntu.ac.uk/iaa/iaa3/aestheticsand.htm>>, p. 1.

esting is the requirement for such a philosophy to be critical, for without this critical element it is difficult if not outright impossible to propose a persuasive philosophical project. What Paetzold then appropriates from Cassirer is his understanding of culture as a “process of man’s progressive self-liberation.” But, for this to be possible, in culture two sides have to be recognized: “All this leads me to the conclusion,” states Paetzold, “that philosophy of human culture becomes a critical endeavor only to that extent that we grasp culture’s two sides: Its hope giving promises and its thorough failures.”<sup>19</sup> Secondly, argues Paetzold, “the philosophy of human culture has to deal with the plurality of symbolic forms in a nonhierarchical, pluralistic way. ... Dethroning scientific and technological rationality from being the foundational paradigm of culture does not mean to enthrone the arts and poetry in place of science as romanticism wanted to do.”<sup>20</sup> Thirdly, the philosophy of human culture contains an answer to the question of what makes a cultured subjectivity. This includes bodily and somatic components which cannot be sublated into pure rationality.<sup>21</sup>

Among the early philosophers of culture Paetzold finds not only Herder and Georg Simmel, but also Vico, Rousseau, Croce and Collingwood, and places aesthetics within a critical philosophy of culture as a component of it,<sup>22</sup> wherein works of art exist as “symbolically significant expressions of culture.”<sup>23</sup> He ends his essay by explicitly embracing a functional understanding of symbolic forms, art included.

While Paetzold’s project of a critical philosophy of culture, a segment of which is also aesthetics as a philosophy of art, appears very promising, it lacks, for the time being at least, an analysis of the negative side, i.e. culture’s failures. Without explaining this side, his project seems to fall under a similar category as the neopragmatist theories of Shusterman and Rorty that Paetzold criticizes for highlighting only the aesthetic dimension of contemporary culture, i.e. only one of its sides. Hence the project of a critical philosophy of culture remains for the time being incomplete.

Another, much better known recent project of a philosophy of culture, is that of Fredric Jameson, many of whose writings after the essay on postmodernism published in the *New Left Review* in 1984 were devoted to various aspects of not only postmodernism as the cultural dominant of the current late capitalism, i.e. its multinational form, but also to broader cultural

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> *Cf. ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.



issues, these being devoted to and supported by a variety of works ranging from films by David Lynch, contemporary poetry and postmodern architecture, to paintings by Andy Warhol and Hedeigger's analysis of a painting by van Gogh. In certain respects Jameson's analysis and critique of contemporary culture is similar to that discussed in Paetzold's project, although it rests not only upon the tradition of the Frankfurt School but especially that of Georg Lukács and partly on Lyotard and Baudrillard. In fact, most of Jameson's theory is surprisingly traditionalist, finding, with its totalizing tendencies, its proper historical place perhaps more in the first half or the middle of the previous century than at the outset of postmodernism. By stating this I in no way wish to diminish its importance and influence or insightfulness. On the contrary, I instead want to point out that such a totalizing stance obviously reveals, firstly, the contemporary need for such a viewpoint and the privileges it offers and, secondly, it avoids the shortcomings of regarding postmodernism as a complete break with the past which then prevents a serious historical comparative analysis. On the other hand, Jameson's frequent almost interchangeable use of the terms art and culture and his treatment of the former as an implicit extension and perhaps a relatively special case of the latter, avoids some of the pitfalls of the desire to establish a clear division between the two, implying a desire to collapse them into a single entity. The reason that Jameson's approach appears successful, be it in relation to realist, modernist or postmodernist art and culture, is in his implicit interpretation of art and culture as a vehicle for creating meaning, for creating a representation and self-representation of ourselves as social beings. Hence his requests addressed to authentic art and culture are requests for political and partisan views and articulations, for subversion of established norms and views – an interpretation that is highly successful when aimed at politically oriented works or an Adorno-type interpretation of art and its place in society, but which falls short when applied to acclaimed works of art which nonetheless show no covert or overt political intentions. This question is frequently raised by Jameson himself, as in the case of Warhol's works: "The question [is] why Andy Warhol's Coca-Cola bottles and Campbell's soup cans – so obviously representations of commodity or consumer fetishism – do not seem to function as critical or political statements?"<sup>24</sup> It is exactly this question that sets the limits to Jameson's endeavor to determine the function or functions of art in a uniform way. Yet, an apparent way out of this impasse is offered by the notion of "cognitive mapping," which is in fact, as Jameson himself admits, a

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<sup>24</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 158.

paraphrase of Lukacs's class consciousness. Put differently, the basic purpose or function of art – any art of any epoch – is to offer a cognitive mapping of oneself and of the society to which we belong, to disclose the truth of oneself within one's place and to offer coordinates which help us establish our here and now within a given social, historical and mental space. In 1984 and also in 1991 (when the essay was published in a book bearing the same title) he expressed his view that postmodernism hasn't developed sufficiently yet to allow for a cognitive mapping which would be not only the opposite of itself – schizophrenia, chaos, temporal displacement, etc. To our surprise this topic is later dropped – something that makes us wonder whether this happened because it was irrelevant or because in no instance an answer for it has yet been found. In other words, postmodernist art and culture seem to offer no clue as how to establish a cognitive mapping similar to that offered in modernism by modernist works as described and explained by Lukacs, Adorno and others. It thus appears as if Jameson accepts Lyotard's views from *The Postmodern Condition*, in the English Introduction to which Jameson offers no way out of what, for him, should be a failure, but which is, for Lyotard, exactly the central feature of postmodern art.<sup>25</sup>

The notion of cognitive mapping somewhat corresponds to ideas promoted by Heinz Paetzold, for cognitive mapping doesn't necessarily mean only a rational endeavor, but is, judging also from Jameson's Hegelian background, equally sensuous, representing in this way a case of symbolic forms. If this is true, a link between these various attempts to forge a philosophy of culture may be established, but we seem to be still a long way from a relatively consistent and theoretically persuasive philosophy of culture, although something of the kind appears, after half a century, to be again a necessity which will help us productively relate art and culture, but in a contemporary historical setting.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Fredric Jameson, "Introduction" in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. xxiii-xxv.