**Old and New Questions of Philosophy – Volume 3**

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Summary

## Presentation

Ancient and New Questions of Philosophy comprises a set of three pamphlets containing twenty essays on simultaneously universal and timeless themes that have been and continue to be part of the history of ideas and philosophy.

The first volume contains the following seven subjects: “On the Idea of Truth”; “Time, Lord of All (Pantocrator)”; “Between Technophilia and Technoprudence”; “Matter and Spirit: Different, Opposite, Complementary?”; “A Few Words About Death”; “Equalities and Differences Among Men”; “The Meanings of Life”.

The second volume presents ideas regarding the following seven questions: “Are Laws Necessary?”; “When We Talk About Culture, What Are We Talking About?”; “Evil, From the Beginning to the Present Day”; “Is a Just Society Possible?”; “Wokism: When Good Intentions Go Crazy”; “What Is Real?”; Modernity and Post-Modernity.

As for the third volume, the arguments cover the following six topics: “Is Freedom What We Ordinarily Think It Is?”; “Is Democracy the Best Political Regime?”; “The Death of Art and the Survival of Aesthetics”; “The False Quarrel of Cultures: On Race and History, by Lévi-Strauss”; “The Age of Masses and Excesses”, “The Many Faces and Dimensions of Love”.

## I. Is Freedom What We Ordinarily Think It Is?

The term "freedom" generally has three meanings: 1. freedom as self-determination or self-causality, that is, the absence of conditions or limits to personal or group action; 2. freedom as adaptation to needs, to a totality to which man belongs – to the world, to substance, to the State, to nature, to society or to culture; 3. as the possibility of choice, that is, of making an option between finite possibilities conditioned by certain factors.

Before we examine these generic understandings of what freedom might be, it is worth remembering that it has commonly been considered the opposite of what is determined or necessary, knowing that these two notions (or even determinism and necessity) concern *that which is in one form or manner and cannot be in another*. Necessity would be a continuous effort or purpose to manifest itself in the living being (an *intentio recta*), as understood, for example, by Democritus. And since there is no clear difference between matter (body) and spirit (consciousness), human freedom would be pure illusion.

There are other conceptualizations of freedom, such as that of Schopenhauer, for example, who makes the following distinction in his work *On the Freedom of the Human Will*: physical freedom, intellectual freedom, and moral freedom.[1] Isaiah Berlin, on the other hand, admits two concepts of freedom – negative and positive.[2] At the appropriate time, we will return to analyze the respective essays and their conceptions.

In the first case of the distinction we made initially, that is, freedom understood as self-causality or self-determination (*autopraguia*), only that which is the cause of itself (*causa sui*) is free. One of the first mentions of this concept is found in Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, and it is expressed in the form of voluntary acts (*ekousios*), as opposed to involuntary acts (*akousios*). Let us see: "It is necessary for those who study the nature of virtue to distinguish between the voluntary and the involuntary. This distinction will also be useful to the legislator in the distribution of honors and punishments. Those things are therefore

[1] German edition: *Über die Freiheit des menschlichen Willens: Über die Grundlage der Moral*, Stuttgart: Kröners, 1979.

[2] I. Berlin, *Quatro Ensaios sobre a Liberdade*, Editora Universitária de Brasília, 1969.

considered involuntary which occur under compulsion or through ignorance; and that which is compulsory or forced is that which has its motive principle outside of us and to which the person who acts and feels the passion contributes nothing – for example, if such a person were pushed by the wind or by men who had taken possession of him [...] What sort of actions, then, should be called forced? [...] they are forced when the cause is found in external circumstances and the agent contributes nothing [...] If someone were to say that noble and pleasant things have a compelling power, because they constrain us from without, for him all acts would be compulsory and forced, since everything we do has this motivation. And those who act under duress and against their will, act with pain, but those who perform acts for their own satisfaction or for what is noble in them, do so with pleasure [...] As everything that is done under duress or out of ignorance is involuntary, the voluntary seems to be that whose driving principle is found in the agent himself who has knowledge of the particular circumstances of the act".[3]

Still as a principle or cause of itself, freedom was understood in this way by the Greek Stoics and Epicureans and, later, by Cicero. This understanding of freedom depends, however, on the knowledge one has of the world and society, combined with self-control or self-mastery. For this reason, Diogenes Laertius, who compiled all the theories up to the second century of the Christian era, wrote about the Stoics and, particularly, about Zeno and Chrysippus. He says: "Only the wise are free, but fools are slaves, because freedom is the ability to act independently, and servitude is the deprivation of this ability. There is another form of slavery that consists in subordination to another, and a third that consists in being someone's property, which is contrasted with lordship, which is equally reprehensible. Furthermore, wise men are not only free, but also kings, because reigning is a form of dominion, exempt from accountability, and which can subsist only in the hands of wise men".[4]

Cicero, in turn, writes: "From the fact that men experience certain propensities, determined by natural and precedent causes, it does not follow that our own wills

[3] Aristotle, *Ética a Nicômaco*, III, 1, 1.110a − 1.110b; 20 − 1.111a, 25 − 1.113a − III, 5.
[4] D. Laércio, *Vidas e Doutrinas dos Filósofos Ilustres*, Livro VII, pg. 209, Editora UnB, Brasília, 1987.

and impulses are determined by these same causes. If this were so, nothing would be in our power. We confess that it does not depend on us whether we are sharp-witted or incapable, whether we are weak or robust, but whoever concludes from this that it is not in our power to sit down or walk would only prove that he does not know how to draw consequences. For if it is true that natural causes make us ingenious or slow-witted, brave or cowardly, it does not follow that irresistible causes determine us to sit down or to walk and regulate, in advance, our actions [...] The dispositions to vices (vicious) can be produced by natural causes, but to extirpate and uproot them completely, in such a way that the soul, where they reside, is freed from them, is not a fact of nature, but the work of will, of energy, of constant discipline [...] For the voluntary movements of the soul one must not seek an external cause, since the movement is in our power and depends on us: it is not for that reason without a cause, since its cause is its own nature".[5]

Greek and Roman thinkers, and later medieval theologians, always considered the experience of passion as something mysterious, dangerous and, at times, reprehensible. Submitted to passions, we are similar to stray horses (Plato), or to people who have gone mad (*aphron*) or are drunk (Aristotle). Abandoned by reason, deprived of self-control (*sophrosine*), we are servants or slaves. Freedom, on the other hand, is autonomy (giving oneself one's own law). The ancient sage wanted to protect himself from the things that would tyrannize him. He did not want to be disturbed by the possession of things or by their lack. To avoid this contamination by things that enthral and excite, they proposed ataraxia (the abandonment of desires and, with it, of disturbances). Once obstacles such as ignorance, fear, pain and passions are overcome, we arrive at a behavior that we can call free.

Epictetus, a Greek who was taken to Rome as a slave when he was still young by one of Nero's secretaries, adopted Stoic philosophy and was the first author of antiquity to speak specifically about the notion of freedom outside the political sphere. His lectures were collected by one of his disciples (Flavius Arrianus) and, with them, two works were published, the *Diatribes* (Colloquies or Discussions)

[5] M. Nisard (éd.), *Traité du destin/De Fato*, paragraphe V, *Oeuvres complètes de Cicéron*, tome IV, Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, Fils, 1864

and the *Enchiridion* or Manual of Epictetus. One of the Diatribes is dedicated to the theme of freedom. Let us look at some of its excerpts:

"- Is it in your power to show interest in an object or not?

- Whatever, it is in my power.

- And to turn away from an object? That is also in your power [...] And if it is a question of desiring what you do not want, can anyone force you to desire it?

- No one. But if I conceive of a desire, it may happen that someone prevents me from carrying it out.

- If your desire concerns what belongs to you, over which nothing can obstruct, how could it be prevented?

- Not at all.

- And thus prepared and trained to distinguish between things that are foreign or alien to you and those that are personal, those that are susceptible to hindrance from those that are open to you, to regard the latter as those that concern you, and the former as having no relation to you, to carefully reserve your desires for the former and your aversions for the latter, could you still fear anyone? [...] How is a fortress destroyed? Not by sword or fire, but by our judgments [...] that is, the fortress that is within us and from which we expel the tyrants that we encounter every day, reigning over each of us, some the same, some different. But here is where we must begin, how we must take the fortress and expel the tyrants: let us abandon our bodies, our fortunes, our reputation, our duties, our honors, and even our friends: let us regard all these as foreign or alien things [...] It is not by the satisfaction of desires that we acquire freedom, *but by the destruction of desires*".[6]

The understanding given by antiquity remained throughout the Middle Ages and appears several times in scholastic theology. Here is an example, very important due to the repercussions it generated throughout the history of the Christian religion and, consequently, of Western culture.

Treating freedom as a self-determination, that is, as free will (*libero arbitrio*), Augustine would say: "There is no other reality that makes the mind an accomplice to passion other than the will itself and free will [...] it is by the will that

[6] Epicteto, *Diatribes Livro IV*, versão francesa, *La Liberté*, pgs. 55 a 67, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1990.

we deserve and lead a praiseworthy and happy life; and by the same will we lead a shameful and unhappy life [...] We have also established that it is the will's own to choose what each one can opt for and embrace. And nothing, other than the will, can dethrone the soul from the heights from which it dominates, and turn it away from the straight path [...] God granted man the free will of the will, and if he had not received it, man certainly would not have been able to sin".[7]

If for Augustine there is no evil in the cosmos, there is indeed a moral and ethical evil that is realized in human actions. For Christian theology, this evil is sin, that is, the free choice that one makes of the goods created by God, inverting the order of their importance, from the spiritual to the material. If free will is a gift from God, its misuse is exclusively human. This understanding – that *freedom is the cause of evil* – was developed in the work to counter the theology of the Manichaeans. For them, there were two supreme and opposing divinities: the principles of good and evil, of light and darkness. Therefore, man would have two souls and evil would be ontological, that is, an ineradicable constituent of man. And, finally, no one would be free not to do evil. Man would be a slave to sin and a being deprived of freedom. Finally, it must not be forgotten that for Augustine (as later for Spinoza), the true or noblest human freedom is that of submitting to the Truth. He who desires it, respects it and practices it exercises to the highest degree the freedom of choice offered to men by God.[8] Hence, Augustine also considers freedom as a mean good, that is, a vehicle for the attainment of the highest moral virtues, for truth and wisdom, on the one hand, and, on the other, for the practice of all vices and sins of a material or corporeal order.

Let us now begin again with an undeniable observation or evidence. Human beings do not choose to be born nor do they choose to remain alive; they do not choose their parents, their homeland, their language or, at birth, their sex. Nor do they determine their innate capacities, but can only improve them. More than anything, human beings are imprisoned by the master of all, which is time. Man, in Heidegger's terminology, is a being thrown into the world and into time (*die Geworfenheit*).

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[7] Aurélio Agostinho de Hipona (Augustine of Hippo)), *Do Livre-Arbítrio*, book I, chapters 11, 13 e 16; book II, chapter I, pgs. 52,60,67 e 73, São Paulo, Paulus, 1995.
[8] Ibidem, book II, chapter 14.

If we also adopt one of the assumptions of structuralist thought, namely, the assertion that human phenomena obey, above all, large structures independent of particular individuals (such as languages, which function as supports for thought, or social and economic structures), a generically cultural determinism will always prevail in each generation, as well as a biological determinism dictated by genetic structures.

Freedom, understood then as a kind of adaptation to those needs and determinisms, also comes from antiquity and is initially due to the Stoics. For them, achieving wisdom means precisely living in accordance with nature or knowing how to submit to the cosmic order of the world. Hence the assertion that only the wise man is truly free, because he understands and conforms to the needs, the empire of nature and the common determinisms of society.

The person who expounded this view most extensively after the Stoics was Spinoza. His *Ethics* practically begins with the definition of what is absolutely free: "I - By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature cannot be conceived unless existing.

II. That thing is called finite in its own kind (in suo genere) which can be limited by another thing of the same nature. For example, a body is called finite because we always conceive another which is greater. So a thought is limited by another thought; but a body is not limited by a thought, nor a thought by a body...

VI. By God I understand Being absolutely infinite, that is to say, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence.

VII. That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its own nature alone and is determined to action by itself alone. That thing, on the other hand, is called necessary or rather compelled which by another is determined to existence and action in a fixed and prescribed manner".[9]

In this sense, only God or Nature is free, since only he/it is the cause of himself/itself and acts based on his/its own laws, without being obliged by anything or anyone. Corollary 1 – It follows from this, first, that there is no cause that, extrinsic or intrinsic to God (or Nature), incites him/it to act, except the

[9] Baruch Spinoza, *Obras Completas, Ética*, pgs. 87 e 88, Coleção Textos, Editora Perspectiva, São Paulo, 2014.

perfection of his/its own nature. Corollary 2 – It follows, secondly, that only God is a free cause. For God exists only by the necessity of his nature (by proposition 11 and corollary I of proposition 14) and acts only by the necessity of his nature. Consequently, only he is a free cause (by definition 7).

Therefore, man (who is a mode, or particular manifestation of substance) can only become free when, knowing his/her limitations, his/her ephemeral character, as well as the determinism of the causes that govern the world, he/she allows himself/herself to be guided by reason (and not by passions); if he acts and thinks as part of a whole (the natural whole and the social whole). In other words, the love of knowledge and ethical conduct are the foundations of his free action. As long as he allows himself to be guided by passions, he is led by nature, he is driven only by individual preservation. When he acts outside of nature, that is, when he thinks and acts within artificial principles, which are those of reason, he is then capable of self-determination, creating the rules of ethics and, therefore, of the common good. Spinoza says:

“LXVII. A free man thinks of nothing less than of death> and his wisdom is not a meditation upon death but upon life. Demonstration. A free man, that is to say, a man who lives according to the dictates of reason alone, is not led by the fear of death (Prop. 63, pt. 4), but directly desires the good (Corol. Prop. 63, pt. 4), that is to say (Prop. 24, pt. 4), desires to act, to live, and to preserve his being in accordance with the principle of seeking his own profit. He thinks, therefore, of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation upon life.

LXVIII. If men were born free, they would form no conception of good and evil so long as they were free. Demonstration. I have said that that man is free who is led by reason alone. He, therefore, who is born free and remains free has no other than adequate ideas, and therefore has no conception of evil (Corol. Prop. 64, pt. 4), and consequently (as good and evil are correlative) no conception of good...

LXXIII. A man who is guided by reason is freer in a Stale where he lives according to the common laws than he is in solitude, where he obeys himself alone.

Demonstration. A man who is guided by reason is not led to obey by fear (Prop. 63, pt. 4), but in so far as he endeavors to preserve his being in accordance with the bidding of reason, that is to say (Note, Prop. 66, pt. 4), in so far as he

endeavors to live in freedom, does he desire to have regard for the common life and the common profit".[10]

There is no evil in nature (on this, Augustine and Spinoza agree). Evil is then understood as deprivation or absence in the human sphere (illness, as deprivation of health, of the balance of functions; poverty as deprivation of satisfactory living conditions; violence and theft as deprivations or absences of respect for others). The norms of conduct and laws in society constitute possibilities through which human deprivations or evils can be remedied in their relationships. The other remedy is knowledge and truth. In one of the letters exchanged with van Blyenberg, in 1665, Spinoza says: "Our freedom is not that of contingency (casual), any more than that of indifference; it consists in the manner of affirming or denying; that is to say, the less indifferent we are in affirming or denying something, the more we shall be free [...] It is enough for us to know, therefore, that we are free and can be so, notwithstanding God's decree, and that we are the cause of evil in the sense that no act can be called evil except in relation to our freedom [...] someone who abstains from crime solely for fear of punishment (this is not your case, I wish to believe) does not act out of love and in no way possesses virtue".[11]

Hobbes, in his own way, also understands the concept of freedom as closely linked to and dependent on the concept of necessity or determinism. In *Leviathan*, the author says: "Liberty, or freedom, signifieth properly the absence of opposition (by opposition, I mean external impediments of motion); and may be applied no less to irrational and inanimate creatures than to rational. For whatsoever is so tied, or environed, as it cannot move but within a certain space, which space is determined by the opposition of some external body, we say it hath not liberty to go further. And so of all living creatures, whilst they are imprisoned, or restrained with walls or chains; and of the water whilst it is kept in by banks or vessels that otherwise would spread itself into a larger space; we use to say they are not at liberty to move in such manner as without those external impediments they would. But when the impediment of motion is in the constitution of the thing itself, we use not to say it wants the liberty, but the power, to move; as when a stone lieth still,

[10] Ibidem, Part IV.

[11] B. Spinoza, Obras Completas, opus cit. *Correspondence*, letter exchanged with Van Blyenberg on January 28, 1665.

or a man is fastened to his bed by sickness. And according to this proper and generally received meaning of the word, a freeman is he that, in those things which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to. But when the words free and liberty are applied to anything but bodies, they are abused; for that which is not subject to motion is not to subject to impediment: and therefore, when it is said, for example, the way is free, no liberty of the way is signified, but of those that walk in it without stop. And when we say a gift is free, there is not meant any liberty of the gift, but of the giver, who was not bound by any law or covenant to give it. So when we speak freely, it is not the liberty of voice, or pronunciation, but of the man, whom no law hath obliged to speak otherwise than he did. Lastly, from the use of the words *free will*, no liberty can be inferred of the will, desire, or inclination, but the liberty of the man; which consisteth in this, that he finds no stop in doing what he has the will, desire, or inclination to do. Fear and liberty are consistent: as when a man throweth his goods into the sea for fear the ship should sink, he doth it nevertheless very willingly, and may refuse to do it if he will; it is therefore the action of one that was free: so a man sometimes pays his debt, only for fear of imprisonment, which, because no body hindered him from detaining, was the action of a man at liberty. And generally all actions which men do in Commonwealths, for fear of the law, are actions which the doers had liberty to omit. Liberty and necessity are consistent: as in the water that hath not only liberty, but a necessity of descending by the channel; so, likewise in the actions which men voluntarily do, which, because they proceed their will, proceed from liberty, and yet because every act of man's will and every desire and inclination proceedeth from some cause, and that from another cause, in a continual chain (whose first link is in the hand of God, the first of all causes), proceed from necessity... But as men, for the attaining of peace and conservation of themselves thereby, have made an artificial man, which we call a Commonwealth; so also have they made artificial chains, called civil laws, which they themselves, by mutual covenants, have fastened at one end to the lips of that man, or assembly, to whom they have given the sovereign power, and at the other to their own ears. These bonds, in their own nature but weak, may nevertheless be made to hold, by the danger, though

not by the difficulty of breaking them. In relation to these bonds only it is that I am to speak now of the liberty of subjects".[12]

In short, out of the need for a common and interdependent life, we use our freedom to create obstacles to our actions in society.

As always, in an ironic manner, Voltaire argues in his *Philosophical Dictionary* that our freedom, like that of animals, is to do what necessity imposes on us, or even what, because we have a need, we are convinced by the ideas that it makes us have and develop. In the dialogue between A and B, in the entry *Freedom*, the latter asks:

"B – I don't have the freedom to want what I want?

A – What do you mean by that?

B – What everyone understands. Isn't it said every day that wills are free?

A – A proverb is not a reason. Explain yourself better.

B – I think I am free to want as I please.

A – Excuse me, that doesn't make the slightest sense; don't you realize how ridiculous it is to say "I want to want"? You necessarily want as a result of ideas that present themselves to you. Do you want to get married? Yes or no?

B – But what if I tell you that I want neither one thing nor the other?

A – You would answer like the one who said: "Some think that Cardinal Mazarin is dead; others, that he is alive; I believe neither one nor the other."

B – Well, I want to get married.

A – That is an answer! Why do you want to get married?

B – Because I am in love with a beautiful, well-educated, very rich girl who sings very well, the daughter of honest parents and who loves me, as does her family.

A – There is a reason. You see, then, that you cannot will without reason. I declare to you that you have the freedom to marry, that is, that you have the power to sign the contract.

B – How can I not will without reason? What then becomes of this other proverb: *sit pro ratione voluntas*![13] My will is my reason.

A – That is absurd, my dear friend, for there would be an effect in you without a cause.

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[12] T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Second Part, Chapter XXI, pgs. 129 e 130, Andrew Crook, London, 1651.

[13] Let the will be in accordance with reason.

B – What? When I play odd or even, do I then have a reason to choose odd rather than even?

A – Yes, without a doubt.

B – And what is that reason, please?

A – It is that the idea of even presented itself to your mind before the opposite idea. It would be comical if in some cases you wished there were a reason for your desire, and in others you wished for no reason. When you want to get married, you feel the dominant reason; you do not feel it when you play odd or even, and yet it is necessary that there be one.

B – Once more: am I free or not?

A – Your will is not free, but your actions are. You have the freedom to do when you have the power to do".[14]

Although freedom of will or desire, as André Comte-Sponville observed,[15] is a kind of pleonasm, since one cannot want what one does not want, the simple freedom of wanting would not be or would not be complete, for Voltaire, a real freedom, capable of being realized, since this would exist only in action. If I want to be free, but find myself a prisoner, the undeniable situation is that I am deprived of freedom. Secondly, again for Voltaire, volition comes from or is a consequence of a defined external cause. A freedom of indifference would be absurd, just as an effect devoid of cause would seem irrational to us.

But if there are really external causes to the particular phenomena of the world (even if all phenomena are within the world), it does not leave reason to be able to perceive them and pronounce on them. And also through it, according to Kant, something is affirmed as unconditional, what he called the *moral law*. How can the human being, even for requirements of social coexistence or practical reason, choose behaviors beyond characteristics or natural impulses, and impose a *metaphysical duty* (that is, something that transcends the common experience), instead of submitting one *so is*, it is deduced that freedom is possible, that is, a rational self-imposition capable of judging and well conducting the innate desires and tendencies so that autonomy (the law itself) serves timeless and universally.

[14] Voltaire, *Dicionário Filosófico*, entry Da Liberdade, pgs. 345 a 350, Martin Claret, São Paulo, 2003.

[15] See A. Comte-Sponville, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, entry Liberté, PUF, Paris, 2013.

For the virtue of this choice loses its value when submitted to the empire of passions.

Despite Kant's understanding, this notion of a determined will (even if immediately imperceptible) is well developed in the already mentioned essay written by Schopenhauer for the contest of the Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences of Trondheim, saying "On the Freedom of the Will" (*Freiheit des Willens*).

There, Schopenhauer argues as follows: "What do we call freedom? Considered more closely, this concept is negative. By it we think of the absence of everything that hinders or impedes us: on the contrary, the obstacle itself, as a manifestation of a force, must be something positive. Depending on the possible nature of this hindrance, the concept is divided into three very different subspecies: physical, intellectual and moral freedom. Physical freedom is the *absence of material obstacles* of any kind. This is why we say: a clear sky, an unobstructed view of the open air, having a free path [...] the free flow of the river, where it is not impeded by mountains or locks [...] The same applies to certain expressions: free lodging, free food, freedom of the press, which designate the absence of impeding conditions that, as obstacles to enjoyment, are linked to these things. We most often think, by the concept of freedom, of animals, whose peculiarity is that their movements proceed from their will, that is, that they are voluntary (*willkürlich*) and that we call them free insofar as no material obstacle impedes them [...] Following this physical meaning of the concept of freedom, animals and men will be said to be free when no bond, no impediment or paralysis or physical or material obstacle hinders their acts, but that they are completed according to their will... But since we turn away from this physical freedom to consider the two other kinds of freedom, we are confronted no longer with the popular but with the philosophical sense, which opens the way to many well-known difficulties... Intellectual freedom (the voluntary and the involuntary in relation to thought) in Aristotle is considered here only to complete the division of concepts. I therefore allow myself to postpone the exposition until the end of this dissertation [...] But since in my division it is with physical freedom that it is most closely related, the former must take its place alongside the latter here... Moral freedom is, strictly speaking, free will [...] It was observed from the beginning that in certain cases, without being impeded by physical obstacles, a man would

simply find himself prevented from acting by motives such as threats, promises, dangers, whereas, if such things did not exist, he would have acted in accordance with his will [...] The next question remained: but *is the will itself free*? [...] The empirical concept of freedom says: I am free if I can do what I want, and this "what I want" decides before freedom. But if we now question the freedom of will, the question would be formulated as follows: *can one will what one wants*? The primordial, empirical concept of freedom, which proceeds from action, cannot be directly related to the concept of will. In order to apply the concept of freedom to the will, it was necessary to modify it, making it more abstract. This was done by thinking of the *concept of freedom in terms of the general absence of necessity*. We then ask: what is called necessity? The usual definition is that "whose contrary is impossible, or cannot be otherwise." The definition I propose is the following: that which follows from a given sufficient reason is necessary [physical reason (cause and effect), logical reason (premises and conclusions), mathematical reason (equality of sides, equality of angles)]. The absence of necessity will therefore be identified with the absence of a given sufficient reason [...] *Since what is free is characterized by the absence of necessity, that which, in general, does not depend on any cause, should then be free, defining itself as absolutely contingent [...] (fortuitous, accidental, uncertain)*. What is free remains that which is not necessary under any relation, that is, that which does not depend on any sufficient reason. Applied to the will of man, this concept would mean that an individual will, in its manifestations or volitions (*Willensakte*), could not be determined by causes or sufficient reasons in general, since the consequence of a given reason (whatever it may be), being always necessary, its acts would not be free (or contingent), but necessary. It is on this that Kant's definition rests, according to which freedom is "the power to begin by itself a series of changes" – *Veränderungen* (Critique of Pure Reason, III, 308) [...] Every consequence of a reason (motive, cause) is necessary, and every necessity is the consequence of a reason".[16]

For these reasons, according to the German thinker, a philosophically naive person believes that he can do whatever he wants and that this free possibility

[16] A. Schopenhauer, *Les deux problèmes fondamentaux de l'éthique*, Sur la liberte de la volonté humaine, pgs. 62 a 68, Folio Essais, Gallimard, Paris, 2009.

coincides with the freedom of will. If you ask him what his will depends on, he will most likely answer that it depends on nothing but me; what I want, I want. Now, everything that occurs in the world, physical-material or physical-spiritual (or psychic, if you prefer), has a cause, known or not. According to this law, every change that occurs in the phenomenal world or in the world of experience is the effect of a previous change, that is, of a preceding cause. The law of causality is, therefore, the law of sufficient reason. This universal and irrevocable law of causality is properly called *cause* in physical-material phenomena, *stimulus* in the organic and animal world and, specifically in the human universe, *motivation*, that is, a causality that passes through knowledge and contains its own representation, which is that of the desired objects. Human beings, through their capacity for thought and representation, can imagine themselves free in their motivations, but in fact this freedom is only relative, that is, it is eventually disconnected from present objects, since memory and future projections permanently act on their spirit and will. The cause may be more distant, more complex, since the separation between the object and the will, in human consciousness, may be immense and more abstract, according to their words, but *always active*. If no cause intervenes and stirs, nothing will happen. Hence the error in believing in free will, understood as absolute freedom of conscience.[17] An action without a cause would be an inexplicable miracle, an entirely fortuitous event. Finally, if we always desired and acted within the scope of free will, there would be no link between human existence and essence.

In modern times, this denial of free will as a determination independent of any factors can be found in certain neuroscience studies. Researcher Michael Gazzaniga,[18] for example, director of the *Center for the Study of the Mind* at the University of California, first points out that physical laws and actions govern the world, with the brain and mind being part of that world, and states that what

[17] Dante, in Canto XVIII of Purgatory (of any edition ever printed), has Virgil explain free will to him: "Here is the source, / Whence cause of merit in you is deriv'd, / E'en as the affections good or ill she takes, / Or severs, winnow'd as the chaff. Those men / Who reas'ning went to depth profoundest, mark'd / That innate freedom, and were thence induc'd / To leave their moral teaching to the world. Grant then, that from necessity arise / All love that glows within you; to dismiss / Or harbour it, the pow'r is in yourselves. / Remember, Beatrice, in her style, / Denominates free choice by eminence / The noble virtue, if in talk with thee / She touch upon that theme".

[18] M. Gazzaniga, *"Who's in Charge? Free Will and the Science of the Brain*", Ecco, 2011.

actually happens is a neuronal interaction (neurons and neurotransmitters) between a lower layer, the brain, and a higher layer, the mind, as if the former were computer hardware and the latter its software. This is why human decisions are made before the individual is aware of them (in the upper layer). Even though, under this analysis, free will cannot be identified, because electrochemical triggers precede and provoke behaviour and consciousness, there is a third layer permanently interacting in these relationships, that is, life in society. Thus, Gazzaniga argues that the human mind acts to restrict the brain and monitor our behaviour, in the same way that a government, created by a society, imposes restrictions on those who conceived it, which means that, at the end of the day, we are responsible for our actions.

Other authors, such as Daniel Wegner, a psychologist (Harvard University), and Yuval Harari, a historian (University of Jerusalem), are more radical in this regard. Wegner argued that although people may believe that conscious intentions drive much of their behavior, in reality both these intentions and the resulting behaviors are products of other, parallel, unconscious mental processes. In other words, conscious will is an illusion or a "modular epiphenomenalism",[19] being produced by a brain system distinct from the system that drives the action. What we call free will only interprets our behavior, but does not cause it. In his words: " The real causal sequence underlying human behavior involves a massively complicated set of mechanisms … [and] the mind can't ever know itself well enough to be able to say what the causes of its actions are... The fact is, it seems to each of us that we have conscious will. It seems we have selves. It seems we have minds. It seems we are agents. It seems we cause what we do". All illusion.

As for Harari, the author writes: "Over the last century, when scientists opened Sapiens' black box, they found no soul, no free will and no "I" - only genes, hormones and neurons, which obey the same physical and chemical laws that govern the rest of reality... when a neuron fires an electrical charge, this can be a deterministic reaction to an external stimulus or the result of a random occurrence... none of these options leaves room for free will... To the best of our scientific understanding, determinism and randomness divide the cake between

[19] D. Wegner, *"The Illusion of Conscious Will"*, MIT Press, 2002.

them, without leaving a single crumb for 'freedom'. The sacred word freedom turns out to be, like the soul, an empty term that carries no discernible meaning... If by 'free will' you mean the ability to act according to your desires, then yes, humans have free will, just like chimpanzees, dogs and parrots... What exists is just a stream of consciousness, and desires arise and pass within it, but there is no self that owns those desires".[20]

This obviously eliminates any and all personal responsibility and moral considerations about good or bad conduct, about crimes and justifications for punishment. All that remains, if possible, is revenge, which is as legitimate and natural as any other neuronal trigger.

From a certain point of view, this branch of neuroscience continues the analysis of psychic dynamics, as understood by Freud and all subsequent psychoanalysis, and it is difficult to admit human freedom in the sense of full self-determination, since the psychic or animic apparatus is powerfully influenced by the unconscious. This can be inferred from texts such as the following: "We have learned from psychoanalysis that the essence of the process of repression does not consist in cancelling, destroying and representing the instinctual impulse, but in preventing it from becoming conscious. We therefore say that it is a state of the "unconscious" and we have good evidence to show that it can also express unconscious effects, even those that finally reach consciousness. Everything that is repressed must remain unconscious, but we also want to affirm that the repressed does not encompass all that is unconscious. The unconscious has a wider scope; the repressed is a part of the unconscious. [...] we can argue that *the hypothesis of the unconscious is necessary and legitimate*, and that, on the other hand, we have multiple proofs of its accuracy. It is necessary because the data of consciousness are very incomplete. In both healthy and sick individuals, psychic acts frequently occur whose explanation presupposes others of which consciousness offers us no evidence. Acts of this kind are not only the lapses (of memory) and dreams of healthy individuals, but also all those that we classify as symptoms and obsessive phenomena of sick individuals. Our daily personal experience presents us with facts whose origin we don't know, and the results of

[20] Yuval Harari, *"Homo Deus, uma breve história do amanhã"*, Part III, Chapter 8, pgs. 286,287, Cia. Das Letras, São Paulo, 2017.

mental processes whose elaboration we don't know. All these facts will become meaningless and incoherent if we maintain the theory that the totality of our actions must be made known to us by our consciousness, but on the contrary, they will be organised into a coherent and intelligible whole if we interpolate the deduced unconscious actions between them. We can also support the existence of an unconscious psychic state by the fact that consciousness integrates only a limited content at any given time, so that most of what we call conscious must in any case be, for long periods of time, in a state of latency, that is, in a state of psychic unconsciousness [...] In my opinion, the antithesis of 'conscious' and 'unconscious' lacks application to instinct. *An instinct can never become the object of consciousness*. It can only be the idea that represents it".[21]

Further on, in the topic "Consciousness and the Unconscious", Freud highlights: "The differentiation of the psychic into conscious and unconscious is the fundamental premise of psychoanalysis. It allows it, in effect, to arrive at an understanding of the pathological processes of the psychic life that are so frequent and important, and to subordinate them to scientific investigation. Or, to put it another way: *psychoanalysis does not see consciousness as the essence of the psychic*, but only as a quality of the psychic that can be added to others, or be absent altogether. After clarifying the relationship between external perception and the superficial Perception-Consciousness system, we can begin to get an idea of the Ego. We see it emanating from the Perception system and first understanding the Pre-Conscious, immediate to the mnemic residues. But the Ego is also, as we already know, unconscious. It will be very useful for us to follow the invitation of an author who, for personal reasons, vainly declares that he has nothing to do with rigorous and elevated science. I'm referring to G. Groddeck, who always claims that what we call our Ego is passively conducted in life and that, instead of living, we are lived by unknown and invincible powers [...]. For my part, I propose to take it [Groddeck's opinion] into consideration, giving the name Ego to the entity that emanates from the Perception system and is primarily pre-conscious, and Id, as Groddeck does, to the unconscious remainder, in which the

[21] Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbewusste*, pgs. 6 and 7, Reclams Universal Bibliotek, Stuttgart, 2017, avaiable at reclam.de.

aforementioned Ego is extended [...] *An individual is now, for us, a psychic Id, unknown and unconscious, on whose surface the Ego appears*".[22]

And it is also worth remembering what the author says in his *Introduction to Psychoanalysis:* "A third disproof will be inflicted on human megalomania (after Copernicus and Darwin) by the psychological research of our days, which aims *to show the ego that it is not master in its own house*, that it is content with rare and fragmentary information about what goes on, outside its consciousness, in its psychic life".[23]

Contrary to Freud, Jean-Paul Sartre says that we are "condemned to be free" or yet "Atheist existentialism, which I represent... declares that, if God does not exist, there is at least one being whose existence precedes essence, a being that exists before it can be defined by any concept and that this being is man or, as Heidegger says, the human creature".[24] Why? Knowing that "being" is a concept applied to what "is", to what "remains", to what doesn't change, there are things and creatures that just "are", like any object produced by man, or even an animal, which will be the same, naturally, from birth to death, obeying the instinctive impulses that are inherent to it. Beforehand, such beings are, above all, "essences" (a Latin derivation of the verb *esse*), and they remain so during their "existences" (being in the world). In a very different way, human beings have the capacity to change in the course of their existence, to transform their situation, to choose life values and ways of acting, both personally and socially. Their nature is flexible or malleable enough for them to build their 'essence' in life, their way of being in the world, despite the many conditioning factors they face.

Its existence precedes the essence to be realized and, precisely from there, its radical condemnation: "We do not have, either behind or in front of us, in the luminous domain of values, justifications or excuses. That is what I would say when I say that man is condemned to be free. Condemned because he did not create himself, and yet free, because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does."[25] Freedom contains, in return, the

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[22] Sigmund Freud*, Das Ich und das Es*, Bewußtsein und Unbewußtes, pgs. 7 and 8, Reclams Universal Bibliotek, Stuttgart, 2017, disponível em reclam.de.

[23] Idem, *Introduction à la psychanalyse*, capítulo 18, pg. 266, Petite Blibliotèque Payot, Paris, 1962.

[24] J.-P. Sartre, *L'Existencialisme est un humanisme*, pg. 21, Paris: Les Éditions Nagel, 1970.

[25] Idem, ibidem, pg. 37.

responsibility for all the values, acts and thoughts that he has formulated or adhered to. Therefore, freedom, understood from an existentialist perspective, is something *terrible*, due to the magnitude and the weight that it has to bear. An undeniable condition, which not everyone is willing to face.

Isaiah Berlin defends the idea that there are two main concepts on the subject, one negative and the other positive, and he presents them in *Four Essays on Liberty*: "To coerce a man is to deprive him of liberty – liberty from what? Almost every moralist in human history has extolled liberty. Like happiness and goodness, like nature and reality, this is a term whose meaning is so porous that there seem to be few interpretations of it that can withstand it. I do not propose to discuss either the history of this mutable word or the more than two hundred meanings recorded by historians of ideas. I propose to examine only two of these meanings – but they are central, with a great deal of acceptance behind them in human history… The first of these political meanings of liberty, which I will call *the negative meaning*, is included in the answer to the question: What is the area or sector in which the subject – a person or group of people – has or should have the possibility (or consent) to do or be what he has the capacity to do or be, without the interference of other people? (absence of obstacles or interference). The second, which I would call *the positive sense*, is included in the answer to the question: "What or who is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do or be this, rather than that"? (What is done in society so that I can act or become what I can be?). The two questions are clearly different, even though both answers may overlap... Coercion implies the deliberate interference of other human beings in the area or field in which I could act if it did not otherwise exist. I lack political freedom only if I am prevented from achieving an end by the action of human beings. This has been brought out in the modern expressions 'economic freedom' and its counterpart, 'economic slavery'. It is plausibly argued that if a man is too poor to be able to spend on something for which there is no legal prohibition—a loaf of bread, a trip around the world, resources at court—he is no less free to have it than if he were prohibited by law. If my poverty were a kind of disease that prevented me from buying bread, traveling around the world, or having my cause heard, just as my limp prevents me from running, this inability would not be described as a lack of freedom, still less of political freedom [...] The criterion of oppression is the role

with which I believe other people act, directly or indirectly, with or without the intention of doing so, in frustrating my desires. To be free, in this sense, means not to suffer interference from others. The larger the area of non-interference, the greater my freedom".[26]

From this first negative criterion, that of non-interference in the action of the individual, arise doubts and contradictions that political life demonstrates in our daily lives: does the freedom of some, or even that of a significant portion of citizens, need to be restricted in order to ensure that of others who are less favoured? But if freedom is sacred and therefore untouchable and inalienable, can there be restrictions on human action, whatever the consequences? Can we be absolutely free within a society, or must we agree to the loss of a certain extent? In the latter case, how far can legal restrictions go? And how are they established?

The positive meaning of the word freedom, on the other hand, derives from the individual's will or desire to be their own master, to give themselves their own law, in other words, to be autonomous. Berlin here recovers the ancient concept of the Hellenistic period, that of the Stoics and Epicureans: "I want my life and decisions to depend on me, not on external forces of any nature. I want to be my own instrument and not the instrument of other human beings, to act according to my own will. I want to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by my own conscious purposes, and not by external causes that affect me... The freedom that consists in being my own master (my own mistress) and the freedom that consists in not being hindered in the choices I make by other men may seem to be concepts without much of a negation of freedom, historically developed in divergent directions, not always by respectable stages, until finally they came into conflict with each other. One way of making this clear is in the moment of independence acquired by the metaphor of self-mastery. 'I am my own master', 'I am no man's slave'; but can I not be a slave to nature (as Platonists and Hegelians are apt to say)? Or to my unbridled passions? Are these not the many species of an identical genus of 'slave' - some political or legal, others moral or spiritual? Have not men already had the experience of freeing themselves from

[26] I. Berlin, *Quatro Ensaios sobre a Liberdade*, pgs. 135, 136, Edit. Universidade de Brasília, 1969.

spiritual slavery, or from the slavery of nature, and have they not become conscious, on the one hand, of a self that dominates, and, on the other, of something to which they are obliged to obey? This dominant self is then variously identified with reason, with my 'higher nature', with the self that calculates and aims for what will satisfy it in the long run, with my 'real', or 'ideal', or 'autonomous', or even my 'best' self. All this contrasts with the irrational impulse, with uncontrollable desires, with my 'lower' nature, with the pursuit of immediate pleasures, with my empirical or heteronomous self, carried away by every tendency of desire or passion, and needing to be rigidly disciplined if it is to reach the summit of its 'real' nature. Then the two egos can be represented as divided by a wide trench: the true self can be conceived as something wider than the individual (as the term is normally understood), as a social 'whole' of which the individual constitutes an element or aspect: a tribe, a race, a church, a party, a state, the great society of the living, the dead, and the unborn. This entity is then identified as the 'true' self, which, by imposing its own collective or organic will on the 'recalcitrant' members, achieves its own and henceforth highest freedom. The dangers of using this organic metaphor to justify the coercion of some men over others in order to raise them to a higher level of freedom have often been pointed out. But what gives this kind of language its plausibility is that we recognize that it is possible, and sometimes justifiable, to coerce men in the name of a goal (say, justice or public health) that they themselves would pursue if they were more enlightened, but do not because they are more blind, ignorant, or corrupt".[27]

Self-control or self-realisation as a positive expression of freedom consists, finally, "in the use of critical reason, in understanding what is necessary and what is contingent [...] Because to want something to be different from what it should be is, given the premises, that is, the needs that govern the world, to be pro tanto ignorant or irrational. Passions, prejudices, fears and neuroses flow from ignorance and take the form of myths and illusions. Being governed by myths, whether they arise from the vivid imagination of unscrupulous charlatans, or from psychological or sociological causes, is a form of heteronomy, of domination by external factors, in a sense not necessarily desired by the agent [...] Knowledge

[27] Ibidem, pgs 142 e 143.

liberates not by offering us wider possibilities from which we can make choices, but by preserving us from the frustration of attempting the impossible".[28]

Finally, I would like to remind you of a perceptive observation by Amelia Valcárcel, in *El Sentido de la Libertad* (The Sense of Freedom): "The idea of freedom cannot be articulated without that of order. They spontaneously limit each other. Whilst freedom and equality are mutually tense, freedom and limits work in synergy. Absolute freedom is pure indeterminacy, something irreducible to a concept. Freedom is resolved in the order of possible and preferential freedoms. An order is nothing other than a system of categories in which possible freedoms function. On the other hand, to overestimate the idea of order to the point of making freedom disappear is a leap into the void, and not only totalitarianism have attempted this".[29]

[28] Ibidem, pgs. 148 e 149.

[29] A. Valcárcel, *El Sentido de la Libertad*, pg. 26, Institució Alfons el Magnànim, Valencia, 2001.

## II. Is Democracy the Best Political Regime?

When the Greeks invented democracy, that is, the political regime in which the people (*demos*) have the right to exercise the power (*kratos*) to lead and administer the commune (a process that lasted about two centuries, between the seventh and fifth centuries BC), they intended to create not only a form of popular sovereignty, but an entirely new society and a much happier way of life.[30]

One of the first exaltations or defenses of the democratic regime was given to us by Herodotus in his *Histories*, already in the middle of the fifth century. The historian says, reproducing the words of Otanes, a Persian lord, after he had exposed the improvident and even cruel character of an absolute monarch, as was customary at the time: "The same is not true of democratic government. Firstly, it is called *isonomy*,[31] and it is the most beautiful of all names; secondly, it does not commit any of those disorders that are inseparable from monarchical states. The magistrate is chosen by lot and is responsible for his administration, and all deliberations take place in common. I am therefore of the opinion that monarchical government should be abolished and democratic government established, since everything comes from the people".[32]

A similar hope arose when the French revolutionaries of 1789 established the first republic of the modern era. One of its leaders, Saint-Just, even suggested from the tribune of the Convention of March 3, 1794, that happiness would be a new idea in Europe.[33]

And what is the best form of government, or the "good city" in Plato's understanding? Given that the ideal Republic is governed by the wisest and most just, and that neither the philosopher-kings nor the guardians make power a means of life or enrichment, but rather of well-being for the entire city, this form

[30] The Greeks of the time could call this form of government a demarchy (like oligarchy or monarchy), but the word was already used for a local magistracy, or, as it is called in Portugal, for the government of a mayor.

[31] Equality before the law.

[32] Heródoto, *Histórias*, livro III, parágrafo 80 em diante, em qualquer edição já impressa.

[33] Saint-Just, *Sur le mode d'exécution du décret contre les ennemis de la révolution*, Anais da Convenção de 1794: "la sagesse d'un gouvernement consiste à réduire le parti opposé à la révolution et à rendre le peuple heureux aux dépens de tous les vices".

of government is, for Plato, the aristocracy, knowing that the words *aristeia* (aristia) and *aristos* mean, respectively, excellence and excellent.

If the philosopher-kings and the guardians allow themselves to be contaminated by the desire for territorial conquests and personal enrichment, the aristocracy degenerates into timocracy or timarchy (*timós* = honor, in this case military honor): "Those who previously guarded their citizens as free men, friends and providers, now subjugate them, treating them as *periecos*[34] and servants, while they themselves continue to occupy themselves with war and the protection of others" (Book VIII, 547).

The decline of the government regime continues with the oligarchy (from *oligós*, little, few), the government of the rich for the benefit of the rich (also called plutocracy), since almost every society always contains a few rich people and many poor people or more poor people than the rich.

The third step on the descending scale of regimes is democracy, the result of the struggle of the poorest against the richest, against the oligarchs. It is the government of excessive, licentious freedoms, the "bazaar of constitutions or institutional measures" (*pantolipon politeion*). In popular government, the punishment of offenses or crimes is never proportional to the gravity of the acts, because there will always be laws in this "constitutional market" that mitigate the deserved punishments. To have access to the highest positions, it is not necessary to have a good education, an upright character or any other attribute. It is enough for someone to declare themselves a "friend of the people", because having an aversion to all hierarchy, one proclaims the equality of what is unequal by nature and/or culture. The democratic man is intemperate, without restraint (*aneu sophrosyne*), prodigal in desires that have no limits, frivolous, and incapable of logic in his deliberations. All things become equal to him: vices and virtues, goods and evils.[35]

The lowest level, and therefore the worst regime, is tyranny, which imposes extreme servitude on the majority of the people. It arises after a period of serious

[34] Inhabitant of a city who did not enjoy the right of citizenship, but was not a slave, and could carry out economic activities.

[35] The novelist Milan Kundera, in his book Immortality, seems to refer to this analysis of Plato when he writes that in today's culture all desires have become rights. We might add that all rights, moreover, have become hysterical.

social and moral crisis in society, in which living conditions become extremely difficult and laws become a dead letter. The people or even a certain social class then gives one person or a small group absolute powers, both legal and based on armed force.

If Plato's Republic can be considered the first great work of Western culture on the subject of politics, the second is Aristotle's Politics, which classifies democracy as a *deviation from politeia* (constitutional government or *res publica*, in Cicero's Latin translation), just as tyranny is a monarchical deviation and oligarchy a vice implanted in aristocracy. Says the author: "Since the constitution means the same thing as government, and government is the supreme power in a city, and the rule may be in the hands of a single person, or of a few people, or of the majority, in cases where this single person, the few people, or the majority govern with a view to the common good, these constitutions must necessarily be the correct ones [...] We usually call a monarchy a kingdom [...] the government of more than one person, but only a few, we call aristocracy, because the best men govern [...] and when the majority governs the city with a view to the common good, the generic name of all its forms applies to the government, that is, constitutional government [...] the deviations from the constitutions mentioned are tyranny, corresponding to monarchy, oligarchy to aristocracy, and democracy to constitutional government (or republic); in fact, tyranny is the monarchy governing in the interest of the monarch; Oligarchy is government in the interests of the rich, and democracy is government in the interests of the poor,[36] and *neither of these forms governs for the good of the whole Community* (my emphasis)".[37]

It is not only the number of people or representatives in government that interests Aristotle, but above all the economic objectives: "It is accidental whether a few or many control power in oligarchies and democracies because the number of rich is smaller and the number of poor is greater everywhere, but what differentiates democracy from oligarchy is poverty or wealth; consequently, wherever rulers exercise power because of wealth, whether they are a majority

[36] Note that government in the interests of the poor, for Aristotle, is not to be confused with the totality of citizens.

[37] Aristotle, *Polítics*, book III, chapter V, 1.279 b, 1.280 a.

or a minority, there will be an oligarchy, and where the poor govern there will be a democracy".[38]

The first difficulty in understanding what democracy is, even though it is more of a word that is exhaustively invoked (in books and in the mass media) than a perfectly established concept, is the definition of what the demos is: is it the whole civic body of citizens and therefore a unit or totality, or a social body, a part or fraction, even if it is a majority, of the civic body, such as the 'popular classes', the proletariat, the workers, the dispossessed (of property), the poor (in the Aristotelian view) or the miserable, as Victor Hugo novelised them?

For example: in Athenian democracy, four very distinct social classes participated in the People's Assembly (*Ekklesia*) (in descending order, *pentacosiomedimnos, knights, zeuguites and thetes*), but the salaried or wage earners (*thetes*) did not have access to the Council of Five Hundred (*Boulè*), the body that prepared the Assembly's affairs and supervised their implementation. Since the Council met every day, the wage earners, who did not have slaves, were not able to attend. To refer also to the "Roman people" (*populus*) in its republican period, it is necessary to consider that it was diversely constituted by the possession of property and its own interests, that is, by the senatorial order (large landowners), by the equestrian order (monetary bourgeoisie, roughly speaking) and by the plebs (merchants and traders, artisans, urban proletarians, exempt from military service and tax contributions, in addition to the rural plebs formed by small landowners).

It is now thought that the class conflicts of the Marxist tradition have lost their quality as the core of opposition in the political economy (as a result of transformations in the means of production that have reduced the weight of the labour force) and therefore as the means by which public problems are resolved. Socio-economic inequalities between men and women, regional or territorial imbalances, (lack of) respect for human and social rights (such as legal work and pay, education, public health and safety), gender freedom, public safety, fear of

[38] Ibidem, 1280 BC. "Let not the word 'people' deceive us, for it has always meant not the totality of the inhabitants, but only that part which enjoyed the right to decide or to elect those who should decide for it, so much so that even Machiavelli distinguished in Florence the divisions between the nobles, those between the nobles and the people, and that essential one between the people and the plebeians." Norberto Bobbio, Teoria generale della politica, Torino, Einaudi, 1999.

migration and the corrosion of cultural traditions came into play. The people, for today's right-wing and left-wing populisms, will be those who are ‘below’ and who demand the extinction of situations considered unjust, or who are threatened by specific and ongoing circumstances (crime or terrorism, for example). The demos would therefore be those who oppose the economic plutocracy, the oligarchies or institutional elites, or a socio-cultural system considered to be unjust and unequal.

Hence, we currently think of two forms of democracy: the one with modern features, that is, liberal democracy, characterized by the institution of mechanisms against tyranny or dictatorship, guaranteeing individual rights, in which popular power is limited to the selection or choice, by vote, of its representatives, both in the legislative and executive branches (rule of law and individual guarantees); and popular democracy (or populism), contrary to the cult of individualism, the privileges of minorities and in favor of popular sovereignty and the less favored or socially exposed, which is realized through mechanisms of direct political decision-making (referendums and plebiscites) and the drastic reduction of unelected authority (of the judiciary).

Historical experience has shown us that democracy does not always automatically lead to well-being and a happy life, if several other factors are not acting simultaneously and favorably. Shortly after the Fall of the Bastille, between 1792 and 1794, the Jacobin Terror took hold in France, resulting in the execution of approximately one hundred thousand people, reaffirming, at the time, what Plato said: that democracy always ran the risk of slipping into its opposite, tyranny. With democracy, that is, through democracy, political expressions were gained and the rise to power of Italian fascism and German Nazism was made possible. Fact: in the legislative elections of 1924, the National List, led by the National Fascist Party, obtained 64% of the votes and consolidated Mussolini's power in Italy. The following fact: it was during the Weimar Democratic Republic in 1920 that the Nazi party was founded, and it came to power in 1933, after legislative elections in which it obtained 43.9% of the votes. Even today, many formally democratic states have enormous difficulties in combating insecurity,

violence, unemployment, job insecurity, corruption[39] and maintaining an efficient system of security or social security (including public health), as can be seen in several countries in Latin America, Africa and even some in Europe, the smallest in the Community.

Considering that a democracy is based on the designation of rulers by the majority of the governed, in accordance with a certain electoral system, it is logical to infer that no authority in the sphere of government (necessarily in the executive and legislative branches, possibly in the judiciary) will be considered so if it is not subject to choice by voting citizens. From a historical and classic point of view, it is this expressly manifest and uncorrupted operation that confers legitimacy on the sovereign powers of the state. However, this strictly political limit has been extended or has sought to incorporate other economic and cultural relations, thus expanding into the most diverse spheres of society. This is a phenomenon that could no longer be called democratisation, but rather unlimited democratism, as we can find in Jean Madiran's analysis in *Les deux démocraties*. In his words, "the authority of the father of the family, that of the teacher in the classroom or workshop, that of the head of the company are heterogeneous to the democratic principle and contrary to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789. These authorities, which constitute freedoms, can only be maintained by limiting the extent of the democratic principle".[40] According to recent history, the attraction of democracy has at least two consequences that can be described as dangerous. On the one hand, the idea that the majority tends to go beyond the political realm and establish itself as the criterion of good, justice and truth in other spheres of life, without there being any connection between these relationships. On the other hand, the unreflective desire for freedom, that is, the pretence that it can command all human actions, dominates minds. This could well lead to the situation that Milan Kundera referred to in his novel

[39] After Otanes' speech, reproduced by Herodotus (cited in the previous pages of this work), Darius speaks out in favor of the monarchy, among other arguments because "corruption, once established in the republic, does not produce hatred among the wicked; on the contrary, it unites them by bonds of close friendship, because those who lose the State act in concert and mutually preserve each other". The innuendo for endemic corruption in Brazil could not be more perfect.

[40] J. Madiran, *Les Deux démocraties*, pg. 47, Nouvelles Éditions Latines, Paris, 1977.

*Immortality*: “every desire becomes a right”.[41] And we could add: every right becomes collective hysteria.

Given this framework, it is possible to ask: what gives value to a political regime? Is it its consequences on society, that is, its economic efficiency and social balance? Its ability to govern with a minimum of social conflicts? The type of political representative it demands in return? Or fairness, that is, the rational balance of its principles of action?

Firstly, by proposing sovereignty, that is, the power of decision in the last instance, to the representatives elected by the people, modern democracy constitutes a form of government that bets on and is based, at least theoretically, on the maturity of the reason of a people or a community, capable of emancipating itself from the figure and influence of patriarchal or even messianic chiefs, leaders or guides. In short, from that providential, feared, and charismatic figure of a *prince*, as Machiavelli refers to him, or even of a *caudillo, a condottiero or Führer*. However, it would be hard for anyone in their right mind to claim that reason prevails in party political disputes, especially since personal passions and social ideologies, which are forms of misrepresentation of reality and illogical justifications for errors and abuses of government and administration, are decisive phenomena in the choice of representatives. Furthermore, Socrates' observations in the first book of *The Republic*, according to which it is a punishment or a disgrace to be governed by someone worse than you or me, are still entirely relevant.[42] Thus, if we are honest, we are governed by corrupt people; if we are relatively educated, we are governed by ignorant people; if we have a clear idea of justice, universally defined, we are governed by people who have many ideas about justice, depending on their particular interests or those of friends, situations or particular opportunities that arise.

Secondly, the very definition of democracy as popular power (except in cases of direct democracy) is more theoretical than practical, since the political corporation often acts independently, as a bureaucratic body situated above or disconnected from the will of the majority of citizens. The more institutions grow, whether within or outside the government, the more they become an end in

[41] Milan Kundera, *A Imortalidade*, Ed. Nova Fronteira, Rio de Janeiro, 1990.
[42] See Plato, *A República*, Livro I. 347 c.

themselves. This phenomenon of bureaucratization is related to that which Robert Michels called the "iron law of oligarchy", which means the progressive autonomization of the governing bodies within state and party organizations, which we could equally call the technical and administrative elitization of a social organism or a State, whatever it may be. For Michels, therefore (an unsuspected socialist), there is no social organism without elitization, which seems evident to us, both from a historical-empirical and theoretical point of view.[43]

If, according to European tradition, including Greco-Latin antiquity, representative democracy is structured through political parties, that is, organizations that partially reveal social and economic interests, they are not exempt from criticism or restrictions, some of them severe, such as that of Simone Weil. In an article published posthumously in the journal Table Ronde, the philosopher and devoted political activist asserts: "The fact that they exist is in no way a reason to preserve them. Only Good is a legitimate reason for preservation. The evil of political parties is obvious. The problem to be examined is whether good overcomes evil in them and thus makes their existence desirable... But it is necessary, first of all, to recognize what the criterion of good is. Perhaps it can only be truth, justice and, secondly, public utility... Only what is just is legitimate. Crime and lies are not legitimate in any case... Truth is one, justice is one. Errors and injustices are infinitely variable... When there is collective passion in a country, any particular will is likely closer to justice and reason than the general will, or rather than what constitutes its caricature... The members of a political party have no thirst for justice and truth, they just want to get as many votes as possible, and to do this they practise sterile opposition in bad Faith".[44] Weil deplores the fact that parties are machines for manufacturing collective passions, exercised dogmatically over the thinking of individuals. And their adherents, with a few exceptions, easily accommodate themselves to particular ideologies, saying: as a socialist, as a liberal, as a monarchist I guess... The author continues: "The very use of the words democracy and republic obliges us to examine with extreme care the following two problems: how to give the men and women who make up the French people the opportunity to express their

[43] See R. Michels, *Sociologie du parti dans la démocratie moderne*, Paris: Gallimard, 2015.
[44] La Table Ronde, nº 26, 1950, páginas 9 a 28.

opinion on the great questions of public life? How to prevent any kind of collective passion from circulating among them when the people are questioned?... The solutions are not easy to devise. But it is obvious, after careful reflection, that any solution would involve, first of all, the abolition of political parties... No finite amount of power can, in fact, be considered sufficient, especially after it has been obtained. The party finds itself in a continuous state of impotence, which it always attributes to the insufficiency of the power it has. Even if it were absolute master of the country, international needs would impose strict limits. Thus, the essential tendency of parties is totalitarian, not only in relation to a nation, but to the entire globe".

At the same time, unpopular (albeit necessary) laws and measures also undermine the fantasy of "government of the people, by the people and for the people". Finally, to believe that a simple mathematical quantity (the majority, the crowd) can therefore become an expression of wisdom and civic virtues is to cling to a reverie that historical experience has never proven. Since democracy allows everyone to express themselves freely, and since intelligence and foolishness can be expressed normally, even if subject to few constraints (crimes of opinion), it is quite likely that the spread of stupidity will be predominant, as today's social networks seem to indicate. Demagoguery, in fact, has proved to be an inseparable companion of the enthusiasm of the masses and the speeches and proposals of political representatives.

It is also worth incorporating into this discussion the relatively recent analysis by Luigi Di Gregorio in his work *Demopatia*.[45] Taking into account the constant crises of democratic regimes, which the author calls "real and contemporary malaise", one can see a tendency towards a decline in trust in parties (of various ideological spectrums), in professional politicians and in representative institutions; a reduction in participation in elections; an increase in electoral volatility (change in the voting trend of the same voter); on the one hand, in certain regions, an increase in the number of parties and, on the other, the sudden death of several new parties; the intensification of the use of referendums (which we have already mentioned) and a spread of populist and purely electoral behavior.

[45] Ver L. Di Gregorio, *Demopatìa: Sintomi, diagnosi e terapie del malessere democratico*, Rome: Rubbetino, 2019.

Correlating these trends with other sociopolitical symptoms, such as the powerful interference of lobbies, corruption, the crisis of political parties and union representations, the media's spectacularization of people and cultural movements, and ideological radicalism, we see that, at the root of all this, the "demos" has fallen ill and this degenerative illness constitutes "demopathy," whose symptoms, according to the author, are evident in extreme individualism and narcissism, media sensationalism, consumerism, and the permissiveness of instincts that give preference to people or personalities, keeping ideas, rational debate, and effective and common actions in the background. This current configuration of human relations, marked by the omnipotent and omnipresent presence of social networks, is what led Umberto Eco to declare, with undeniable indignation: 'Social media gives the right to speak to legions of imbeciles who used to speak only in the pub after a glass of wine, without harming the community. Then they shut up, while now they have the same right to speak as a Nobel Prize winner. It's the invasion of the imbeciles".[46]

What the Italian critic clearly understood is that the indiscriminate and popularised orality that today's technology allows us does not produce and even denies the critical mass that the written word, presumably more thoughtful and reasoned, can generate and that the traditional humanities have always encouraged.

So, if the distances between the abstract ideal of democracy and its reality are so great, why do we still prefer this regime? First, because democracy presupposes (even if this does not occur in practice, especially in certain latitudes of the planet) that the citizen acts as an adult, free person, capable of a simultaneously rational, enlightened choice, which takes into consideration the ultimate objective of politics, that is, the common good (beyond the sovereign power itself). Democracy, unlike an absolute or oligarchic regime, in the restricted sense, does not impose a special will, that of a person or that of a minority group. We can initially recall Spinoza, in his Political Treatise: "For patricians will always think those the best, who are rich, or related to themselves in blood, or allied by

[46] I social media danno diritto di parola a legioni di imbecilli che prima parlavano solo al bar dopo un bicchiere di vino, senza danneggiare la collettività. Venivano subito messi a tacere, mentre ora hanno lo stesso diritto di parola di un Premio Nobel. È l'invasione degli imbecilli". La Stampa, 11-06, 2015.

friendship. And, indeed, if such were the nature of patricians, that they were free from all passion, and guided by mere zeal for the public welfare in choosing their patrician colleagues, no dominion could be compared with aristocracy. But experience itself teaches us only too well, that things pass in quite a contrary manner, above all, in oligarchies, where the will of the patricians, from the absence of rivals, is most free from the law. For there the patricians intentionally keep away the best men from the council, and seek for themselves such colleagues in it, as hang upon their words, so that in such a dominion things are in a much more unhappy condition, because the choice of patricians depends entirely upon the arbitrary will of a few, which is free or unrestrained by any law. From what has been said in the last section, it is manifest that we can conceive of various kinds of democracy. But my intention is not to treat of every kind, but of that only, "wherein all, without exception, who owe allegiance to the laws of the country only, and are further independent and of respectable life, have the right of voting in the supreme council and of filling the offices of the dominion." I say expressly. "who owe allegiance to the laws of the country only," to exclude foreigners, who are treated as being under another's dominion. I added, besides, "who are independent," except in so far as they are under allegiance to the laws of the dominion, to exclude women and slaves, who are under the authority of men and masters, and also children and wards, as long as they are under the authority of parents and guardians. I said, lastly, "and of respectable life," to exclude, above all, those that are infamous from crime, or some disgraceful means of livelihood".[47]

For the philosopher, therefore, democracy (*omnino absolutum imperium*) guarantees at least three things that are favorable to the community of men: greater individual autonomy, broader equality in civic life and a more honorable society, if the good laws expected of representatives are complied with.

And it is also worth remembering the astonishment of Étienne de La Boétie, in his famous work *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*: " For the present I would only like to be made to understand how it is that so many men, so many towns, cities, and nations can sometimes endure only one Tyrant, who has no power

[47] B. Spinoza, *Obra Completa I: Tratado Político*, Chapter XI, paragraph 2, pgs. 482 e 483, São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2014.

other than that which is given to him, who has no power to harm them unless they wish to endure it, and who could do them no harm if they did not prefer to suffer it rather than to contradict it. It is truly surprising (and yet so common that one must rather lament than be astonished) to see a million men miserably subjected, their heads under a deplorable yoke, not because they are compelled to do so by a greater force, but because they are fascinated and, so to speak, bewitched by a single man, whom they should neither fear, because he is only one, nor love, because he is inhuman or cruel to them. Such is the weakness of men [...] Shall we call it pusillanimity? Shall we call these men vile and cowardly"?[48]

La Boétie's answer is the title of his booklet: a voluntary servitude of men in society, a consent out of laziness or disregard for freedom of thought and public office, which generates a chain of petty tyrannies or a network of petty powers in mutual compromise.

For this reason, in theory too, democracy asks citizens, both those who elect and those who are elected, to do their best, considering an honest choice of action that corresponds to the general interest, rather than blind and absolute loyalty to a leader, a party or a social group. In other words, through the freedom it grants, it favours the ability to judge and decide with personal autonomy. A necessary condition, although not a sufficient one.

There is, however, a constant danger to rationality and even common sense, and it is called democratic populism, something that extends to all positions in the political spectrum. This is what Pierre Rosanvallon explains to us in his Le *Siècle du populisme*: "The populist theory of democracy is based on three elements: a preference for direct democracy, illustrated by the sacralisation of the referendum; a polarised and hyper-religious view of the sovereignty of the people, which rejects intermediary bodies and seeks to domesticate non-elected institutions (such as constitutional courts and independent authorities); and an apprehension of the general will as being capable of spontaneous expression. The populist conception of representation is, in this respect, linked to the figure of the 'people's man', who has a sensitive capacity for incarnation in order to remedy the state of misrepresentation considered to exist. National protectionism

[48] É. de La Boétie, *Discours de la servitude volontaire ou Le Contr'un, pg. 12*, avaiable at classiques.uqac.ca.

is also a constitutive element of populist ideology, provided we realise that it is not just linked to an economic policy. It is more deeply inscribed in a sovereigntist vision of rebuilding political will and looking after the security of a population [...] The political culture of populism is, finally, explicitly linked to the mobilisation of a set of emotions and passions whose importance is recognised [...] Here we can distinguish between the emotions of intellection, aimed at making the world more readable, based on reports of plots, the emotions of action (releasing acts) and the emotions of position (feeling abandoned and socially invisible)".[49]

To say that democracy, in order to function properly, demands and favors the best from us, allows us to understand why freedom of expression and voting are extended to the enemies of democracy. The possibility of manifestations of extremist thought, from the right and left of the political spectrum, is commonly evoked to underscore the weakness of democracy, since this compromise can lead to the end of the very form of government. Consequently, it is the only regime that does not defend itself legally from its enemies, relying on the common sense of an adult population. Forcing its enemies to remain silent is to feed the aura of the excluded and persecuted, of defenseless victims. Thus, all political positions can be made public, as long as they are peaceful; the divisions of society will be clear and not its unity, embodied in a man or a party. Being the best, as democracy requires, is to accept difference, as long as it proves beneficial to the common good. With this, there are more doubts to be experienced and overcome in the democratic system than previous and already consolidated certainties.

If Tocqueville should be read, it is because he also points out some dangers that time can unleash in democratic experience: "Equality produces, in fact, two tendencies: one leads men directly to independence and can suddenly lead them to anarchy; the other leads them, by a longer, more secret and more secure path, to servitude. People easily see the first and resist it; they allow themselves to be drawn into the other, without seeing it [...] The idea of a right inherent in certain individuals quickly disappears from the minds of men; the idea of the all-powerful and, so to speak, the sole right of society comes to take its place. Such ideas take root and grow as conditions become more equal and men more similar;

[49] P. Rosanvallon, Introducion, *Le Siècle du populisme: Histoire, théorie, critique*, Paris: Seuil, 2019.

equality gives rise to them and they, in turn, accelerate the progress of equality [...] Since the men who inhabit democratic countries have neither superiors nor inferiors, nor habitual and necessary associates, they willingly close in on themselves and consider themselves isolated. I had the opportunity to demonstrate this well when it came to individualism. Only with great effort do men disassociate themselves from their private affairs to occupy themselves with common affairs [...] Private life is so active in democratic times, so hectic, so full of desires, of work, that each man has almost no energy or leisure left for political life".[50]

Another weakness, already pointed out by Cicero in his time, warns us of the primacy of equality over other social aspects: "In a monarchy, the majority of citizens take little part in common law and public affairs; under aristocratic rule, the multitude, barely free, is deprived of any means of action and deliberation; finally, when the people assume power, even assuming them to be wise and moderate, equality itself becomes unjust inequality, since there is no gradation that distinguishes true merit [...] When the Athenians, at certain times, suppressed the Areopagus, in order to recognize only the acts and decrees of the people, not offering their republic the distinct gradations of dignity, it was not long before they reached their greatest decadence".[51]

If on the one hand equality requires appropriate laws and legal structures, on the other it tends to demean the most talented, the most gifted, those who, whether we like it or not, naturally possess special or more developed attributes. In other words, it is progressively more difficult for democracy, and its social propensity for equality, to coexist with the individual aristocracy of the spirit, that is, with subjective knowledge, creative capacity and personal effort, because, as the ancient and indubitable Latin maxim says, "it is not given to everyone to land in Corinth".

In his book *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu sets out the values that would be characteristic of political regimes, and highlights that monarchy is the regime of honor, tyranny, the regime of fear, and the democratic republic, that of virtue.

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[50] A. De Tocqueville*, De la Démocratie en Amérique*, Book II, Part IV, pgs. 353 a 360, Garnier-Flammarion, Paris, 1981.

[51] Marcus Tullius Cicero*, De re publica*, Livro I, XXVII e XXVIII.

Precisely for this reason, the philosopher says: “It is clear that the monarch who, through bad advice or negligence, fails to comply with the laws, can easily repair the damage; he only needs to change his advice or correct his own negligence. But when in a popular government the laws cease to be faithfully executed, as this can only come from the corruption of the republic, the State is already lost. It was a beautiful spectacle, in the last century, to see the impotent efforts of the English to establish democracy among themselves (reference to the beheading of King Charles I and the establishment of the Republic, led by Oliver Cromwell). Since those who took part in affairs and business had no virtue, and their ambition was excited by the success of those who dared the most [...] the government changed without ceasing; the people sought democracy and could not find it anywhere. Finally, after so many movements, shocks, and disquiets, it was necessary to rest in the government itself that had been proscribed”.[52]

Does being the best, as democracy allows us to be, make us capable of turning the ideal into practice? What do we express when we vote or support a demonstration or political demand? An enlightened, reflective, rational position? Spontaneous affection in favour or resentment against events, ideas, and people? A concern for the general interest or a selfish hope? All of these answers are possible, but reactions of an affective nature tend to prevail the lower the educational or cultural level of a population, and for various reasons: the material situation of a given moment in life, family or social influences, uncritical acceptance of party political propaganda and subliminal messages from the mass media, ignorance of history or the tendency to be equally known as gregarious and bovine, something that social networks have expanded beyond measure.

It must be made quite clear, first of all, that whatever the cause or reason for our support or rejection of our choice, democracy shows us that we are, individually and collectively, responsible for our political actions, whether they are conscious or ignorant, considered and reflected, or frivolous and irresponsible. We must admit the obviousness pointed out by Hegel, although it is very difficult for us, since it makes us responsible for our actions: there is no action that is not individual.

[52] Montesquieu, *O Espírito das Leis*, Book III, Chapter III, Do Princípio da Democracia, pgs. 49 e 50. Coleção Os Pensadores, Abril Cultural, São PPaulo, 1973.

Secondly, it’s clear that democracy is the only regime that invites citizens to protest against political and administrative measures, even if only at times when public power is being formed, that is, during election periods. Even so, democracy is the only regime that organizes or channels dissent into demonstrations and mass protests, if society has this more incisive and sometimes even violent behavioral or reactive characteristic, since the behavior of the masses easily tends towards excess, aggression, and violence.

And here's a comparison: over the last hundred years, the Scandinavian and Swiss democracies have always remained relatively peaceful, alternating between conservative and social democratic governments, without any major disturbances. Does this mean that democracy fits magnificently well in countries with small populations (as Aristotle understood it), and not so well in countries with large and even more heterogeneous populations? But then, how can we evaluate democratic life in the United States, with its immense territory and large population? Compared to large nations, Russian democracy is visibly less perfected than American democracy. And doesn't this imperfection contain a strong historical influence from its tsarist and dictatorial tradition, whereas the American democratic spirit was already in place at the very beginning of its formation?

Since capitalism became dominant in the late 1980s, prioritizing capital movements, productive distribution and multilateral economic agreements – the much-vaunted globalization – our era has seen a sharp reduction in the room for maneuvering in national policies. In other words, local socioeconomic policy decisions either have no effect in the face of the complexity of international relations, or depend on several other centers of resolution, making national sovereign power dependent. At the same time, we have observed two inverse movements: on the one hand, a growing lack of interest in politics, which is revealed in the abstention rates in countries where voting is not mandatory (American presidents, for example, have been elected with 30% of the total votes, discounting abstentions and votes cast for the losing candidate); on the other hand, there has been a generalized and dizzying increase in personal and group contacts, made possible by information technology. Individuals are expressing themselves more and more on social networks, in the media, on television, on blogs, in street surveys, so it seems that democracy now means ‘giving your

opinion' on any market issue or on strictly personal life, a typical habit of media futility (what you wear, what you eat, what gender you prefer, what kind of haircut and colour you wear, etc.). When, in a very different way, the universe of democracy is strictly political, by which we mean the scope of a choice that makes up and interferes in the collective decision, in the common good, in the broader and more important structures of the lives of entire populations.

The beautiful idea that, through democracy, debate makes citizens competent depends on our ability to represent the general interest, gathering stronger and more consistent reasons and evidence for the majority choice. Without this attitude, without personal good will, from which ideological prejudices should be excluded, there is no justification for saying that the people are competent and that the choice was what the notion of democracy presupposes and desires: the largest number so that the resolution is the best possible. The weakness of democracy is revealed, in fact, as our individual weakness, that of not being able to represent to ourselves what is the general interest, at the moment in which we act and considering the future consequences, since a decision at that moment inevitably projects itself onto what will come later. When the majority of citizens prefer to act out of immediate, unreflective, personal, or selfish interests, the possibility of electing the worst greatly outweighs the common good, even because this here often goes against personal and class desires. When politics (as we have seen in Brazil, and in many parts of the world) becomes an opportunity or a counter for big business, a unique opportunity for private enrichment, party funding at the expense of the public treasury, condoning criminal acts, favouring the plutocracy, and voters continue to elect the same representatives or the same kind of people who provide such facilities and practise such privileges, who, as Max Weber (*Politik als Beruf*) analyses, live from politics and not for politics, then the democratic regime has little impact on economic development and the general well-being of society.

We must be aware that democracy cannot do everything, but it can contribute a lot. To believe that democracy can do everything is to demonstrate utopian naivety or naivety typical of romantic politics, the kind recorded in history in the 19th century and characterized by a conception that was more emotional than rational, more pious than effective, more eloquent and deceptively redemptive than sensible and realistic. On the contrary, to believe that it can do nothing is to

accept tyranny, to use an older term, or to flirt with dictatorship and the explicit violence that characterizes it.

But it is not difficult to conclude that all the defects pointed out here are more bearable,[53] due to civil and political freedoms, than those of a monocracy (government by one) or an aristocracy (government by a few), even if enlightened, because both are dependent on people and not on a legal structure and greater flexibility in resolving inevitable problems and conflicts.

[53] "Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time". Winston Churchill*, House of Commons*, 11 de novembro de 1947.

## III. The Death of Art and the Survival of Aesthetics

Since the first half of the 19th century, with Georg Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, given between 1820 and 1828 in Berlin and published between 1835 and 1838 (in three volumes), not only the idea but also the verdict of the *death of art* has gained strength, due to its historical evidence.

In Hegel's view, this tendency stemmed from the revolutionary characteristics of the culture that were gradually taking hold and whose foundation lay in the growing manifestation of subjectivity. In the realm of art, the self-figuration of this personalism and an increasingly formalist dedication led to the dissolution of everything that had, until then, given meaning to the realm of beauty and the dominion of beauty in art ("das Reich des Schönen und die Schöne Kunst").

In the opening words of this work, we can read: "Art has always been an instrument for man to raise awareness of the noblest ideas and interests of the spirit. It was in artistic works that peoples laid down their highest conceptions, expressed them and became aware of them [...] In art we have a particular way of manifesting the spirit; we say that art is one of the forms of manifestation because the spirit, in order to realize itself, can use multiple forms... Now, originated and engendered by the spirit, art and artistic works are of a spiritual nature... in this aspect, art is closer to the spirit and thought than to external, inanimate or inert nature...".[54]

Such spiritual characteristics, however, began to wane with the advent of Romantic art and its formal independence of character. For this reason, the philosopher understood that: "In effect, if subjectivity has reached a point where independence constitutes the essential for it, then the particular content in which it will have to exercise itself must participate in this independence. Given, however, that such content is not part of the substantiality of subjective life... its independence can only be formal. On the other hand, external circumstances and situations, events with their chains and complications, continue, after recovering

[54] G.W.F. Hegel, *Curso de Estética, O Belo na Arte*, pgs. 5 a 18, Martins Fontes, São Paulo, 1996.

their freedom, an adventurous, disorderly career that is not subject to any guideline... it is oriented towards purely subjective conception and representation, subject to accidental variations, that is, towards mood... which marks the end of the creative power of artistic subjectivity over form and content, whatever they may be... Art remains, for us, as regards its supreme destiny, something of the past. Because of this, he lost everything that was authentically alive and true, his reality and his previous need".[55]

Modernity and the industrial world were responsible for radically transforming the previous vision and conception of art, much more than Hegel imagined, especially from the end of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century. Many other authors added arguments to the philosopher's observation, not just in relation to art, but to culture itself in its narrower humanistic sense (compared to anthropological), in other words, as care for the spirit and the excellence of an integral education. Among others, Oswald Spengler, Tolstoy, Ortega y Gasset and George Steiner.

*Poetics*

Let's start with the vocabulary and ideas of the inventors of philosophy and art criticism to remember how it was understood and why, at a certain point in its history in the Western world, the formulation of the death of art was reached.
As analyses and propositions on the subject have their most consistent beginnings with Aristotle's *Peri Poietikes*, usually translated as Poetic Art or just Poetics. The word ποιησις indicates, in Greek, creation or making. On the other hand, τεχνη means skill, technique, the ability to do. Latin philosophers and commentators used the term *ars, artis*, for this word, which was later adopted in the Latin languages and even in English. Hence the Aristotelian expression *tekné poietike*, usually translated as poetic art, originally means creative or creative skill. Depending on the author, it can indicate: 1. the critical and specific study of poetry; 2. the theory of literary creation, covering all its genres; 3. the general theory of the arts, including their various manifestations, including, in ancient Greek, the arts of medicine and agriculture.

[55] Idem, ibidem, pgs. 581 e 630.

The purpose of the text, as seen in the original Greek, concerns the representational capacity of the arts and the word, the constitutive elements and forms - eidos - through which literature is expressed. At the same time, it is in this work that Aristotle defends artistic, rhetorical, and fictional languages, opposing the criticisms that Plato had formulated against them in Book X of the *Republic* and in the *Sophist*.

For the latter, a theorist of idealism, the essential creation is divine; the second "poetic" level derives from the activity of the craftsman, the producer of useful objects; art, finally, would consist of the imitation or reproduction of simple "appearances" of the previous levels. In the Platonic conception, the value of painting or sculpture depends on its greater or lesser approximation to true knowledge. It should be something that is in conformity with the Idea. However, and although it appears to be the Idea, art is as far removed from it as a name for the thing it represents. Art reveals itself rather as an image *(eikón*) of a thing (*pragma*). Either it is an imitation by copying, in which case it uselessly duplicates reality, or it engenders deceptive appearances, simulacra, distorting true knowledge.

Aristotle, on the other hand, seeks to demonstrate that art, and especially literature and theater, establishes itself as a vehicle of knowledge (its cognitive side) and of sensitive and hedonistic pleasure (in modern times we would say aesthetic), both through the understanding and the recognition of reality. It is through the reliving of passions (recognition) and the overcoming of such feelings (understanding) that the indispensable cycle of catharsis is completed and that the imitative or mimetic power of literature and drama reveals its maximum value.

In this regard, the author says: "Generally speaking, it seems that two causes, both natural, give rise to poiesis (literary creation, music, painting, etc.). Imitation is natural to man from childhood – and in this he differs from other animals, in that he is the most capable of imitating and of acquiring his first knowledge through imitation – and everyone takes pleasure in imitating [...] Another reason is that learning is extremely pleasant, not only to philosophers, but also to other men, with the difference that to the latter it is less so [...] Epic and tragic poetry (tragedy), as well as comedy, dithyrambic poetry, most of the auletics (the art of playing the aulos and flutes) and citharistics, considered in general, all fall within the arts of imitation (of objective nature and of human nature). However, there

are three differences between these genres: their means are not the same, nor are the objects they imitate, nor the manner of imitating them. Just as some make imitations according to a model with colors and attitudes [...] so too, in the above-mentioned arts, imitation is produced by means of rhythm, language, and harmony, used separately or together".[56]

Of course, mimesis - to whose notion we can add today the ideas of fiction, fantasy, imagination or fabulation - does not necessarily mean the reproduction of concrete events, but of those that are possible, credible and necessary (logically linked and therefore credible, believable). This is what can be learnt from passages such as: "the work of the poet does not consist in telling what happened, but things that could happen, possible from the point of view of verisimilitude or necessity [...] The object of imitation is not only a complete action, but cases of inspiring awe and pity, and these emotions are all the stronger when, arising from each other, they are nevertheless unexpected facts, for then they will have more of an aspect of wonder than if they sprang from chance and luck; even among the fortuitous, those that appear to occur on purpose arouse the greatest admiration".[57]

Or, further on, "when plausible, the impossible should be preferred to a possible that is not convincing". Mimesis, in short, affects the characters of men (*ethe*), their passions (*pathe*) and actions (*praxeis*).

The Aristotelian conception remained alive and served as a model for Roman civilization. Horace used it as a basis for writing his *Epistle to the Pisos* at the end of the 1st century BC, also known as *The Art of Poetry* (a name consolidated by Quintilian in his work *Institutiones Oratoriae*, that is, the doctrine or education of oratory). The poet, and in this case also a theorist, sought to demonstrate that art in general, and literature in particular, are a continuous and indispensable effort in the search for perfection. In other words, in the creation of complete, finished works, clearly constructed under the domains of technique and rationality.

This thought and concern is already evident at the beginning of the text: "Suppose a painter wanted to attach a horse's neck to a human head, add limbs

[56] Aristóteles, Horácio, Longino, *A Poética Clássica*, Poética de Aristóteles, pgs. 19 e 20, Cultrix, São Paulo, 1992.
[57] Idem, ibidem, pgs. 28 e 29.

of all kinds and cover them with various feathers, so that the figure, with a beautiful woman on top, ended up in a hideous black fish; if you went in to see the painting, my friends, would you hold back your laughter? Believe me, Pisos, a book like that would be very similar to a painting in which forms without consistency were fantasised, like a sick man's dreams, so that the foot and the head couldn't be combined into a single being".[58]

Those who dedicate themselves to the craft of art and text must, first and foremost, have an in-depth knowledge of the subject they are dealing with, because then they won't lack either the eloquence or the necessary order: 'If I can't and don't know how to respect the mastery and tone of each genre, why should I salute the poet? Why the false modesty of preferring ignorance to study"?[59]

Horace always reaffirms the aphorism of old Cato: *rem tene, verba sequentur*, that is, master the subject that the words will follow. Otherwise, one falls into superficiality, into the childish, into the unperceived concession that corrodes the greatness that is expected of art. Alongside this foundation, others coexist: common sense, lively language, the union of the useful (of knowledge) and the pleasant (of sensitive pleasure): "if you want to see me cry, you must first feel the pain; if a face is sad, somber words are more appropriate; if angry, those loaded with threat; if happy, jovial; if severe, serious".[60]

Seen from another angle, artistic creation either follows tradition or creates something unusual. In the first case, if the author seeks to represent already known characters, their characters must be preserved in what made them most convincing and lasting: "If the writer re-edits the celebrated Achilles, let him be strenuous (fearless), irascible, impetuous, because the laws were not made for him, since everything (in him) is given over to the decision of weapons; Medea will be fierce and indomitable; Ino, tearful; Ixion, perfidious; Oreste, gloomy." In the second case, "when one experiments with a subject never tried on stage, when one dares to create a new character, one should keep it as it appeared at the beginning, faithful to itself".[61] Thus, anyone who thinks that Horace was only

[58] Ibidem, pg. 55.
[59] Ibidem, pg. 57.
[60] Ibidem, pg. 58.
[61] Ibidem, pg. 58.

a staunch defender of tradition is mistaken. Innovation in art was dear to him and, above all, inevitable: “If, by employing delicate caution in the linking of words, a term that has been used for a long time, thanks to an intelligent connection, achieves a new aspect, the style will gain in refinement [...] It was and always will be permissible to give course to a word of recent coinage [...] As, with the rapid passage of the years, the woods change their leaves, so the old generation of words perishes and, like youth, the nascent ones flourish lushly. We are a possession of death, we and what is ours”.[62]

Another crucial aspect for the artistic conception of antiquity, that is, for those after Plato, is that it would be beyond nature, not only because it imitated it, but because it was even superior to it, that is, because it corrected its particular flaws or imperfections, achieving a beauty that only partially exists in the reality of the world. According to Xenophon's account in *Memorabilia*, even Socrates admitted that painting, being initially a copy of visible things, was equally capable of, in the absence of a man whose physique was irreproachable in all aspects, representing a body whose appearance was the most beautiful possible, combining the forms of several bodies or individuals in particular.[63] A well-known legend with the same purpose was related to Zeuxis, the painter of the grapes that deceived the birds. Both Pliny the Elder (Naturalis Historia) and Cicero (De inventione) say that, wanting to portray the extraordinary beauty of Helen, the cause of a war, he gathered the five most beautiful young women of Crotona, and from them he extracted the most perfect forms to compose his ideal representation.[64]

Renaissance classicism also preserved the ancient precepts of similarity and adequacy, of a norm to be learned and transmitted, as well as the specular idea of art, although not necessarily that of exact copy or transposition. But the understanding of the poetic act was the same, and thus Torquato Tasso asserts,

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[62] Ibidem, pgs. 56 e 57.

[63] See Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, Chapter 10, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994. "Moreover, in making as likenesses the beautiful (kalos) forms, you bring together from many what is most beautiful in each, and in this way you make whole bodies appear beautiful, since it is not easy to chance upon a single human being all of whose parts are blameless”.

[64] See Plinio, il Vecchio, *Naturalis Historia*, Pisa: Giardini, 1984; M.T. Cicero, *De inventione*, Whitefish: Kessinger, 2004.

in *Discorsi dell'Arte Poetica ed in particolare sopra il Poema Eroico*, among other things, that poetry is an imitation, carried out in verse, of human actions, and made for the teaching of life; that the verisimilar must be united with the marvelous; that the work must be one, that is, contain a unity of action, although it can contemplate the variety of stories. A conception very close to that of the academic exponent Alessandro Piccolomini.[65] With his *Annotationi nel Libro dela Poetica d'Aristotele*, Piccolomini inserted himself into the debate on literary creation of the time, supporting Vicenzo Maggi's views on the need for the artistic work not only to contain the aspect of *delectare* (to please), but also to include the role of moralising and intellectual benefit for humanity (*docere*).[66] What was to be emphasised, as a naturalist conception, was the fact that a work should not only represent something that shared the principles and order of nature, in other words, the typical, but that it should serve the human species, everywhere and at all times. Detached, therefore, from accidental, particular, or ephemeral conditions.

As René Wellek reminds us in History of Modern Criticism, "by nature one could mean ideal nature, nature as it should be, judged by aesthetic and moral standards. Art was supposed to display beautiful nature, la belle nature. This meant not only a selection, but an elevation, an improvement of nature [...] in sculpture, the human body was to be represented not as it normally is, but as it should ideally be [...] Certainly, the epic hero had the defined function of representing ideal human nature".[67]

Thus, poetics, seen simultaneously as creation, based on natural principles, and idealization of what would become perfect, attributed to the artist an almost divine capacity for the reconstruction and improvement of forms and spirit.

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[65] Torquato Tasso, *Discorsi dell'Arte Poetica ed in particolare sopra il Poema Eroico*, Bari: G. Laterza, 1964.

[66] For example*: "*Troppo lungo sarei, s'io volessi discorrer per tutte le sorti d'utilità, che la poesia in varii modi, s'ella è trattata, come si dee, ed à quel fine, che la fece introdurre, e trovare, e nelle ben governate Città stimare; può recar alla vita nostra. Nè si dee credere, per alcun modo, che tanti escellentissimi poeti, ed antichi, e moderni, havesser posto tanto studio, e diligenzia in questa nobilissima facultà, se non avesser conosciuto, e stimato di far con l'uso di quella giovamento alla vita humana; e non havesser pensato, che con gli essempi di coloro, che com'immagini, e ritratti di somme virtù, e di sommi vizii, ci ponesser con le lor imitazioni innanzi, noi non havessimo à restarne instrutti, ammaestrati, e ben'instituiti."

[67] R. Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950,* Volume 1, Neoclassicism, pgs. 16 e 17, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Even at the beginning of the 19th century, this conception remained intact in the comments of the critic and philosopher Giacomo Leopardi, in *Zibaldone di Pensieri*: “The perfection of a work of Fine Arts is not measured by beauty, but by the most perfect imitation of nature. Now, if it is true that, in substance, the perfection of things consists in the perfect attainment of their object, what is the object of the Fine Arts? Usefulness is not the aim of poetry, although it can please [...] A plant or an animal seen in its true state would delight you more than one painted or otherwise represented, for it is not possible that in imitation there is nothing left to be desired. But the opposite is manifestly true: it appears from this that the source of delight [of what is esteemed] in the arts is not the beautiful [itself], but the imitation [which is beautiful]”.[68]

Yet for Aristotle, beauty constitutes the image of order, symmetry, fair proportion, and a greatness – mathematical and spiritual – capable of being seen in its entirety. And this understanding of proportionality and harmony of parts was applied for centuries in the visual arts and architecture through the so-called golden section. As is well known, this is a mathematical theory by Euclid for establishing proportional relationships between straight line segments and spatial divisions that give us a clear sense, for example, of progressive distancing between the planes of a painting or between the greatness or proportions of bodies and their parts. Such relationships strongly suggested the classical concept of beauty, as they established measures of symmetry, balance, and harmony. Apparently, ancient Greek sculptors and builders already used it, both theoretically and practically. Polykleitos, the author of the famous statue of *Doryphoros, The Spear Bearer*, even wrote a treatise on proportions, now lost. And the architects of his time designed temples stipulating rules such as that the length should be twice the width; or that the proportions of the open vestibule (pronaus) and the internal chamber (cella) should maintain the relationship 3-4-5, with 3 being the depth of the pronaus, 4 its width and 5 the depth of the cella.

The idea of beauty, therefore, tended towards the universalisation of an ideal, towards a representation distanced from the excessively particular, the personal or the subjective, understanding that it arises or is established through a defined

[68] G. Leopardi, *Zibaldone di Pensieri*, pg. 6, Torino: Einaudi, 2004. (Re-issue of *Pensieri Di Varia Filosofia e di Bella Letteratura*, Firenze: Le Monnier, 1921.)

standard, since it is in the multiplicity of singular entities, different from each other, that dissymmetry, disharmony, defect or ugliness are most manifest.

If we were to summarise all the functions of art, according to the various poetic treatises, they would be: *prodesse*, that is, the usefulness that derives from someone developing a technique capable of modifying the raw material or an object (tracing shapes, relating colours or manipulating clay, for example), as well as improving an action (a choreographic leap, a literary composition); *movere*, that is, to move or make an attractive psychic or spiritual sensation resonate within the observer/reader/listener; *delectare*, which is the pleasure, the satisfaction resulting from the previous movement; and finally, *docere* or teaching, that which concerns understanding, cognitive enhancement and the moral refinement of living together in society.

But halfway through the 18th century, this concept was questioned by critics, initially English critics, such as Lord Henry Kames and Thomas Twining. Both argued that art can be both a 'mirror' and a 'convention' (an artificial rule or principle, tacitly and socially accepted). If painting and sculpture (at the time entirely figurative) were imitations, music and architecture were developed using conventional, internal criteria and forms. So, while on the one hand there are iconic arts (Twining), i.e. those that bear a resemblance to reality, there are others, and always have been, that are independent or regulated exclusively, conventionally. Even within literature, only drama would imitate, because the characters speak like real human beings.[69]

From that moment on, the different principle of art was developed as that of a "second nature", "creative act in and of itself", or truly demiurgic action. That which is born of the personal genius, the imaginative capacity, the subjective power of an author and which, through such evidence, transcends objective reality, the facticity of the immediate. On the one hand, genius, that is, a gift and acute or extraordinary sensitivity for perception: "Taste is often separated from genius. Genius is a pure gift of nature; what is produced is the work of a moment;

[69] See Thomas Twining, *Aristotle's Treatise on Poetry Translated: With Notes on the Translation and on the Original and Two Dissertations on Poetical and Musical Imitation*, London: Luke Hansard, 1812; Henry Home (Lord Kames), *Elements of Criticism: Natural Law and Enlightenment Classics*, Carmel: Liberty Fund, 2005.

taste is the work of study and time; it depends on knowledge of a multiplicity of rules, either established or supposed, it produces a beauty that is only conventional. For something to be beautiful according to the rules of taste, it must be elegant, finished, worked without appearing so: to be genius, it must sometimes be neglected; it must appear irregular, steep, wild. [...] Strength and abundance, I don't know what rudeness, irregularity, the sublime and the pathetic, this is the character of genius in the arts; it doesn't move frankly, it doesn't please without astonishing, it astonishes even by its mistakes".[70]

On the other hand, *inspiration*, or a mysterious, non-shareable illumination, capable of creation. What art fundamentally expresses now is the inner world and the hidden relationships or perceptions behind appearances. Hence the romantic vision, for whom consistent reality resides in the self. "Poetry is the authentic absolute real [...] it is the core of my philosophy. The more poetic, the truer [...] The poet is, literally, a fool. But, on the other hand, everything happens in him. He is, at the same time, subject and object, soul and universe; genius is the ability to use imagined objects as if they were real, and to treat them in the same way".[71] Or again, in the words of Alfred de Musset: "Konow that it is the heart that speaks and sighs / While the hand writes, it is the heart that melts".[72]

This change in criteria, from imitation to the creation of another reality, was also inscribed in Kant's ideas, who differentiated that world that manifests itself through causality and necessity, Nature, and the properly human universe of freedom, of the choice of means and ends. The "beautiful", which was previously adequate because it was compared to general norms, since it represented a synthesis of order and pleasure, ceases to be a "thing" and becomes a "judgment" about something. It is no longer objective, universal, but localized and changeable. Reality exists, evidently, but as empirical data, a source for the transformative expression of the spirit, of the "furor poeticus". Art no longer adapts, but frees itself from nature and necessary causality. And the very designation of Poetics gives way to the modernity of aesthetics.

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[70] D'Alembert and Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie Française,* entry Genius, volume 7, 1751.

[71] Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), *Pólen: Fragmentos, Diálogos, Monólogo*, trad. Rubens Rodrigues Torres Filho, São Paulo: Iluminuras, 2021.

[72] Alfred Louis Charles de Musset: "Sachez-le, c'est le cœur qui parle et qui soupire. Lorsque la main écrit, c'est le cœur qui se fond". Primeiras Poesias, Canto IV, Vharpentier, 1863

We must emphasise, however, that the classics also considered the creative role of the unique personality or subjectivity of the creator. But they didn't give it as much importance as the centuries after the 18th. It's enough to remember the fragment of Democritus, for whom the poet creates beauty 'when he writes with enthusiasm' (seized by a god or divine enlightenment). The same can be seen in Plato, where poetics (the creative act) is one of the forms of sacred mania or madness, of contemplative ecstasy.

It turns out that, in both cases, creation is not an internal psychic phenomenon, an underground dive, a "nocturnal flowering", but a donation, a superior blessing, mediated by the muses. Theophrastus, in turn, distinguishes *poiesis*, the non-rational, elusive or emotional content, from *poiema*, the arrangement, the reflected choice that leads the previous impulse to the conformation and ordering of the work. And Horace, in the text already mentioned,[73] observes: "There are those who argue whether what makes a poem worthy of praise comes from art or from nature: for my part, I see no art without rich intuition, and ingenuity is of no use without being worked; each of these qualities complements the others, and they must all cooperate amicably." Boileau also recognizes the importance of natural gifts when juxtaposed with the patient effort of reason: "It is in vain that in Parnassus a reckless author / Thinks of reaching the height of the art of verse. / If he does not feel the secret influence of Heaven, / If his star in birth did not form him a poet, / In his narrow genius he is always a captive; / For him Phoebus is deaf, and Pegasus is restive".[74]

And, contrary to what one might imagine, Edgar Allan Poe, the poet of mysteries and morbid passions, included among the Romantics, was in fact a master of rational construction. In the essay "The Philosophy of Composition", he showed us that the process of his poetic art was always marked by an elaboration far removed from "enlightened" inspirations. The author says: "I choose The Raven as the most generally known. It is my intention to make it clear that no point in its composition refers to accident or intuition – that the work proceeded

[73] Aristóteles; Horácio; Longino, op. cit., Horácio, pg. 67.

[74] Nicolas Boileau-Despréux, *Art Poétique, Librairie Hachette, Paris, 1887, primeira estrofe*: "C'est en vain qu'au Parnasse un téméraire auteur / Pense de l'art des vers atteindre la hauteur. / S'il ne sent point du Ciel l'influence secrète, / Si son astre en naissant ne l'a formé poète, / Dans son génie étroit il est toujours captif; / Pour lui Phébus est sourd, et Pégase est rétif".

step by step, until its conclusion, with the precision and rigidity resulting from a mathematical problem".[75] In other words, the poem followed a logical trajectory, of just measures, despite the contrary emotional effect that emerges from it. First, he chose the length of the poem, neither long nor short. Then, he was guided by the idea of Beauty as the purpose of poetry and the manifestation of sadness. He then opted for a short, sonorous refrain, *never more*, a synthesis of the loss of the beloved woman and the melancholy resulting from her loss. He then imagined a character other than the poet to pronounce the rhyme of sadness: initially a parrot, but finally the somber figure of a crow.

This perspective of combining the classical and the romantic, between intellect and emotion, between logical arrangement and lyrical intuition led Baudelaire to admit that Poe 'taught him how to think' (poetically). It is through this interaction that poetic art achieves its most beautiful moments when it skilfully moves between order and disorder, sensibility and reason. Which is no small feat, and not easily achieved. In literature, who knows best, because a special language must be constructed from common linguistic elements, a 'great language', in the words of Thomas S. Eliot.

Hegel

To understand Hegel's thoughts on art, its decline and disappearance, we must begin with the definition that the philosopher gives to the artistic phenomenon. And the starting point is the understanding of the concept of spirit, that is, the human capacity to consider oneself, that is, of self-consciousness and consciousness of the environment, of thinking about oneself and external nature. "For the beauty of art is the beauty born and reborn of the spirit, and just as the spirit and its productions are higher than nature and its phenomena, the beauty of art is higher than the beauty of nature... it produces works of art from itself as the first intermediary link that reconciles the merely external, the sensual and the transitory, and pure thought, between nature and finite reality and the infinite

[75] E.A. Poe, *The Philosophie of Composition*, 1846, without page number, avaiable at gutenberg.org/cache/epub.

freedom of comprehensive thought".[76] Hence the philosopher states that "art is the apparition or sensible appearance of the idea in the object" (*sinnliches Scheinen*)[77], that is, the sensible manifestation (line, volume, sound, word, sign) of an idea of a spiritual nature, serving so that the spirit itself sees and recognizes itself, even if partially, in this work. Furthermore, "Far from being mere appearances, the phenomena of art must be attributed to a higher reality and a truer existence than common reality".[78] Artistic beauty therefore only appears as a portrait or self-portrait of the spirit. Even music, the most ineffable of the arts, aims to make interiority visible to itself.

This understanding, although expressed less technically, philosophically speaking, had already been formulated in ancient times by Cicero in his work *Orator ad Brutum*. Over there, can we read: "I do not think that there is anything so beautiful anywhere whose original, from which it has been copied, is not even more beautiful, as is the case with a face in relation to its portrait; but we cannot apprehend this new object either by sight or by hearing or any other of the senses; on the contrary, it is only in spirit and thought that we know it. This is why we can imagine sculptures even more beautiful than those of Phidias, which are the most perfect of their kind; when this artist worked on the creation of his Zeus and his Athena, he didn't consider just any man, that is, a really existing one, whom he could have imitated, but it was in his spirit that the sublime representation of beauty resided".[79]

But how does the relationship between the spirit and the sensible reality of the work of art occur? In an apparent contradiction, Hegel would say that art has the function of freeing us from the appearance of what is sensible. External objects are apprehended by the senses in a manner that is, above all, immediate and, therefore, imperfect. Because of this sensible immediacy, the apprehension of the object is almost devoid of ideas, of thoughts (*gedankenlos*) about it. At first, therefore, the apprehension of the object is passive, a simple, non-reflective impression. At a second moment, the object can become a desire for possession

[76] G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Capítulo I, pgs. 2 e 9, avaiable at lernhelfer.de.
[77] Ibidem, pg 10.
[78] Ibidem, pg. 10
[79] M.T. Cicero, Orator ad Brutum, apud Erwin Panofsky, *Idea: A Evolução do Conceito do Belo*, pgs. 15 e 16, São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1994.

and use by the subject. In other words, the subject seeks to incorporate the object into himself or to use it practically (a meal, a tool, an instrument, a tree, a pen, a computer, money, and even an emotional partner). Ultimately, the subject intends to consume, incorporate, or assimilate the external object. But beyond this relationship of possession, of a merely sensitive and immediate consciousness of the subject with the object, the human being is capable of, spiritually, maintaining another type of relationship or apprehension that is of an artistic or aesthetic order, which Kant had already called *disinterested apprehension*. Therefore, he states that: "'A second way in which what is available externally can give itself to the spirit is, unlike individual sensory perception and practical desire, the purely theoretical relationship with intelligence. The theoretical contemplation of things is not interested in consuming them in their details and being satisfied and sustained by them, but in knowing them in their generality, finding their inner nature and law, and understanding them according to their concept".[80]

For Hegel, to the extent that the subject is a being determined by thought, he can surpass or overcome the immediate and merely sensible sensitivity of this relationship based on desire and will. This occurs when the subject ceases to consider what he sees or feels as an immediate and useful reality, which is what is seen in a work of art. In other words, a tree or a hunted animal in a still life painting cease to have utilitarian interest and are transported to the realm of ideal appearance, no longer sensible or immediate. In a work of art, this overcoming, this liberation of the sensible is indispensable and characterizes it as a symbolic and representative object. The words of a poem no longer have the function of order, of orientation, of practical purpose, but of reflection on the human condition in general, universal, timeless. Thus, the work of art does not satisfy an immediate and material need, but establishes, now in Kant's words, an agreement between imagination and understanding.

[80] Ibidem, pg. 44: "Eine zweite Weise, in welcher das äußerlich Vorhandene für den Geist sein kann, ist der einzelnen sinnlichen Anschauung und praktischen Begierde gegenüber das rein theoretische Verhältnis zur Intelligenz. Die theoretische Betrachtung der Dinge hat nicht das Interesse, dieselben in ihrer Einzelheit zu verzehren und sich sinnlich durch sie zu befriedigen und zu erhalten, sondern sie in ihrer Allgemeinheit kennen zu lernen, ihr inneres Wesen und Gesetz zu finden und sie ihrem Begriff nach zu begreifen".

By overcoming the simple condition of sensible appearance, the work of art takes a step forward and approaches thought and, therefore, Hegel says that art is the middle ground between immediate or direct sensibility and pure or ideal thought, the latter being the domain of science and philosophy (*Kunstwerk steht in der Mitte zwischen der unmittelbares Sinnlichkeit einer Seits und dem ideellen Gedanken anderer Seits*).[81] If we understand art, we will no longer be deceived by immediate sensibility, but we will seek in it the transparency that leads to a spiritual world possibly contained within it, which is its essence. Remembering, however, "that appearance is indispensable to being or essence, for truth would not exist if it did not seem like and appear" (*Doch der Schein selbst ist dem Wesen wesentlich, die Wahrheit wäre nicht, wenn sie nicht schiene und erschiene*).[82]

The human being is therefore an amphibious being, because he lives in the world of the senses, i.e. forms, and in the world of the spirit, i.e. thought, ideas, and it is up to art to unify both spheres.

But the domain of art is above nature and the finite (particular) spirit; it does not coincide with logic (when thought manifests itself to itself) or with nature, objectively. In other words, artistic beauty does not exist in nature, nor is it of a logical order, and therefore does not form part of the finite (particular, of a given object or agent) spirit. The idea of artistic beauty belongs to the sphere of absolute spirit. And it is only absolute spirit when it is recognised as such in the time and community that produces it.

Considered in its highest and truest dignity, art is therefore situated on the same plane as religion and philosophy. It is yet a manifestation of the Idea, that is, of an adequate concept (*adäquate Begriff*). In art, religion and philosophy, man rises above private interests, above opinions, above individual knowledge in order to express the truth, that is, the spirit in itself and for itself.

But each historical stage reveals, in its artistic objects, an idea of beauty and a certain manifestation of the spirit. In the history of art, therefore, there is no evolution, as in science and technology, which are simultaneously cumulative and perfectible. Hegel then distinguishes, up to his time, three particular forms of art and of the manifestation of artistic beauty. These particular forms are characterized by their internal determinations, and the realization of the idea or

[81] G.W.F. Hegel, op. cit. pg. 45.
[82] Ibidem, pg. 45.

content will correspond to a formal realization. “Conversely, the deficiencies of the form are also deficiencies of the idea, for it is the latter that gives an internal meaning to the external manifestation in which it is realized”.[83] The particular forms are (or were) *symbolic, classical, and romantic*.

In symbolic art, the idea is still imperfect and groping. In Hegel's words, “the idea still seeks its true artistic expression, but does not find it, because, being still indeterminate and abstract, it cannot create an external manifestation in accordance with its essence. It finds itself, in the presence of the phenomena of nature and human life, as if it were faced with an alien world. Instead of combining and identifying, of fusing form and idea, it only achieves a superficial and crude approximation”.[84]

The symbol, in its enigmatic and mysterious character, applies particularly to an entire historical era, to oriental art and its extraordinary creations. It characterises that order of monuments and emblems through which the peoples of the East sought to express their ideas and could only do so in an equivocal and obscure way. Instead of beauty and regularity, their works offer us a bizarre, grandiose, fantastic aspect.

“It soon becomes clear that the idea, in accordance with its concept, cannot remain in the vagueness and abstraction of general ideas... This simple adaptation of content and form constitutes the second form of art, classical art. But the realization of works of classical art demands that the spirit which is to be represented by art be not the absolute spirit, the spirit fully imbued with spirituality and interiority, but rather the spirit still tainted with particularity and abstraction... Classical art has gone very far in the development of its concept and has succeeded in representing the idea in the form of a spiritual individuality in a perfect way... When, thirdly, the idea of beauty conceives itself as the absolute spirit, and therefore free in and for itself, it no longer has the possibility of fully realizing itself by external means. Thus it destroys the fusion between the inner depth and the outer manifestation that had been achieved by classical art... And thus Romantic art emerges: since, by virtue of its free spirituality, its content

[83] *Curso de Estética, O Belo na Arte*, opus cit, Desenvolvimento do Ideal em Formas de Arte Particulares (Development of the Ideal in Particular Art Forms), p. 338.
[84] Idem, Ibidem, same page.

demands more than its external and corporeal representation could give it, Romantic art shows itself to be completely indifferent to form. This gives rise to a new split between depth and form, but for reasons opposite to those we find in works of symbolic art".[85]

The Hegelian conviction that classicism has reached the apogee of artistic manifestations is shared by not a few intellectuals, including Albert Camus, who expresses it in one of his chronicles collected in *L'Été*, entitled 'The Exile of Helena', as well as Winckelmann, who wrote: "The only way for us to become great and, when possible, even inimitable, is to imitate the ancients".[86] Camus writes: "The Mediterranean possesses a tragic solar system that is not that of mist. On certain afternoons, over the sea, at the foot of the mountains, night falls on the perfect curve of a small bay and, from the silent waters, a distressing fullness emerges. One can understand in these places that if the Greeks experienced despair, it was always through beauty and its oppressive qualities. Our time, on the contrary, has fed its despair in ugliness and convulsions [...] We have exiled beauty and the Greeks have taken up arms for it".[87]

Returning to Hegel and his analysis that leads to a decadence of the arts, it would already be found in the topic of romantic art. In his understanding, the real content of this style lies in the fact that it possesses an absolutely intrinsic character, as if the spirit were turned only in on itself. In his words, this attribute "implies an absolutely negative attitude towards all particularity, a simple agreement with oneself that ignores all separation and all the processes of nature, the succession of birth, disappearance and reappearance, all limitation of spiritual life... it is the individual, real subject, animated by inner life, that acquires an infinite value, as the only center where the eternal moments of that absolute truth that is realized only as spirit are elaborated and from which they radiate... the divine element is considerably reduced in romantic art. First of all, nature is stripped of its divine character; the sea, the mountains and valleys, the rivers and springs, time and night, as well as all the general processes of nature lose their

[85] Ibidem, opus cit., pgs. 339 e 340.
[86] Johann Joachim Winckelmann*, Reflexões Sobre a Imitação das Obras Gregas na Pintura e na Escultura, pg. 39, Porto Alegre: Movimento/UFRGS, 1975.*
[87] A. Camus, *L'Été*, pg. 87, Gallimard, Paris, 1959, avaiable at athenaphilosophique.net.

value as a means of representing the Absolute, or constituent parts of it.... The content is thus all concentrated and located in the intrinsicness of the spirit, in feeling and representation... The ends and enterprises that he has to achieve consist of man's inner struggle with himself".[88]

Gradually, therefore, the spirit of modern times began to infiltrate Western culture through the psychic interiority, subjectivity, and free will typical of the bourgeois spirit. Increasingly, the tendency of art would then be to focus on immediate, phenomenal reality, rather than on the generality or universality of spiritual expressions.

The importance of subjectivity and individual freedom, which gained prominence and gradually shaped modernity (both in the civil and political spheres), came from a spirit that still favoured theoretical, scientific knowledge, as well as the practical usefulness of technology. This autonomy-hungry spirit's demand for scientificity penetrates the very idea of beauty and the artistic object, which makes them both tend towards the pure concept.

Finally, considering that form begins to acquire independence in relation to content, art would already in its time move towards a disinterested appearance of objects. Technical means and artistic material thus acquire an unprecedented importance: color, sound, wordplay and pure movement stand out over the union of form and spiritual content.

## Aesthetics and the Modern World

As a category of analysis of artistic productions, the term "aesthetics" was used for the first time by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, a disciple of Leibniz, in the work *Aesthetica*, dated 1750, defining it as *scientia cognitionis sensitivae*, the science of sensitive knowledge or sensitivity, including the knowledge of Beauty. Which, in turn, will be considered as the satisfaction and excitement of a desire (*Wohlgefallen und Erregung eines Verlanges*). It was then differentiated from *scientia rationalis*, the science of abstract, reflective, conceptual knowledge.

The name also comes from the ancient Greek *aisthetikós*, a material object capable of impressing or being perceived by the senses, as opposed, in its origin,

[88] *Curso de Estética, O Belo na Arte*, A Arte Romântica (The Romantic Art), opus cit, pgs. 571 a 579.

to objects or things that are only thought about, immaterial (noetikós). Baumgarten also clings to a distinction that Ludovico Muratori, an Italian historiographer, had mentioned regarding the much broader concept of Beauty within classical aesthetics: “We usually consider as Beautiful that which, when seen, heard or felt, delights us, pleases us or captivates us, causing us a sweet sensation and affection. Most beautiful, above all things, is God, the source of all beauty; beautiful is the Sun, a beautiful flower, a stream, a painting, the sound of a musical instrument, an ingenious expression, an elegantly told or written story, a virtuous action. Among the many and so different beauties with which Nature is full, some are corporeal, others incorporeal... Leaving aside corporeal beauties, let us restrict ourselves to the incorporeal ones only, which we also call spiritual or intellectual [referring to Truth, Goodness, Justice, Kindness, or, generically, the virtues]”.[89]

As we have seen, until the mid-eighteenth century, works of art were considered objects that revealed something beyond their particular materiality, an order external to man. They were therefore capable of a bond of transcendence. Beauty expressed or illustrated an idea that was superior to it – a unity or synthesis of manifestations that were not only material or formal, but, above all, ideal, that is, belonging to the sphere of ideas. A Gothic cathedral realized the ideal of grandeur, celestial elevation, and luminosity typical of divine experiences. The artistic object maintained commitments to a more comprehensive moral, religious, historical, political or intellectual notion. From this point of view, it signaled or represented, under a particular or concrete aspect, an intelligible truth that was different from art itself, which here was a privileged vehicle of perception and understanding. However, since the artistic object was a manifestation linked to sensitivity and emotion, an immediate participation in life, it could not aspire to the fullness of knowledge (brought by philosophy, religion, natural sciences, politics, etc.).

It was only with the cultural revolution of nineteenth-century individualism that aesthetics began to claim its rights. In 1733, for example, the abbot Du Bos published his *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting*. In them, his attention

[89] L. Muratori, *Della Perfetta Poesia Italiana*, pgs. 63 e 64, Bartolomeu Soliani, Modena, 1706.

was focused on the “subjective effects” experienced by the reader and spectator, shifting the analysis from the rule and form of elaboration of a work to personal “taste” and the sensation of sensory pleasure. For Du Bos, “We experience every day that verses and paintings cause a sensitive pleasure, but it is no less difficult to explain the nature of this pleasure, which often resembles affliction and whose symptoms are sometimes the same as those of the most intense pain. The art of poetry and the art of painting are never more applauded than when they succeed in afflicting us... We don't hesitate to reject, like an unfaithful mirror, the mirror in which we don't recognise ourselves... The pleasure we feel when we see the imitations that painters and poets are able to make of objects that would have aroused passions in us, the reality of which we would have had to endure, is pure pleasure”.[90]

In other words, an autonomy of the sensible was suggested in relation to the knowable, to logic, to reason, and to ideal norms. And so, entirely human and subjective, art could multiply itself in an infinity of perspectives, without ties to the other provinces of reason or faith. Taste, the pure form of pure sensibility, was enough. It was not for nothing that Voltaire, commenting on the entry “Beautiful” in his *Philosophical Dictionary*, recorded the nascent relativism of the idea: “Ask a toad what Beauty is, the Great Beautiful, the *to kalon*, and he will answer that it is its toad... Ask the devil. He will tell you that beauty is a pair of horns, four claws and a tail... After much reflection, he concluded that beauty is extremely relative, just as what is decent in Japan is indecent in Rome, what is fashionable in Paris is not fashionable in Beijing”.[91] The decline of the universal was making its appearance in the world of art.

After Baumgarten, who claimed the free territory of aesthetics, independent of morality, Karl Moritz, in *On the Formative Imitation of Beauty*,[92] from 1788, reiterated the autonomy of the artistic work. For the author, art is an exclusive world, an organic and beautiful microcosm, and beautiful precisely because it does not need to be useful. In this moment of transformation, beauty ceases to

[90] Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Reflexions Critiques sur la poésie et la peinture,* First part and section 3, no page number, avaiable at obvil.sorbonne-universite.fr.
[91] Voltaire, *Dicionário Filosófico*, entry Belo, Beleza, pg. 29, avaiable at dominiopublico.gov.br.
[92]Seer Karl Philipp Moritz [1788], *Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021.

be an abstract conception that particular works realize or approximate to, and becomes a markedly sensitive and individualized relationship – a relationship between a given object and the perception that a spectator makes of it. In other words, beauty began to lose its attribute of a general, intelligible principle, subject to rules or norms guiding creation, to gain more intimate forums of feelings and gestures that might be expressed there. Beauty would now be "aesthetics", any form that impressed the sensibility. Unlike the older poetics, the concept of aesthetics shifted the meaning or focus of analysis. In other words, it moved away from the artistic object, from the thing produced, and became concerned with the artistic act and subject. It was no longer a question of rational knowledge of beauty (which selects or imposes criteria), but of a reflective judgment, that is, of internalized relationships and feelings of pleasure that a subject can experience.

On the other hand, and if properly observed, the recent aesthetic postulations accompanied the socio-political transformations of the period. This is why Terry Eagleton wrote: "What is at issue here is nothing less than the production of an entirely new kind of human subject - one who, like the work of art, discovers the law in the depths of his own free identity, rather than in some oppressive external power. The liberated subject is the one who has appropriated the law as the very principle of his autonomy; he has broken the tablets of the law in order to reinscribe the law in his own flesh. Obedience to the law thus becomes obedience to their own inner being. 'The heart,' writes Rousseau in *Émile*, 'only receives the law that comes from itself: by trying to imprison it, we free it; it can only be dominated when we let it free".[93]

For Kant, in *Critique of Judgment* or *Critique of the Faculty of Judgment*, there are two types of judgment or possibilities of relating the universal and the particular. One of them is the determining judgment, which relies on the support or evidence of the universal (of the law, of the principle, of the common rule) and is pronounced "scientifically"; the other is the reflective judgment, or of taste, which, initially, only has the particular at its disposal – in the case of aesthetics, an artistic work or action. For this reason, the judgment of taste constitutes, above all, a "hope", a type of indeterminate thought that seeks to conform to the universal. Hence, it is not characterized as a concept, but rather as a guiding idea

[93] Terry Eagleton, *A Ideologia da Estética*, pgs. 21 e 22, Zahar Editores, Rio de Janeiro, 1990.

or empirical association. Beauty, then, signifies an internal and contingent harmony of the subject, a harmony obtained between the understanding and the imagination that the work arouses. These faculties of knowledge, imagination, and understanding, move freely because no determined concept assigns them to a special rule of knowledge (categories). Consequently, beauty is not inscribed in the work or even in its content, but emanates from a unity or combination of form and content that are the result of the subject's faculties. It also manifests itself as a free phenomenon, detached from an objective interest, from an ulterior purpose, consisting of something absolutely autonomous. Imagination and understanding always establish a 'free game', a playful behaviour in front of an art object, which leads the author to state that art is an "endless purpose". This is the point of view of the "qualitative analysis" of aesthetic judgement.[94]Por um exame "quantitativo", o julgamento deve ser universal e compartilhado. Em hipótese alguma pode resumir-se ao que é *particularmente* agradável (apenas para mim).

Ou seja, para que ele ocorra, exige-se um "senso comum", uma reciprocidade de sentimentos, uma comunhão (*Gemeinschaft*) entre os valores da obra e os da recepção de quem a vê – o espectador, o público, a assistência, o leitor. Para certos comentadores, no entanto, a introdução deste "senso comum" aparece como uma tentativa de Kant para salvar a "universalidade" da obra artística face ao juízo absoluto do gosto.

Heidegger, probably influenced by Hegel, would say that art is, indeed, a form of knowledge.[95] This is because man (*Dasein*) realizes his existence among beings. Therefore, to guide his conduct he needs to "know about beings". The author says: "According to the usual conception, the work originates from and through the activity of the artist. However, what the artist is, is he through what and from what? Through the work [...] only a work allows the artist to emerge as a master of art".[96]

[94] I. Kant, *Crítica da Faculdade do Juízo*, São Paulo: Forense, 2012.
[95] Martin Heidegger, A Origem da Obra de Arte, *Caminhos de Floresta*, Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1977.
[96] Idem, ibidem, pg. 8.

First of all, the work of art has the character of a thing (*Dinghafte*). But precisely because it intends to go beyond its character as a thing, it is also something other, something beyond (*αλλο αγορεύει*, writes Heidegger, using Greek). It is composed of the thing on which it rests, and this coming together (*συμβαλλειν*) is becoming a symbol. Through art, one of the possibilities of unraveling or discovering beings, phenomena, and human relations is realized. In addition to a subjective doing or constructing, art is a knowing how to conduct oneself among beings in the form of a production. It manifests itself as a path in search of truth, which is also the discovery (illumination and concealment) of beings. Continuing, the author asserts: "Now we raise the question of truth, in view of the work [...] it is necessary to make the event of truth in the work manifest again. Let us deliberately choose for this attempt a work that does not belong to figurative art. An architectural work, a Greek temple, is not a copy of anything. It simply stands there in the middle of a rocky and rugged valley. The architectural work envelops the figure of the god and in this concealment (*Verbergung*) lets it advance through the open portico into the sacred precinct. Through the temple the god becomes present in the temple. This being-present of the god is in itself the extension and delimiting of the sacred precinct. But the temple and the precinct do not vanish into the indeterminate. The work that the temple is articulates and gathers around itself the unity of the paths and connections in which birth and death, misfortune and blessing, triumph and disgrace, perseverance and decline [...] confer upon the human being the figure of his destiny (*Geschick*) [...] The work that the temple is, standing there, originally makes a world evident and, at the same time, restores it to the earth, which, in this way, only then appears as the native soil".[97]

When art, or the work of art, becomes an eminently aesthetic expression, it loses its capacity to express a relationship with the absolute, with the unconditioned, to reveal it in the midst of history. Aestheticism and formalism tend to diminish this greatness of the artistic mission, because the beauty of the work of art consists precisely in the realisation of the truth of Being, in the construction of a world open to the manifestation of entities and their unveiling (art would be an ontological battlefield), and would not be restricted to making the earth appear,

[97] Ibidem, pgs. 38 e 39.

that is, the raw material of the work of art, from which it draws its impulse, which constitutes mere aesthesia.

Art in the 20th century

In the 20th century, art sculpted the definitive image of an autotelic universe, that is, one in which forms or means already constitute purposes. Beauty, in the ancient or traditional sense, required norms and conventions in order to be elaborated or discovered. Aesthetics chose to create “unusual tensions”, especially those constructed with the internal possibilities of its language. Its sources and objectives are valuable in themselves, for their formal properties. Although works can be evaluated by external criteria – as a vehicle of knowledge, a principle of morality, an expression of elevated feelings or a representation of social and political conflicts (individual versus society, individual and society), these are not the truly aesthetic points. In the words of Harold Osborne, for example, “Perhaps the most distinctive feature of practical aesthetic attitudes today has been the concentration of attention on the work of art as an independent thing, an artefact with its own patterns and functions, rather than an instrument manufactured in order to favour purposes that could be equally favoured by other means. No one denies that works of art can legitimately reflect... a reality outside themselves, or that they can effectively concretise and enact social, religious and other values... [but these things] are considered irrelevant to its quality as a work of art... the excellence of any work of art as art is judged according to its suitability for aesthetic contemplation. This means that art is autonomous”.[98]

It differs greatly from a concern such as that of Tolstoy, who, guided by moral reasons, asserts: "It is necessary for a society in which works of art emerge and are sustained to discover whether everything that claims to be art really is; whether everything that is art is good; how it is thought of in our society, and, if it is good, whether it is important and worthy of the sacrifices it demands”.[99] When cerebralism in art began to emerge, that is, when purely aesthetic conceptions

[98] H. Osborne, Estética e Teoria da Arte, pgs. 247 e 248, Cultrix, São Paulo, 1970.
[99] Leon Tolstói, *O que é Arte?*, Chapter II, pg. 30, Ediouro, São Paulo, 2002.

were announced, it was possible to perceive the inflection of the values that predominated in the 20th century.

In 1925, Ortega y Gasset wrote and published a booklet entitled *The Dehumanisation of Art*, in which he examined the aesthetic characteristics that were taking hold and spreading in the 20th century. On the one hand, he was convinced that romanticism and realism had exhausted their combinations and that it was therefore to be expected that a new artistic form would emerge; on the other, he sought to show its new aspects and meanings. Says the author: "This is why the new art divides the public into two classes of people: those who understand it and those who don't: in other words, artists and those who aren't artists. The new art is an artistic art (made by artists, for artists). I don't intend to exalt this form of art now, and even less to denigrate the one used in the last century [...] Twenty years ago, the most attentive young people of two successive generations in Paris, Bern, London, New York, Rome, and Madrid were surprised by the inescapable fact that traditional art didn't interest them; what's more, it repulsed them [...] If you analyse the new style, you'll find in it tendencies that are extremely closely related to each other. It tends: 1. to dehumanise art; 2. to avoid living forms; 3. to make the work of art nothing but a work of art; 4. to consider art as a game, and nothing more; 5. to an essential irony; 6. to elude all falsehood and therefore avoid scrupulous realisation; 7. art, according to the young artists, is something without any transcendence".[100]

Concerning the first aspect, analyzes the author: "If, when comparing a painting in the new style with others from 1860, we follow the simplest order, we will begin by comparing the objects that are represented in one and the other. It is immediately clear that the artist of 1860 intended, above all, that the objects in his painting should have the same air and appearance that they have outside of it (a man, a house, a mountain) [...] In the recent painting, everything happens the other way around; it is not that the painter makes mistakes and that his deviations from the natural-human do not reach this human, it is that they point to a path opposite to that which can lead us to the human. Far from the painter going more or less numbly towards reality, we see that he went against it. He

[100] J. Ortega y Gasset, *A Desumanização da Arte*, pgs. 29 a 31, Cortez Editora, São Paulo, 1991.

decidedly set out to deform it, to break its human aspect, to dehumanize it. With the things represented in the traditional painting, we could live together in an illusory way [...] With the things represented in the new painting, coexistence is impossible: by removing their aspect of lived reality, the painter has cut the bridge and burned the ships that could transport us to our usual world. He leaves us enclosed in an abstruse universe, forcing us to deal with objects that are not humanly appropriate to deal with [...] It is not a question of painting something that is completely different from a man, or a house, or a mountain, but rather of painting a man who looks as little like a man as possible, a house that retains what is strictly necessary for us to witness its metamorphosis, a cone that has miraculously emerged from where it was a mountain, as a snake emerges from its skin. For the new artist, aesthetic pleasure emanates from this triumph over the human... Sometimes this dislike of the living form ignites into hatred and produces public conflicts. The revolution against the images of Eastern Christianity, the Semitic ban on reproducing animals, an instinct opposed to that of the men who painted the cave of Altamira, undoubtedly have, along with their religious meaning, a root in aesthetic sensibility [...] In the new art there is evidently this strange iconoclastic feeling that occasionally arises in religion and art [...] A curious reversal of Greek culture, which was, in its heyday, so friendly to living forms".[101]

In this regard, José Merquior, in *As Ideias e as Formas* (The Ideas and Forms), opines that: "The discovery of the subjectivism, underlying modern aesthetic radicalism, unmasks the apparent innocence of these modernist games. Absolute object and absolute form are phantoms (in the Freudian sense) of the *tyrannical imagination*. Radical modernism has shown a total disdain for the minimum conditions of understanding and recognition that presided over the reception of works of art by even an enlightened and liberal public. In turn, in most of its manifestations, this tyranny of the aesthetic imagination has generated a general attribute of genuinely modern works – their chronic obscurity, whether formal or semantic... The two archetypal poles of radical modern art: Malevich's absolute form and Duchamp's absolute object, are both extreme symbols of this puritanical

[101] Ibidem, pgs. 41 a 43 e 68.

purism and this tyrannical imagination. The semantic regime of the modern work or anti-work is distinguished by the constancy of enigmatism - what Walter Benjamin thematized in his concept of allegory, and Adorno called the chronic 'participation in darkness'... Under the 'playful' and 'metamorphic' compulsion of the artistic ego, subjectivism, and not just the legitimate and necessary aesthetic subjectivity, began to dictate its law to the judicial impotence of new audiences and the complicity of the majority of critics... It does not even occur to us to ask whether this metamorphic furor of modern art does not hide certain deficiencies, the main one being what the Englishman calls 'ungrowingness', the lack or atrophy of the capacity for growth, in the sense of *maturation*".[102]

Nowadays, the emphasis of aesthetic analyses has sought to break away from the connection between utility, beauty and the artistic object, even using new linguistic criteria. The aim is to clean up non-aesthetic terms that have traditionally contaminated the discourse on art. An example of this investigation, coming from Gestalt, would be the assumption that we perceive 'emotional qualities' directly in objects when we observe their totality. These qualities can be expressed by words and ideas such as 'delicate, graceful, dynamic, static, bright or sombre, joyful or austere' that the work of art carries with it. They would not, therefore, be simple mental projections of the viewer and would not be confused with the changing and relative concept of beauty.

Unlike theoretical science, which remains restricted to objectivity, without the predominant spaces of individualism, aesthetics has achieved the most absolute subjectivism that humanity has been capable of up to now. And the artist has ceased to be someone who illustrates, discovers or expresses, in a sensitive way, divine and natural truths, theoretically lasting, to become an inventor, a creator of forms consistent with his human condition – that of being finite, ephemeral and circumstantial. Therefore, art has become an increasingly rapid process of mutation of the forms themselves, which are "truths in themselves" (truth now as a radically subjective point of view).

## Breaking a Code

[102] J.G. Merquior, *As Ideias e as Formas*, A Tirania da Imaginação, pgs. 111, 113, 118, Editora Nova Fronteira, Rio de Janeiro, 1981.

It can be considered a banality or a truism that artistic expressions have links to or receive significant influences from the cultural universe of their time – from social organizations and conflicts, productive forces, available technological and scientific levels, political structures, prevailing ideologies and mentalities, prevailing mythical-religious conceptions, among many other factors that are constantly at play.

And we cannot forget past eras, the traditions to which we return or with which we confront. In any case, there is always a past historical involvement and a current contemporary perspective, which results in changing, mutable and transitory situations, both in the perception of the world of its creators, in the characteristics of the art produced, and in the social structures to which it is directed. Such evidence does not go so far as to induce a single meaning, to establish a rigid or absolutely necessary connection between socioeconomic infrastructure and symbolic superstructure. It is also unquestionable that two civilizations or cultures with similar material bases and living together produce their own values, content and artistic forms. Consequently, they are distinct from each other. One may be more rationalist and the other sensorial. The first may be more naturalist, while the second may be stylized or spontaneous. As there will be differences in perception, treatment, techniques used and meanings attributed to the works.

The 20th century, however, has seen ruptures and innovations that were hitherto unusual, both in their forms and in the depth and dynamism with which they occurred. All we have to do is turn our attention to the political, socio-economic and, above all, scientific and technological transformations that took place in the previous century and which have come to fruition in an astonishing way in contemporary times. If we remember that it has been characterised, among dozens of factors, not only by democratic and social conquests, but also by totalitarianism that was previously unthinkable; by the growing comforts of public life and private satisfaction, by kinetic experiences of speed, but also by the simultaneous irruption of the masses and minorities, by economic crises with a worldwide effect, by unprecedented exterminations and the prospect of global destruction.

Over the course of the century, the tension in Beauty – well observed by Baudelaire – between a desire to express the eternal, the immutable, the memorable, and another to capture the circumstantial, the fleeting, the innovation of the present (which "is the transitory, the fleeting, the contingent, it is half of art"[103]) ended up relaxing and sliding, with greater intensity, towards this second side of the scale. Of course, all the previous periods were also contemporary phases. When the Gothic style took hold in architectural design, it was called *opus modernum*, different at the time from the Romanesque *opus antiquum*. So, what difference in the creative process could there be between the most ancient eras and the 20th century?

If we compare in general terms the schools or styles developed between the Renaissance – including the close allusions to ancient classicism, as well as to medieval religious figures – and the end of the 19th century, we can note at least one constant permeating the changes produced in the various conceptions and expressions of art, namely, the preservation of a code, the invariance of a core or the stability of certain principles around which poetic variations and clashes were proposed and realized. The permanence of this code was based on the conviction that art was not a "problem in itself", but a form of expression capable of illuminating and providing knowledge or a sensitive representation of ideas, contemplations, aspirations, and human conflicts, overcoming the irreducible ephemerality of existence. Even an enthusiast of modernity, such as André Malraux, felt it right to admit that art would be an *antidestination*,[104] understanding that it allows man to establish his own meaning in the world, considering that the world and life appear to him as something senseless, incomprehensible or even absurd. With this, an ancient tradition was established in Western culture – that of figurative mimesis or the representation of a common and historically identifiable universe, be it "hieratic", "idealized" or "naturalistic", the link to a closed web of meanings, allusions or mythical, religious, social or political associations, the so-called humanist culture –, but it was gradually abandoned.

[103] Charles Baudelaire*, The painter of modern life*, IV - La Modernité: "La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable. Il y a eu une modernité pour chaque peintre ancien". Avaiable at blog.ac-versailles.fr.
[104] See *Les voix du silence*, Galerie de la Pleiade, NRF, Paris, 1951.

In short, art had a belief, religious or rational, that prevented the erosion of its foundations and its purposes.

For Walter Benjamin, photography proved to be the initial weapon of this great impact: “When the first truly revolutionary reproduction technique, photography, appeared [...] artists sensed the approach of a crisis that no one could deny. They reacted by professing ‘art for art's sake’, in other words, a theology of art. This doctrine... led directly to a negative theology: in fact, one ended up conceiving of a pure art that refused not only to play any essential role, but even to submit to the conditions always imposed by an objective matter”.[105]

Because there was something allegorical about that common character of transcendence - in the sense of an ‘elusive presence’, but nevertheless human or divine beyond the work - that required a memory, an analogy, a comparison between different domains of previous and ongoing cultures. A distance was maintained, an evocation of a sacred kind, even in profane matters, which the author called an “aura”. From another point of view, i.e. in the realm of techniques or skills, the ritualisation or standardisation of learning, knowledge, and “academic” models was minimised to the point of almost disappearing.

Writing on the subject in 1933, Herbert Read said in Art Now: “There have been revolutions in history before our own time. There is a revolution in every generation, and periodically, every century or so, we have a major or profound change of sensibility which we recognize as a period - the Trecento, the Quattrocento, the Baroque, the Romantic, the Impressionist, and so on. But I do think that we can already discern a qualitative difference in the contemporary revolution: it is not so much a revolution, which implies subversion or even a return, as a dispersion, a degeneration, some would say a dissolution [...] The goal of five centuries of European effort has been clearly abandoned”.[106]

By the end of the century, critics such as Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane were arguing that modernism “is the only art that responds to the fabric of our chaos. It is the art resulting from Heisenberg's ‘uncertainty principle’, from the destruction of civilisation and reason in the First World War, from the

[105] W. Benjamin, *A Obra de Arte na Época de suas Técnicas de Reprodução*, pgs. 16 e 17, Coleção Os Pensadores, Abril Cultural, São Paulo, 1975.
[106] Herbert Read, *Art Now,* pgs. 59 e 60, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1933.

world transformed and reinterpreted by Marx, Freud and Darwin, from capitalism and continuous industrial acceleration, from existential vulnerability to meaninglessness or absurdity. It is the literature of technology. It is art derived from the dismantling of collective reality and conventional notions of causality, from the destruction of traditional notions about the integrity of individual character, from the linguistic chaos that ensues when public notions of language are discredited and all realities become subjective fictions".[107]

In his last work, *Aesthetic Theory*, written over ten years and in the form of sparse, sometimes contradictory sentences, Theodor Adorno analyses the modern arts as a socio-cultural phenomenon and points out, among many other things, that: "The signs of disorganization are the seal of authenticity of modernism; that by which it, disorganization, desperately denies the closure of invariance. The explosion is one of its invariants. The anti-traditionalist energy transforms itself into a devouring whirlwind [...] Even when the modern preserves, as techniques, the traditional acquisitions, these are suppressed by the shock that leaves no legacy intact [...] this is, paradoxically, the foundation of the modern and gives it its normative character [...] The experimental *gestus*, a term that designates the artistic procedures for which the new is obligatory, has remained, but today it designates something qualitatively different: the fact that the artistic subject practices methods whose concrete results he cannot foresee [...], the unforeseen is not only an effect, but also has an objective side".[108]

Shortly before this passage, Adorno had already defended the idea that abstraction in modern art "is linked to the commodity (or commercial) character of art. That is why, when it is first articulated theoretically in Baudelaire, modernism immediately has the tone of unhappiness. The new is similar to death. What behaves like Satanism in Baudelaire is the identification with the real negativity of the social situation. Cosmic pain (*der Weltschmerz*) is displaced into the world. Something of this remains mixed, like yeast, in all modern art".[109]

Plastic Arts and "Dehumanisation"

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[107] M. Bradbury; J. McFarlane, *Modernismo: Guia Geral*, trad. Denise Bottmann, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1989, p. 19.
[108] T. Adorno, *Teoria Estética*, pg. 35, trad. Arthur Mourão, Lisboa: Edições 70, 1970.
[109] Ibidem, p. 33

Thus, taking the plastic arts as an initial example, human and natural realities still remained in Impressionism as elements of the representational and tectonic code, despite formal simplifications and the economy of strokes, subjective choices, and the decomposition of colours into stains, and the refusal to use gradual transitions (*sfumati*). It corresponded to "the last orientation which is based on a criterion of universal taste. After its dissolution, it has no longer been possible to classify stylistically any of the different arts or the different nations and cultures [...] Modern art is, however, anti-impressionist in yet another sense: it is a fundamentally "ugly" art which shuns the euphoria, the fascinating forms, the tones and colours of impressionism. In painting, it destroys pictorial values; in poetry, it carefully and consistently sacrifices images, and in music, it dispenses with melody and tonality. It implies an anguished flight from everything that is pleasant and gives pleasure, from everything that is attractive".[110]

With Cubism, the tendency toward rupture became radical. The previous notions of central perspective and symmetry of proportions were broken. At the same time, the multiplicity of viewpoints and the geometrization of figures were established. From there to complete abstraction, a rapid, explosive and largely predominant step was taken. Modernism not only often got rid of the human figure but also partially "de-Westernized" the old notion of visual representation, a sign of another reality. In other words, an unexpected link was established between a rationalizing and technologically advanced civilization (in the sense that Weber attributes to it) and the artistic forms of mystical or traditionalist cultures (African, Asian or Amerindian). Two extremes merged – on the one hand, archaisms and primitivisms and, on the other, futuristic imaginations. In other words, artists not only reacted against the aristocratic and bourgeois mentality of the "Victorian" type, but also included in this contestation all the canons of a common and Western past. The newcomers clung to the configurations, experiences and concepts of a revolutionary scientific and industrial world (energy, mass, lines of force, speed, simultaneity) to create an unusual sensibility, while absorbing, at the same time, that which was spontaneous, "primitive", grotesque, distant, exotic

[110] Arnold Hauser, *Teorias da Arte*, pg. 321, Lisboa/São Paulo: Presença/Martins Fontes, 1973.

or of colonial origin, such as African manipansos, the colors of Japanese crepe, “chinoiseries”, Javanese or Indian sounds. As a result, an aesthetic without historical weight in the predominant European world, whether cultured or even popular.

At the same time, there was a need for extremely conceptual forms, not just perceptual ones: “I couldn't portray a woman in all her natural beauty. I don't have the necessary skills. No-one does. I must therefore create a new beauty, a beauty that appears to me in terms of volume, line, mass, weight and, through this beauty, interpret my subjective impression”.[111] Or one plunged into the vortex of industrial techniques and products, as if they were the only relief still possible for a civilisation without gods and limits: “We affirm that the magnificence of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car with its trunk decorated with thick tubes, resembling snakes with explosive breath... a roaring car, running on grapeshot, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace... We want to destroy museums, libraries, academies of every kind, and combat moralism, feminism, and all opportunistic and utilitarian vileness”.[112]

The spontaneous, the instinctive, the technical purity, and a radical premonition of human ephemerality were thus combined. And unlike the mystical, conservative or repetitive patterns expressed by non-Western cultures, the new mentality opted for experimentalism, constant mutation and the transitory (the origin of installations, performances, happenings, and later body art), exempting art from pretensions to the timeless, the absolute and the eternal. Lines, movements, colours, and volumes ceased to be at the service of an analogy, a reference, a meaning or a ulterior purpose, and all became self-expository expressions. Technique acquired a life of its own and, in this sense, kept pace with the spirit of the new times, committed to invention, research, and the delight

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[111] George Braque apud Herschel B. Chipp, *Teorias da Arte Moderna*, São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1996, p. 263.

[112] F.T. Marinetti, *Manifesto del Futurismo*, itens 4 and 11.: “Noi affermiamo che la magnificenza del mondo si è arricchita di una bellezza nuova: la bellezza della velocità. Un automobile3 da corsa col suo cofano adorno di grossi tubi simili a serpenti dall’alito esplosivo... un automobile ruggente, che sembra correre sulla mitraglia, è più bello della Vittoria di Samotracia... Noi vogliamo distruggere i musei, le biblioteche, le accademie d’ogni specie, e combattere contro il moralismo, il femminismo e contro ogni viltà opportunistica o utilitária”, avaiable at scuola.zanichelli.it

of seeing transferred to devices what only personal skill and experience could achieve before.

Something similar happened with sculpture, although it coexisted with figuration more than painting. For there were artists who remained adept at identifiable representation, even if they distanced themselves from detailed treatment, smooth and finished modelling or tectonic elevation. The novelty was evident, for example, in the roughness of the surfaces, the use of concave (negative), internalised volumes, or in unusual balance solutions. Many others, on the other hand, favoured a grotesque or radical dissolution of the human figure. They moved towards a strictly geometric construction of spatial masses, marked by voids and indeterminate inflections, without closed planes. Along these lines, it is not uncommon to find works that resemble 'natural' objects, in other words, as if they had been randomly sculpted by the forces of nature, without human intervention.

This aspect of chance, randomness, or accident in the way the work is conceived has generated a problem that was previously unimaginable. For if there is no prior original intention, relatively clear or distinct, how can we reconstruct, in the act of appreciation, the same path that would allow for its understanding and emotional sympathy? How can we rediscover the path of selections and choices that, in principle, are also part of the distinction of the artistic act? One could counter-argue that natural objects also excite contemplation of an aesthetic order and that, excluding the possibility of divine consciousness, the acceptability or feasibility of a "natural art" would still persist. However, this line of thought reopens the discussion, considering that the work of art is a *symbolic artifact*, a cultural creation, as long as the idea of culture remains an essentially human phenomenon, distinct from and interpretative of nature.

In architecture, the traditional elements of the orders were eliminated – for example, arches, friezes, columns and their capitals – and with them, the close decorative and allegorical ties with other arts, that is, the inclusion of traceries or sculptural and pictorial treatments of buildings. Devoting itself preferentially to the coldness of volumetric or spatial aspects, "architectural nudism" emerged. For more than restricting itself to utilitarian functions, past architectures always had the task of symbolizing manifestations of a religious character, social conditions,

and artistic values that stimulated the visual sense. Hence its visible scenographic components, which go back to Art Nouveau at the end of the 19th century. In the opinion of a typical contemporary architect, such as Adolf Loos, “ornament is a crime”. Along the same lines were the stripping down and aesthetic geometrization of the Bauhaus, based on simple configurations of cubes and prisms. A type of rationalism that, as it became internationalized, tended to disregard the cultural characteristics of peoples and regions. In this case, however, aesthetic purity was supplemented by the postulates of functionality and environmental vision (continuous, intercommunicable, “democratic” architectural spaces), or the generous and humanist principle of merging beauty and utility (in industrial design) in the use of everyday objects, such as furniture and other household appliances or artifacts.

In classical music, the tonal system was challenged with the advent of dodecaphony, atonalism, serialism, bruitism, or concrete, aleatory, and electroacoustic compositions. In the literary field of poetry, after the emergence of free verse with its floating periods of short and long sentences (“rediscovered” by Walt Whitman in the mid-19th century), the use of rhyme, the rigor of metrics, and the mastery of expiatory rhythm (strong syllables contrasted with unstressed syllables) took a back seat (romanticism and symbolism preserved minimal principles of versification, the former recovering, as a novelty, popular and archaic uses). In the period in question, the freedom of arrangements became extreme, “prosaic”, asymmetrical, polyrhythmic, until reaching graphic-visual-concrete poetry (also based on plastic geometry) or the pure and simple death of verse, in Russian and Italian futurism.

Even the art of narration, the novel, less susceptible to radical transformations, became the object of limiting experiences that were contrary to the figure of the character or the evolution of a plot. This is what happened with the French nouveau roman, because the art of the novel, according to Robbe-Grillet, was incapable of giving meaning to the world and, therefore, there was no need to attribute so much importance to the referential (to the meaning of the story), being able to dedicate itself to the form itself and to the mundane and anodyne facts of daily life. In his words, for example, “creators of characters, in the traditional sense, can no longer offer us anything other than puppets, in which they themselves no longer believe. The novel of characters belongs to the past. It

characterizes an era, the one that marks the apogee of the individual... The 19th century novel knew only destiny. In the modern one, one only knows the instantaneous moment, nothing exists beyond the present".[113]

Pure Form, Ludism and Self-Sufficiency

This revolution was therefore established from the beginning as an incessant search for pure form, for a configuration free from extra-artistic ideas, exclusive and autarchic. Undoubtedly cerebral, but averse to rhetoric and metaphorical figures (an unmistakable component of traditional codes), it became progressively anti-conceptual. Less anthropocentric and biomorphic, in the aforementioned analysis by Ortega y Gasset,[114] high art exchanged the ancient ritual of a specular reason (in form) and reordering of life (in content) for the liberalizing drive of "vital energies". In other words, Apollo was removed from the scene so that Dionysus could be enthroned, in the absence now of sacred myths, prophecies or political values. The ironic and the playful were preferred to the transcendental.

From this aesthetic formalisation came the "impersonality" of the work, now clearly ascetic and hygienic, materialised in games of colour and abstract volumes, in absolute objects (Duchamp and his ready-mades) or in the desired incorporation of chance, the unpredictable, the random (especially in painting, sculpture and music). Each work became an autonomous code, internally constructed and self-sufficient. In terms of content, the most visible option was either the grotesque (based on Cubism and Expressionism) or parody (of the Dadaist type) of traditional allusions. The new scepticism could not adapt to cult, moral imperatives or the fidelity of past memories. Its 'vitalism' tended, preferably, towards an obsessive exploration of sensitivity, towards free movements, primitive or random gestures (including modern and post-modern dance), towards a spontaneous and mysterious liberalisation of the unconscious (as in surrealism).

[113] Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Pour um nouveau roman, pg. 25, Ed. De Minuit, Paris, 1963.*
[114] See J.O. y Gasset, op. cit.

The theatre has also given itself over to dramatising the senses and for the senses, at least in its avant-garde manifestations. Since the first decade of the century, reality has become incongruous: “Realism is over. The time has come to bring the unreal to the stage. Life must be represented not as it really is, but as the artist sees it in his dreams and visions, in his moments of inspiration. It would be necessary to translate this vision of beings and things on stage, in the style of the painters, musicians and poets of the new school, whose works do not have clear contours, finished melodies or clearly formulated thoughts. The strength of the new dramatic art must come from a combination, from a harmony of colors, lines, sounds and assonances, capable of creating a general impression that influences the spectator unconsciously”.[115]

At the same time, Meierhold emphasised that movement in a performance was the most powerful expressive medium. Even deprived of words, costumes and all the other elements, theatre would remain theatre only with the actor and his art of movement. Thus, on several occasions, the rationalist theatre of language, based on literature or dialogues, lost its importance to the corporeal interpretation of ideas and sensations that had previously been verbalised, giving prominence to technological, scenographic, lighting and sound effects. Unsuspectedly or consciously, much of what was done still echoed the conceptions of Antonin Artaud, for whom clear language is lazy and practically useless: “One of the reasons for the suffocating atmosphere in which we live with no possible escape and no remedy – and for which we are all a little to blame, even the most revolutionary among us – is the respect for what is written, formulated or painted, and which has taken shape, as if all expression were not already exhausted and had not reached the point where things must be destroyed in order to start all over again [...] Shakespeare himself is responsible for this aberration and degradation [...] We must put an end to the superstition of texts and written poetry [...] The action of the theater does not rest on the social plane. Even less on that of ethics or psychology [...] This obstinacy in making characters talk about feelings, passions, desires and impulses of a psychological order, in

[115] Stanislavsky, on the Moscow Art Theatre before the Soviet Revolution. Constantin Stanislavsky, *Minha Vida na Arte*, trans. Esther Mesquita, São Paulo: Anhembi, 1956, p. 158.

which a single word takes the place of countless gestures, is the reason. And the theater has lost its true *reason* for being".[116]

Negative Freedom (Lukács)

This tendency towards purity and the impersonal character of high art had its most fertile roots in the growing subjectivity of the Romantic period. The idea and condition of freedom demanded by the artist accompanied, at least theoretically, the political, social, and economic transformations brought about by liberalism and the structures of capitalist production and exchange. In general terms, nothing should bind the creator: neither the formal rule nor the object of the content.

For this reason, in György Lukács' opinion, the only measure of art today is the free and total affirmation of the artist's personality or, more precisely, his *humour*. For him, the ancient artist was never free and couldn't even understand what we now call 'freedom of art'. Firstly, because of his social condition of birth and class; more importantly, because art was part of public life and was aimed at a relatively specific audience and stronghold. You knew who to address and how to do it. Within these conditions, however, the great artists were able to extract the necessary ingredients to translate and reflect their particular images, the deepest orientations of existence, and the transformations of lived reality. Although socially orientated, this art proved to be fruitful and attractive. For freedom and personal contributions manifested themselves precisely in the ideological and symbolic aspects of creation: that is, in that which is fundamental to the artistic phenomenon. The author was expected to have the ability to perceive the essence of time, ideological relations, psychic motivations and stylistic forms. In his words, "This art is freer because it is more deeply connected to the essence of reality than the acts that manifest themselves in its objective and subjective genesis would suggest".[117] In the 20th century, "The new artist finds himself, considering the social function of art, in the situation of the producer

[116] Antoine Marie Joseph Artaud*, Le Théatre et son double,* Pour em finir avec les chefs-d'oeuvres, pgs. 79, 82, Gallimard, Paris, 1938.
[117] G. Lukács*, Arte Livre ou Arte Dirigida?,* Revista Civilização Brasileira, n. 13, maio 1967.

of commodities in relation to the abstract (generic and impersonal) market. His freedom is – in appearance – as great as that of the producer of commodities. In reality, the laws of the market dominate the artist for the same reason that they dominate, in general, the producer of commodities [...] The relationship between the artist and his public has not only lost its immediate character; a new, specifically modern intermediary has introduced itself between them: capital [...] This situation determines the character of the freedom of art in the modern sense, its true content and the illusions that necessarily accompany it [...] Most modern artists, and precisely the best among them, contemplate with anger, despair and even horror the chaos of the society that surrounds them, which wants to reduce them to its likeness. From this moment on, artistic freedom is based on exacerbated subjectivity [...] The notion of freedom is then, for the modern artist, an abstract, formal and negative notion: it contains only the demand to prohibit anyone from intervening in this supreme personal authority".[118]

For these reasons, the artist, as the producer of an economic good, will often have to submit to the logic of the market, to the demands or preferences of an indistinct public. Any "success" obtained with a "formula" tends to keep them tied to the most economically advantageous standard.

Irrationalism, "Everything is Art" and the "Death of Art"

Some critics also saw in the high art of the century either the absence of transcendental content or the more or less ostentatious presence of irrationalism. In the first case, for example, the feeling, the image, and the reference to what is divine and spiritual would have disappeared:

Our aesthetic forms explore the void, the white freedom, which derive from the withdrawal (*Deus absconditus*) of messianism and the divine. If the "sanctified precision" of Job and his Wife (a painting by Georges de La Tour) or a landscape by Giorgione express the epiphany of a real presence, if the latter proclaims the kinship of art with the incarnation of mystery [...] Malevich and Ad Reinhardt reveal their encounters with a "real absence" [...] It is with this absence that we fence in front of a mirror, or, as the German language rightly says, with shadows

[118] Idem, ibidem.

(*Schattengefecht)* [...] no man can fully read or respond responsibly to aesthetics if 'his flesh and his fibers' feel at home in skeptical rationality, if they are comfortable in immanence [...] The humanist, in fundamental contrast to the scientist, tends to experience the feeling that the dawn and the noonday sun are already behind him".[119]

In the second case, an anecdote told by Degas perhaps illustrates this discomfort of reason. The painter once asked Mallarmé: 'When you have the idea for a poem, how do you turn it into a work?' To which the poet replied: 'You don't make a poem with ideas, you make it with words.' Whether true or not, the joke draws attention to the fact that the play of formal combinations has, in many ways, ruined the human meanings that were once expected of the work. Understanding has shifted in favour of the author's strict imagination. And if everything is possible, the extent to which it can move becomes immeasurable. Meanings float adrift, uncommitted to the other extra-artistic instances that have historically sustained creation. If art had never been the terrain of the false or the true, it has also often become the place of the beautiful or the ugly, of morality or immorality, of the sublime or the real, of the affirmation or denial of a belief. Any criterion is self-justifying, even when summarised in terms of the unusual, the heteroclite or the scandalous. "Everyone is an artist," declared Joseph Beuys in the mid-1950s, adding that "creativity is only what can be defined and justified as the science of freedom".[120] If this is so, or if it were so, asks James Gardner in *Culture or Trash?:* "Why is it that in this period, the most respectful and indulgent in the history of the visual arts, the work of our artists is not better than it is? Since artists have never been so adored, admired, almost sanctified, wouldn't it be natural that they should answer for the consequences? Wouldn't it be natural to imagine that these days would show us geniuses like never before? Perhaps we should think about the words of Robert Hughes: the number of students who graduate in fine arts every two years in the United States is greater than the number of inhabitants of Florence in the last quarter of the 15th century. Given this, wouldn't it be natural that we should also have our geniuses, and many of them? Why then does the work of the modern artist seem so insignificant when compared to that of

[119] George Steiner, *Réelles présences, Les Arts du sens*, pgs. 271,272, Gallimard, Folio, Essais, Paris, 1991.

[120] Beuys apud James Gardner, see note below.

Renaissance artists [...] the poverty of contemporary art is the price that must be paid for the freedom that it so conspicuously enjoys".[121]

Conspicuously, that is, in an evident and exaggerated way.

In the chapter "The Man of Images" from his book The Humiliated Word, Jacques Ellul observes: "It is not without reason that painters and sculptors insist so much on the discovery of space: what matters is not the objects produced or reproduced, but the space between them, the meaning, the polarization, the distribution of this space. The play of light and color is there exclusively to enhance space [...] So much so that, for example, Merkado's sculpture (exhibition at the Burdelle Museum, 1975) is very significant: on the one hand, it is purely technical (it involves geometric forms joined by mechanical relationships, a set of machines, we could say); on the other, it announces space. Everything there is an experience of space, the void, the volumes, the masses, the matter. "What is important is what happens in the void, between the volumes." The most technical modern sculpture has no meaning or value in itself; the figurative is nothing; the situation in space and its outline are what count, just as for the technique itself [...] Painting must act on the nervous system itself, without passing through consciousness. Isn't this, once again, the negation of man? The spectator must be without past, without future, completely whole in the instantaneous sensation [...] a strange turnaround in art [...] With the ideology of instantaneity in art, with immediacy, with spontaneous creativity (happening etc.), we are faced with a pure assimilation to the technological process and a total denial of everything that, since the origins, has been considered as art".[122]

As a result, the ability to choose and compare values seems to disappear in the name of unlimited freedom, or becomes 'problematic' to the point where judgement is suspended. That's why a striking fact of the time was the relationship between the work and the public, because never have the feelings experienced been so ambiguous, unstable, enigmatic or lacking in conceptual elucidation, only possible to understand outside of the artistic objects themselves. This explosion of all the criteria of value, which multiply adrift in a state of

[121] James Gardner, *Cultura ou Lixo? Uma visão provocativa da arte contemporânea*, pg. 31, Civilização Brasileira, BCD, Rio de Janeiro, 1996.

[122] J. Ellul, O Homem das Imagens, *A Palavra Humilhada*, pgs. 224 e 225, São Paulo: Paulinas, 1984.

“ecstasy”, led Baudrillard to say that: “Art is proliferating everywhere. The discourse on Art is even more rapid, but with its own character, its adventure, its power of illusion, its capacity to reject reality and to oppose reality with another scenario, where things obey a rule of a superior game [...] in which beings, like the lines and colors on the canvas, can lose their meaning, exceed their own purpose and, in a rush of seduction, reunite with the ideal form, even if it is that of their own destruction. In this sense, Art has disappeared. It has disappeared as a symbolic pact, by which it distinguishes itself from the pure and simple production of aesthetic values [...] The “works” are no longer exchanged, neither among themselves nor in referential value, they no longer have the secret complicity that is the strength of a culture. We no longer read them, and we decode them according to increasingly contradictory criteria [...] It is because they arouse in us a profound indifference that we can accept them simultaneously [...] All the industrial machinery of the world has been aestheticized, all the insignificance of the world has been transfigured by the aesthetic”.[123]

The 20th century saw the death of art proclaimed, at least as it had existed since its prehistoric origins. Alongside the spiritual factors already mentioned, let's also remember the material causes of this funeral proclamation, in Carlo Argan's opinion: “The so-called death of art is nothing other than the consummate decay of a set of artisanal techniques, which no longer coordinate with the industrial system of production - in many cases, the production of the same kinds of things that were produced by art. There is no question, however, that this decay has created a cultural void, which has not yet been filled. This explains why the so-called death of art has not led to the disappearance of artists and the institutions involved in disseminating knowledge of their activities. It is necessary to become aware of the void left by art in the cultural context, to decide the fate of the sum of values constituted by the still present legacy of the artistic civilisations of the past; this ineliminable artistic legacy is still, at least in quantitative terms, the main component of the material environment of existence, the one that characterises cities”.[124]

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[123] Jean Baudrillard, *A Transparência do Mal: Ensaio Sobre Fenômenos Extremos*, pgs. 21 e 22, trad. Estela dos Santos Abreu, Campinas: Papirus, 1990.

[124] Giulio Carlo Argan, *Arte Moderna*, Chapter VII, pg. 581, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1992.

To conclude, let us see what three art and culture critics have to say, in addition to Jean Baudrillard, a theorist of contemporary society. The first of them, Jorge Romero Brest, is a supporter and activist of experimentalism and, therefore, exempt from any claims of backwardness. In his analysis, since the 1950s, approximately, only the object or the action has existed in the visual arts, something that is neither painting nor sculpture and, consequently, is not an image either. The prevailing attitude is that of *iconophobia*, the disdain for representation by image. What is important now is the *proposal*, something that does not establish the traditional duality between creation on the one hand and contemplation on the other. In other words, the primacy of the aesthetic over the artistic. The new image is currently found in everyday life, in work, in games, in clothing, in advertising, in happenings, in installations.

In the opinion of the second, Arnold Gehlen, art became revolutionary in the first three decades of the 20th century because it broke with all traditions, in other words, with its history. Its interest and practice turned to its own elements, to the formal aspects of its making - line and colour in painting, turning it into art for art's sake; pure volume in sculpture; ordinary or even creeping and falling movement in dance; dissonance and random experimentation in musical construction, as well as a fragmented syncretism of all past styles.[125]

As for the third, it is Jean Molino, who, in a long article written for the magazine Esprit, analyzes it as follows: “Some, however, would see in all these practices the ultimate truth of art, its internal deconstruction that would only leave a fragmented shadow, an empty shell. The owl, at the moment when the shadows fall, would have understood that art is a pure institution. Nominalist theory or, rather, baptismal theory of art: piece of canvas, color, stucco, excrement, laser beam, dust, drawing, framing, picture, I baptize you art and, through this baptism, I make you enter the world of art. In all the eras in which art has existed, there has been nothing but the set of things that its contemporaries recognized as belonging to the world of art and that served as a response to a theory, to an idea of art. Our era does not innovate, except by taking the process to its limit and, in

[125] A. Gehlen, *Zeit-Bilder und weitere kunstsoziologische Schriften*, Vittorio Klostermann, Leipzig, 2016.

doing so, lighting the fuse. Yes, art was this and today we know it: art, today, is anything".[126]

Writing at the end of 1980, Jean Baudrillard states with conviction: "Nor has art succeeded, according to the aesthetic utopia of modern times, in transcending itself as an ideal form of life (before it had no reason to surpass itself in a totality, since this already existed, and was religious). It was not abolished in a transcendent ideality, but in a general aestheticisation of everyday life, and disappeared in favour of a pure circulation of images, in a trans-aesthetic of banality".[127]

For all that has been alleged here, a postmodern definition of a work of art would be: *anything, made by anyone, with any technique or raw material, in any form or circumstance, which may or may not carry any meaning. The statement by any person or institution that such an object or action is art is enough.*

[126] J. Molino, L'art aujourd'hui, *Esprit*, juil.-août. 1991, p. 72-108.
[127] J. Baudrillard, *A Transparência do Mal*, Depois da Orgia, pg. 17, opus cit.

## IV. The False Quarrel of Cultures: On Race and History, by Lévi-Strauss

At the end of the first chapter of *Race and History*, a text written at the request of the UN and initially published in 1952, Claude Lévi-Strauss acknowledges the diversity of cultures (which is an absolutely evident fact, diachronically or synchronically speaking, as semiologists often vainly express themselves) and, at the same time, asks himself: "If there are no innate racial aptitudes, how can we explain that the civilization developed by white men has made the immense progress that is known, while those of men of color have remained behind, some halfway, others affected by a delay that can be measured in thousands or tens of thousands of years"?[128] At the beginning of the second chapter (Diversity of Cultures), he observes: "To understand how, and to what extent, human cultures differ from one another, whether these differences cancel each other out or contradict each other [...] it is necessary to take stock. But here the difficulties begin, because we must realize that human cultures do not differ from one another in the same way or on the same plane".

We also read at the beginning of the third chapter (Ethnocentrism): "And yet, it seems that the diversity of cultures has rarely appeared to men for what it is*: a natural phenomenon*,[129] resulting from direct or indirect relations between societies. They have seen it as a kind of monstrosity or scandal". Therefore, the author will continue, the oldest attitude has consisted of simply repudiating different cultural forms. Not only did the Greeks call other peoples "barbarians", but in almost all cultures "humanity ceases at the boundaries of the tribe", regardless of its material and spiritual characteristics. We are therefore in the presence of a very old, universal and recurring phenomenon: ethnocentrism.

But since human beings are necessarily realised 'within a culture' and not abstractly, modern Western man would have created a recipe (*recette*) for his contradictory speculations, that is, those that oppose his affective experiences of

[128] C. Lévi-Strauss, *Race et histoire*, in Le racisme devant la science, Unesco, Paris, 1973, pp. 9 to 49. The entire article is based on this edition and therefore all the quotations contained herein

[129] My emphasis.

cultural diversity and the denial of those traits that seem scandalous or shocking to him. In short, Western man has developed the idea of a *false evolutionism*, because “if we treat the different states in which human societies find themselves, both ancient and distant, as if they were stages or phases of a single development, which starting from the same point makes them converge towards the same end, we see that the diversity is only apparent”. This theory, which would be based on biological Darwinism, would be completely erroneous or illegitimate because biological and cultural facts are incomparable, although the same author has previously stated that cultural diversity is a *natural phenomenon*.

If we now accept, together with Lévi-Strauss, the notion of the falseness of cultural evolutionism, it will be coherent to equally reject the Enlightenment ideas of the progress of humanity (at least of European culture and its ancient and modern colonizations), such as those of Condorcet, as well as those of Marxism and its vision of an inescapable historical determinism, or those of Comte and his theological, metaphysical and positive states, all of which have the West as their model.

However, Lévi-Strauss ends up stating, or at least suggesting, that “we would thus come to distinguish between two genres of history: a progressive acquisitive history, which accumulates discoveries and inventions to build great civilisations [he is clearly referring to Western culture], and another history, perhaps equally active, which employs the same talents, but which would lack the synthetic gift, which is the privilege of the first”. This second history will be labelled “stationary” in the following chapter. But in the next chapter, he adds: “The progress made by humanity since its origins are so manifest and dazzling that any attempt to discuss it would be reduced to an exercise in rhetoric”.

It becomes clear that the need to respond to the UN’s appeal, and also to demonstrate his personal convictions (closer to an ideology, it seems, than to an impartial scientific analysis), makes Lévi-Strauss’s argument take on a contradictory, erratic, and even schizophrenic characteristic. This means that, on the one hand, all cultures must be considered as adult and equal, but, at the same time, different and uneven, since they have embarked on clearly disparate types of history, evolution, conquests, or gifts (his word). Or, after having suggested that the hypothesis that various types of hominids have coexisted in time and even in space is not excluded, he finds himself obliged to recognize that “all this

does not aim to deny the reality of humanity's progress, but invites us to conceive of it with greater caution". However, this progress is "neither necessary nor continuous; it proceeds by leaps, jumps or, as biologists would say, by mutations". But why turn to biologists and their science if he himself recently denied any similarity between Darwinian biological evolution and cultural change, even though the latter is a natural phenomenon?

This tortuous argument now leads him to propose two opposing concepts - cumulative history and stationary history: "In other words, would the distinction between the two forms of history depend on the intrinsic nature of the cultures to which it applies, or would it result from the ethnocentric perspective from which we always place ourselves to evaluate a different culture? We would thus consider as cumulative any culture that developed in a direction analogous to ours, that is, whose development would be endowed, for us, with meaning. Whereas other cultures would appear to us as stationary, not necessarily because they are, but because their line of development means nothing to us, is not measurable in terms of the reference system we use [...] The opposition between progressive and inert cultures thus seems to result, initially, from a difference in location".

In short, it is our reference systems (what we learn, give importance to and what we believe in, our acculturation and educational form) that offer us and shape a scale of values for things, thoughts, and actions.

This understanding must then fit all cultures, which means that they are all equally ethnocentric. If this is the case, then here again we find a uniform, universal criterion, just as they are all adult and equal as purely human phenomena (in other words, there is no human collectivity that is not intrinsically cultural).

We are then approaching the heart of the problem: are there superior, eminent cultures? The negative, the paving of which has already been laid, is radical or categorical, because the whole discussion depends, for the anthropologist, on a partial criterion, a particular value, something that, although it cannot be called 'subjective', is exclusive (it concerns the very culture from which we are speaking) and exclusive (because it does not give meaning to foreign or external attributes). Thus, at the end of Chapter VI, the author states: "Western civilization has been turning its attention, for the past two or three centuries, to making increasingly

powerful mechanical means available to man. If this criterion [of superiority] is adopted, the amount of energy available per inhabitant will be the expression of the greater or lesser degree of development of societies [...] If the criterion had been the degree of aptitude to triumph in more hostile geographical environments, there is no doubt that the Eskimos, on the one hand, and the Bedouins, on the other, would have won the palm. India knew, better than any other civilization, how to develop a philosophical-religious system, and China, a way of life capable of reducing the psychological consequences of a demographic imbalance [under the government of Mao Zedong?]. Already thirteen centuries ago, Islam formulated a theory of solidarity of all forms of human life: technical, social, spiritual, which the West would only encounter recently with aspects of Marxist thought and ethnology [...] The richness and audacity of the aesthetic invention of the Melanesians [...] constitute one of the highest pinnacles that men have reached in these directions".

It is astonishing how weak Lévi-Strauss's argument is in his attempt to deny what he himself could not help but admit at the beginning of the essay: the history of civilizations and contemporary reality (Hegel is right when he says that it teaches nothing to politicians and certain intellectuals). But then, in the following chapter ("The Place of Western Civilization"), it seems that common sense has returned: "it is extremely difficult for the ethnologist to give a fair assessment of a phenomenon such as the universalization of Western civilization. Initially, the existence of a world civilization is probably a unique fact in history, or one whose precedents should be sought in a distant prehistory, about which we know almost nothing".

But the continuation soon reveals that the wanderings of an incoherent thought prevail: "It is not a question of undertaking a study of the philosophy of civilizations; we could discuss the nature of the values professed by Western civilization over the course of volumes. We will only reveal the most manifest, those least subject to controversy. They seem to be twofold: Western civilization seeks, on the one hand, in the words of Mr Leslie White, to continuously increase the amount of energy available per inhabitant; on the other hand, to protect and prolong human life; and if we want to be brief, we will consider the second aspect to be a modality of the first".

In this essay, either Lévi-Strauss demonstrated an enormous ignorance of Western culture (which, let's face it, is very unlikely), or he acted out of purely personal interests, without any scientific rigor. Whatever the reason, it is deplorable in an intellectual who was at the height of his prestige.

And when we say that he was motivated by personal interests, without logical-historical precision, we mean the attempts of part of the intelligentsia, at least since Nietzsche, to "deconstruct" the humanist tradition, and to convert the strange into the familiar. Hence Hayden White's opinion about Lévi-Strauss: "The interest in the singular, bizarre, grotesque and exotic, not in order to reduce them by psychological or sociological unmasking of their contents [...] has the same effect on the historiography carried out by Lévi-Strauss in his mandarinesque reflections on the forms of savage thought and action [...] does not introduce the distinction between savage and civilized thought in order to finally affirm the continuities between them. On the contrary, it proposes the distinction in order to offer them as alternative, mutually exclusive forms of humanity. Strauss's method of analysis and explanation of primitive societies is defamiliarizing in a double sense. On the one hand, it conveys to us the feeling of how tragically civilized man is separated from his savage counterpart, who would be more human; on the other, it alienates us from the modes of thought and behavior that we valued as proofs of civility".[130]

Let us start from the beginning. It is well known that one of the deepest, densest, and most creative roots of Western culture is Hellenic culture (the other being, obviously, Judeo-Christian). The well-known "Greek miracle", that is, the transformation of mythical thought into philosophy, political life, science, arts, games, geometry and history, is what led Herodotus, for example, to write, for the first time, not only about Greece and its neighbors, but also about Egypt and Persia. This interest in the "other", in the "different", is already clear in his magnum opus: "The Egyptians live entirely alien to the customs of the Greeks and, in a word, to those of all other peoples. Esse alheamento se observa em todo o país, exceto em Quémis, importante cidade da Tebaida, perto de Neápolis, onde existe

[130] H. White, *Trópicos do Discurso: Ensaios sobre a Crítica da Cultura*, Chapter "Foucault Decodificado", Edusp, 1994, pg.282.

um templo de Perseu, filho de Daneia."[131] Jacques Dewitte, em *L'Exception européenne*, nos indica outra passagem do historiador, recuperada por George Steiner: "There is a question that inhabits us. And it goes back to Herodotus: 'We Greeks have risked our lives on water-logged ships, on camels and elephants, to take us, by any means possible, to the most unbelievable places on earth and to question other peoples about their ways of life, to ask them who they are and what their laws are. None of them have ever visited us".[132]

This incessant curiosity, this same overall perspective, can be found in Ephorus and Polybius, the first two intellectuals to be aware of writing a "world history", that of the regions known from Greco-Latin antiquity. Nor do I believe that one can refute, for example, Karl Jaspers in his short article on History and the Present: "Until 1440, the lifestyles, technical means and working methods of these three civilizations (India, China and the West) were very similar. Only later, only among us and only in Europe, did the age of technology begin: rationalization of everything, pure empirical science, which was not disturbed by anything that was f□reign t□ it; meth□dically in□enti□e techn□l□gy, in incessant pr□gress. □ revolution unknown to all previous history, it accelerated the dominion over nature and the production of goods... Thus the age of technology involved all of humanity and gave rise to truly universal history".[133]

This means that, since then, Europe has been the first and only socio-geographical space in which, paradoxically, the ethnocentric departure has occurred as a characteristic of its own universalist ethnocentrism. This is how Leszek Kolakowski explains it: "This is an observation of an epistemological nature and a value judgment [...] it is the defense of an idea that, having been the target of violent attacks in recent decades, has almost been withdrawn from circulation: Eurocentrism [...] The list of words against it is long and they are ideological words par excellence: elitism, male chauvinism [populist Marxism], racial purity, domination [Nazi-fascism] [...] On the one hand, we assimilate this kind of universalism that refuses to offer value judgments about different

[131] Heródoto, *História*, livro II, XCI.
[132] J. Dewitte, *L'Exception européenne*, Paris: Michalon, 2008, p. 9.
[133] K. Jaspers, *Introdução ao Pensamento Filosófico*, article A História e o Presente, pgs. 25 e 26, Cultrix, São Paulo, 1976.

civilizations and proclaims their intrinsic equality. On the other hand, by affirming this equality, we also affirm the exclusivity and intolerance of each culture, we affirm what we boast of having overcome in the very act of affirmation [...] we affirm its capacity to question itself, to leave its exclusivism, to want to see itself through the eyes of others. It was at the beginning of the [Spanish] conquest that Bishop Bartolomeu de las Casas launched his vigorous attack against the invaders, in the name of the same Christian principles that they claimed".[134]

And we can remember that the Jesuits did the same in Brazilian indigenous lands. Still in Kolakowski's words, "looking at one's own civilisation through the eyes of others in order to attack it became a very widespread literary mode in the Age of Enlightenment, with the 'others' being both the Chinese and the Persians, a visitor from another planet [Voltaire] and even animals [Swift] [... It's plausible to say that at the same time that Europe acquired, perhaps thanks to the fear of the Turks, a clear awareness of its own cultural identity,[135] it questioned the superiority of its own values, opening itself up to a permanent process of self-criticism, something that became the source of its power as much as its fragility and vulnerability".[136]

An identical notion was put forward by economist Guy Sorman in his lecture "Valeurs de l'Occident, de quoi parle-t-on au juste?", given in 2014: "The critical spirit, it seems to me, explains how the West came to be the historical home of innovation and progress. As Karl Popper explained to us, science progressed first of all in the West because every scientific hypothesis was immediately subjected to the critical fire that would either reinforce it or replace it with another, more persuasive hypothesis [...] Granting that this Western singularity is reasonably well-founded, I proceed cautiously with two emblematic sources - the Bible and Greek tragedy. In the book of Job, the reader witnesses a controversy inconceivable in any other revealed religion, between Job, a mere mortal, and his God. Because God inflicts punishments on him that he considers unfounded, Job

[134] L. Kolakowski, *Où sont les barbares? Les illusions de l'universalisme culturel,* Cairn.info*,* n. 11, 1980, avaiable at: <https://www.cairn.info/>.

[135] Personally, I believe that the Catholic Church and the university movement already had a clear vision of European identity, especially after the conversion of the Germanic peoples. It is no coincidence that the Holy Roman Empire, a multi-ethnic conglomerate that lasted a thousand years, was established.

[136] Idem, ibidem.

protests and criticizes Him. God will finally give in and restore Job's good fortune, telling him, however, that since God has no reason to justify Himself. Job then responds "that he submits", and it is up to Him to have the last word. Adhering to Jewish and later Christian theology therefore leads to the possibility of discussing even that which, a priori, is revealed and comes from above [...] We will recall here, with a concern for simplicity, the dispute between Antigone and Creon, her sovereign. Antigone (and this is about her brother's funeral) opposes monarchical authority in the name of superior laws that, according to her, would impose themselves on the king; therefore, political authority could not be absolute, which makes Antigone the ancestor of all supporters of democracy and human rights [...] The criticism of authority, taken to incandescence, of the King, of God, would make the West vacillate between anarchy and despotism for a long time. The balance would be found in the times of the Enlightenment with the introduction of the rule of law, a kind of synthesis between social order and critical vitality".[137]

In 1919, just after the war, Paul Valéry's sentiments portrayed the complexity of this unique culture, its greatness and its misery, its achievements and failures, its plethora of ideas and actions: "There is the lost illusion of a European culture and the demonstration of the impotence of knowledge to save anything; there is science mortally wounded in its moral ambitions, and as if dishonored by the cruelty of its applications; there is idealism, hardly victorious, deeply tormented, responsible for its dreams; realism disappointed, beaten, full of crimes and faults; greed and renunciation equally outraged; beliefs confused in the fields, cross against cross, crescent against crescent; there are the skeptics, themselves confused by events so sudden, violent and exciting and who play like a cat with a mouse. The skeptics lose their doubts and find them again, and no longer know how to use the movements of their mind [...] And what is this disorder of our mental Europe made of? The free coexistence of all minds cultivated by the most dissimilar ideas, by the most opposite principles of life and knowledge. This is what characterizes a modern age [...] The European Hamlet sees millions of specters. But he is an intellectual Hamlet. He meditates on the life and death of truths. He considers all the objects of our controversies as phantoms; he

[137] G. Sorman, *Valeurs de l'Occident, de quoi parle-t-on au juste?,* Contrepoints*,* juil. 2014, avaiable at: <https://www.contrepoints.org/>.

c□nsiders all the titles □f □ur gl□ry as rem□rse; he is □□erwhelmed by the weight of discoveries and knowledge, incapable of regrouping in this limitless activity. If he takes a skull, it is an illustrious skull. Who was it? It was Leonardo. He invented the flying man, but the flying man did n□t exactly ser□e the in□ent□r's intenti□ns; we know that the flying man, mounted on his great swan (*il grande uccello sopra del dosso del suo magnio cecero*[138]), has other jobs besides collecting snow from the tops of mountains to throw it, on hot days, on the pavement of the streets. And this other skull is that of Leibniz, who dreamed of universal peace. And this one was Kant's, who generated Hegel, who generated Marx, who generated...".[139]

And let us not forget Ortega y Gasset in his *The Revolt of the Masses*: "Europe had created a system of norms whose effectiveness and fertility have been demonstrated over the centuries. These norms are by no means the best possible. But they are undoubtedly definitive as long as others do not exist or are not foreseen. To overcome them, it is essential to create new ones. Now the people-masses have decided to consider as obsolete those systems of norms [moral, religious, scientific, technical, artistic] that c□nstitute Eur□pean ci□ilizati□n; but since they are incapable of creating another, they do not know what to do and, to fill their time, they resort to somersaults".[140]

Years later, when the war was over, Valéry himself wrote: "Wherever the names of Caesar, Trajan and Virgil are found, wherever the names of St Paul and Moses are found, wherever the names of Aristotle, Plato and Euclid have meaning and authority, there is Europe".[141]

The process of Westernization, which had begun with Greco-Roman Hellenism, that is, with the empire of Alexander the Great and the subsequent, three-century-old Roman Empire (which was able to offer its citizenship to its conquered), returned vigorously and steadily in the 9th century with the alliance between the papacy and the Carolingian dynasty.[142] This protean culture was

[138] The great bird on the back of its great swan.
[139] P. Valéry, *La Crise de l'esprit,* Paris: Robert Laffont, 2000.
[140] See Editorial, São Paulo, 2016, Second Part, Chapter 2.
[141] P. Valéry, *Mais qui est donc Européen?,* Oeuvres, tome I, Paris: Gallimard, 1957.
[142] Celtic and Germanic contributions cannot be left aside, since, as Emmanuel Berl (*Histoire de l'Europe*, Paris: Gallimard, 1973-1983) rightly observed, neither Tristan and Isolde nor Faust are Greeks baptized by Saint Paul.

consolidated in the 15th century, when, through science, technology, military force and commercial ambitions, Europe set out to conquer the Americas and, later, in the 19th century, in the midst of the industrial era, to explore Asia and Africa. We must not forget the enormous artistic and political influence of both France and Italy on Tsarist Russia.

George Kneller, in *Science as a Human Activity*, is almost certainly right when he says that: “Europe's backward science began its meteoric career with Galileo's discovery that mathematical hypotheses, tested by experiment, can provide precise knowledge of the operations of nature. This approach, together with mechanistic theory (the doctrine according to which all natural phenomena can be explained in terms of the movements of particles under the influence of forces), soon put European science well ahead”.[143] [It is incomprehensible that he forgets that Greek speculative science and its exemplary viniculture, Roman engineering (aqueducts, thermal baths, roads, vaults, theatres, basilicas), law and jurisprudence, medieval agricultural development in Catholic monasteries, among a hundred other techniques and products, are all European phenomena].

This is how Western culture, especially in Europe, and later its offshoots, especially in North America, constructed a unified vision of the world, gave names to its surfaces, established the coordinates by which people travel within it, stipulated its temporal references (the Gregorian calendar and the Greenwich meridian), introduced international laws on the production and trade of goods and services, and came up with the idea and made possible the existence of the UN, of which Lévi-Strauss spoke (an organization whose history began in 1918 with the “fourteen points” of American President Woodrow Wilson and whose proposal was accepted in the Treaty of Versailles by the European nations).

Already in Brazil, Stefan Zweig gave us a cosmopolitan picture of his native Austria in Le Monde d'Hier: Souvenirs d'un Européen, in 1941: “The genius of Vienna has always been to harmonise all ethnic and linguistic contrasts within itself; its culture is a synthesis □f all Western cultures; th□se wh□ w□rked and li□ed

[143] George F. Kneller, *A Ciência Como Atividade Humana*, trad. Antonio José de Souza, São Paulo: Zahar/Edusp, 1980, p. 18.

there felt free of all narrowness and prejudice. Nowhere was it easier to be a European".[144]

Last but not least, it was undeniably at the end of the 20th century that the global triumph of the capitalist market economy was consolidated, with or without the establishment of democracies or liberal republics at the political level. Inexorably, we see people on a global scale fascinated by representations of the Western way of life (especially the US, since the overwhelming dominance of its film, music and computer industries) and the promise of a growing individualism, opposed to or already distanced from ancient local traditions. Added to this, of course, is the pervasive role of internet networks, which make up a technological world so interconnected that it can be said to be unique, under the dominance of the English language.

The indisputable evidence of the superiority of Western culture, its leadership and attractiveness, the scope of its vision, its power of contamination and conquests cannot and should not be translated into disrespect for other cultures. For, as we have already seen, the most generous and universal propositions and achievements on human values and behaviour were also generated by it. If everything it has achieved, for better or for worse, means nothing, then we'd better keep quiet about it, because historical facts and reason will not have been invited to this symposium.

[144] S. Zweig, *Le Monde d'hier: Souvenirs d'un Européen*, pg. 37, Bibliothèque numérique romande, 1941, avaiable at ebooks-bnr.com.

## V. The Age of Masses and Excesses

By simple coincidence or, on the contrary, in view of a very close relationship, the Industrial Revolution and the vertiginous growth of the world population developed in parallel. If in the year 1000 the world population was estimated at around 280 million individuals, by 1500 this estimate had risen to 400 million. In other words, in five hundred years, the increase was approximately 42.8%.

If we take the year 1700 as a base, i.e. just before the first industrial phase, that of coal, there would have been around 682 million people on Earth, but a hundred years later, in 1800, this number had risen to 978 million (an increase of 43.4% in that century, something already unusual historically). In 1900, we would have reached around 1,615,000,000 (one billion, six hundred and fifteen million), a secular increase of 65%. In 1950, the figures, which were already more reliable, indicated 2.5 billion individuals, in other words, an increase of 54.7 per cent in just fifty years. The growth since then has been even more extraordinary. In 2022 (72 years later), we will reach 8 billion, an exponential increase of 220%, which is definitely unbearable for the planet's natural resources.[145]

These figures allow us to clearly perceive a sociological phenomenon that is also simultaneous with industrialisation and accelerated urbanisation: the irresistible evolution of the masses. This human density, the crowd, has already become an undermining force for the individual when considered in isolation, not just because of the number of people moving together, but because this conglomeration can act in an overwhelming or even violent way. As early as the Middle Ages, there was a fear of the ‘peasant masses’ (then numerically superior to the townspeople or bourgeoisie) in the event of a revolt for social and economic reasons. Later, it came to be identified with the urban proletariat, still unaware of its strength, and therefore without representative organisation, be it trade union

[145] Interval data or average between estimated data avaiable at: <un.org>; <Infodata.ilsole24ore.com>;<Worldmeters.info>;<https://www.ined.fr/fr/publications/editions/population-et-societes/l-evolution-du-nombre-des-hommes/>.

or party - the ‘popular masses’ opposed to the aristocracy, the capitalist bourgeoisie, the typical behaviour of individualism.

We can imagine or visualize the crowds at large pilgrimages or celebrations and major religious events, at carnivals and other public festivals, at funerals and burials of famous people, at stadiums to watch games and competitions, at concerts and popular music shows, at airports, in the daily traffic jams of large cities or on the roads and beaches, during weekends or holiday periods, during mass tourism, at social protests and political demonstrations that invade the streets and even in commercial areas of large cities.

This is why several authors have dedicated themselves to the subject over the course of the 20th century and, initially, the invariant characteristics of the concept refer us to two dimensions: one quantitative, in which the mass constitutes the numerically broader base of society (πληθος άνθρωπων, *plethos antropon*, sometimes identified with the *demos* in the p□litical literature □f □ncient Greece); the other, qualitative, indicating an agglomeration united by a reasonably objective element, such as similarity of lifestyle, interests, desires and everyday, ordinary attitudes.

This is what Gustave Le Bon wrote in 1895, after the past revolutions and some recent conquests of political and civil rights: “The most striking thing about a crowd is this: whatever the individuals who compose it, whatever the similarities or differences in their way of life, their occupations, their character or their intelligence, the simple fact that they constitute a crowd gives them a collective soul. This soul makes them feel, think and act in a different way from the way they would feel, think and act individually. Certain ideas, certain feelings only arise and are transformed into actions in individuals in a crowd. The psychological crowd is a provisional being, composed of heterogeneous elements that have, for a moment, come together, just as cells that come together in a new body form a being that manifests characteristics quite different from those that each of the cells p□ssesses; [...] the p□wer □f the cr□wd is the □nly □ne that rises and seems destined to rapidly absorb the others [...] The voice of the crowd has become preponderant. It is this voice that dictates to kings their conduct. The destinies of nations are no longer played out in the councils of princes, but in the souls of the multitudes [...] The demands become more and more defined and seek to destroy, from top to bottom, the present society [...] Little given to reasoning, the

multitudes show themselves, on the other hand, to be very apt for action [...] Thus, the divine right of the multitudes replaces the divine right of kings".[146]

The author takes it for granted that a crowd is capable of actions that are not inspired or dependent solely on the psychology of the individuals who make it up, because it reveals a dynamic of its own, a kind of organic unity in the face of the given situation and moment. Normally, as curious as it may seem, emotions are cumulative in large gatherings and can, precisely for this reason, spill over, go beyond civilised limits, which is not the case with the serenely reflected thoughts and actions of an individual. Among the causes that modify the individual character in the midst of the masses are a feeling of invincible power and a sense of anonymity and impunity that allow instincts and thoughtless acts to give way, making the morality of responsibility disappear.

Thus, the idea, or even the observation, that the masses behave in a much more thoughtless than rational manner, and that such customary procedure ends up predominating throughout society (being an instigating majority), shows to what extent the action that laws and institutions exert over their impulsive nature is limited, and how they are incapable of having any opinion other than those that are suggested to them, however ideological or self-interestedly distorted they may be: "It's not the rules based □n pure the□retical fairness that can guide them; they need to be impressed in order to seduce them. If a legislator wants to introduce a new tax, for example, should he opt for what is theoretically fairer? Absolutely not. In practice, the most unfair can be the best for the crowds if it is the least noticeable and, apparently, the least burdensome. That's why an indirect tax, even an exorbitant one, is always easily accepted by the crowd".[147]

Elias Canetti, who also did not experience the widespread expansion of information technology and social-virtual networks, highlighted four main properties of the masses: 1. they always want to grow, regardless of the real or potential limits, and "there are no sure-fire ways to definitively prevent their gr□wth"; 2. equality reigns within the masses, and it is because □f this equality that the phen□men□n □f the masses is generated; 3. the masses always desire

[146] Gustave Le Bon*, Psicologia das Multidões (Os Pensadores)*, Introduction and Book I, Chapter I, A Alma das Multidões, no number page, São Paulo: Nova Cultural, 1980, avaiable at groupes.google.com/digitalsource.
[147] Idem, ibidem.

greater density, that is, concentration or compactness and power; 4. the masses require direction, because “the common direction of all its members strengthens the feeling of equality, and the fear of disintegration [...] makes it possible to guide them towards any goals”. This characteristic evidently facilitates the rise of charismatic leaders. As for the “affective contents” of the mass, Canetti distinguishes, for example, the mass of accosting, which acts to kill in public executions, the mass of prohibition, when an agglomeration refuses to do something, as in strikes, or the mass of inversion, which acts in protest against socio-economic situations and can reach the stage of revolution. In addition, among its characteristic features, “As soon as it comes into being, its desire is to consist of more. The urge to grow constitutes the first and supreme quality of the mass... The natural mass is the open mass... The word open must be understood here in all senses. Such a mass is so everywhere and in all directions... In contrast to the open mass, which is capable of growing to infinity and is everywhere, we have the closed mass. This renounces growth, aiming above all at durability... [In them] one finds something that could be called a feeling of persecution, a particular and angry susceptibility and irritability towards those whom it definitively characterizes as enemies. Whatever they do – whether they behave harshly or sympathetically, whether they are sympathetic or cold, hard or soft – everything is interpreted as proceeding from an unshakable malevolence, from a hostile disposition towards the mass: a purpose already fixed, openly or covertly, to destroy it”.[148]

But if we remember that there is a relatively diffuse “public opinion” in societies, what relationship would it have with the masses? Gabriel Tarde, a contemporary of Le Bon who also analysed the subject, insightfully observes that public opinion is the “multitude at a distance”, like the readers of newspapers and magazines at the time and, later on, radio listeners and television viewers, in other words, the consumers of mass communication networks. This contingent doesn't need to be physically close or have the same immediate interests, although it does constitute a plethora or large number of individuals converging on an identical action. Therefore, “The psychology of crowds has been done; it remains to do the psychology of the public, understood in the sense of a purely

[148] Elias Canetti, *Massa e Poder*, pgs 15 a 30. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995.

spiritual collectivity, as a dissemination of physically separated individuals whose cohesion is all mental... It is not in the gatherings of the streets or public squares that these kinds of social rivers are born and develop, these great impulses that now take the firmest hearts by storm, the most resistant reasons, and are enshrined in laws or decrees by parliaments or governments".[149]

The result is that "audiences are less exaggerated, less despotic, less dogmatic".[150] In Canetti's terminology, this audience, when concentrated in large concert halls of his time (theaters, music halls, cinemas, circuses), is called a *stagnant mass*, of a calmer or more contained nature, which is no longer the case, evidently, in concerts and popular music festivals after the advent of rock and roll and disco or electronic music. Wright Mills also establishes a fundamental difference between what he considers public opinion and the mass. For the North □merican s□ci□l□gist, as an audience, pe□ple express □pini□ns and recei□e them; therefore, in public communications there is a chance to respond to any openly expressed opinion, including legal proceedings for crimes against people, institutions, and their authorities. When these conditions prevail, we come across the model of a community of audiences that fits perfectly into classical democratic theory. The author observes, when social networks did not yet exist: "At the opposite extreme, i.e. in the mass, far fewer people express opinions than receive them; for the community of publics becomes an abstract collectivity of individuals who receive impressions from the mass media [...] The realisation in act of opinion is controlled by authorities who organise channels for such action. The masses have no autonomy from institutions; on the contrary, agents of authorised institutions interpose themselves in the masses, reducing any autonomy they may have in forming opinions through discussion [...] Entire professions and sectors are in the opinion business, impersonally manipulating the public on demand. In the primary public, the competition of opinions takes place between people who defend points of view in the service of their interests and reasoning. But in the mass society of media markets, competition, if any, takes place on the

[149] Gabriel Tarde, *L'Opinion et la foule*, pgs. 8 e 9, Presses Universitairres de France, Paris, 1989.
[150] Ibidem, pg. 21

one hand between the multitude of manipulators with their media and, on the other, the people who receive their propaganda".[151]

Not unlike Le Bon, Ortega y Gasset argued in the early 1920s: "There is one fact that, for better or for worse, is the most important in European public life at the present time. This fact is the rise of the masses to full social power [...] In order to understand such a formidable fact, it is important to avoid giving the words 'rebellion, masses, social power' an exclusively or specifically political meaning. Public life is not only political, but also, and first of all, intellectual, moral, economic, and religious; it encompasses all collective customs, including ways of dressing and enjoying oneself [...] The crowd suddenly became visible; it took up the preferred places in society [...] it advanced with all its might and is the main character [...] Society is always a dynamic unity of two factors: minorities and masses. Minorities are specially qualified individuals or groups. The mass is the set of people who are not specially qualified [...] The mass is the average man [...] the common quality, the man insofar as he does not differ from other men, but who repeats within himself a generic type [...] The mass is everyone who does not give himself a value, good or bad, for special reasons, but who feels 'like everyone else' and, nevertheless, does not feel distressed and likes to feel identical to others".[152]

In his view, what emerged during the 19th century and has since consolidated in the 20th, becoming characteristic, was that both the expansion of education and the speed of communications in a mass society lost density or depth and, consequently, the spirit of the time tended towards vulgarity; and "the characteristic of the moment is that the vulgar soul, knowing itself to be vulgar, has the audacity to assert the right to vulgarity and imposes it everywhere... [it] stifles everything that is different from itself [including the past], everything that is magnanimous, qualified or select'[1]. [it] suffocates everything that is different from itself [including the past], everything that is magnanimous, qualified or select".[153]

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[151] Wright Mills, The Mass Society, *The Power Elite*, pg. 298 a 300, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
[152] José Ortega y Gasset, *A Rebelião das Massas*, pgs. 77 a 81, Vide Editorial, Campinas, 2016.
[153] Idem, ibidem, pg. 80.

Some common truths: the world has not only been overpopulated with people, but also with exponential production and its commercial objects, which has led humanity to exceed (without return) six of the nine eco-planetary limits in 2020, with climate change and the drastic reduction of biodiversity being the most visible faces of these excesses; it has also been overpopulated with advertising and consumerist appeals (the *infodemic*, or information pandemic), as well as with increasingly rapid and fleeting actions and reactions, including classic and more frequent social relations (such as marital and work relations), and its natural resources have been overexploited, which are already on the verge of depletion. And although the world, in the 20th and 21st centuries, has produced more wealth than in all previous centuries, migration has never been so intense on all continents. If there were 153 million immigrants in 1990, they rose to 174 million in 2000 and to 281 million in 2020 (an 83% increase).[154] From then on, the number must have grown not only for socioeconomic and political reasons (wars, dictatorships, and poverty), but also due to the evident degradation of biomes.

At the same time, and as a consequence, we experience an overproduction, abundance or allude of signs, texts, images, sounds, and information, both useful and futile, correct and incorrect, true and false, salutary and toxic. Everything that can be done exponentially will be done, because the sense of measure, balance, and even primary reasons has been lost. This is the case, for example, of Marc Andreessen's *Techno-Optimist Manifesto*,[155] in which we can read, among so many exorbitant beliefs and statements, such as that markets constitute the solution to all problems in society, which leads us to assume that markets and capitalism, acting with the perspective of infinite growth in production and consumption, do not cause any problems: “Combine technology and markets and you get what Nick Land called the technocapital machine, the engine of perpetual material creation, growth and abundance. We believe that the technocapital machine of markets and innovation never ends, but instead spins in a continuously upward spiral... Technological advances tend to feed on themselves, increasing the rate of future advances. We believe in

[154] Organização Internacional de Migração (OIM/IOM) da ONU, avaiable at worldmigrationreport.iom.int.

[155] Computer scientist, creator of Mosaic and Netscapea, Internet browsers. Avaiable at 16z.com/the-techno-optimist-manifesto.

accelerationism - the conscious and deliberate propulsion of technological development - to ensure the fulfilment of the Law of Accelerated Returns. To ensure that the upward spiral of technocapital continues forever". As if nothing on this planet could ever run out, but on the contrary, everything could be indefinitely created, remade, and increased.

And if we agree with Baudrillard, we must admit that, in this extremely dense and fluid scenario, "the masses outrageously resist the imperative of rational communication. What they are given is meaning and they want spectacle [almost always entertainment or confrontation]. No force can convert them to the seriousness of the content, not even the seriousness of the code. What they are given are messages, they only want signs, because they idolize the game of signs and stereotypes, they idolize all content, as long as it is transformed into a spectacular sequence. Once again, this is not a question of mystification, it is a question of their own demand [...] a work of absorption and annihilation of culture, knowledge, power, and the social".[156]

In a multitudinous society with communications that are clearly compatible with the masses, that is, gigantic and invasive, for the French thinker, there would be neither representation in this cluster (the masses do not express themselves, they are surveyed; they do not reflect, they are statistically tested) nor a priority for communicative production over daily "verbal-audiovisual" consumption, or vice-versa: "It has always been believed that the media entangle the masses – which is the very ideology of the mass media. [...] [However] The process of the masses and the media are a single process [...] why, after countless revolutions and a century or two of political learning, despite the newspapers, the unions, the parties, the intellectuals and all the energy put into educating the people, are there still a thousand people ready to mobilize and twenty million [who remain] passive"?[157]

It is also clear that mass society and permanent communication keep us confined to the present and call us to what is simpler, more immediate, spontaneous and, preferably, more ready or available, and therefore easier to consume or absorb (*ready for use, prêt-à-porter*) by all ages and social

[156] Jean Baudrillard*, À Sombra das Maiorias Silenciosas, ou o Fim do Social*, pgs. 14 e 15, São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1986.
[157] Idem, ibidem, pgs. 38 e 39.

conditions, at any time of the day or night. It is also worth noting how language and daily behavior have become rudimentary, sloppy or aggressive in almost all institutions, social classes, and circumstances. In the midst of the masses there are no longer any points of reference or gravity regarding values and everything can happen or develop in any direction, as had already happened with art in the artistic and intellectual circles of the 20th century.

Bruno Patino also reminds us: "We greedily surrendered in carelessness, pride and recklessness. This mobile phone screen, a window onto the planet, a universal library, a passport to global conversations, a pass to revolutions of all kinds, an absolute memory, and a tool for planetary teleportation, seemed to put divinity at our fingertips. We didn't realise that it was our master, who presented himself in the guise of a universal remote control, a personal magic wand. The power wasn't ours. We weren't the magicians in this digital tale. We were, at best, the witnesses and, at worst, the products [...] There is a lot of advertising to be offered, a lot of products to be bought, a lot of transactions to be made. To do this, our data is extracted over and over again, voluntarily or involuntarily, and the algorithms offer us, via networks and platforms, the daily dose of drugs that settle us into the routine of digital life: time cut, attention shortened, the dopamine ration that excites, the reward as derisory as it is addictive of a *like*, a share, a heart-shaped *emoji* or an increasing number of views. The time has come for submersion. Here comes the time when choice becomes impossible".[158]

Still thinking about the phenomenon of the masses as a specific object of political philosophy, Hannah Arendt's analysis is that the development of ideologies or totalitarian systems can be explained by the rise of modern anti-Semitism since the end of the 19th century, by the imperialism of nation states[159] and by the advent of a mass society, subject to crises of the most diverse nature.

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[158] Bruno Patino, *Submersion*, Parte I, Déluge, Les pleurs du Poisson, Paris: Grasser, 2023.

[159] Golo Thomas Mann, a German historian, considered anti-Semitism and European imperialism as factors not linked to totalitarianism. He stated that "The first two parts of the work deal with the prehistory of the total state. But here the reader will not find what he is accustomed to finding in similar works, that is, research on the historical peculiarities of Germany or Italy or Russia […] On the contrary, Hannah Arendt devotes two-thirds of her work to anti-Semitism and imperialism, and above all to imperialism of English origin. […] Only in the third part, in view of which everything else was written, does Hannah Arendt seem to really address the subject" (Vom Totalen Staat, Die Neue Zeitung - Die amerikanische Zeitung in Deutschland, n. 247, Oct. 1951).

Of course, not every mass necessarily generates totalitarian regimes, as the crowds that formed with the Industrial Revolution and the considerable increase in populations preceded those political regimes. According to the authoress, the First World War changed social relations and gave rise to a generalised aspiration for an anti-aristocratic or anti-bourgeois order, as well as a negative solidarity that transformed social classes into a disorganised and unstructured mass of individuals who had nothing in common except the idea that party hopes were ineffective. In her words, "Totalitarian movements are possible wherever there are masses who, for one reason or another, have developed a taste for political organisation. The masses are not united by the awareness of a common interest and they lack that specific class articulation that expresses itself in determined, limited and attainable goals. [...] It was in this atmosphere, in the midst of the collapse of class society, that the psychology of the European developed. The fact that the same fate, with monotonous but abstract uniformity, touched a large number of individuals did not prevent each one from judging themselves in terms of individual failure and criticising the world in terms of specific injustice. The mass of these disillusioned and desperate men [thousands of expatriates] grew rapidly in Germany and Austria when inflation and unemployment aggravated the dislocation after the military defeat [...] This self-centred bitterness could not constitute a common bond because it was not based on any common interest, be it economic, social or political. This self-centredness therefore brought with it a clear weakening of the instinct for self-preservation. The realisation of one's unimportance and dispensability ceased to be an expression of individual frustration and became a mass phenomenon".[160]

The masses' adherence to the appeal of totalitarianism (and also to Latin American populism) has almost always been due to the omission or indifference of a majority (or a significant number of the population) in participating in civil society organizations, such as unions, political parties or professional organizations, creating specific conditions for an atomized mass (in which subjective interests prevail) that interacts driven by immediate passions and grandiose idealizations rather than by rational, plausible objectives for the

[160] H. Arendt, *Origens do Totalitarismo*, Part III, Uma Sociedade sem Classes, pgs. 438-439. 444-445, Companhia de Bolso, São Paulo, 2023.

resolution or overcoming of opposing interests. The myth and the fabulousness of an ideology are preferred, as in the case of the pure and superior race in Nazism or the end of social classes in Soviet communism. In both cases, as in the most severe theocracies, a demand for total, unrestricted, unconditional and unalterable loyalty is imposed on each individual member, which definitively destroys the principles of natural law and personal freedom, even if the latter here has a reduced scope due to the limited condition of human beings.

In such circumstances, it is up to politics (understood above all as the highest instance of power, or sovereign power, not as a vehicle for the common good and the administration of social justice) to propose the ultimate and supreme ends, which no longer refer only to the social order or the organisation of states, but to man as a whole, with his life values, including the most intimate or private. Totalitarian ideologies, which go beyond dictatorships and rely on the masses, take on sacred aspects and, led messianically, claim a redemption that is nonetheless secular and earthly, and aims to be realised at the cost of any human sacrifice, disregarding social consequences or ethical principles. With them, the 20th century reached the known excesses of genocide and hitherto unthinkable horrors.

Finally, from an economic point of view, the energy matrix based on fossil fuels led to the accelerated development of a globalised thermo-industrial civilisation in the 20th and 21st centuries, which not only included the industrial sector, but also trade and services. There was a historically unprecedented increase in goods and services (industrial furnaces, land, sea and aeronautical vehicles, fuels, transport, domestic heating, paints, rubbers, various types of plastics, cement, colourants and even cosmetics), which only recently turned out to be a delayed-effect bomb. A quick mention of oil production already reveals the scale of this growth: in 1900, world extraction was 234.95 TWh[161]; in 1950, 6,055.58 TWh (an increase of 1,577%); in 2000, 41,844.17 TWh (an increase of 600% compared to 1950); in 2022, 51,255.57 TWh (an increase of 22% compared to 2000).[162]

[161] Terawatt-hour, a unit of measurement for energy production and consumption, based on one kilowatt-hour. It therefore corresponds to one billion kilowatt-hours.

[162] Source: connaissancesdesenergies.org.

As a result, the amount of CO2, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) and perfluorocarbons (PFCs), as well as other particles daily released into the atmosphere, triggered the well-known greenhouse effect and the era of extreme weather; the amount of waste, especially various plastic products and textiles, flooded lands and seas, as did microplastics, which now circulate in the atmosphere and are deposited not only in all parts of the planet, but are also inhaled by all beings living there; biodiversity has been drastically reduced, whether due to predatory global consumption, degradation of habitats, deforestation, use of agricultural pesticides or climate change and its consequences, such as forest fires, prolonged droughts and floods. In another place and circumstance, I was able to write the following: "'... that of the *nine* planetary boundaries that are indispensable for life as we know it in our tiny world, because they are factors in the stability of the biosphere, we have already exceeded *six* in 2020: climate change, i.e. an atmospheric CO2 concentration of less than 350 parts per million; the rate of extinction of genetic biodiversity, which would be a maximum of ten species out of a million, having already reached more than a hundred annually; the disruption of the biochemical cycles of nitrogen and phosphorus, due to the intensive use of these elements in agriculture; changes in land use, estimated from the forest area, with the limit set at 70 per cent of the area before deforestation; the introduction of new entities into the environment, such as heavy metals, synthetic organic compounds and radioactive compounds that are pollution factors; the use of fresh water (estimated at less than 4. 000 km3/year of consumption of runoff resources in spillways) and green water, or soil moisture. Two other global limits have not yet been exceeded, although they could happen: the acidification of the seas (absorption of CO2, with a consequent reduction in pH) and the amount of stratospheric ozone. The ninth and final limit has not yet been quantified, i.e. the atmospheric concentration of aerosol".[163]

The warnings are old, going back to the end of the 20th century, such as those of the Club of Rome and this one by André Gorz, which, unfortunately, are confirmed, and without equivocation: "... what we call 'industrial civilization' will not survive this [next] century. For another decade or two it will provide dubious

[163] Preface to *Como tudo pode desmoronar* (How Everything Can Fall Apart), Editora Perspectiva, São Paulo, 2024.

pleasures and privileges, and privileges for which one will have to pay more and more. Then all this will have to stop: the change of cars that are changed every two or five years; the end of clothes that last only one season, plastic or metal packaging that we throw away, our daily meat, the freedom to generate and conceive. The sooner this stops, the better; the longer it continues, the greater will be the brutal and irreparable collapse that it is preparing. You can shrug your shoulders and consider the matter closed... [but] remember this: other civilizations collapsed before ours, through wars of extermination, barbarism, hunger and extinction of their peoples for having consumed what cannot be reproduced, and destroyed what cannot be repaired".[164]

[164] Michel Bosquet (André Gorz), *Les impasses de la croissance*, in "Critique du capitalisme quotidien", Paris, Galilée, 1973, p. 287.

## VI. The Many Faces and Dimensions of Love

The theme and conception of love were already present in ancient Greek philosophy and poetry, as much as in medieval Christian theology or in troubadour and Renaissance lyric. But I believe it is undeniable that the artistic romanticism of the 19th century ended up formulating, in the popular imagination and culture of that time and the following centuries, as much as among the usual philistines of the arts and culture, the predominant but restrictive idea of an erotic-affective feeling, its raptures, and its troubled human relationships.

Thus, although Romanticism also had political, mystical or spiritualist, historical, evasionist and anti-bourgeois aspects,[165] it never failed to repeatedly emphasize the subjective states of the soul, its aspirations, ecstasies and torments in love. Early on, novels such as *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (Goethe) and *Delphine* (Madame de Staël) were very successful with the public throughout Europe, based precisely on stories of impossible, failed and, consequently, tragic passions.[166] Since then, the theme has invaded the creation and consumption of popular art in its most diverse languages, stimulated above all by the entertainment industry or mass culture (literature, music, cinema, television soap operas). Since then, and increasingly so, love, passion, and sex

[165] Novalis, for example, wrote: "By giving the common an elevated meaning, the ordinary a mysterious reputation, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite the infinite appearance, I romanticise it" (Indem ich dem Gemeinen einen hohen Sinn, dem Gewöhnlichen ein geheimnisvolles Ansehen, dem Bekannten die Würde des Unbekannten, dem Endlichen den unendlichen Schein gebe, so romantisiere ich es). Quoted by Bertold Heinzman, Goethes Romantik-Kritik, in goethe.gesellschaft-erfurt.de.

[166] It is worth remembering that Goethe later acknowledged that "I call the classical health and the romantic illness... The romantic is not a natural and original thing, but something manufactured, sought after, magnified, exaggerated, bizarre, to the point of being caricatured". Understanding romantic illness as a state of permanent rebellion, a constant desire for spiritual conquests that the real world is incapable of satisfying. (Das Klassische nenne ich das Gesunde und das Romantische das Kranke... „Das Romantische ist kein Natürliches, Ursprüngliches, sondern ein Gemachtes, ein Gesuchtes, Gesteigertes, Übertriebenes, Bizarres, bis ins Fratzenhafte und Karikaturartige). This quote from Goethe comes from a conversation with Eckermann on April 2, 1829. But before that, a similar opinion can be found in *Maximen und Reflexionen* (No. 863).

have gained exceptional importance, and those who profit from them commercially have reason to be happy.