

Art as a process and crowning achievement

The Work of Covenant of Man and the World

The modern tendency to multiply symbolic and technical intermediaries between human beings and the world has today led, notably through the omnipresence of digital technologies of communication and virtualisation in everyday life, to a critical distancing from reality. Human beings are increasingly both the agents and the unwitting victims of a loss of contact with reality. The harmful effects are as much individual as they are collective. To this situation must be added the underlying existence of a universal tendency – at least within the modern Western world – for human beings to keep the world and things at a distance from themselves, owing to a pre-reflective attitude of objectification and reification towards them. Within this subject–object dualism, representation, while undergoing a profound crisis for more than a century, has become overabundant and has imposed its screen of mediations at the expense of a relation of presence.

Art, this open field of experience in which behaviour, skill, creation, and works are all at stake, is implicated in more than one respect. We shall, however, retain only two essential points. First, it appears that an art founded upon solipsism and/or derealisation is inconceivable, or else capable only of generating empty and hollow forms. For there can be no art worthy of the name except as the fruit of a real, living, and consciously embraced encounter between the human being and the world. More precisely, art possesses substance and significance only as a singular and disciplined confrontation between a human being and something that is genuinely there – something that presents a certain density, resistance, and opacity, and which may equally well be the human being himself or herself.

Art is not an escape but a trial of reality, and in this lies its rarity and preciousness. The general conception of art that we defend leads us to highlight a second important aspect of its involvement, no longer within but rather in response to the contemporary situation described above. Might not art itself constitute a possible – and perhaps even an eminent – resource, enabling us not only to rediscover the path towards the real world and all the presences that inhabit it, but also to enter into resonance and communion with both the world and those presences through the exercise of an appropriate mode of conduct corresponding to the fulfilment of that path? It is this problem, at once ethical and aesthetic, since it concerns both the beauty and the truth of the world and of things, that we shall address here.

Our aim is to rethink the meaning of art, but also its end, in the double sense of the term, from the perspective of an art concerned with the constitution and embodiment of meaning through a seeing (*what is*) and a doing (*bringing into fulfilment what is*). This art, understood as a way of being and a personal mode of conduct, open yet irreducible to the creation of works, and pertaining equally to immanent and transitive action, is potentially available to all, though actualised only by a few. Such an art should be both the agent and the revealer, both the witness and the celebrant, of the dynamic alliance between humanity and the real world – in other words, of their correlative transformation.

In order to examine the conditions governing the existence of, and the factors contributing to the actualisation of, such an operative art of alliance, we shall draw both upon the methodological resources of Husserlian phenomenology¹ and upon the major insights of the gnosis established by Raymond Abellio. Our analysis will unfold through five key moments, each corresponding to

¹ Let us recall the extent to which Husserl's philosophical thought renewed reflection on art during the twentieth century. It opened an unprecedented, rich, and fertile path for approaching and interpreting aesthetics, the creative act, and works of art alike.

Among the best-known representatives of the application of the phenomenological method to the field of art are Martin Heidegger (*The Origin of the Work of Art*), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*Eye and Mind*), Michel Henry (*Seeing the Invisible*, on Wassily Kandinsky), Henri Maldiney (*Art and Existence*), and Mikel Dufrenne (*Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*).

the disclosure of a necessary modality of creative activity. Although the art under consideration appears to emerge explicitly only at the final stage, it is in reality already present from the outset. We shall begin with Husserl's twin demand for the reduction of the objectivist natural attitude and for a "return to the things themselves". There then follows the pivotal moment in which things are transfigured into "hyper-things" (surchoses) through the agency of the true operative principle underlying these processes: transcendental constituting consciousness. Finally, at the culmination of our enquiry, we shall seek to disclose the meaning of a universal, integral, and sublimated art, which we call "pure art", understood as a personal "lived vision" of the world and of things.

I. Purification, or the reduction of every dualism and natural objectification

For art not to remain mere *mimesis* – a more or less faithful imitation of a world or of things presupposed as objective – but to become genuinely creative, *poiesis* as much as *praxis*, it is imperative to interrupt what Husserlian phenomenology calls the "natural attitude". This attitude alienates individual consciousness through a spontaneous, underlying, unreflective, and dogmatic belief in the existence of a world independent of ourselves, imposing upon the subject its objects, forms, spatiality, temporality, meanings, and laws. This implicit and objectivist "general thesis" unconsciously postulates that there is constantly present, "*facing me, a single spatio-temporal reality of which I myself form a part, together with all other human beings.*"² To break with this thesis, with the belief it entails and the attitude it engenders, is to adopt a mode of conduct that makes possible the overcoming of the subject–object dualism and the alliance of humanity and the world.

For there can be no true and free relation to the world and to things, no fruitful and fulfilling alliance with them, no edifying and revelatory art, except through the establishment of a relation purified of every obstacle, every illusion, every disturbance, every falsehood, and every form of alienation. It is therefore necessary to purify our relations with them, and this is precisely what follows from breaking with the natural attitude. This act of purification, which Husserl calls the "phenomenological reduction"³, must be regarded as the first condition for a fruitful rediscovery of the world and of things, but also for the successful establishment of union and expression. In reality, this reduction comprises two complementary sub-moments: first, a "suspension" or "bracketing" of the "general positing of the natural attitude"; second, a transcendental reduction that discloses the entire field of the transcendental life of consciousness, within which the meaning of the being of the world and of things in fact originates. Before becoming a properly artistic mode of conduct, this reduction must be conceived and lived as a "*spiritual attitude from which the phenomenological way of working proceeds. This attitude is nothing other than the will for a radical absence of prejudice at the outset.*"⁴

This founding gesture is radical and revolutionary in at least three respects. First, through the "phenomenological epoché", the aim is to bring to an end our blind adherence to the thesis of the objective existence of the world. In doing so, we discipline ourselves no longer to accept as self-evident any pre-established belief, opinion, prejudice, presupposition, or previous knowledge⁵. The goal is thus to "free ourselves from the tyranny of what is taken for granted"⁶, to put an end to "a kind of blindness within seeing itself"⁷, whose cause is the fascination – one might even call it idolatrous – exerted by pre-existing forms upon consciousness. The objective is to experience a "fresh encounter with being itself"⁸ rather than with its spectres.

² Husserl, *Idées directrices pour une phénoménologie*, Livre premier, Gallimard, coll. « Tel », 1985 p. 95.

³ Husserl, *La crise des sciences européennes et la phénoménologie transcendantale*, Gallimard, coll. « Tel », 1989, § 39 à § 44.

⁴ Eugen Fink, *Proximité et distance*, Jérôme Millon, 1994, p. 26.

⁵ This 'garment of ideas' or 'symbols' referred to by Husserl (Krisis, p. 60).

⁶ Fink, *Proximité et distance*, op. cit., p. 70.

⁷ Paul Ricœur, « Introduction à *Ideen I* de Husserl », *Idées directrices pour une phénoménologie*, op. cit., p. XX.

⁸ Fink, *Proximité et distance*, op. cit., p. 27.

The phenomenological gesture of “suspension” therefore amounts to turning away from objectivist obsession and setting out towards an encounter with the world – not as it is imposed upon us through supposedly objective facts and forms, but as it gives itself from itself. It is not a matter of denying the existence of a reality-in-itself, but rather of refusing to fall into the objectivist and positivist trap into which the necessity of presupposing such a reality may lead us. There is indeed something rather than nothing; the question, however, is how this something is given to us, how it acquires meaning, and how we may enter into communion with it. The art we seek therefore has as its condition the (re)discovery of the world and of things through an approach to them – by sight, but also by hearing, smell, taste, touch, affection, and reason – that has been made virginal once more, purified of imposed structures, logics, propositions, validations, and mental constructions. As Husserl would say, I no longer make these my own; they no longer serve as my “foundation”.

This “creation of a fresh gaze upon the world”⁹ requires a conversion and transformation of vision to take place, constituting the second aspect of this radical and revolutionary gesture. As our analysis progresses, it will become apparent that seeing differently also means seeing something different. This conversion inaugurates a new way of seeing the world and things, but also a new way of understanding them, *understanding* being taken here in its fourfold sense of gathering, recognising, integrating, and relating. Not only the senses, but also thought, reflection, knowledge, and meditation are renewed through the “putting out of play” of the thesis of the natural attitude and through conversion to the new mode of givenness of the world that it discloses. We shall see that these transformations also entail, for the new subject, who has become a seer once more, a phase of rebirth into the world and into things.

This reduction is therefore a deliverance of consciousness, to be understood in the dual sense of liberation and donation. To purify here means to liberate oneself from facticity and from fascination with facticity by reducing – that is, by bringing to light, delimiting, isolating, and rejecting – the intermediaries that obstruct my access to, and union with, the world and with things. Symbolically, this operation bears affinities with methods of chemical purification, but above all with the *alchemical opus albedo*, the “work in white”. Yet purification also means unveiling the existence of a pure domain of being, and this unveiling constitutes the third radical and revolutionary aspect of the reduction. In this second phase, the latter becomes “transcendental reduction”. If we know from what the *epoché* delivers us, we must now ask what it delivers to us. What remains and imposes itself at the culmination of this reduction-as-purification is in fact a new “region” of being: the “transcendental field”, the domain of what Husserl calls both “pure phenomenological seeing” and “pure consciousness”¹⁰. The barrier that limited consciousness has been shattered, “releasing its absolute scope”¹¹, as well as its power, hitherto concealed. We thus find ourselves brought back into the presence of the immanence of pure, non-factual conscious life, revealed as the indubitable foundation of every donation of meaning, the original locus in which the being of the world and the being of things manifest themselves to us in their truth. It is within this “transcendental field” that the “theatre of appearances” unfolds – not the theatre of mere appearances or phantoms, which have now been reduced, but that of the “self-givenness of things”: immediate, intuitive, originary, and self-evident. Once the obstacles have been removed, “it is appearing itself that becomes the object”¹², in other words, the manner in which the world and things show themselves, and as they show themselves.

⁹ Natalie Depraz, *La crise de l'humanité européenne et la philosophie* (il s'agit de la traduction et d'une présentation du texte de Husserl), Hatier, 1992, p. 25.

¹⁰ Husserl, *Idées I*, op. cit., p.106 + chap. III.

¹¹ Paul Ricœur, « Introduction à *Ideen I* de Husserl », op. cit., p. XVIII.

¹² E. Housset, *Husserl ou l'énigme du monde*, Éditions du Seuil, 2000, p. 155.

Husserl's choice of, and radical commitment to, the transcendental orientation leads to "one and the same intentional fabric, indissolubly that of consciousness and of the world."¹³ In this way, the dualisms of interiority and exteriority, of subject and object, are brought to an end. For Eugen Fink, this "tendency towards originality is ... the return of life to itself within itself, and thus a radical movement of life towards itself."¹⁴ It then becomes possible to envisage a rapprochement – or even a marriage – between art and life. Fink further adds that the later Edmund Husserl, the thinker of the return to the "lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*), "seeks to return to the formless ground from which formations emerge ... he seeks to grasp it as an originary upsurge."¹⁵ It must be clearly understood that only the accomplishment of this return, carried out in full awareness of what has been gained through the reduction, can "free us from the sole concern of making use of the world, of mastering it, and teach us instead to answer for the meaning of the world."¹⁶ Is it not precisely here, in this radical disinterestedness, that the distinctive condition of all genuine art is founded?

II. Correlation, or "the Return to the Things Themselves"

Art, we have suggested, is the confrontation of a being with a material. What material, then, presents itself to the human being once reduction-as-purification has been accomplished? We now find ourselves in the presence of the immanent, transcendental life of pure consciousness, a life in and through which the world and things, Husserl emphasises, give themselves of their own accord, in their proper density and thickness. It is important to note that the purity attained through this form of ascetic practice that is reduction is in no way equivalent to a state of inner emptiness. The "pure art" to which Husserl refers in his *Letter to Hofmannsthal*¹⁷—an art in which all "posits of existence" have been neutralised, an art unfolding in disinterestedness towards worldly affairs and concerns (moral, political, economic, or practical)—is not an empty art. The manner in which transcendental consciousness relates itself to the world and to things has nothing whatsoever to do with any form of subjectivism or subjective idealism. To designate the new relation to self and world established by this immanent life, Husserlian phenomenology speaks of a "return to the things themselves". To call for such a return is by no means to advocate, against an overbearing rationalism, the virtues of empiricism.

What this programmatic watchword ultimately suggests is that we should abandon a distorted relation to ourselves, to the world, and to things. It is not a matter of retreating into the merely sensible matter of things in the form of an impossible return to pure immediate sensation. Nevertheless, it does indicate the necessity of finding the path towards a genuine encounter with that which is not simply consciousness closed in upon itself. Thus, the radical and revolutionary transformation of the natural attitude, far from annihilating the world and things, allows us instead to see them in their truth and in their being as world and as things.

But once the reduction has been carried out, what are we to understand by "truth", "world", and "thing"? Truth no longer signifies objectivity and no longer implies the correspondence or fidelity of what now appears to consciousness to some external referent or model. We shall see that the idea of "adequation" present in Husserlian phenomenology involves a different issue—an experiential one—than the mere reproduction of an external reality. As for "things" and the "world", their meaning and their being depend upon this "appearing" which, as we have seen, becomes the new and genuine object towards which all attention must be directed. Our consciousness, Husserl reveals, is always moving towards things, and it is through this transcendental movement, which characterises its very nature, that they offer themselves to it.

¹³ Depraz, *La crise...*, op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁴ *Proximité et distance*, op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁵ Idem, p. 184.

¹⁶ Housset, *Husserl ou l'énigme du monde*, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁷ Trad. E. Escoubas, *La part de l'œil*, n° 7, 1991.

This movement bears the name of “intentionality”¹⁸ and designates the characteristic of consciousness as a being-directed-towards. According to a now-famous formulation, the German philosopher defines it by the fact that “all consciousness is always consciousness of something”; in other words, to every intending act (or noesis) directed towards a particular reality there corresponds an intended object (or noema), which is none other than the appearing to consciousness, at the very moment it is intended and through the very movement that intends it, of that reality. This immediate association, the alliance we have been seeking, takes the technical name of transcendental “a priori correlation”: the correlation that places the operations of pure consciousness and things in relation to one another. Consciousness therefore never functions in a void but is always correlated with what it intends and which, through this intending, appears. Intention is thus accompanied by an intuition of the intended thing, an intuition which Husserl determines as that which comes to fulfil the intention¹⁹. What thus appears—this appearance at the heart of appearing itself, that is to say, the content of intuition—is precisely “the thing itself”.

To understand fully what is taking place here, and why Husserl can speak of an “originary giving intuition”²⁰, it must be borne in mind that what intention causes to appear, and which receives the name of “phenomenon”, is not a purely arbitrary and subjective datum. Rather, it refers to a reality transcendent to consciousness, a reality which nevertheless gives itself to consciousness, through appearing, in the form of a thing or a world. For consciousness, causing something to appear is therefore not a feat of conjuring or magic, but the immanent process through which the very meaning of things and of the world is constituted (as we shall see in Part Four), including the meaning of their transcendence. Consciousness’s movement towards things thus becomes not only an opening through which they may be received, but also the operation by which they manifest themselves—appear—as what they are. As for the world, it too is apprehended as a phenomenon; more precisely, it presents itself as the horizon of all horizons of things, an “infinite horizon of possible experience”²¹, and imposes itself as the “unity of meaning” within every intention.

Let us insist upon this appearing, for it is the key to art. It should be made clear that access to this “a priori correlation” is possible only through the exercise and maintenance of the reductive gesture, under the now reflexive and disinterested gaze of consciousness—that is to say, when consciousness grasps its own transcendental life and observes itself observing. Here, “a priori” designates an originary experience through which the meaning of the being of things is apprehended. The thing rests entirely within its appearing. Its being, Husserl maintains, is equivalent to its appearing. Whether it be my own body, another person, a landscape, a feeling, a memory, an automobile, or the architecture of a city, the thing manifests itself to consciousness in the fullness of its phenomenality, together with its horizon, its qualities, its concrete inscription in time and space, its shadows and its light. It demands that we accord the utmost importance to its appearing, so that the contours of its existence and the manner in which it unfolds in and through itself may be discovered and expressed. The more I concentrate upon it, the richer its presence becomes in quality and nuance; the more it is illuminated and revealed.

If, for Husserl, aesthetics and phenomenology are closely related, it is because neither concerns itself with facts or with the existence of objective things, as in the natural attitude, but rather with their manifestation to and through consciousness. The world, Husserl explains, “becomes for the artist a phenomenon; its existence is indifferent to him... He does not seek, like the philosopher, to discover the ‘meaning’ of the phenomenon of the world and grasp it conceptually, but rather to appropriate the phenomenon of the world intuitively, in order to gather from it an abundance

¹⁸ Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes : Introduction à la phénoménologie*, Vrin, 1986, § 14.

¹⁹ Voir *Recherches logiques*, Presses universitaires de France, 2002, Tome III, Recherche VI, Section 1, § 45.

²⁰ Husserl, *Idées I*, op. cit., pp. 65-66.

²¹ Husserl, *Philosophie première II – Théorie de la réduction phénoménologique*, PUF, 1972, p. 206.

of forms and materials for creative aesthetic configurations.”²² The art we have in mind—an art no longer of representation but of presence—must therefore consist in a meticulous, sustained, and continually renewed attention to things and to the manner in which they appear. “The artist,” notes Michel Haar, “makes us return from forms to their formation, from what has appeared to the very process of appearing.”²³ From the phenomenological perspective, art thus presents itself as “the rediscovery of a world in the state of its birth.”²⁴ Perhaps this is what Paul Klee sought to express through his celebrated statement: “Art does not reproduce the visible; it makes visible.”²⁵

Within this phenomenological method, *intuition* and *evidence* constitute the experiential foundation upon which both knowledge and art may be grounded²⁶. Once again, it is important not to conceive intuition as an arbitrary act of subjective consciousness. Precisely because it is not such an act, but possesses its own autonomy, intuition imposes measure and limit upon our experience of the thing. The thing itself imposes its norm; it serves as the guiding thread of its own donation, as phenomenology puts it. Within the *a priori correlation*, what is given is neither a copy nor a conception of the thing, but the entirety of the thing itself, with all its aspects as a thing. Originary donation, Husserl assures us, is accompanied by an evidence that owes nothing to the subjectivity of the subject. “In evidence, in the broadest sense of the term, we have the experience of a being and of its manner of being; thus, in it, the gaze of our mind reaches the thing itself.”²⁷ Evidence—which may require several intention-intuition sequences before it is fulfilled and becomes the ultimate sign of a perfect fulfilment of intuition—is established by Husserl as the final and self-sufficient criterion of the successful donation of things. Within this “theatre of appearances” that is the life of transcendental consciousness, it therefore amounts to the same thing to speak of the “thing itself”, the “concrete thing”, the thing “in the flesh”, “presence in person”, or the thing “in the original”.

III. Transfiguration, or the passage from things to “hyper-things”

If there is an aesthetic truth of the thing that is given in intuitive evidence, we must also discern within it the eidetic truth (that which makes a thing what it is) that it bears, for it is through the unified combination of these two truths that the thing and the world can present themselves in their total and integral unity and truth. “The very principles of being [the essences] are given in intuition, but through sensible intuition, and it is this that grounds the unity of the world.”²⁸ The thing that discloses itself through its sensible aspects is always already inhabited and illuminated by a complex of essences, even though we are usually unaware of their presence. Things – and therefore the world they compose through their interrelations – fully and completely disclose their truth only through the unveiling of the intimate and irreducible unity within them of sensibility and ideality.²⁹ Consequently, just as there exists access to things themselves according to their sensible aspect, we also have at our disposal another specific method of reduction, which Husserl called “eidetic”, providing us with the means of revealing essences.

Eidetic reduction thus reveals essences that are already there, already at work at the heart of every intention and intuition. These are *a priori*, absolute, unconditioned, and indubitable structures and principles. Ideality, another name for this realm of essences, is neither a being-in-itself devoid of

²² *Lettre à Hofmannsthal*, op. cit..

²³ Haar, M., *L’aure d’art. Essai sur l’ontologie des œuvres*, Hatier, 1997, p. 74.

²⁴ Idem.

²⁵ *Théorie de l’art moderne* (1920).

²⁶ Husserl regards intuition as a ‘source of knowledge’ (Ideas I, p. 78). This discovery constitutes the ‘Principle of Principles’ (Idées I, §24, p. 78).

²⁷ Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes*, op. cit., p. 10.

²⁸ Housset, *Husserl ou l’énigme du monde*, op. cit., p. 116.

²⁹ ‘It is in the very nature of the matter that, in the final analysis, everything that is categorical rests upon a sensory intuition’, Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 220–221 (183).

any relation to subjectivity and things, nor a being-for-itself dependent solely upon my present subjectivity and its finitude; rather, it is imposed by the thing itself. The intuition of essence therefore always presupposes the givenness of a thing, which serves as the limiting framework for that intuition. The thing also serves as an example through which the existence of an essence may be illustrated – as, for instance, the black cat I perceive exemplifies animality. But how is conscious and voluntary access to essences achieved? Through ideation, or the process of idealisation. The aim is to detach from things, in contrast to the accidental character of facts, those ideal features that are necessary. The method proposed by Husserl is known as “eidetic variation” or “free variation”.³⁰ It consists in subjecting reality, particular things (a round object), to imaginative variations (all possible round objects throughout space and time) and extracting from the superimposition of these variants the invariant, which may be called universal (roundness), the identical element present throughout diversity. Like the thing itself, the essence is given “in person” within what Husserl calls the “intuition of essence”.

What we wish first to emphasise is that this new reduction, consciously undertaken, in no way impoverishes our experience of things and the world. On the contrary, it enriches it – provided, of course, that these essences are not regarded merely in themselves and for themselves, which would constitute yet another source of fascination, but are immediately reintegrated into things and become inseparable from them, henceforth manifesting themselves as if in filigree. As Raymond Abellio forcefully explains, although such a reduction initially produces a derealisation of the “natural object” or the “fortuitous event”, “it derealises them in the same way that a work of art, refusing merely to copy nature, exalts it in the very act. The continual growth of the powers of abstraction and structuring goes hand in hand with a sensory and even bodily enrichment, an exultation and deepening of all the powers of the body.”³¹ In this way, we discover within ourselves “unsuspected visual resources”.³² We shall designate this new stage on the path of art by the term chosen by Abellio to describe the transformation undergone by things and the world: transfiguration³³. It marks the decisive stage in what Abellio calls the interiorisation of the world.

The significance of grasping essences within sensible intuition – or, in Abellio’s terms, of their “integration” into things following their reduction – is therefore to render our experience of the world, and our communication with it, more meaningful, more ordered, more transparent, more luminous, richer, more nuanced, more intricately interconnected, and ultimately more alive because more deeply explored. To proceed in this way is to attain a higher degree of truth, both sensible and intelligible, concerning the world and things, by discovering within them – that is to say, by bringing to appearance – the inherent presence, immersed within the sensible, of meaning and universality. Without this meaning and universality there would be no order, no relation, no intelligibility, no unity, and therefore no world – only chaos. The world thus manifests itself as an organised and rational unity grounded in this universal aesthetic-eidetic *a priori* that prefigures every act of consciousness. Essence reveals itself as “pure meaning, which must be intuited if one is to grasp the rationality of the world”³⁴, its own *logos*.

This alliance of the sensible and the intelligible offers a way beyond the opposition between idealism and materialism. The eidetic reduction thus undertaken presents itself as a form of transcendental empiricism or, to borrow a phrase from Emmanuel Levinas, as an “idealism of the

³⁰ *Expérience et jugement. Recherches en vue d'une généalogie de la logique*, PUF, 1971, pp. 412-434 + *Psychologie Phénoménologique* (1925-1928), Vrin, 2001, pp. 71-84.

³¹ S. A., p. 32. For details of Abellio’s projects, please refer to the end of the text.

³² Natalie Depraz, « Crise et création », *Rencontres Raymond Abellio 2005* (<https://rencontres-abbellio.net/Archive/2005>), p. 6.

³³ “I thus find myself reducing the problem of the ‘return to things themselves’ to that of the transfiguration of the thing within the living present of that very same Ego.” Abellio, M. N. G., p. 85.

³⁴ Housset, *Husserl ou l'énigme du monde*, op. cit., p. 115.

sensible". Essences are and remain within things; it is therefore not a matter of induction or deduction, nor even of abstraction in the sense of "drawing out from". The apprehension of the universal (the colour yellow) occurs within the sensible world given through intuition (the colour of this sunflower). Essence is fused with the thing itself, within which it grounds both its universal identity and its participation in the world.

Abellio regarded transfiguration, which he considered "abrupt", as "the highest enigma". Indeed, because of what it brings about within us – an irreversible consequence that radically and completely transforms our relation to things and to the world – transfiguration cannot fail to provoke wonder and questioning. By comparing its effects to that spiritual manifestation which Christian tradition calls the "glorified body"³⁵, Abellio further accentuates the mystery surrounding its nature. There is, moreover, an undeniable difficulty in speaking about and describing it, for it designates the lived experience of a limit-state of consciousness whose singularity, subtlety, and intensity cannot be adequately conveyed by any particular verbal expression. When Abellio occasionally speaks of illumination, he does so not from a mystical and ecstatic perspective but from a gnostic and *enstatic* one. Through and within this illumination, things become radiant and are transformed, in turn, into "supports of knowledge". A circular – and indeed spherical – movement thus emerges between knowledge and transfiguration, each being at once the source and the product of the other, and vice versa.

The following passage is one in which Abellio succeeds in synthesising the process of transfiguration.

But this perception of perception radically alters the original state. The lived state, initially naïve, loses its spontaneity [...] Among the elements of my new perception there figure not only those of the house as such, but also those of perception itself as a lived flow [...] Yet the concomitant vision I have, in this state, of the house that was my original motive, far from being lost, distanced, or obscured by the interposition of 'my' secondary perception before 'its' primary perception, is paradoxically intensified: clearer, more present, and more charged with objective reality than before. [...]

Here lies the whole problem of consciousness's presence to itself: the 'reflective' distance between consciousness and its object is abolished. There is no longer reflection but adhesion. In fact, a secondary spontaneity replaces the former primary spontaneity. A spontaneous reflex gives way to a power that is no less spontaneous. We are confronted here with a fact that cannot be justified by purely speculative analysis: namely, the transfiguration of the thing as a fact of consciousness, its transformation [...] into a 'super-thing' (*surchose*), and the passage from the state of science to the state of knowledge.³⁶

The two key points of this passage are, on the one hand, the abolition of every separation – and therefore of every dualism – between subject and object, and, on the other hand, the emergence of a power. We have already dealt with the first point. As regards the second, we are confronted with a crucial issue: the constitution of a genuine personal power as a condition for the establishment of an art grounded not only in eidetic-sensible vision but, above all, in its embodied enactment and testing. In reality, it must be stressed that there is not merely one power but several, all related to the acquisition and exercise of freedom, all ultimately reducible to the constitutive power – a power that is neither magical nor political and in no sense worldly. We have already encountered, in the practice of eidetic variation, the positive power of imagination operating between the sensible and the intelligible. The free play of this faculty, unconcerned with any "positing of existence" on the part of things, grants us access to the realm of pure possibilities. Its privileged domain is, of course, art, and particularly fiction, in which it can give

³⁵ To understand this connection and, above all, how it enables Abellio to shed light on the process and significance of the Transfiguration, see his analysis of Raphael's painting aptly titled *The Transfiguration* ('Gnosis and Transfiguration', the final lecture transcribed in *Question* no. 72, *La structure absolue*, 1987, pp. 39–40).

³⁶ Abellio S. A., pp. 62–63.

free rein to the voluntary variation of images in order to reach these pure possibilities. This is why Edmund Husserl accords a certain privilege to art and poetry. We must also acknowledge the power of identifying essences – or, as Zen would say, of designation – which likewise enables us to escape the confines of the here and now, as well as contingency. Another important aspect of this power lies in the opportunity it affords consciousness. By opening to it the realm of ideal or pure possibilities, it enables a passage from the finite world of facts and things to the infinite world of the possible, both actual and potential – for example, all yellow objects currently in existence, but also all those that have existed in the past or may exist in the future. This phenomenon, which allows consciousness – and thereby our experience itself – to gain a firmer grasp upon the world and no longer to be “taken by surprise” by it, to use Abellio’s expression, corresponds to an intensification of experience. These powers facilitate the exercise of freedom of spirit by establishing a distance, even a detachment, from factual reality. If artistic creation may benefit from the illumination and aesthetic richness brought by such powers, individual and collective human existence can only be ennobled by their use when they are united within the constitutive power that confers meaning upon the world.

Another distinctive feature of transfiguration as identified by Raymond Abellio deserves emphasis, for it enables us both to understand the existence of the many conceptions and practices of art and to distinguish those that concern us here. In his analysis³⁷, Abellio identifies two types of essence: *lower essences*, formed by particular and universal properties (for example, those of a particular spatial form – round, square, parallelepipedal, and so forth), and *higher essences*, constituted by the most universal idealities (for example, the essence of space itself). It is from their “short-circuit”, he argues, that transfiguration springs forth. This means that, within the unified and illuminated vision of the world, the higher essences are inseparable from the lower essences, the latter serving as “supports” of knowledge for the former. It is at this stage that the “derealisation” of the thing takes place. The significance of this distinction lies in its indication of the two extremes of the broad spectrum of possible art. At one end, that of reduction pushed to its limit and of pure extension, we find the disconnected and multivalent multiplicity of disruptive elements that provoke fascination. At the other end, that of ultimate integration and pure intensity, there appears the constituted unity of edifying meaning, a source of communion not only with others and with the world but also, as Abellio adds, with the Self, understood as the presence of Universal Intelligence.

The reduction–integration pair proposed by Abellio constitutes the major operative polarity in the establishment of the kind of art we are seeking. From this perspective, either we ascend upwards, towards ever more integrating and ever better incarnated meaning, or we descend downwards towards innumerable and dispersed signs, formalism, or possession. Three major tendencies within modern and contemporary art may be distinguished from this conception. At the lower pole, we find the exclusive overvaluation, mobilisation, proliferation, and sedimentation of lower components taken in isolation – words, images, notes, sensations, planes, lines, points, moments, material components, and so forth – together with the chthonic, matricial, nocturnal, irrational, and centrifugal forces associated with them. At the upper pole stand all those pictorial, literary, cinematic, and musical compositions that undertake a work of crystallising the layers of reality, revealing the unity of meaning, and universalising relation: the domain of analogies, proportions, genesis, structures, mediations, correspondences, and dialectics. Here too are manifested the solar, autonomising, diurnal, anagogical, and centripetal powers. At the precise midpoint between these poles lie all artistic forms belonging to *mimesis*, realism, and naturalism. Between these two extremes – in that interval where art still finds its place and its *raison d’être*

³⁷ S. A., chap. 2, § 6.

through the expression of a style – unfolds the entire spectrum of possible mixed works³⁸, whether they are marked predominantly by a descending dialectic or by an ascending one.

IV. Constitution, or the Work of Meaning Performed by Transcendental Consciousness

“The world of which we speak, and of which we shall ever be able to speak, which we know and shall ever be able to know, is in fact nothing other than precisely that world which we constitute within the immanence of our conscious life, both individual and communal, through the multiple systems of cognitive formations that are unified within it... that world which, as knowing subjects, we never cease to possess and towards which we never cease to strive as the goal of knowledge; and, in the final analysis, this world is nothing other than our idea, a pure and simple idea.” - Edmund Husserl, *First Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 354 (277)

Let us now examine in greater detail what this constitutive power represents, a power which we have suggested gathers within its exercise all the transcendental powers liberated through reduction-as-purification. We have seen that, in order to perceive the world more fully in all its richness, depth, diversity, and truth – and therefore to express it more adequately, particularly through profound, revealing, and radiant works – it is necessary to distance oneself from it and detach oneself from all that has become worldly. This applies equally to ourselves, insofar as we are initially regarded as objects in the world, as external beings subjected to objectification. Reduction and the reflexive return of consciousness upon itself have revealed the existence of the transcendental ego as the “ground” of all validation. They have also taught us that, although the thing and even the world, as phenomena, are what appears, this appearing of things and of the world is itself the product of an activity of transcendental consciousness. Consequently, the constitutive power – which in phenomenology is the power of conferring meaning upon the things and world that present themselves – depends likewise upon this transcendental subject. The explication of the world as meaning therefore refers back to a self-explication of the ego. The evolution of the world’s meaning is in fact related to the subject’s own inner development. This implies that the unity and clarity of the world depend upon the practical resolution of the problem of continuity and unity within intentional life itself. It is the necessity of such a return to the constituting activity of consciousness that Raymond Abellio indicates in the following passage:

We shall achieve nothing with regard to a profound grasp of the artistic phenomenon so long as we do not undertake a simultaneous reconstruction of all means of expression and knowledge, considered not only in their particular relativity but in the relativity of all communication to the poles of consciousness bearing experiences, intention, and intensity, from which that communication seeks to emanate or through which it seeks to pass. And indeed aesthetics will remain futile so long as it has not measured this intensity and unveiled this intention; that is, until it has reached, beyond techniques, consciousnesses themselves.³⁹

The genesis of the world and the genesis of the self are therefore parallel. This teaching also invites us to recognise that, if the world requires the transcendental ego in order to be a world and to possess meaning, the ego in turn requires the world in order to fulfil itself as a giver of meaning. The relation to oneself thus passes through the world. In constituting the world, the concrete subject constitutes itself. The encounter between self and world is therefore necessary, and their alliance here takes on the character of a work to be accomplished, the true horizon and meaning of the art we are seeking. Thanks to the phenomenological awakening, we know that we must move from the stage of naïve and dualistic confrontation to that of translucent and unifying communion. With constitution – a key notion never systematically expounded by Edmund Husserl – the ego once again experiences itself as inscribed within and absorbed by the world.

³⁸ ‘One might even define art as the result of the fusion of intensity and scope, or rather of their more or less irreducible combination.’ Abellio, ‘L’esthétique de la fin des temps’, in A. N. G., p. 56

³⁹ A. N. G., p. 52.

Yet this is now a world of meaning, a spiritual world. In his later works⁴⁰, Husserl designates this new world, the object of a new gaze purified of all natural naïveté, by the transcendental concept of the *lifeworld* (*Lebenswelt*), that is, the world of common human experience. This lifeworld is at once the pre-given ground and the horizon of all praxis, both actual and possible. The constitutive power with which we are entrusted, as the power of conferring meaning upon this shared lifeworld, is a responsibility that we must assume. This responsibility must be constant and can never be completed, for the idea of a fully constituted world – that is, a fully meaningful world – is an infinite idea implying a teleology.

Furthermore, because this life-world—from which we come and to which we ceaselessly return—is both ground and horizon, our constitutive power must be inscribed within an evolving circular movement of reflection unfolding between, on the one hand, a return to the origin of all experience—a return that must be understood as an illuminating recollection of the foundation of all life and all meaning—and, on the other hand, a centrifugal movement towards an end situated in infinity, a movement responding to (and called upon to answer for) the insistent appeal, the vocation, addressed to us human beings by the life-world itself. There is nothing arbitrary in this bestowal of meaning by the transcendental subject; rather, it is a personal response governed by what Abellio, from a metaphysical and gnostic perspective, calls the world's “global structuring intentionality”. To grasp fully what is at stake here, one must simultaneously accept the two meanings—objective and subjective—contained within the genitive expression “consciousness of the world”. Things in reality form a totality, an ordered system of things, and therefore a meaningful world, one that signifies and conveys meaning. It is this world of relations that constitution must take into account, step by step, using as its guiding thread the things that give themselves. When Fink defines this “bestowal of meaning” (*Sinngebung*) as a “creation”⁴¹, he does not understand it as creation *ex nihilo*, but rather as self-generative creation; that is to say, as implementing an intensifying circularity, an evolving and integrative reflection between constituting consciousness and the constituted world, or between intended meaning and constituted meaning. We might now say: between transfiguring consciousness and the transfigured world.

That there is nothing arbitrary or contingent in this constitution of meaning inaugurated by reduction, purification, and conversion – and that such meaning is not relative to any particular empirical self – is further confirmed by the fact that this triple transformation leads simultaneously to a depersonalisation and a universalisation of both world and subject. “The thought of which it speaks [phenomenological analysis] is nobody's thought,” Husserl assures us. “We put out of play the transcendent positing of the ego [the empirical ego], and hold fast to the absolute, to consciousness in the pure sense.”⁴² This does not mean, however, that the conferral of meaning is disembodied. Rather, what is truly mine is defined not by the empirical self and its worldly interests, but by the activity of my own transcendental subjective life awakened to the universal problem of meaning. The transcendental subject is in reality free from every personal attachment to the world, free – as we have seen – with respect to facts. Abellio even declares that such a subject no longer takes sides in anything while continuing to participate in everything. It has attained a state governed by unconditionality, impartiality, and disinterestedness, attitudes that must be firmly distinguished from indifference. Abellio further adds that such a subject has become amoral (not immoral) and asocial (not antisocial).

To understand more fully the intertwining of consciousness and world, let us examine this constitutive power more closely. For Paul Ricœur, “constitution must be the essential positivity of consciousness”⁴³; that is, both that through which consciousness continually affirms itself as

⁴⁰ Particularly in *Krisis*.

⁴¹ “...in the depths of his life, the creation of the world takes place.” *Proximité et distance*, op. cit., p. 34.

⁴² *Chose et espace. Leçons de 1907*, PUF, 1989, §13, p. 64(41).

⁴³ « Introduction à *Ideen I* de Husserl », op. cit., p. XVIII.

giver of meaning (being-as-meaning) and the very principle through which the world appears as phenomenon (meaning-of-being). Constitution rests upon the *a priori* correlation between habitus and the surrounding world, or lifeworld. According to Ricœur, “reality is relative to consciousness, in the sense that it announces itself there as a unity of meaning within a diversity of convergent profiles.”⁴⁴ The problem then becomes one of understanding how the unity – and therefore the continuity – of consciousness and of its correlate, the world, is possible. The explanation lies in the synthesising power of constitution, the true principle of all genesis. It is a structuring and unifying power of the ego, which Husserl calls the “universal constitutive synthesis”, because it succeeds in constituting a unified world from the diversity of modes of consciousness and the infinite multiplicity of “profiles”⁴⁵ through which things are given to us. The world is therefore the product of a continuous and indefinite synthesis, both passive and active. The various acts and lived experiences of consciousness – perception, imagination, memory, and so forth – are articulated with one another through the present activity of meaning-giving, which stands out against the background of the world’s already pre-given, already pre-constituted unity of meaning. Present meaning is therefore grounded in already constituted meaning (and retention), while simultaneously opening through anticipation (or protention) towards a potential future constitution, thus generating an intentional unity of meaning.

To speak of synthesis and genesis is therefore to return to the problem of time as a key dimension in the constitution of self and world. Fundamentally, if there is a world possessing a history, it is because its constitution belongs to a subject who likewise has a history: the history of its own constitution, which is equivalent to the history of its constitutive power. Temporality is no longer here an objective form, as in Isaac Newton or even Immanuel Kant. Rather, it is the mode of being of the subject in its presence to itself and to the world. It is subjectivity itself in its mode of givenness and of meaning-giving. It is the universal and immanent form of every genesis of the “I”, referring concretely to personal acts of intentional life that crystallise into habitus. It is also the bond linking past, present, and future. Our “I” is no longer simply subjected to the passage of time, because time has become for us both the material and the means of intervention and transformation. Duration, for example, becomes an *a priori* possibility of reactivating a past evidence for the sake of present or future action. To see, to know, and to build the meaning of the world all refer to a temporalisation of conscious life in its constitutive relation to the world. The meaning of the world evolves as the ego evolves. To assume the richness and meaning of the world is therefore to adopt a comprehensive mode of conduct that integrates, directs, and elevates habitus; to live an operative relation to time, to the instant, to the living present, even to eternity itself; to implement what Abellio calls a “synthetic style”⁴⁶; to choose an appropriate manner of being and art of living that takes account of all these dispositions of the pure ego. All these choices through which we constitute ourselves, while simultaneously constituting a world, must therefore become a living art – an art that may ultimately be accompanied by creating, now understood in the sense of creating works. Such an art will consequently be an art of temporality. It becomes evident, therefore, that constitutive power is inseparable from the constitution of a *power-to-be*.

There is indeed an auto-constitution of the ego. In reality, it is threefold and corresponds to a threefold temporalisation: as transcendental ego, the identical pole of lived experiences, a pure absolute self-presence beyond time; as ego underlying habitus, the self-presence of noetic ipseity

⁴⁴ Idem, pp. XVI-XVII.

⁴⁵ To fully understand what is at stake here, let us take an example. The moment I perceive a tree, the tree-object is constituted. It cannot be reduced to the sensations it triggers in me at that moment. These sensations merely provide me with a ‘sketch’ of what this object is, a sketch that is relative to my position in relation to it. In every perspective on it, in every new sketch, it is the entire tree-object (‘identical X’ = ‘unifying centre’) that is targeted as an intentional unit, and is therefore constituted as identical by means of syntheses of identification. This amounts to saying that this constituted tree-object transcends my lived experience.

⁴⁶ Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes*, op. cit., § 37, pp. 123-124 et 109-110.

evolving through the constitution of immanent temporality and through the subject's decisions in its work of constitution; as empirical ego, resulting from a self-objectification subject to worldly time. The constituting ego thus truly individualises itself as a knowing being in the process of becoming, beginning from its stream of lived experience. This individualisation is originary in relation to the secondary individualisation of the world. There therefore exists a "sphere of ownness"⁴⁷ belonging to the ego, the sphere in which meaning becomes incarnate in a living body. This sphere affirms itself not only through its conferral of meaning but also through the integration of that meaning – in other words, through the interiorisation of the world as "immanent transcendence". Indeed, Abellio tells us, "transcendental vision is personal, specific, and incommunicable. It belongs to the action of gnosis, that is, to the process of personalisation and specification of states."⁴⁸ This constitution of an intensity of consciousness, understood as the "conscious interiorisation of all separate or external knowledge transformed into gnosis, or ineffable knowledge"⁴⁹, is crucial for establishing art as a manner of being. This amounts to saying that transfiguration is a product of gnosis, but equally that gnosis is a product of transfiguration.

V. Communion, or the Resolution of Vision and Action in a Pure Art

"The problem of consciousness is to transform perpetually the factors of fascination into factors of transfiguration (or communion), but this task is endless, for the multiplication of signs is indefinite and the organisation of those signs is indefinitely infinite."

– *Dialogue avec Raymond Abellio*, p. 153

If there exists a possible art of being-in-the-world – one that is also an art of world-making (of meaning and community) – arising from transcendental reduction, purification, and conversion, then it depends not merely upon our awakened and receptive relation to the world, nor even upon our conferring meaning upon it, but upon our capacity to embody and live that meaning. In doing so, we ourselves become world-making, both individually and with others; that is, we exercise a power of communion with the shared lifeworld, a power that is none other than a capacity-to-be in adequation with a meaningful world. The challenge consists in passing from the conferral of meaning to a genuine personal power-to-be, through the aesthetic and ethical assumption of responsibility for the transcendental correlation between consciousness and world. Put differently, our concern here is with the artist himself – the one who must be simultaneously the author, the agent, and the point of application of art. Whether we conceive it as the personal signature of a work or as the signature of a life, style is always that which reveals both the concrete commitment of a being and the degree of advancement attained in the practice of art. Within the perspective that concerns us here – that of a "pure art", to borrow Husserl's expression, an art emancipated from representation – the question of style becomes that of constructing and expressing a personal mode of being capable of fulfilling art's ultimate end: communion with the world, the transfiguration of the subject, and, ultimately, the formation of an intersubjective community. The issue is therefore not one of appearance or display but of inner state; far less one of action than of presence. A quality of smile or silence, even of stillness itself, can here be more eloquent than discourse, and conduct takes precedence over attitude.

What we seek is the apotheosis of the dialectic of incarnation and assumption within an art of operative knowledge: access to the impersonal Self. In Pauline and Abellian terms, we aspire to an art of the inner man.⁵⁰ In relation to this goal, one must acknowledge – indeed, Abellio

⁴⁷ Idem, § 44.

⁴⁸ S. A., p. 67.

⁴⁹ Idem, pp. 62-63.

⁵⁰ "The transfiguration of the world and the edification of the inner man are one and the same act, perpetually repeated and intensified: such is the function of art." Abellio, "Gnose et Transfiguration", op. cit., p. 38

perhaps does so excessively – that artistic style, the style embodied in a work, appears as the “final iridescence of the essence of matter” and therefore as the “last obstacle between the artist and God... Art does not prevent one from seeing God, but from attaining Him. Or rather, art allows one to believe that one sees God. Yet the issue is not to see God; it is to be Him.”⁵¹ The same holds true of style understood as a general “way of doing”, for here too, because of embodiment, we must reckon with our body, its particularities, limitations, and resistances. Yet the body to which we refer – the transcendental flesh, distinct from the objectified and reified body of the natural attitude and of science, the flesh that is ours and that we experience as a unity of physical, psychic, and intellectual life – is in no way secondary or arbitrary. As the domain in which constituted meaning and gnosis become incarnate, and as the basis from which we project ourselves towards the world and things, it is, on the contrary, central and primordial. Whereas the reduced gaze, Abellio notes, separates and distinguishes, the body integrates and unifies.

The real problem is that although communion with the world possesses a certain recurrence on the level of vision, producing apodictic evidences, the situation is different on the level of action. There, evidence is measured in terms of the degree of adequation between intention – that which is aimed at or willed – and what is actually realised through action. In this second case, where the subject’s intention confronts what Abellio calls “the intention of the world”, confirmations, validations, and verifications are infinite. Outside simple, common, and repetitive activities – in domains such as reflection, art, or even sexuality,⁵² which require self-reflection, acquired knowledge, individuation, and development – the transition from the domain of vision, even embodied vision, to that of action charged with fulfilling it⁵³ or satisfying its intention, in other words the active realisation of the project carried by vision, is never completely accomplished. A gap remains. There is always a residue. This interval of inadequation between vision and action, between willing and being able, is, according to Abellio, “the motor of the perpetual renewal of genesis.”⁵⁴ In order to confront and illuminate this issue, we shall now present the distinction and dialectic established by Raymond Abellio between vision, action, and art – or between seeing, doing, and the manner of doing – or again between knowing, doing, and know-how.⁵⁵

If there is always a manner of doing within action, and if, conversely, there is always an element of action within art (which explains the persistence of inadequation), Abellio nevertheless distinguishes them by proposing that action belongs to the sphere of repetitive activity, whereas art – understood here as a generic term designating a way of being rather than the domain of the arts properly speaking – belongs to the sphere of non-repetitive activity. However, in order to demonstrate the connection and continuity that exist between them, he presents art as the sphere in which action is intensified. Art thus occupies the summit of the triptych of vision–action–art. It is its culmination. An important clarification is required. Although nothing stands above art, art does not simply conclude a linear development inaugurated by vision. In reality, Abellio argues, art in turn nourishes the gnosis already constituted that led to it. Through an intensifying closure of the circle between the extremes, it relaunches vision itself, now endowed with a new knowledge that must be embodied and that will give rise to a new project.

This embodiment of vision, knowledge, and the essences of the world is what Abellio, as we have seen, calls *knowledge* or *gnosis*, a “lived vision”. To distinguish it both from being-in-itself – which

⁵¹ A. C., p. 83.

⁵² Abellio considers sex, art and the contemplation of death to be the three ‘essential driving forces’ or ‘ultimate questions’ of the inner self.

⁵³ As it is said, ‘to carry out a task’.

⁵⁴ S. A., p. 127.

⁵⁵ “In reality, the author of ‘La structure absolue’ explores each of his actions in terms of their transformative power, which is strikingly evident in this unique fusion of seeing and doing—a fusion that precisely defines the demiurge’s creative act.” N. Depraz, “Crise et création”, op. cit., p. 9.

designates the pre-reflective world, the world of matrices, of “diffuse knowledge”, reflexes, and fusion – and from being-for-itself, the proper mode of consciousness through which scientific knowledge becomes possible, Abellio identifies gnosis, or infused knowledge, as being *cause-of-itself*, that is, as the power of self-construction and communion with the totality of being. The process of embodiment begins with constituted knowledge (vision), arising from the power to designate things, essences, and “syntactic or logical forms”⁵⁶. We are here at the stage of what Abellio calls *substantivisation*. From this point, two paths of embodiment – or *substantialisation* – become available. The first proceeds from the flesh, now rendered knowledgeable, towards the world through the construction of tools, whether material or symbolic, which are placed “at the service of the body” and extend it in order to secure a firmer grasp upon the world. The second proceeds through the progressive interiorisation of the world: I come to understand more fully its “supports”, its meaning, its “pedagogy”. Through the constitution of gnosis and the immanent presence of self to itself, scientific knowledge becomes embodied, the flesh becomes illuminated, and gnosis short-circuits things (transforming them into *hyper-things*). Ultimately, at its highest point, it renders tools and intermediaries unnecessary. All transformations of the flesh are inscribed within what Abellio calls its *germ*, that is, its indefinite potential for experiences of the world. Being cause-of-itself thus corresponds to germination, which tradition, he notes, regards as “the supreme art, also called the Great Work”.⁵⁷

In their strict distinction, then, we have, on the one hand, action, supported by our already acquired knowledge – which must constantly be renewed because the gap between willing and being able is irreducible, because the world’s “surprises” are inexhaustible, and because our local connections with it are infinite – and, on the other hand, pure art, founded upon gnosis, whose genesis is itself endless because the reserve of meaning to be constituted and embodied is inexhaustible. The former multiplies tools within “spatial time”, operating through sedimentation and, through engagement in the world, often sacrifices itself to utility and efficiency. The latter unifies meaning within “lived time”, operating through crystallisation and, whether through detached conduct and/or the creation of works, devotes itself to truth and beauty. Whereas action realises itself within the visible, pure art, when it remains at the stage of purely gnostic vision without works, abides within the invisible immanence of personal consciousness and flesh. In both cases, however, the finite confronts the infinite and is thereby relativised. The same was already true of vision.

We may invoke here another triptych that synthesises this process of embodiment: from nouns (vision and knowledge) to flesh (knowledge-as-gnosis, art), by way of verbs (action). This spherical genetic process – a continual circular return to the origin, to the ground, mobilising reduction and integration while generating vertically, in opposite directions, both tools and meaning – unceasingly amplifies and intensifies my “sphere of proper belonging”, advancing me endlessly in my knowledge of the world. Being cause-of-itself thus perpetually and hyperbolically surpasses itself (“positivity”) towards an ultimate “position”: that occupied by Unitotal Being, whose vision is granted in its entirety to the gnostic, yet with whom no real and integral communion will be accomplished before the end of time. This is what Abellio calls the *paradox of gnosis*. My desire for communion with the world is absolute, but my action, the power of my flesh over the world, and the art I practise in order to realise this desire remain limited and relativised because of the infinity of possible relations that the world requires me to discover and integrate – an infinity that Abellio explains through the existence of a “universal interdependence”. Pure art and the gnosis with which it is correlated both depend upon the conscious recognition of this universal interdependence. If the vision of this interdependence – and therefore of the infinite – is “authentic”, because it is one, total, and apodictic, the action undertaken in order to live it is

⁵⁶ Abellio, S. A., p. 196.

⁵⁷ S. A., p. 133.

“inauthentic”, because it is multiple, local, repetitive, and inadequate. It is art, in turn – unique, non-repetitive, global, and productive of adequation – that recovers authenticity.

Pure art must therefore be understood as a contradictory experience of the infinite, for it sets in motion, on the basis of its vision, a *becoming of* (in the intensifying sense of the genitive) the Absolute, which for us remains an endlessly renewed becoming-Absolute. It is also an art of constituting the relations between all things, bringing them forth from universal interdependence through its knowledge of structures and dynamics, stases and ecstasies, levels and passages.

In every present moment, therefore, the fate of the encounter between a will-to-be and a power-to-be is at stake; between the vision of communion between my flesh and the world and the concrete, personal realisation of that communion. Between the two stretches the entire field of action. In truth, Abellio declares, every present moment gathers together vision, action, and art. Every present moment may potentially be crowned by a communion with the world of which pure art is the guarantee. In such a case, we pass from an initial and spontaneous experience to vision (essences and knowledge); then, through a first inversion, from vision to another experience (action); and finally, through an inversion of the inversion, from this integrated and crystallised experience to a new vision (art), which is also a new spontaneity, more knowing than the first.⁵⁸ Here we rediscover the contiguity of the extremes. In turn, “the artistic must also become natural. Art must be a form of immediate and universal communication, a new nature.”⁵⁹

A new gaze and a new world have come into being for us; our action has become more assured. We have crossed the double transcendence from being-in-itself to being-for-itself, and from being-for-itself to being-cause-of-itself. We have effected the synthesis of being-in-itself and being-for-itself. We have thereby integrated the possible infinity of similar situations. We have ultimately amplified our “proper sphere” and attained a higher level of intensity. As Raymond Abellio emphasises, “Man encloses himself within a succession of ever more integrating totalities. He is a universe of universes; he continually universalises universes.”⁶⁰

When, conscious of the paradox mentioned above and of the underlying presence of universal interdependence, we succeed in living this continual amplification and intensification in full awareness, we attain a state of paradoxical communion with the world in which time opens onto eternity, speech onto the ineffable, action onto stillness, creation onto non-doing, ethics onto aesthetics, aesthetics onto ethics, beauty onto truth, and truth onto beauty. Lived transfiguration becomes the permanent event “through which the succession, the patient progression of time, hitherto misunderstood, suddenly comes to a halt within us, while being itself is at once melted and founded by the flame; an event that possesses a history only in order to lead us out of history.”⁶¹ It is this event which, through the second incarnation, derealising and transforming things into *hyper-things*, enables us to interiorise presence itself (in the form of meaning), and not merely what is present.

Having disclosed to us, from within and through the lifeworld, the light, order, and meaning concealed within it, and having led us “from the being of the phenomenon to the phenomenon of being”,⁶² that is, to the ineffable vision of totality, the phenomenological-artistic way gradually detaches us from all commerce with things and worldly concerns. It also allows us progressively to dispense with mediation, whether material or symbolic tools. This is the inner man: the one who, crucified upon the “contradiction between the intensity of time and the expanse of space”⁶³, inhabits the gap opened between vision and action, willing and being able, and who, through

⁵⁸ To understand this structure of the evolution from action to art, see the example cited by Abellio (a fall in the mountains) in S. A., § X, pp. 143–153.

⁵⁹ P. G., p. 106.

⁶⁰ S. A., p. 151.

⁶¹ A. N. G., p. 60.

⁶² S. A., pp. 185–191.

⁶³ Abellio, D. M. I., p. 32.

pure art, is inhabited by this light, order, and meaning. He is reborn into the world – that is, into a continually renewed state of knowledge of the world – insofar as he becomes the world at the same time as the world becomes him, throughout an indefinite duration rising upon the eternal present. Pure art rediscovers life while life itself is elevated through art. Conscious that “art, in itself, is unfinishable”⁶⁴, the inner man nevertheless rises to “the lived vision of the eternal present and to the permanent establishment of relations, the interiorisation, and ultimately the effacement of every ‘event’ as such through ‘second memory’.”⁶⁵

This aesthetics of communion, which is equally an ethics, tends, according to Raymond Abellio, towards the “formless perception” and the art-without-art of Zen Buddhism.⁶⁶ What, then, becomes of the work of art itself within such a conception? It is, Abellio confides, that “which arises in the in-between, at the centre of the cross.” It “hollows out transcendence”⁶⁷ and, for this very reason, always remains unfinished. Moreover, because it is doubly relative – firstly as an external and visible form dependent upon the inadequate domain of action, and secondly because of the invisible gnosis that sustains it, which is itself a vision and an aiming towards the Absolute – “every human work is always unsatisfactory.”⁶⁸ The inner man understands this relativity and insufficiency of the work when measured against art’s ultimate end as communion. The work thus occupies a paradoxical position. It is “like those means whose end ignores them, yet which one is nevertheless obliged to use”⁶⁹; but it is also the case that the final, unique, and unifying work must ultimately be conceived as both the absence of a work and the work of its own absence. Therein lies its mystery. Meanwhile, if one nevertheless accepts, beneath the horizon of pure art, an art of forms, it may affirm itself as the art of expressing – through finite works composed of words, signs, images, figures, gestures, and sounds that “detach themselves”⁷⁰ from gnosis – the origin of things and of the world. Such an art allows these things, in their truth, richness, complexity, and original self-evidence, to come forth and reveal themselves. It presents, in the form of paintings, performances, music, sculpture, installations, or films, their very emergence. Born from a rupture with the self-evidence of the natural attitude, arising from wonder, astonishment, and contemplative recollection before the appearing being of the world and of things, before the fact that there is something rather than nothing, it seeks to awaken the same states of soul in those who encounter its works. It may also take another path, as it does in Abellio’s metaphysical novel⁷¹: on the one hand, evoking the drama of the inner man – that is, the actions and events that lead to his emergence and detachment – and, on the other, showing the possibilities for the constitution of a transcendental intersubjective community, a true gnostic fraternity of pure art.

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⁶⁴ D. R. A., p. 37.

⁶⁵ Idem, p. 153.

⁶⁶ Abellio, C. H., p. 152.

⁶⁷ D. M. I., p. 32

⁶⁸ M. N. G., p. 289.

⁶⁹ D. M. I., p. 40.

⁷⁰ Abellio, S. A., p. 194.

⁷¹ C.H., p. 155.

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