

# Kant's Dove

By Alt Går Bra

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In our article for the previous issue of *Billedkunst*, we spoke of exciting opportunities awaiting artists today to redefine the art of the future.<sup>1</sup> We referred to indicators of profound changes, including mass protests—with vast sectors of the population worldwide expressing their will to take stronger stands in decision-making processes—and the shift from a unipolar to a multipolar world.



In that article, we discussed Antonio Gramsci and the role he bestowed on organic intellectuals, including artists, as a catalytic for change. Characterizing the current

<sup>1</sup> Alt Går Bra, "Vi kan forestille oss et samfunn uten kunst," *Billedkunst*, no. 4 (2020): 52-7.

situation in a recent article, philosopher Alain Badiou calls to embrace affirmative dialectics as a more fruitful way to engage with present events, “...negation, which unifies, does not bear in itself any type of affirmation, creative will, nor any active conception of the analysis of the situations and of what can be or should be, a politics of a new type.”<sup>2</sup>

In the present text, we would like to reflect upon ways of affirmative engagement, departing from some considerations on the relationship between art and society. One of the philosophers we mentioned in our previous article, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, analyzes this relationship in several of his works, including his first full-fledged book *Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics*.<sup>3</sup>

Best known as a thinker of the philosophy of praxis—thus an heir of Antonio Gramsci and György Lukács—, Sánchez Vázquez made important contributions to aesthetics and the sociology of art.<sup>4</sup> Very influential in Latin America, this Mexican philosopher is yet to be fully discovered elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> He dedicated a total of ten books to aesthetics—published throughout his life—, a theme recurrent in many of his other works. Here, we will primarily refer to two of his books, the aforementioned *Art and Society* from 1965 and *Cuestiones estéticas y artísticas contemporáneas*<sup>6</sup> from 1996.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Alain Badiou, “A propos de la conjoncture actuelle,” *Quartier général*, December 2, 2020, <https://qg.media/2020/12/02/a-propos-de-la-conjoncture-actuelle-par-alain-badiou>. Also in English translation in “On the Current Conjunction,” *Verso* (blog), December 21, 2020, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4954-on-the-current-conjunction>.

<sup>3</sup> This is the only one of Sánchez Vázquez’s treatises on aesthetics to be translated into English, *Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics*, trans. Maro Riofrancos (London: Merlin Press, 1974), originally published in Spanish as *Las ideas estéticas de Marx. Ensayos de estética marxista* (Mexico City: Era, 1965) [Fourteenth printing, 1989]. Re-published: Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1966 and 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Stefan Gandler’s book *Critical Marxism in Mexico* contains a comprehensive bibliographical appendix on Sánchez Vázquez, which the present article uses as reference. Stefan Gandler, *Critical Marxism in Mexico: Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez and Bolívar Echeverría* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2015), 363-408.

<sup>5</sup> Up to today, Sánchez Vázquez has been rather absent in the international scene, either when it comes to aesthetics or philosophy in general. For instance, Sánchez Vázquez is not mentioned in Andrew Hemingway’s *Marxism and the History of Art* (Andrew Hemingway, ed., *Marxism and the History of Art: From William Morris to the New Left* (London ; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto, 2006)) and appears only in a footnote in *ReNew Marxist Art History* (Warren Carter, Haran Barnaby, and Frederic J. Schwartz, eds., *ReNew Marxist Art History* (London: Art Books, 2013)). As Néstor Kohan points out, Perry Anderson does not mention Sánchez Vázquez in *Considerations on Western Marxism* (Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1987)) nor in *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism: The Wellek Library Lectures* (London: Verso Ed, 1983)) in Néstor Kohan, “El marxismo crítico de Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez,” *Utopía y praxis latinoamericana* 7, no. 18 (2002): 104.

<sup>6</sup> Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, *Cuestiones estéticas y artísticas contemporáneas* [Contemporary aesthetic and artistic questions] (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996). 292 pp. Reprint 2003.

<sup>7</sup> His other prominent works on aesthetics include the following five books: *Estética y marxismo* [Aesthetics and Marxism], 2 vols. Vol. 1: *Comunismo y arte* [Communism and art]. Vol. 2: *Estética comunista* [Communist aesthetics] (Mexico City: Era, 1970). 431 pp. and 525 pp. [5th edition, 1983], *Textos de estética y teoría del arte. Antología* [Texts on aesthetics and art theory. Anthology] (Mexico City: UNAM, Colegio de Ciencias y Humanidades/Dirección General de Publicaciones, 1972). (Col. Lecturas Universitarias no. 14.) [Fifth reprinting, 1996.] 492 pp. (Editor and compiler of the anthology), *Ensayos sobre arte y marxismo* [Essays

## A Radical Conception of Art

Not many philosophers have expressed such profound appreciation for art as Sánchez Vázquez did. His finest articulations of this esteem emerge in his discussions of the relationship between art and society.

Sánchez Vázquez opens one of the most fascinating chapters of his *Cuestiones estéticas y artísticas contemporáneas* by stating that “If humans are above all practical beings who transform and create, producing a humanized nature with their work and creating through this very process their own social and human nature, art is, then, an essential human activity.”<sup>8</sup> In this chapter, Sánchez Vázquez puts forth his radical vision of art as a sine qua non of human nature. He posits the relationship between human beings and art as a necessity: “Art exists only for and because of human beings (understood in social and not purely individual terms); human beings, likewise, exist only when they transform and create,”<sup>9</sup> with art being the quintessential act of transformation and creation. Sánchez Vázquez remarks that it is through art that human beings most poignantly affirm their human condition, and it is through art that they are able to acquire the fullest awareness of their humanity.

With transpiring frustration, Sánchez Vázquez asks why such an essential human activity has been declared dead for so long and with such persistence. Turning frustration into critique, he claims that those who announce the death of art do not really mean so, but they are rather affirming that art can be replaced by science and technology. In *Art and Society*, Sánchez Vázquez indicates the reasons why art is nowadays the target of such hostilities, “In a world where everything tends to be quantifiable and abstract, art, which is the highest sphere of expression of the concrete, of the qualitative, enters in contradiction with this alienated world, and, at the same time, appears as an insupportable redoubt of the human.”<sup>10</sup>

## What Is Art?

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about art and Marxism] (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1984) 218 pp. (Col. Enlace), *Invitación a la estética* [Invitation to aesthetics] (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1992) 272 pp. (Col. Tratados y manuales.) [Second edition, 2005. Republished Mexico City: Random House Mondadori, 2007.], and *De la estética de la recepción a una estética de la participación* [From an aesthetics of reception to an aesthetics of participation] (Mexico City: UNAM, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 2005). (Col. Relecciones.) Reprint 2007.

<sup>8</sup> All citations of Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez are direct translations from the Spanish original by the authors. Chapter “Socialización de la creación o muerte del arte.” [Socialization of the creation or death of art] in Sánchez Vázquez, *Cuestiones estéticas y artísticas contemporáneas*, 150.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>10</sup> Sánchez Vázquez, *Las ideas estéticas de Marx*, 116.

Art, according to Sánchez Vázquez, can only be the production of knowledge and creative work, its function being to enlarge and enrich reality. Art is indissoluble from society, even if this relationship has always been complex. Claiming art's independence from society so that it can reach higher levels of freedom or development would be reasoning like Kant's dove, who got the idea that without the resistance of the air, it could fly at full speed in all freedom.<sup>11</sup> Sánchez Vázquez, however, admits the undeniable divorce between art and the public in our time vis-à-vis what he qualifies as a false dilemma: "art of the elites or art of the masses, privileged consumption of works of art or massive consumption of artistic subproducts."<sup>12</sup> In his view, the response should be no other than the outright rejection of this dilemma.

### **A "Popular Art"**

A "truly popular art" should be used to oppose that false dilemma.

In spite of the ambiguity of the term, Sánchez Vázquez insists in reclaiming "popular art" or "truly popular art" to name what he defines as authentic art. He points out that the false dilemma is structured around two misleading uses of the term "popular art": either as art for the masses or as populist art.

The former conception denotes an art consumed in large numbers, an art for the masses. Assuming that "popular art" is art for the masses, according to Sánchez Vázquez, implies the existence of another art, and art for the minorities, an "antipopular" art. In his view, this conception of "popular art" presupposes that it is only by denying its own nature and means of expression that true art can aspire to communicate to larger audiences. This first component of the false dilemma closes the doors to authentic art, what Sánchez Vázquez calls a "truly popular art," which is the art produced not for the minorities nor for the masses, but for the people.

The second component of the false dilemma, uses the term "popular art" to denote populist art, a type of art that represents the people displaying conformist idiosyncrasies and picturesque habits. According to Sánchez Vázquez, this conception is as false as the former since it establishes a superficial relationship with the people and leads to a costumbrist, populist, and rather backward type of art.

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<sup>11</sup> Kant's quote is as follows: "The light dove, in free flight cutting the air the resistance of which it feels, could get the idea that it could do even better in airless space." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 129.

<sup>12</sup> Sánchez Vázquez, *Las ideas estéticas de Marx*, 261.

True, authentic art, in Sánchez Vázquez's view, is that which is quantitatively open to the majority, instead of narrowing itself to cultural and financial elites, and qualitatively profound and fecund, instead of complaisant and populist.

## Subjectivation



*Cuestiones estéticas y artísticas contemporáneas* closes with a chapter analyzing the thoughts of artist Diego Rivera.<sup>13</sup> In this chapter, Rivera's ideas resonate with those of renowned contemporary philosophers including the aforementioned Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière. Rivera's thoughts relate to the former in their affirmative aspect and to the latter in their conception of collective subjectivation.

Sánchez Vázquez quotes Rivera as follows: "The artistic object—as any other product—creates a public sensible to art and capable of aesthetic enjoyment. Production, therefore, not only produces an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object."<sup>14</sup> This is Rivera's concept of a "popular art," an art that is not populist but that addresses itself to the people, as subjects and not as masses. The key of Rivera's concept is in the latter part of his statement, when he claims that art produces "a subject for the object." As Sánchez Vázquez points out, the current system is hostile to art because, as a totality, it needs for

<sup>13</sup> Chapter "Claves de la ideología estética de Diego Rivera" [Keys of the aesthetic ideology of Diego Rivera].

<sup>14</sup> Sánchez Vázquez, *Cuestiones estéticas y artísticas contemporáneas*, 201.

the whole to be subordinated to the market. Artwork is, therefore, forced to become, above all, a merchandise—either to be sold at the highest possible price in the market or to be diluted into a lower product that can be sold in mass to the general public. A “truly popular art” needs to produce a new subject, different from both the elites and the masses, claims Sánchez Vázquez.

A concept central to Jacques Rancière’s thought, subjectivation is a rather complex idea, which he, however, describes in a simple and effective manner in the following paragraph:

“We are surrounded by people who want to save the planet, head off to treat the wounded in all four corners of the Earth, serve meals to refugees and fight to revitalise deprived neighbourhoods. There are a lot more people committing themselves today than in my own era. We do not lack for ideals, but for collective subjectivations. An ideal is what incites people to concern themselves with others. A collective subjectivation is what makes all these people, together, constitute a people.”<sup>15</sup>

Rancière’s collective subjectivation is a strategy of identification outside the given categories, which in Rivera’s thought art has the capacity to produce, i.e. not only an artistic object but also a subject, a collective subject, a people.

The shift from a unipolar to a multipolar world could be read in those terms, as the result of the struggle of those in the periphery for greater geopolitical equality. Worldwide mass protests could be understood as a movement parallel to that, at the national and regional levels, with people in the streets refusing to keep playing the role of inaudible masses.

### **An Art for the People and by the People?**

Not only does Sánchez Vázquez refer to the need for an art addressing the people as subjects but also to the role of the people in the production of art itself. With the advent of industrialization and urbanization, Sánchez Vázquez remarks that a new struggle against creative human capacity took place, resulting in the subordination of creativity to profit. As we pointed out in our previous article in *Billedkunst*, this issue emerged in Adolf Loos’s article “Ornament and Crime,” with its negativity toward the strain of creativity in the popular classes.<sup>16</sup> According to Sánchez Vázquez, popular artistic expressions such as folk art tend to be no longer perceived as the articulations of collective creativity and become eventually degraded as curiosities and collector’s

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<sup>15</sup> Jacques Rancière, “Getting Beyond Hatred: An Interview with Jacques Rancière,” *Verso* (blog), February, 17, 2016, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2505-getting-beyond-hatred-an-interview-with-jacques-ranciere>.

<sup>16</sup> Sánchez Vázquez, *Cuestiones estéticas y artísticas contemporáneas*, 54.

items—ineluctably deemed the expression of either brutes or noble savages. This tendency values creativity concentrated in individuals with exceptional talent to the detriment of modest artists and amateurs. As our previous article remarked, that exceptional talent is sometimes determined by arbitrariness or simply a whim, often finding support in dense theoretical apparatuses, rather impenetrable for most.<sup>17</sup>

This process has resulted in the dispossession of the creative talent from vast sectors of the population, concentrating artistic creation within a limited number of individuals, effecting, in turn, a separation of art from society. Sánchez Vázquez, who praises the capacity of art to remain this relentless stronghold of creativity, however, points out that the very existence of art is dependent on society at large. As our previous article pointed it out in the words of Janet Wolff, “the idea of the artist as sole originator of a work obscures the fact that art has continued to be a collective product.”<sup>18</sup>

Far from objecting individual talent, Sánchez Vázquez praises the skill of great artists who have brought creativity to the heights of human existence through their masterpieces. He concludes *Art and Society* with Marx and Engels’s response to Stirner to summarize his point on art by the people, “... it is not as Sancho imagines that each should do the work of Raphael, but that anyone in whom there is a potential Raphael should be able to develop without hindrance.”<sup>19</sup>

### **A Final Thought: On Political Art**

It could be useful to close this article with some observations about political art. Is the “truly popular art” that Sánchez Vázquez spoke about what we would call political art today? Perhaps, we should begin by asking what political art is or we could also ask what apolitical art is. We will look for the answer going back to Sánchez Vázquez’s analysis of Diego Rivera’s texts, where Rivera is quoted referring to apolitical art as he speaks of the artistic theory of l’art pour l’art. Rivera remarks: “This artistic theory, which pretends to be apolitical, actually possesses an enormous political content: the implication of the superiority of a minority.”<sup>20</sup> And what is the impact of the artistic theory of l’art pour l’art according to Rivera? He answers, “This theory serves to discredit the use of art as a revolutionary weapon and serves to affirm that all art with a theme, a social content, is bad.”<sup>21</sup> If Rivera’s thoughts are to be taken into account, it would be, then, difficult to

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<sup>17</sup> “Just like Loos, [Clement] Greenberg calls to replace traditional skills and representation as parameters of judgement by arbitrariness, by the whim of the artist or perhaps just that of the art critic.” Alt Går Bra, “Vi kan forestille oss et samfunn uten kunst,” 56.

<sup>18</sup> Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 27.

<sup>19</sup> Sánchez Vázquez, *Las ideas estéticas de Marx*, 281 from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 1998) 416-7.

<sup>20</sup> Sánchez Vázquez, *Cuestiones estéticas y artísticas contemporáneas*, 199.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

name a certain art political and another one apolitical, in short, to speak about political art per se.

Sánchez Vázquez does not make a distinction between political and apolitical art, but he sees instead all art as being in an indissoluble relationship with society. And since society is in permanent movement, as a tightrope walker on the rope of history, Sánchez Vázquez puts forth the idea that artists are constantly changing their positions toward society: sometimes being more harmonious with it, at other times just trying to escape from it, and sometimes profoundly engaging with it in protest and rebellion. In Sánchez Vázquez's view, none of these approaches seem to be necessarily more or less political per se.

Jacques Rancière can, again, help us further clarify this subject with more recent examples. In a lecture he gave at the 2nd Moscow Biennale in 2007, Rancière referred to a type of art many would qualify as political art:

... parodies of promotional films, reprocessed disco sounds, media stars modelled in wax figures, Disney animals turned to polymorphous perverts, montages of “vernacular” photographs showing us standardized petty-bourgeois living-rooms, or overloaded supermarket trolleys, huge installations of pipes and machines representing the bowels of the social machine, swallowing everything and turning everything into shit.<sup>22</sup>

There is little doubt that most of these dispositifs aim to help us discover the wrongdoings of the current order, but, as Rancière points out, since “it will be hard to find anybody who still ignores them [the wrongdoings of the current order], the mechanism ends up spinning around itself and playing on the very undecidability of its effect.”<sup>23</sup> Regardless of their intentions, these artistic strategies tend to reinforce the omnipotence of the system, thus contributing to the consensus. Dissensus, on the contrary, focuses on opposing ways of understanding the relation between the particular and the universal, the logic that separates the few experts from the masses. Artistic investigations, according to Rancière, could more fruitfully focus on what he calls “the part of the uncounted” or “the part of those who have no part,” since “This is the kind of universality that politics is about: the capacity of anybody.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Jacques Rancière, “Misadventures of Universality,” (presented at the Second Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art, “Thinking Worlds” An International Symposium on Philosophy, Politics, and Aesthetic Theory, November, 17th -18th, 2007), available through Wayback Machine, [https://web.archive.org/web/20150517223025/http://2nd.moscowbiennale.ru/en/mouffe\\_report\\_en](https://web.archive.org/web/20150517223025/http://2nd.moscowbiennale.ru/en/mouffe_report_en). Note that the entry is misnamed as Chantal Mouffe. Also with slightly different formulations in *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2008), 76, and in “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art,” *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas*, 2. no. 1 (Summer 2008): 12.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

It is very exciting to imagine the myriad ways in which artists will engage with the current indicators of profound changes in a multipolar world.

Artists, of course, can also choose to ignore the current events or to acknowledge them and disengage. After all, as Sánchez Vázquez would say, what is human is tragic. And it is precisely this tragicity, originating in the artform of Ancient Greek tragedy, that terrifies most of us the most—our very capacity to transform and create in face of the unknown—what makes life exciting and worth living.



Images:

Diego Rivera, *Man at the Crossroads* (*El hombre en el cruce del camino*), 1934, mural, repainted after the Rockefeller Center original, Mexico City, Palacio de Bellas Artes.

Diego Rivera with a xoloitzcuintli dog, photograph, anonymous, Mexico City, Frida Kahlo Museum.

David Alfaro Siqueiros, *New Democracy* (*Nueva Democracia*), 1944, mural, Mexico City, Palacio de Bellas Artes.

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So, how are artists going to engage (or disengage) with the current indicators of profound changes in a multipolar world?

After all, as Sánchez Vázquez would say, what is human is tragic. And it is this unknown (precisely what scares most of us the most) what makes life exciting and worth living, a human life and not the life of a machine. G.W.F. Hegel would say, a life of freedom. Hic Rhodus, hic saltus!

Una nuova storia alternativa della filosofia \_ il cammino ontologico-sociale della filosofia.pdf (page 325 of 513)

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È del tutto chiaro che le categorie filosofiche sono fatti sociali, che possono essere socialmente dedotti con una certa precisione (ed anche ovviamente con una fisiologica imprecisione), ma questo non significa che i loro empirici portatori possono anch'essi essere dedotti dialetticamente. L'empirica esistenza di Platone, Aristotele, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel e Marx dipende dal fatto aleatorio per cui i loro genitori hanno fatto all'amore nove mesi prima della loro nascita, e questi grandi filosofi non sarebbero mai nati se i loro genitori avessero litigato e si fossero separati dieci mesi prima. In proposito, sarebbe errato sostenere che avremmo egualmente i loro sistemi, perché qualcun altro li avrebbe sostituiti scrivendoli, ed adempiendo così alla loro stessa funzione sociale. È ovvio che non può essere così. Così come sono, questi sistemi filosofici derivano direttamente dall'empirica contingenza della concreta personalità dei loro autori. Come direbbe Hegel, bisogna che anche il casuale ed il contingente siano necessari. **Chi scrive fa parte di una generazione la cui parte maggioritaria ha compiuto una pittoresca riconversione ideologica da un apparente marxismo estremistico ad un reale neoliberalismo dei diritti umani** stessi, ma evidentemente il potere del contingente ha voluto che lo scrivente, in questo simile all'atomo epicureo ed alla sua deviazione (*clinamen, pareklisis*), sia "caduto" in una diversa traiettoria, per nulla predestinata dal corso della storia universale, che lo ha portato ad opporsi in modo radicale ed implacabile a questa ripugnante deriva generazionale, che quasi sicuramente i nostri discendenti condanneranno (non subito, però, il purgatorio sarà ancora presumibilmente lungo).

La sinergia di rimozione della **tragicità** della storia, di accettazione bovina dell'ingiunzione inesequibile alla "scientificità" predittiva della giustificazione logica della superiorità morale del socialismo sul capitalismo, ed infine dell'accettazione della teoria neokantiana del rispecchiamento e della retroazione identitaria dell'*inesistente* opposizione polare fra materialismo ed idealismo, con conseguente negazione del carattere sociale e storico di *tutti* i concetti filosofici, ha prodotto un vero e proprio mostro ideologico, che potremmo definire come la formazione ideologica marxista classica, oppure il codice marxista primario, usando qui un termine di origine freudiana (la "scena primaria", ecc.). Detto questo, senza alcuna *pietas* retrospettiva, bisogna applicare *anche* a questo codice la deduzione sociale delle categorie, da cui risulta che questo codice teorico penoso era comunque *socialmente necessario*, e quindi interamente *legittimo* sul piano storico e culturale.

La classe operaia europea della Grande Depressione (1873-1896). della seconda

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chi non ha preventivamente capito (anche sulla base dell'insegnamento dei Greci) che la storia è di per sé tragica, e la tragicità è la sua fisiologia, non la sua patologia. Nel clima di riscrittura della storia e di annientamento pianificato della memoria, sembra oggi che in settant'anni si sia levata soltanto la voce della signora Hannah Arendt, che avrebbe detto che il socialismo era una forma di "totalitarismo", e che qualunque *vita activa* deve rifiutarlo con ribrezzo. In altre parole, contestare il capitalismo non può che portare al totalitarismo, in quanto l'utopia, essendo in-

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seguibile, non può che portare al terrore. E con questo la faccenda è chiusa, e possiamo tracciare un rigo sull'intero ventesimo secolo, secolo della follia totalitaria. È questa la visione del mondo cialtrona della fallimentare generazione sessantottina, che appunto ipostatizza il proprio grottesco fallimento in una sorta di disincanto verso la storia universale. In altre parole, si giunge a Karl Popper, Max Weber, Karl Löwith e Lucio Colletti attraverso la propria iniziazione alle droghe nelle facoltà occupate. E tuttavia, la natura miserabile di questi buffoni non deve esimere dal discutere seriamente la categoria di "totalitarismo".

De la Estetica de la Recepcion\_2005.pdf (page 78 of 131) — Edited

o de entretenimiento que, por su carácter masivo, sirve aún más que el "gran arte" al principio de rentabilidad y de la supremacía del valor de cambio, propio de esta sociedad. La sujeción, en uno y otro caso, a las exigencias del mercado se traduce en una limitación de la libertad de creación y a esa limitación conduce la hostilidad del capitalismo al arte.

Ahora bien, esa tendencia hostil que Marx denuncia con

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ción reivindica el papel activo, creador del receptor, hay que considerar también que su actividad y creatividad sólo la refiere — como ya hemos señalado — al aspecto significativo o interpretativo de la obra. Pero, ¿es posible la participación del receptor que afecte también a sus otros dos aspectos — el formal y el material, sensible, o sea: al artefacto, según la terminología de Mukarovsky? De ser posible, ello exigiría la necesidad de pasar de la Estética de la Recepción a una estética de la participación, entendiendo por ésta la intervención del receptor en el proceso creador mismo al afectar con ella a la obra no sólo en su aspecto significativo, sino también como objeto sensible, material, dotado de cierta forma.

Sánchez Vázquez enumerates a series of facts that, conspiring against art, undermine the vital necessity of art for humanity, giving the impression that art is dead. He summarizes these facts in a few points, some of which we will succinctly state as follows. First, since art has increasingly become a merchandise, artworks tend to be less appreciated for their use value (the aesthetic value) than for their exchange value. Secondly, since art is subjected to the laws of the market, consisting in maximum profit, it is possible to mass produce artworks as uniform and standardized products, homogenizing the tastes and needs of consumers. Lastly and perhaps more importantly, Sánchez Vázquez refers to the paradox of art and communication. It is precisely in the era of mass communication and overabundance of channels of dissemination that art is able to communicate the least. Sánchez Vázquez, unpropitiously, remarks, “Modern art has been left without a public, or more precisely, the public has been reduced to a minority or to an elite.” There are two concomitant reasons for that divorce: art’s inability to plunge into a deformed sensibility and the public’s incapacity to raise to the level of art. The result is, Sánchez Vázquez ominously lashes out, the “escision between the minority art of the elites and the majority art of the masses: one authentic, the other false and banal.”<sup>25</sup>

In his first book on aesthetics, *Las Ideas Estéticas de Marx*, Sánchez Vázquez dedicated a chapter to a historical analysis of the aforementioned rupture. The chapter focuses on

<sup>25</sup> P. 154

how, throughout history, artists have been obliged to negotiate two needs: artistic freedom and communication with the public. As Sánchez Vázquez explains, in ancient Greece, artists generally produced work directly for the public—for the polis or State. Likewise in the Middle Ages, artists produced art for the Church, keeping a direct relationship between artist and public. Sánchez Vázquez observes that, similarly with the introduction of patronage, artists kept a direct relationship with the public or consumer. In addition to this direct relationship, through all these epochs, art was perceived as a spiritual production, avowedly ‘unproductive’ when measured with criteria and values of material production. As Sánchez Vázquez puts it, “Even if a possessor physically owns a piece of artwork, residing within the walls of a palace or a house, the owner is not conceived as its true possessor unless the artwork is spiritually possessed, by entering into an ideological and aesthetic relationship with the work.”<sup>26</sup>

Incipient in the Renaissance and achieving certain maturity with Dutch painters from the 18th century, a new configuration began in the 19th century. Artists no longer produced for a known individual or patron, nor for the State or Church, but for an anonymous client, an “abstract consumer, who is the invisible public, hidden behind this impersonal dividing line, traced by the market.”<sup>27</sup> This new configuration resulted in the perception that artistic production could be carried out in all freedom, without the intervention of an individual or institution commissioning the work: “By no longer producing for a determined client and no longer depending on a commission, artists believe that they have indeed affirmed their freedom, coming to think that this new configuration is the one that best responds to their aspirations and that they have achieved the much wanted artistic freedom to create as they wish.”<sup>28</sup> According to Sánchez Vázquez, however, the constraint of this hidden, invisible figure is even more constant and all pervasive, without an identifiable voice nor face.

As Sánchez Vázquez put it, artists have always been obliged to negotiate their material needs with their need for freedom, which has proved to be problematic in all historical periods. Following Marx, Sánchez Vázquez explains that this is ultimately rooted in the spiritual nature of art, in direct opposition to the capitalist logic of material production, but to fully address this issue we would need to produce a much longer piece.<sup>29</sup>

Our use of Marx in this article will be circumscribed to the postulate, cited at the beginning of this text, from the Preface of his Critique of Political Economy. “No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.” While the productive forces of art continue to

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<sup>26</sup> P. 171 (Aesthetic)

<sup>27</sup> P. 174 (Aesthetic)

<sup>28</sup> P. 174

<sup>29</sup> Look into SV XXX and XXX and into Marx XXX and XXX

produce for the market, instead of giving birth to the new, art will be a hindrance rather than a conducive force for the new configuration to be born.

It is not by denouncing, the, by now obvious, alienating effects of an order that art will have a part in the social maieutic of delivering something new by using what Ranciere calls a “labor of fiction.” Artists are those who intend to “make the invisible visible or to question the self-evidence of the visible; to rupture given relations between things and meanings and, inversely, to invent novel relationships between things and meanings that were previously unrelated.”<sup>30</sup> Far from designating the imaginary as opposed to the real, this labor of fiction “involves the re-framing of the 'real', or the framing of a dissensus. Fiction is a way of changing existing modes of sensory presentations and forms of enunciation; of varying frames, scales and rhythms; and of building new relationships between reality and appearance, the individual and the collective.”<sup>31</sup>

Both Marx and Sánchez Vázquez, together with many of the neglected thinkers we listed in our previous article, are rather pessimistic. Marx’s understanding of art as, by its own nature, inimical to capitalism has not inspired thinkers to conceive ways to bestow art with efficacy within a hostile social order. In very general terms, many Marxists envisioned, namely throughout the last century, the ultimate defeat of capitalism as a mesianic fact, something like a prophecy carved in the script of history. We just had to sit and wait. In 2006, we assisted one of those very rare moments of history when Warren Buffett confirmed Karl Marx: “There’s class warfare, all right, but it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning.”<sup>32</sup>

History is ruthless and it tends to damn those who walk bare.

Then to Sanchez Vazquez’s Gramsci

And then back to the Ranciere example and Marx

Then to the example of Pasolini

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<sup>30</sup> *Dissensus, The Paradoxes of Political Art*, p. 141

<sup>31</sup> *Dissensus, The Paradoxes of Political Art*, p. 141

<sup>32</sup> There’s class warfare, all right, but it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning. As quoted in “In Class Warfare, Guess Which Class Is Winning” by Ben Stein, in *The New York Times* (26 November 2006)

## Conclusion

\*\*\*END

“Wohl aber, auch heute, jeder Mensch jeder Zeit erklären: ich mache meine eigene Entfremdung nicht mehr mit, auch wenn ich dabei tragisch untergehe; was freilich objektiv auch nicht ein fatales Schicksal ist.”

Georgy Lukacs, “Lob des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts,” in Werke, IV, pp. 659-64 (p.63), in typewritten p. 6, Heinrich Boll

“But, even today, everyone should explain at any time: I no longer go along with my own alienation, even if I go down tragically in the process; which is, of course, objectively not a fatal fate either. ”

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/German\\_History\\_and\\_German\\_Identity/Rhlvhew1JFEC?q=lukacs+alienation+boll&gbpv=1#f=false](https://www.google.com/books/edition/German_History_and_German_Identity/Rhlvhew1JFEC?q=lukacs+alienation+boll&gbpv=1#f=false)

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“My independence, which is my strength, results in solitude, which is my weakness.” (La mia indipendenza, che è la mia forza, implica la solitudine, che è la mia debolezza.) Pasolini

"Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig."

La premessa della nuova letteratura non può non essere storico-politica, popolare: deve tendere a elaborare ciò che già esiste, polemicamente o in altro modo non importa; ciò che importa è che essa affondi le sue radici nell'humus della cultura popolare così come è, coi suoi gusti, le sue tendenze ecc., col suo mondo morale e intellettuale sia pure arretrato e convenzionale.<sup>33</sup>

Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* 15, 58, (Q15, 58, p. 1820-1822)

Such disdain for popular roots exemplifies Gramsci's idea of the traditional intellectual, as opposed to the new organic intellectual. Speaking about the new literature, Gramsci states that its premise can be nothing else than “sinking its roots in the humus of popular culture.”

Perhaps, one of the first distinctions to make when speaking about colonialism is that between State and Empire. The fagocitical institution that expands its frontiers, physically and culturally, is the Empire. The State is something else.

This article will, therefore, speak of empires and not states.

Arnold Hauser addresses the issue in similar terms when he compares how freedom is constrained in contemporary and popular art. Hauser points out that we often think of popular art as a slave of its public, only able to produce what pleases and confirms the whims of the public—a sort of sounding board. Hauser sharply remarks, however, that, even if it is less evident, high-brow art is to some extent also captive of this same logic. As Sánchez Vázquez observes, artistic creation is no longer constrained by a somehow precise commission from a known individual. This concrete “job description” is no longer present to force the artist and bend its freedom. The constraint is now constant, all pervasive, without an identifiable voice nor face. Hauser takes this configuration beyond the patron or client into the system of legitimation of the artworld. Just like popular art might produce to please and confirm their potential clients and consumers, high-brow art produces to confirm the establishment of colleagues, curators, and critics,

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<sup>33</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, Vol. III, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), Q15, §58, 1822 (“Critica Letteraria,” 1933). Our own translation. For an English selection, see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, eds. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, trans. William Boelhower (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 177.

whose thumbs will tip up or down, just like an hourglass okaying the go ahead or ordering “back to start.”