

# The Schopenhauer-Galaxy

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Figure 1 Raphael, *Transfiguration*, 1519-1520. Oil on wood, 405 x 278. Vatican: Pinacoteca

## Masks of Dionysus

In *The birth of tragedy*, Nietzsche summarizes the concept of his essay by a comprehensive description of Raphael's *Transfiguration*. The philosopher prizes the 'naïve' Aeschylus, and compares him with the Urbinate painter:

Raphael, himself one of those immortal 'naive' men, has presented in an allegorical painting that reduction of an illusion into an illusion, the fundamental process of the naive artist and Apollonian culture as well. In

his *Transfiguration* the bottom half shows us, with the possessed boy, the despairing porters, the helplessly frightened disciples, the mirror image of the eternal primordial pain, the sole basis of the world. The 'illusion' here is the reflection of the eternal contradiction, of the father of things. Now, out of this illusion there rises up, like an ambrosial fragrance, a new world of illusion, like a vision, invisible to those trapped in the first scene—something illuminating and hovering in the purest painless ecstasy, a shining vision to contemplate with eyes wide open. Here we have before our eyes, in the highest symbolism of art, that Apollonian world of beauty and its foundation, the frightening wisdom of Silenus, and we understand, through intuition, their reciprocal necessity. But Apollo confronts us once again as the divine manifestation of the *principii individuationis*, the only thing through which the eternally attained goal of the primordial oneness, its redemption through illusion, takes place: he shows us, with awe-inspiring gestures, how the entire world of torment is necessary, so that through it the individual is pushed to the creation of the redemptive vision and then, absorbed in contemplation of that vision, sits quietly in his rowboat, tossing around in the middle of the ocean.<sup>1</sup>

It is not my purpose to correct Nietzsche from the standpoint of wise-guy art history, by denouncing the philosopher's iconographic ignorance. Indeed, the double action in the picture represents nothing else than a correct reading of the Gospel: Raphael depicts the transfiguration of Christ on the mountain of Tabor, followed the healing of the moonstruck boy according to Matthew 17 and Luke 9. But the modernist view, connoting pictures by a subjective hermeneutics, has unlearned reading religious imagery as a visual commentary to the Bible in a strictly literal way.

Let us be thankful, for Nietzsche himself was as 'naïve' as Raphael and Aeschylus. His productive misreading allows the unhindered display of a thesis whose virulence determines the general perception of art for a century. As already mentioned, the description of the Raphaelian picture records the plot in the *The birth of tragedy*; likewise, the 'schwankende Kahn' reports Schopenhauer's *leitmotiv*, the relation between 'will' and 'idea':

Just as a sailor sits in a boat trusting to his frail barque in a stormy sea, unbounded in every direction, rising and falling with the howling mountainous waves; so in the midst of a world of sorrows the individual man sits quietly, supported by and trusting to the *principium individuationis*, or the way in which the individual knows things as phenomena.<sup>2</sup>

Nietzsche matches Schopenhauer's 'world as idea' with the figure of Apollo. Christ on the mountain of Tabor in Raphael's painting is an Apollinian vision: a glowing body of light, invented by our faith so that it may guide as a lodestar above of our

<sup>1</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche: *The birth of tragedy, Out of the Spirit of Music* (1872) translated by Ian Johnston of Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, BC, last revised December 2008, see [http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/tragedy\\_all.htm](http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/tragedy_all.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer: *The world as will and idea*, translated from the German by B.B. Haldane, and J.Kemp, London: Kegan, Trench, Trübner, seventh edition, n.d. (1910?) vol.I, p.455. By text archive, Canadian Library.

unsaved, sombre life. Its sparkle spreads beauty and confidence to that Dionysian vale of tears, which, according to Nietzsche, is displayed in the foreground below by the tumultuous scene around the moonstruck boy.

The polarity of *will* and *idea*, of ordinance and chaos, individuation and fusion, the *Dionysian* and the *Apollinian* principle became a mental topos of Modernism. Sigmund Freud, self-proclaimed follower of Schopenhauer, puts the polarity four decades after Nietzsche into the psychoanalytical terms of the *Id* and the *Ego*. The Ego is that little self-conscious skipper who dares to sail through the howling drives, the 'world as will', following his vision of a reasonable scheme of life, the 'world as idea'. Life takes place in this contest between consciousness and the unconscious.



Figure 2 Arnold Böcklin, *Self and Death*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 75 x 61. Berlin: Nationalgalerie.

Arnold Böcklin's *Self and Dead* stems from 1872, the same year when Nietzsche's first version of the *The Birth of tragedy* was published. This edition was too scarcely disseminated for it to have been noticed by the artist. But the thoughts in it were due: the pertinent key words of an epoch rise simultaneously in the minds of creative contemporaries. The artist depicts himself in the light moment of

listening at the violin playing Death as a source of his inspiration. Böcklin's self portrait represents the artist as the Apollinian hero by wresting from the dark melody of primordial lust and pain the persistent art work. According to Schopenhauer, the desire to get lost partakes of the will. Sigmund Freud will call it the *Nirvana principle*, the state of highest abandon, that common ground of *Eros* and *Thanatos*. Inebriation, love making and sleeping represent the small deaths, foreshadowing the eternal return to the great one. All these small deaths include the tempting promise to which the artist actually listens from the fiddling Death: that the weak instants of fulfilled lust – always interrupted by longing, boredom, and pain – might be replaced by a definite dose of Nirvana. It is the same dangerous wisdom which Nietzsche's Silenus once addressed to King Midas when he had hunted for the demon in order to force him to tell the truth about life:

Suffering creature, born for a day, child of accident and toil, why are you forcing me to say what would give you the greatest pleasure not to hear? The very best thing for you is totally unreachable: not to have been born, not to exist, to be nothing. The second best thing for you, however, is this – to die soon.<sup>3</sup>

This wisdom makes the Ego scared of itself, becoming aware of being seducible, veering between the plight of sticking to his proper Self and the lust of getting lost. The attentive traits in the artist's self-portrait show individuation as a kind of suffering vigil.

Böcklin's *Self with Dead* represents the process of the *principium individuationis* in terms of Schopenhauer. The painter translates it by brush and colour on canvas, transforming the gloomy drive into artistic clarity. The work bears assurance that the quarrel between selfhood and the desire of abandon can be sustained in a moderated form: within an esthetics of dissonance. The Apollinian-Dionysian conflict overcomes by artifice. The observer can indulge in the temptations of the Nirvana without getting really lost. The art lover is able to navigate safely through the esthetic temptations like Ulysses and his companions: to the one who can listen, the hands are bent, and to the others who are rowing, the ears are blocked by wax while they all are passing by the reef of the Sirens. The deadly sound is banished to artistic pleasure. Esthetic experience gives you, like dreaming or love making, a little death with the licence for repetition by the durable work, again and again, riskless and with a healing impact.

## How is knowledge about the unconscious possible?

### A methodical interjection

At this point we have to call up methodical doubt. Can it be correct to compare the text of a philosopher with the work of an artist if both of them hadn't noticed each other? Doing so, don't we give way to editorializing arbitrariness? Indeed, this risk is given. Comparative analysis needs methodological reasoning. But on the other hand, is it just enough to evidence a manifest correspondence between a textual source and an artistic document? What is achieved by the proof, for instance, that Giorgio De Chirico, the painter, had really studied the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer? The mechanist model of humanities as a history of influences bears

<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche, *Tragedy*, by Johnston, see footnote 1.

almost tautological insights. It misconceives the actual process of creativity. Correspondent manifestations don't grow according to a cause-and-effect-chain but according to autopoietic analogy. Neither does the painter illustrate a philosophical thought, nor does the philosopher need to be set on the right track by contemplating a piece of art. In systemic terms, the discourses of different disciplines develop autonomously. Occasional references of an artist to a philosopher's text or, *vice versa*, the philosopher's observation on a painting occur always in order to confirm a concept that one has already seized. Comparisons between art and philosophy only make sense if we look for the contemporaneity of ideas. The fitting method is a comparative discourse analysis: it develops either epistemic forms of knowledge or the intuitive mentality of an epoch. Here, we concentrate on the latter.

Mentality fits as a link between art, knowledge, and policy of a given epoch. The word itself is a product of Modernism. We talk naturally about 'mentalities'; the term is a neo-latin creation, coming up around 1900 in English together with an esoteric taste, correspondent to that *zeitgeist*. It came down to earth, according to today's understanding, by the researches of *Annales* historiography. A founding work of a history of mentalities was *Les rois thaumaturges*, published in 1924 by Marc Bloch, treating the magic healing power of the French kings.<sup>4</sup> Mediating between the esoteric origins and historiographic ossification of the term were the works of the anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, and the vitalism of Henri Bergson.

With 'esthetic mentalities', I understand in particular the unconsciously assumed ideas, observable in the artistic endeavour. My mental ground is the blind spot of my perception. It takes part in the collective unconscious that remains generally concealed among contemporaries. There lies the difference from iconology, that art historical method for deciphering the meaning of art works. As a rule, it deals with messages that were once manifestly addressed by artists and patrons to a circle of addressees. Iconology analyzes therefore an iconic content that has been known before the readability of the art work became blurred in the course of time. Therefore, the lack of understanding is caused by the historical and cultural distance that separate today's observer from the old work of art. The deciphering claims to reconstruct a knowledge which once had existed. Research in mentalities, however, concerns an unrecognized knowledge by its historical agents. The full contour of a mentality emerges only by the temporal distance of the historian. Iconographical programme and mental context correlate like the manifest and the latent message of a dream according to Freud. An esthetic mentality performs the collective unconscious of a time. Signs, consciously positioned, rock on mental waves like anchored boats on an agitated sea. As vague is the treasure of mental topics, as unstable the manifest content of imaginary thinking.

<sup>4</sup> See Marc Bloch (1886-1944): *The royal touch: sacred monarchy and scrofula in England and France* (1924), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973. Concerning historiography of mentalities see André Burguière: *The Annales school, An intellectual history* (2006), Cornell University Press 2008; Peter Burke: *The French historical revolution, The Annales school, 1929-1989*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1990; Lutz Raphael: *Die Erben von Bloch und Febvre, Annales-Geschichtsschreibung und nouvelle histoire in Frankreich 1945 – 1980*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994; Ulrich Raulff: *Ein Historiker im 20. Jahrhundert: Marc Bloch*, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1995; Carlos Antonio Aguirre Rojas: *La escuela de los Annales, Ayer, hoy mañana*, Puerto Rico: Editorial ERA, 2004.

‘They don’t know that but they do it’: The Marxian dictum about the unconscious within economical acting<sup>5</sup> has been translated by Michel Foucault into the ambit of epistemology. In his preface to the German edition, he calls it ‘empirical knowledge’, neglected by the conventional history of sciences. It is comparable with the conventional iconology that is used to reconstruct the manifest cognition of a given time. Foucault, instead, is interested in a ‘positive unconscious’ whose rules are never defined because they are naturally practised. His archaeology of cognition describes taxonomically the spatial order by which an historical knowledge is constituted. An epistemic field becomes visible almost trivially by the spines along a book case of a library, by the positioning of show cases with stuffed animals in a museum of natural history or the hanging of pictures in an art collection. They follow an order, naturally evident to the contemporary observer. When it becomes altered, the new order becomes installed out of pragmatical reasons because the old order doesn’t match the habitual performance of a form of knowledge any more. When such interventions didn’t happen for decades or even centuries, the order of a library, a curiosity cabinet or an art collection looks completely unpractical, disorderly and bizarre.

The cognition plan becomes recognizable by its obsolence as a quasi archaeological excavation field. According to Foucault, the conditions of knowledge are subject to historical breaks. The endurance of an epistemic order follows an *historical apriori*. Foucault has been reluctant to be qualified as a follower of structuralism. He denies its strict separation of synchrony and diachrony by applying an historical discourse analysis. *Les mots et les choses* develops a system of plateaus by epochs whose spaces of cognition become comparable. Those plans, though, seem to be static as they are breaking in each case suddenly at the end of an epoch. The agency for an epistemic change of an historical apriori remains unexplained:

It seemed to me that it would not be prudent for the moment to force a solution. I felt incapable, I admit, of offering the traditional explanations – spirit of the time, technological changes, influences of various kinds – struck me for the most parts being more magical than effective. In this book, then, I left the problem of causes to one side.<sup>6</sup>

This statement marks the difference from the history of mentalities which really tries to answer the question about the epistemic changes, to describe this ‘magic’ by which ideas become disseminated and formed beyond the consciousness of the historical agents who act it out without knowing it.

Let us summarize: According to Foucault, the empiricity of ordering remains in the Unconscious, like the modality of how things become positioned in the space of knowledge by thinking. The unconscious, in the sense of mental history, is the functioning of habitual conceptions of thinking. I call them *fuzzy thoughts*: vague ideas, shipped by epistemic acting in all ambits of science and belief. The way that fuzzy thoughts act as fatal driving power of culture definitely has a kind of ‘magic’

<sup>5</sup> Karl Marx: ‘Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es’ in: *Das Kapital, Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, in: Marx und Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23, Berlin: Dietz, 1973, p. 88

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault: *The order of things, An archaeology of the human sciences*, Oxford: Routledge, 1989, p.XIII f

of which Foucault speaks somehow disparagingly. Fuzzy thoughts represent the latent zones of culture where dull phantasies of empowerment, collective prejudgements and dimly objectives emerge.

While the archaeology of knowledge speaks of epistemic breaks, taxonomically inscribable in spaces of cognition, the history of mentalities analyzes topical constants, persistent by *longue durée* as commonplaces and idiosyncrasies for a long time.<sup>7</sup> Foucault opposed a history of ideas. This brief interjection is not a place to reason about the critique whether an archaeology of knowledge is possible by blanking out the imaginary of ideas, whether a description of epistemic spaces would become completely abstract without considering the topical narrative of thinking. It may suffice to ask the question. I content myself with the observation that the archaeology of knowledge and history of mentalities operate by methodically quite similar scientific interests. The Foucault position asserted itself interdisciplinarily while the approach of the *Annales* is confined, more or less, to historiography and cultural studies. Both ways are bridged by the *habitus theory* of Pierre Bourdieu whose sociological method is influenced by Emile Durkheim. His school, in turn, had an impact on both Foucault and the *Annales*.

The discovery of the unconscious is a specific achievement of modernist cognition. The history of mentalities as a history of unconscious action corresponds therefore with a modernist conception of historiography. Relinquishing the *res gestae* of kings and of warriors, the sovereign subjects of dominance, it turns towards the events of everyday life. Thus, a coincidence between archaeology of knowledge and mental history can be defined negatively. Both are not focussing on acts of free will, free cognition, and deliberate deeds.

### Post idealist German pessimism

As prominently the unconscious is discussed by French post structuralism, as fragmentarily perceived is the correspondent German tradition: that rhizome of thoughts which I call the Schopenhauer Galaxy, whose shape is given by the lodestars Richard Wagner, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud. Schopenhauer created his nihilistic panorama of *The world as will and idea* as a general counterdraft to the Hegelian philosophy of reason. In 1820, the young private lecturer rivaled Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's teaching at the University of Berlin by scheduling his lectures at the same hour. Schopenhauer lost the philosophical duel against the last great representative of German idealism: the auditorium stuck with Hegel. The Restoration era might have warmed towards the optimist thought of a progressing *Weltgeist* that leads humankind on its course to self conscious liberty. Only after the mid-nineteenth century, Schopenhauer's critique of consciousness came across within the climate of scientific positivism while the enlightened trust in the power of the free subject began to fade.

According to Schopenhauer, humankind resembles hedgehogs by trying to huddle against each other until they prick and separate again: a dancing ceremony of attraction and repulsion which recurs ceaselessly anew. Happiness, for which the will of life is striving, can only be defined negatively: as avoidance of deficit and pain. Fundamentally, the manifestation of will is to want something to cease. One

<sup>7</sup> See Beat Wyss: *Der Wille zur Kunst, Zur ästhetischen Mentalität der Moderne*, Cologne: DuMont, 1996

wants absence of ache and urge. Lust is nothing other than the aversion to a lack that has to be plugged. But this pain of lust grows again after each act of satisfaction like the heads of Hydra, proliferating by getting decapitated.

The introduction of *The world as will and idea* compares the effect that *The critique of pure reason* by Immanuel Kant produces with the operation of an eye cataract upon a blind man: 'the aim of my own work may be described by saying that I have sought to put into the hands of those upon whom that operation has been successfully performed a pair of spectacles'<sup>8</sup>

By describing life as a realm of fooling representations, Schopenhauer takes up a parable out of the Hindoo Veda and the Puranas:

It is Maya, the veil of deception, which blinds the eyes of mortals, and makes them behold a world of which they cannot say either that it is or that it is not: for it is like a dream ; it is like the sunshine on the sand which the traveller takes from afar for water, or the stray piece of rope he mistakes for a snake.<sup>9</sup>

In his *Opus magnum*, Schopenhauer lets appear an earth-spirit who shows the reader the great individuals, the highlights and catastrophes of world history: the theater of will. History is nothing else but a nightmare in which dreaming humankind tosses and turns. The real pointlessness of its proceeding mirrors the essence of the will in-itself, whose forces are based beyond the chain of cause-and-effect. Much as the pure will is the source of all events and appearances, as much is 'its self-knowledge and its assertion or denial (...) the only event in-itself.'<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche objected to this stoical crossroad. He claimed, instead, for the 'Ja-Sagen', the *Will to Power*, thus that slogan which the army of the Avant Garde by the majority will follow.

The second possibility, opened up by the Schopenhauer crossroad, is a life abnegating the will, being thereby a performance by which humans differ from all creatures. We are able to abdicate the world with stoical serenity and with that philosophical insight 'we become, as it were, freed from ourselves.'<sup>11</sup> Having danced through the agitated night of life, its vestiges lay ahead of the abnegating one:

He now looks back smiling and at rest on the delusions of this world, which once were able to move and agonise his spirit also, but which now stand before him as utterly indifferent to him, as the chess-men when the game is ended, or as, in the morning, the cast-off masquerading dress which worried and disquieted us in a night in Carnival.<sup>12</sup>

This metaphor makes an advance on the pictural imaginations of James Ensor where disrobed masks of bygone fancy dress parties lie about, almost too glaringly illuminated by the paleness of dawn.

A modern way to exercise the denial of will is a life for art's sake. Displaced

<sup>8</sup>Schopenhauer I, see footnote 2, p.XIf

<sup>9</sup> Schopenhauer I, see footnote 2, p.9

<sup>10</sup> Schopenhauer I, see footnote 2, p.238

<sup>11</sup> Schopenhauer I, see footnote 2, S.504

<sup>12</sup> Schopenhauer I, see footnote 2, p.505

into the esthetic state of 'pure, will-less knowing', of 'unbroken blissful peace'<sup>13</sup> by the active process of creating, but also by passive contemplation, the artist's and the observer's minds fuse with the ideal, perceived by the art work. 'The artist lets us see the world through his eyes.'<sup>14</sup> Cézanne will say it even more pointedly: 'In painting we see all that mankind ever has seen. We all are the same human being.'<sup>15</sup>

Particular subjects dissolve by esthetic experience into a single transcendental World-Ego of perception. Within artistic experience, affirmation and denial of will are both potentially included: the affirmation of will by enjoying the sensual pleasure in art, the denial by renunciation to transform the sensually experienced will by art into ordinary life. Schopenhauer calls Raphael the painter of 'that perfect calm of the spirit, that deep rest, that inviolable confidence and serenity' by which the will is vanished.<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche was probably inspired by this observation, interpreting Raphael's *Transfiguration* as an allegory of Apollinian taming of the Dionysian drive.

### Suprematist nothingness

Due to ordinary philosophical limitation, Schopenhauer illustrates his thoughts by using examples out of the great past in art history, misconceiving therefore his contemporariness that unconsciously connects his work with the art of his own time and that of the future. Kasimir Malevich is probably Schopenhauer's most consequent follower. His Suprematist theory fuses the Russian tradition of religious mysticism and Peter Ouspensky's occultist natural philosophy almost directly with Schopenhauer's doctrine of abnegation, on its part influenced by Buddhism. Malevich's writings out of the 1920's, published posthumously in German in 1962 under the title *Die gegenstandslose Welt*, sound at length like paraphrases of an intense reading of Schopenhauer. The philosophical model becomes obvious in the most famous passage, often quoted as the Suprematist manifesto:

Therefore, consciousness, attached to realism, remains in a sleepy state of ideas and assumptions. Humankind rushes sleepingly through the spaces of time, produced by the imaginations of its consciousness.

Economy, reason, judgement, meaning, logic, science: all this are means to seek for God, or for the future, one seeks the perfect being, one seeks the truth. But by the awakening, it will turn out that we find ourselves in the nonrepresentational truth. The world as idea, as reason, as will will disappear like a fog.

Summing up, I would like to assert: To all actions, caused by human wisdom, there is to oppose the principle of the nonrepresentational, a principle that is free from any attempt to strive for something objective in the future or in God, to put any real hope in them.

<sup>13</sup> Schopenhauer I, see footnote 2, p.323

<sup>14</sup> Schopenhauer I, see footnote 2, S.252

<sup>15</sup> Paul Cézanne: *Über die Kunst, Gespräche mit Gasquet, Briefe*, edited by Walter Hess, Mittenwald: Mäander, 1980, p.32. Translated by B.W.

<sup>16</sup> Schopenhauer II, p.507.

In the lofty space of cosmic feasts, I establish the white world of the Suprematist Nonrepresentational as a manifestation of uncaged Nothingness!<sup>17</sup>



Figure 3 Casimir Malevich: Suprematism (with eight rectangles), 1915. Oil on canvas, 57,5 x 48,5. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum.

The closing sentences out of Malevich's *Gegenstandslose Welt* join in the closing sentences of Schopenhauer's *World as will and idea* which ends up a thousand pages of philosophical scepticism and asceticism as follows:

No will: no idea, no world.

Before us there is certainly only nothingness. But that which resists this passing into nothing, our nature, is indeed just the will to live, which we ourselves are as it is our world. That we abhor annihilation so greatly, is simply another expression of the fact that we so strenuously will life, and are nothing but this will, and know nothing besides it.

(...)

Rather do we freely acknowledge that what remains after the entire abolition of will is for all those who are still full of will certainly nothing; but, conversely, to those in whom the will has turned and has denied itself, this our world, which is so real, with all its suns and milky-ways is nothing.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Kasimir Malewitsch: *Suprematismus – die gegenstandslose Welt*, edited by Werner Haftmann, translated into German by Hans von Riesen, Cologne: DuMont, 1962, pp.193-194. Translated into English by B.W.

<sup>18</sup> Schopenhauer I, see footnote 2, p.530

Malevitch's curious phrase 'Schlaf der Vorstellungen' ('sleepy state of ideas and assumptions') must have been inspired by Schopenhauer whose introduction treats the relation of vigil and dreaming. Both states of mind belong to the world as idea. They differ only gradually to the extent that the representations are ordered according to the law of cause and effect:

Life and dreams are leaves of the same book. The systematic reading of this book is real life, but when the reading hours (that is, the day) are over, we often continue idly to turn over the leaves, and read a page here and there without method or connection: often one we have read before, sometimes one that is new to us, but always in the same book.<sup>19</sup>

The scatterbrained scrolling of a book represents the brief and airy dream within the long and heavy dream which is life. Corresponding to this metaphor, Malevitch understands the objective world of idea generated by dormancy. Suprematism claims to wake up dreaming humankind into unleashed nothingness.

### **The Apocalypse and the twilight of the gods**

Schopenhauer's philosophy implies an inspiration theory of Modernism which comprehends itself as a creation out of the unconscious. Therewith, the stage opens up for the recurrence of the suppressed, for the evil, and that already mentioned lust for abandonment. Freud's *Nirvana principle* explains the intrinsic vicinity between Modernist esthetics and iconoclasm. Every modernist work of art includes, more or less, a leaning towards self effacement, the narcissist rage about its own arbitrariness. Honoré Balzac created a literary figure of artistic self destruction in with master Frenhofer in *Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu*. But the most monumental art work, celebrating self-abandonment, isn't one of fine art, nor of literature, but a musical one: *Der Ring des Nibelungen* by Richard Wagner, one of the most faithful and deliberate followers of *The world as will and idea*. There are the Apollinian gods like Wotan, die Walkyries, Siegfried, and Hagen, driven by ambition for honour and property, pursuing a clear goal, becoming guilty by their actions. Wotan is able to construct Walhalla Castle only by investing the raped gold treasure from the Rhine ground and by bartering away his own sister Freia. In the end they all fail in their conflicting goals. Triumphant are Erda, Loge, and the Rhine Daughters: Woglinde, Wellgunde, Flosshilde: Dionysian gods and demons, embodiments of blind will and unintentional being. Only temporarily bereft and tamed, they get their satisfaction in the *Twilight of the gods* when the unchained elements of water and fire annihilate Wallhalla Castle, the symbol of intentional striving.

Thus, Loge comforts the Rhine Daughters for the loss of the Rhine Gold prophesizing already at the beginning of the narrative the end of the gods:

They hasten to their end,  
Though they think themselves strong and enduring.

<sup>19</sup> Schopenhauer I, see footnote 2, p.22

I am almost ashamed to share their doings;  
 My fancy lures me to transform myself  
 Back into flickering flames.  
 To burn them who once tamed me,  
 Rather than foolishly end with the blind,  
 Even though they be the most godlike gods,  
 Does not seem stupid to me.  
 I'll think it over: who knows what I will do?<sup>20</sup>

No one knows it. Loge is even unable to know it because he has no Ego, no goal, as he represents only a mask of the willing will, which objectifies itself, according to Schopenhauer, and rushes ahead like a cascade, a volcanic flow, or a burning comet out of ice.

Wagner, the composer and bandmaster, wanted to follow Loge's path when he originally planned to burn the libretto and the festival hall of Bayreuth after the execution of the *Ring* so that his work may 'hasten to its end' like the Wallhalla gods. Fortunately there were economic objections, moderating a factual transgression of the *Götterdämmerung* into nothingness. The message of Wagner's work remains: Loge of the *Rhine Gold* can be understood as the avenging angel of Modernism. His prophecy glowed out in the *Ragnarök* above the German cities when a fascistically blinded leadership, despite of an already lost war, still kept forcing their soldiers and civilians, by hundreds of thousands, to endure extermination. Hitler acted as Siegfried who triumphs morally by his death over Hagen and his companions who, treacherously, had stabbed him in the back.

Wagner's Loge is still alive as a personification of terror, as castigating preacher of a return into a realm beyond this technical civilisation of the West. The fire demon patronizes gnostic fundamentalism whose doctrines flare up in several political shades.



Figure 4 Henri Fantin-Latour, *Rhine Gold*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 116,5 x 79. Hamburg: Kunsthalle.

<sup>20</sup>Richard Wagner: *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, *Rhine Gold*, end of the fourth scene. Quoted by the booklet, edited by Anne Schneider, with full libretti enclosed, in German, French, and English, p.147. Recording location: Vienna, Sofiensaal, directed by Sir Georg Solti, September/October 1958, London: Decca, 1966, 1997

The Islamicist version, for instance, proves that the Mohammedian, the Jewish, and the Christian Gnosis are interrelated in a way which must irritate any zealot.

### Clinical drying-out

To put it pathetically, Modernism has been the victim of its own concept of a *will to power* which ends in a cascade of self destruction. Thereby, a fatal dialectic develops within the dictatorships of the totalitarian regimes of the thirties. Its leaders claim to put the Modernist concept of will under the supremacy of politics. This demand became ideologically manifest by a reactionary resistance against the presumed danger of subversion by the unconscious. The movement of psychoanalysis had to retreat into Anglo-Saxon exile.

A strong will or an inner experience may be proved by one's work, and not by chatty words. We all are actually much less interested in the so called will than in the skill.<sup>21</sup>

Therewith, Adolf Hitler inaugurated in June 1937 the exhibition *Great German Art*, parallel to the infamous *Entartete Kunst* which violently ended the artists's will to power. Hitler struck the vital ambition of the avant-garde. It wasn't just a question of taste or style, it was the question of leadership. Modernist art had to give up its Messianism. The totalitarian state castrated the mission of art. The result was a range of artistic eunuchs whose function was to insulate an incited society in the state of war with innocuous kitsch. The totalitarian states of the 1930s usurped the promise for salvation instated by the avant-garde. In the German Reich, the artists - among them also some sympathetic to the Nazis - were forced into their external or inner exile. In the Soviet Union they were re-educated or exterminated. In Italy they were allowed to march with the *Movimento*. The aim to form society into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* should not be pushed through by art but by war policy. Many artists accepted even this turn, marching enthusedly in the 1914-1918 and the 1939-1945 wars, that continuation of art by the weapon. By awaiting *Ragnarök*, the Apocalypse, and the twilight of the gods, the avant-garde is absolutely modern – insofar as Modernism constitutes itself as an inversion figure between promise and catastrophe. According to the prophecies, salvatory histories end in self abolishment, leading from historical time into eternal presence. In the form of esthetic experience, the *nunc stans*, the standing 'Now!' represents an anticipation of that prophecy.

In spring 1945 Modernism woke up into the reality of its esthetic visions. By the end of the twilight of the gods, announced by the terrible banality of alarm sirens, and glowing out in firestorms above the cities, one had become tired of the Apocalypse. Postwar culture was no more eager to remind of the avant-garde's salvatory expectations. The concept of the *nunc stans* underwent a transformation. The messianist dimension became cut off. The standing 'Now!', understood by the avant-garde as an eschatological state at the end of history, a gratification after the

<sup>21</sup> Translated by B.W. : 'Ob jemand ein starkes Wollen hat oder ein inneres Erleben, das mag er durch sein Werk und nicht durch schwatzhafte Worte beweisen. Überhaupt interessiert uns alle viel weniger das sogenannte Wollen als das Können.' Quoted by Hein 1992, p.270

passed battles for the new`s sake, has been internalized by Postwar Modernism into a purist esthetic experience where notions like history and sociology were discredited to be milieu kitsch. In the art field, it was no more matter of collective salvation; instead, the drama of individual existence was at stake.

After 1945, the unconscious lost its eminent meaning as a creative force in art. The refusal of psychically inspired theories emerged in the 1940s, when the United States took over the leading role in the system of Western art. Though the artists of Abstract Expressionism, like Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock, did connect psychoanalyst experiences with the process of painting, cultural policy during the Cold War period rejected artistic methods whose exponents were suspected by the average American to be parlour communists. Given the friendship of André Breton with Leo Trotsky, the sympathies of Pablo Picasso with Josef Stalin, the McCarthy era must have sensed evildoing in Surrealism. Clement Greenberg`s formalist art theory can be understood as an initial, cultural roll back and containment of Old Europe`s dominance in the West.

Starting already with Freud, the roaming will has been subjected to a psychoanalytic treatment. His symptoms became classified by a clinical scale of diseases between neurosis and psychosis. Therefore, the unconscious was an inept source of inspiration, the dream acted as the keeper of sleep. This clinical sobriety of psychoanalysis had been the reason why Freud rejected the surrealist art theory by Breton.

In terms of post modern scepticism, it is only beneficial when art, politics, and psychology unlocked from each other by *autopoiesis*. While existentialism faded out in the late 1950s, artists developed a lasting aversion against the sentimentalism of the 'Psyche'. Its paradigm lives on in epigonal esotericism, recreational self-awareness groups and New Age seminars for managers.

Today the Schopenhauer galaxy shows an abandoned, displaced concept of avant-garde containing a legacy of ideas which, retrospectively, sound just too German.

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