

Ben Sonnenberg

The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art

Author(s): Arthur C. Danto

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THE PHILOSOPHICAL
DISENFRANCHISEMENT OF ART*Arthur C. Danto**I am learning that it's inspiring to be
where writers can be dangerous.*

Hortense Calisher

In his great poem on the death of W. B. Yeats, Auden wrote: "Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still, / For poetry makes nothing happen. . . ." No one, I suppose, not even a poetic visionary, would have expected lyrics to dispel the humidities of the Emerald Isle, and this gives Auden his paradigm of artistic impotency. The equation with Ireland's political madness is then meant to discourage the comparably futile but more often held hope that the right bit of verse *might* make something happen—though it is not to the especial discredit of art that it is ineffective in Irish politics where it is not plain that anything else could be effective. "I think it better that in times like these / A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth / We have no gift to set a statesman right," Yeats wrote as a poetic refusal to write a War Poem. And, in another poem, Yeats seems to have endorsed the thought Auden expressed to the extent of dignifying as art failed political actions, if fervently enough motivated: "We know their dream; enough / To know they dreamed and are dead; / And what if excess of love / Bewildered them till they died? . . . A terrible beauty is born." That politics becomes poetry when ennobled by failure is a sentimental transfer I doubt would be consoling to the gunmen of the Easter Rising, since to be seriously enough bent on political change to spill real blood is exactly not to want one's actions appreciated merely as a kind of deflected writing in the medium of violence. To have slipped out of the order of effectiveness into the order of art, to have inadvertently achieved something of a piece with the golden bird in the Byzantine throne room or the unconnecting figure on the Grecian urn must then be a doubled failure for the already defeated warrior.

“I know,” Auden wrote, with characteristic honesty, “that all the verse I wrote, all the positions I took in the thirties, did not save a single Jew. Those attitudes, those writings, only help oneself.” And in a manuscript he worked on in the summer of 1939, we read:

Artists and politicians would get along better at a time of crisis like the present, if the latter would only realize that the political history of the world would have been the same if not a poem had been written, nor a picture painted, nor a bar of music composed.

This of course is an empirical claim, and it is difficult, simply because of difficulties in the topic of historical explanation, to know how true it is. Did jazz in any sense cause or only emblemize the moral transformations of the Jazz Age? Did the Beatles cause or only prefigure the political perturbations of the Sixties—or had politics simply become a form of art in that period, at least the politics responsive to music, the real political history of the world taking place on a different level of causation? In any case, as we know, even works intended to prick consciousness to political concern have tended by and large to provoke at best an admiration for themselves and a moral self-admiration for those who admired them. The cynical bombing of the Basque village of Guernica on April 26, 1937, made *Guernica* happen—so it was not merely wit when Picasso responded to the German officer’s question, having handed him a postcard of the painting, “Did you do that?” with “No, you did.” Everyone knew who did what and why: it was an atrocity meant to be perceived as an atrocity by perpetrators who meant to be perceived as prepared to stop at nothing. The painting was used as a fund-raiser for Spanish war relief, but those who paid money for the privilege of filing past it used it only as a mirror to reflect attitudes *already* in place, and in later years it required art-historical knowledge to know what was going on: it stood as a handsome backdrop for pickups at the Museum of Modern Art, or a place to meet a date, like the clock at the Biltmore Hotel, and it was sufficiently handsome in its grey and black harmonies

to have ornamented the kitchen cupboard in a sophisticated apartment I once saw written up, where soufflés were concocted for bright and brittle guests who, no more than the hostess, realized that gutted animals and screaming mothers agonized above the formica: it was painted at about the same time as *Night Fishing at Antibes*, after all, as Anita Silvers has observed, and uses the same sorts of forms as that lyrical work. So in the end it did about as much for the ravaged villagers as Auden's poem did for dead Yeats or as Yeats's poem did for his slaughtered patriots, making nothing relevant happen, simply memorializing, enshrining, spiritualizing, constituting a kind of cenotaph to house the fading memories, about at the level of a religious ceremony whose function is to confess the extreme limitation of our powers to make anything happen. Hegel places religion just next to art in the final stages of the itinerary of the spirit, where history is done with and there is nothing left but to become conscious of what in any case cannot be changed.

Fine. But if the sole political role of poetry is this deflected, consolatory, ceremonial not to say reliquary office, why is it so widely subscribed a political attitude that *art is dangerous*? The history of art is the history of the suppression of art, itself a kind of futility if that which one seeks to cast in chains has no effectiveness whatever, and one confers upon art the illusion of competence by treating as dangerous what would make nothing happen if it were allowed to be free. Where, if Auden is right, does the belief in the dangerousness of art come from? My own view, which I mean to develop here, is that it does not come from historical knowledge, but rather from a philosophical belief. It is based upon certain theories of art that philosophers have advanced, whatever it may be that caused them in the first place so to have sensed a danger in art that the history of philosophy itself might almost be regarded as a massive collaborative effort to neutralize an activity. Indeed, construing art, as Auden does, as a causally or politically neutered activity is itself an act of neutralization. Representing art as something that in its nature can make nothing happen is not so much a view opposed to the view that art is dangerous:

it is a way of responding to the sensed danger of art by treating it metaphysically as though there were nothing to be afraid of.

Now it is my thought that we cannot arrive at an assessment of what art is nor what art can and cannot do, nor where in the political plane its natural locus is, until we have archeologized these disenfranchising theories. The relationship of art to philosophy is ancient and intricate, and though I shall paint it in very lurid terms, I am obliged to acknowledge that its subtlety may transcend our powers of analytical depiction, much as the relationship of mind to body does, since it is far from plain that we can separate art from philosophy inasmuch as its substance is in part constituted by what it is philosophically believed to be. And its insubstantiation by its oppressor may be one of the great victories of political metaphysics.

In the first serious philosophical writings on art—perhaps the first writings in which art is so much as recognized as such—a kind of warfare between philosophy and art is declared. Because philosophy itself is a warring discipline, in which philosophy is divided against philosophy with nearly the degree of antagonism we find expressed between philosophy and art in the fateful initiating pages of Platonic aesthetics, it ought to be cause for suspicion that there is a near unanimity on the part of philosophers of art that art makes nothing happen: for on what else do we agree? Even so engaged a writer as Sartre thought of art, hence thought of his own practice as a novelist in the fiction in which he sets forth this view, as lying outside the order of existential contingencies: a shelter against mutability. Plato notoriously identified the practice of art with the creation of appearances of appearances, twice removed from the reality philosophy addresses. It is striking that Sartre, like Keats, like Yeats, puts artistic reality exactly where Plato put philosophical reality, but this interchange leaves the topology unaltered, and we may remark anticipatorily at this point that the charge that *philosophy* makes nothing happen is not unfamiliar. In any case, both philosophy and art, on the Platonic scheme, contrast with the kind of practical knowl-

edge possessed by craftspeople, whose products artists merely imitate. And Plato seized upon the inference that one can imitate without possessing the slightest knowledge of what one imitates save how it appears, so that if what one imitates is knowledge, it is consistent that one can appear to have it while lacking it altogether. It is important for Plato to quarantine art against the politico-political sphere into which the philosopher may deign to descend (himself imitating the relationship in which Forms stand to appearances), and the thought that art is arrested in the realm of second-order appearances assures that it can make nothing happen in even the slightly less degenerate realm of first-order appearances, being radically epiphenomenal, like a dream or a shadow or a mere reflection. It is as though Platonic metaphysics was generated in order to define a place for art from which it is then a matter of cosmic guarantee that nothing can be made by it to happen.

It is more or less for these reasons that I have diagnosed Plato's theory of art as largely political, a move in some struggle for domination over the minds of men in which art is conceived of as the enemy. So the portrait of the artist we get in Book Ten of *The Republic* has to be placed alongside the portrait of the philosopher—the portrait in fact of Socrates—we get in Aristophanes' cruel comedy, *The Clouds*, where the philosopher is stigmatized for being out of touch with the same reality Plato stigmatizes the artist as capable only of imitating. *The Clouds* is an attack on intellect in the name of feeling, much in the way, millennia later, Lawrence is going to celebrate feeling against Russell, whom he fictionalizes in *St. Mawr* with Aristophanic malice. So it is only taking art at its own self-estimate when Socrates explains to Ion that he (characteristic of his discipline) lacks knowledge, his powers being not those of reason but of darker and more confused forces which overcome Ion and ultimately swamp an audience itself addressed at a level lower than intellect so far as it succumbs. And Ion is depicted as stupid by Plato in order to dramatize a confirmation of the psychology of *The Republic*, art being used against art in sly duplicity. And Plato, as metaphysical politician, extrudes the artist both

from republic and from reality, to which he is so loosely tethered that imitation gives us less a theory than a powerfully disabling metaphor for impotency. The combination of danger and ineffectiveness sounds contradictory until we recognize that the latter is a philosophical response to the former, for if art can be transferred ontologically to the sphere of secondary and derivative entities—shadows, illusions, delusions, dreams, mere appearances and sheer reflections—well, this is a brilliant way to put art out of harm's way if we can get people to accept a picture of the world in which the place of art is outside it. And since Plato's theory of art is his philosophy, and since philosophy down the ages has consisted in placing codicils to the Platonic testament, philosophy itself may just be the disenfranchisement of art—so the problem of separating art from philosophy may be matched by the problem of asking what philosophy would be without art.

There are two stages to the Platonic attack. The first, just sketched, is to put across an ontology in which reality is logically immunized against art. The second stage consists so far as possible in rationalizing art, so that reason bit by bit colonizes the domain of feelings, the Socratic dialogue being a form of dramatic representation in which the substance is reason exhibited as taming reality by absorbing it into concepts. Nietzsche refers to this as "aesthetic Socratism," the philosopher having so identified reason with beauty that nothing could be beautiful that is not rational. This, Nietzsche proposes, marks the death of tragedy, which finds a terrible beauty in irrationality: but it also marks the death of comedy, which Socrates assures us comes to the same thing. And ever since this complex aggression, as profound a victory as philosophy has ever known or ever will know, the history of philosophy has alternated between the analytical effort to ephemeralize and hence defuse art, or to allow a degree of validity to art in treating it as doing what philosophy itself does, only uncouthly.

This latter, Hegelian strategy then raises the question of what it is that philosophy does—after all, philosophy stands just next to religion and art in his scheme—and there is a comic justice in the fact that the two-stage attack

consisting of ephemeralization and takeover has characterized the sorry history of philosophy in recent times—as though it after all had but consisted in the weapons it was destined to die from. In the period of high positivism, for example, philosophy was cast in a role relative to science parallel to that in which art was placed relative to philosophical knowledge in the Platonic scheme—so distant from the cognizable not to say meaningful order of things that “philosophy makes nothing happen” follows as a matter of course. “Philosophy begins when language goes on holiday” is a Wittgensteinian echo of the invidious contrast between art-making and the real skills of carpentry and navigation, with philosophy now the useless shadow of serious endeavor. And it became a metaphysical consensus that since there is no body of fact for philosophy to deal with alongside the body of fact—The World—which science addresses, the problems of philosophy only appear to be real problems but are actually nonsense, or *Scheinsprobleme*. Professor Rorty’s deconstruction carries this sour assessment into the immediate moment. But now comes the consoling thought that to the degree that it had any validity at all, philosophy tried to do what science really does, just as Plato had said in effect that art did poorly what philosophy does well: philosophy just *is* impatient science. Caught in the dilemma of being either pseudo science or proto-science, philosophy thus reenacts the dilemma Plato set for art. And perhaps if we could liberate philosophy from these toils we might find no better place to begin than liberating art from them, and by emancipating art from its philosophy we might emancipate philosophy from its own parallel philosophy: the liberation of the oppressed being, by a familiar liberationist formula, the liberation of the oppressor as well. In any case there must be something deeply common to two enterprises which seem subject to a common dissolution, especially when this form of dissolution has no obvious application elsewhere, unless (of course) to religion. Before addressing myself to these last optimisms, let me somewhat confirm my brash historical claims on the philosophy of art by considering the two forms of repression—what I refer to as ephemeralization and take-

over—as exhibited in the unsuspecting thought of Kant and Hegel. The texts of course are familiar—but the political subtexts are perhaps not.

For Kant, to begin with, our attitude toward works of art is characterized in terms of what he calls *disinterest*, itself an attitude with which an immediate contrast exists with having an interest, hence some personal or social reason for caring whether or not something exists, since its not existing, or even its changing in certain ways, would make some individual or social difference. With works of art we have nothing of this sort to gain or lose. It is not difficult to see how Kant should take this view, given the systematic constraints of his philosophy, for what he was concerned to show was that aesthetic judgments are universal, with which having an interest would somehow be incompatible: if my judgment is contaminated with my interests, it hardly could claim an acquiescence of those whose interests differ. One of the reasons Plato thought philosophers should be kings was that they, concerned only and ultimately with pure forms, could not coherently *have* any interests in the world of appearances, hence not be motivated by what normally move men and women—money, power, sex, love—and so could achieve disinterested decisions. Plato cleverly situates works of art outside the range of interests as well, since who could feel exultant at possessing what merely appeared to be gold? Since to be human is very largely to have interests, art stands outside the human order pretty much as reality stands outside the primary apparent order in Plato's system—so though they approach the issue from opposite directions, the implication in both is that art is a kind of ontological vacation place from our defining concerns as human, and with respect to which accordingly “makes nothing happen.” This is reenforced in Kant when he speaks of art in terms of “purposiveness without any specific purpose.” The work of art looks as though it ought to be useful for something, but in philosophical truth it is not, and its logical purposelessness connects with the disinterests of its audience, since any use it might be put to would be a misuse, or a perversion. So art is systematically neutered, removed from the domain of use on one side (a

good thing if artists lack practical intelligence they merely can give the appearance of having) and, on the other side, from the world of needs and interests. Its worth consists in its worthlessness, which you may recall is also Plato's caricature of the thought that justice is a skill.

Schopenhauer had a considerably higher regard for art than any Plato shows in his philosophy, but in an important sense he agrees with his great predecessors that art makes nothing happen in the causal order of the world. Its importance rather consists in its power to lift us *out* of that order and to put us in a state of contemplation of eternal things. There is a characteristically bad inference that contemplation of the timeless is itself timeless, which then provides a lever for hoisting us, in fulfillment of a Yeatsian wish, outside the order of time and suffering. We must appreciate that simply to exist in the causal stream is, on Schopenhauer's view, to suffer, since suffering is the defining trait of worldly existence. But then, one might parenthetically observe, one must distinguish between the sort of suffering of which the standard human condition simply consists, and that sort of suffering which occurs, say, to persecuted Jews, which Auden laments the incapacity of his poetry to mitigate. It certainly would have been a bitter counsel to suggest to the skeletal sufferers of Dachau that life *is* suffering, though the contemplation of art helps. As Auden once wrote on the particular issue of Third World hunger: "It's heartless to forget about / The underdeveloped countries, / But a starving ear is as deaf as a suburban optimist's." But I am less concerned to deal with the after all cheerful pessimism old Schopenhauer stood for than in stressing that his continuity with Kant is locating art at right angles to the world as will.

Kant did suppose art should give pleasure, but it will have to be a disinterested pleasure, hence a tepid gratification since unconnected with the satisfaction of real needs or the achievement of real goals. So it is a kind of narcoleptic pleasure, the pleasure which consists in the absence of pain, which is just Schopenhauer's thought that the value of art must lie in the freedom it promises from topical urgencies in real life. Nevertheless, disinterested pleasure, with its implied contrast with the prac-

tical dimensions of lived existence, largely summarizes the manner in which philosophers of art have thought about art in the intervening years. Santayana thinks of art in terms of beauty and beauty in terms of objectified pleasure, which is to say pleasure contemplated rather than felt. Ballough keeps art at an aesthetic distance, drawing an explicit contrast between aesthetic and practical attitudes, our relationship to art beginning when practice goes on holiday. What Ballough calls aesthetic distance, other philosophers have spoken of as disinterested attention (Stolnitz) or intransitive perception (Vivas) which consists in looking at an object for no reason. And, to bring us to the threshold of present discussion, Professor Dickie builds into his definition of art the condition that something must be in candidacy for appreciation—where he must clearly mean aesthetic appreciation, whatever his disclaimers, since he speaks of the chaste pleasure the eye might take in the curvatures and colors of an object—a urinal—which is not commonly appreciated for such reasons by those who primarily appreciate them.

This thumbnail run-through of the table of contents of the standard undergraduate anthology of aesthetics yields an answer to the question anyone, a philistine, say, might wish to raise about art (testimony philosophers might offer when the National Endowment of the Arts comes under fire), namely what *good* art is, what *use* art has: its goodness consists in its not being good for anything, and its use consists in having none, so the question is misapplied. So that poetry makes nothing happen flows from the philosophical status assigned by philosophy to art: and this is a matter of such overwhelming philosophical consensus that it ought to give us pause. It leads us to wonder whether, rather than art being something the philosopher finally deals with in the name of and for the sake of systematic completeness—a finishing touch to an edifice—art is the reason philosophy was invented, and philosophical systems are finally penitentiary architectures it is difficult not to see as labyrinths for keeping monsters in and so protecting us against some deep metaphysical danger. And perhaps we ought to ask whether this war with which the discussion begins is not, millennia afterward, still being fought by philosophers who compete in ingenuity

to the common end of putting out of play what they have not paused to wonder may not be an enemy at all? If each philosophical period requires a kind of booster, ought we not to ask ourselves at last what power it finally is that philosophy is afraid of? Perhaps the fear is that if the enemy is illusory, *philosophy* is illusory, since its prime objective has been to slay what only seems a dragon!

Indeed, it has at times struck me that the conventional division between the fine and the practical arts—between *les beaux arts* and *les arts pratiques*—serves, in the name of a kind of exaltation, to segregate *les beaux arts* from life in a manner curiously parallel to the way in which calling women the *fair sex* is an institutional way of putting women at an aesthetic distance—on a kind of moral pedestal which extrudes a woman from a world it is hoped she has no longer any business in. The power to classify is the power to dominate, and these parallel aestheticizations must be regarded as essentially political responses to what were sensed as dark dangers in both (see Germaine Greer). Aesthetics is an eighteenth-century invention, but it is exactly as political, and for the same causes, as Plato's was of setting artists at a distance which *aesthetic distance* is a refined metaphor for. It was a bold and finally successful strategy, leaving serious artists to suppose it their task to make beauty. So the metaphysical pedestal upon which art gets put—consider the museum as labyrinth—is political translocation as savage as that which turned women into ladies, placing them in parlors doing things that seemed like purposive labor without specific purpose: embroidery, watercolor, knitting; essentially frivolous beings, there for an oppressor's pleasure disguised as disinterested. Small wonder that Barnett Newman should have written (1948): "The impulse of modern art was this desire to destroy beauty . . . by completely denying that art has any concern with the problem of beauty." Small wonder that Duchamp should have said, regarding his most famous work, "The danger to be avoided lies in aesthetic delectation!"

I owe to Duchamp the thought that, from the perspective of art, aesthetics is a danger, since from the perspective of philosophy *art* is a danger and aesthetics the agency for dealing with it. But then what should art be if it throws

off the bondage to prettiness? It is not enough to be self-assertively ugly, though this is a tactic a good bit of recent art has sought to employ. Uglification is too negative a stance, and finally futile since being ugly remains a way of being an aesthetic object and hence underscores bondage instead of overthrowing it. It is like the self-defeminization of women, casting frills to the flames. The way to stop being a sexual object is not to become an anti-sexual object, since one remains an *object* through that transformation when the problem is how to slip objecthood altogether. I mean, of course, *aesthetic* objecthood, and to change one way of appearing for another remains an acquiescence in the view that one's essence is one's *appearance*. So some deeper transformation is required, one to which surfaces, lovely or awful, are irrelevant or merely a fact. The canvases of Arakawa are *irrelevantly* beautiful since not really aesthetic objects at all—as though Arakawa were subtly emphasizing the ontological insight that it is not after all necessary to be ugly in order to escape the servitudes of aesthetics. But escape to *what*? This brings me to the Hegelian version of the alternative proposed by Plato to the ephemeralization of art.

Duchamp's *Fountain* is, as everyone knows, to all outward appearances a urinal—it *was* a urinal until it became a work of art and acquired such further properties as works of art possess in excess of those possessed by mere real things like urinals (the work is dated 1917, though it would take research into the history of plumbing to determine the date of the urinal, which made it possible for Duchamp to use urinals dated later than *Fountain* when the original was lost: the *work* remains dated 1917). In his own view he chose this particular object for what he hoped was its aesthetic neutrality. Or pretended that that is what he hoped. For urinals have too strong a cultural, not to say a moral identity, quite to allow themselves to be without affect. They are objects, to begin with, highly sexualized through the fact that women are anatomically barred from employing them in their primary function, at least without awkwardness. So they show their arrogant exclusivity through their form. (The fear

of equal access to all Johns was a major factor, it will be remembered, in the defeat of the ERA.) They are, moreover, given the cultural realities, objects associated with privacy (though less so than stools) and with dirt. But any object that lies at the intersection of sex and secretion is too obviously charged by the moral boundaries it presupposes *simply* to stand as a culturally neutral object picked out just for its aesthetic neutrality. Duchamp was being disingenuous when he asked: "A urinal—who would be interested in that?" It would be like taking the filthiest verb in the language as one's paradigm for teaching conjugation: *possibly* the word's moral energy will go submerged as one ponders it from the perspective of gerunds and pluperfects, but why struggle when there are plenty of innocent words? It is, meanwhile, ingenuous to treat the urinal *merely* as an aesthetic object, rather like the Taj Mahal in its elegant gradients and dazzling whiteness. But then what is the conceptual fulcrum of this still controversial work? My view is that it lies in the question it poses, namely why—referring to itself—should this be an artwork when something else exactly *like* this, namely *that*—referring now to the class of unredeemed urinals—are just pieces of industrial plumbing? It took genius to raise the question in this form, since nothing like it had been raised before, though from Plato (sharply) downward the question of what is art had been raised and unimaginatively answered on the basis of the accepted art world of the time. Duchamp did not merely raise the question, What is Art? but rather why is something a work of art when something exactly like it is *not*? Compare Freud's great question regarding parapraxes, which is not simply why do we forget but why, when we do forget, do we remember something else instead? This form of the question opened space for a radically new theory of the mind. And in Duchamp's case the question he raises *as an artwork* has a genuinely philosophical form, and though it could have been raised with any object you chose (and was raised by means of quite nondescript objects)—in contrast with having been capable of being raised at *any time* you chose—for the question was only historically possible when in fact it was raised—it perhaps required

something so antecedently resistant to absorption into the art world as a urinal so as to call attention to the fact that it after all was already *in* the art world.

There is a deep question of what internal evolution in the history of art made Duchamp's *question-object* historically possible if not historically necessary. My view is that it could only come at a time when it no longer could be clear to anyone what art was while perfectly clear that none of the old answers would serve. To paraphrase Kant, it seemed to have an essence without having any particular essence. It is here that Hegel's views come in.

For Hegel, the world in its historical dimension is the dialectical revelation of consciousness to itself. In his curious idiom, the end of history comes when spirit achieves awareness of its identity as spirit, not, that is to say, alienated from itself by ignorance of its proper nature, but united *to* itself *through* itself: by recognizing that it is in this one instance of the same substance as its object, since consciousness of consciousness is consciousness. In the portentous jargon of the Continent, the subject/object dualism is overcome. Quite apart from such reservations as one must justifiably hold regarding this overcoming, let alone the celebration of it as the end of history, it is worth observing that certain stages in this history are specially marked, art being one stage and philosophy another, and it is the historical mission of art to make philosophy possible, after which art will have no historical mission in the great cosmo-historical sweep. Hegel's stupendous philosophical vision of history gets, or almost gets, an astounding confirmation in Duchamp's work, which raises the question of the philosophical nature of art from *within* art, implying that art already is philosophy in a vivid form, and has now discharged its spiritual mission by revealing the philosophical essence at its heart. The task may now be handed over to philosophy proper, which is equipped to cope with its own nature directly and definitively. So what art finally will have achieved as its fulfillment and fruition is the philosophy of art.

But this is a cosmic way of achieving the second stage of the Platonic program, which has always been to substitute philosophy for art. And to dignify art, patronizingly, as philosophy in one of its self-alienated forms, thirsting for

clarity as to its own nature as all of us thirst for clarity as to our own. Perhaps there is something to this. When art internalizes its own history, when it becomes self-conscious of its history as it has come to be in our time, so that its consciousness of its history forms part of its nature, it is perhaps unavoidable that it should turn into philosophy at last. And when it does so, well, in an important sense, art comes to an end.

I cannot trace in this paper the structure of such a possible history (but see my essay "The End of Art"). My main concern has been to put into perspective the somewhat shabby history of the philosophy of art as a massive political effort either to emasculate or to supersede art. And to sketch certain of the strategies in this long unedifying career. It is always a question in psychotherapy whether the knowledge of the history of a symptom will constitute a cure or merely a kind of acquiescence. Our pathologies may after all, as Freud perhaps realistically affirmed, be the *Kern unser Wesens*, and in the present case art may by now have been so penetrated by its philosophy that we cannot sunder the two in order to rescue art from the conflicts aesthetics has trapped it in.

But in revenge, philosophy has itself become entrapped in its own strategems. If art makes nothing happen and art is but a disguised form of philosophy, philosophy makes nothing happen either. Of course this was Hegel's view. "When philosophy paints its grey in grey," he wrote in one of the most melancholy phrases a philosopher might read, "then has a form of life grown old." Philosophy makes its appearance just when it is too late for anything *but* understanding. So if, according to a ringing slogan, since hardened into a radical cliché of Marxism, we want to change rather than understand the world, philosophy cannot be of use. When, then, self-consciousness comes to history, it is by definition too late for something to be made in consequence to happen. So the philosophy of historical being which holds art to be a transform of philosophy shows philosophy to be a transform of art, and this is the great irony of Hegel's theory: the second part of the Platonic attack reduces to the first part of the Platonic attack, and philosophy, having set itself against art, sets itself finally against itself. This would give us a

kind of explanation of the fact that the same structure of argument philosophy mounted at the beginning against art should have returned to call the enterprise of philosophy into question in our own time. So there is an incentive in philosophically curing art of philosophy: we by just that procedure cure philosophy of a paralysis that it began its long history by infecting its great enemy with.

Perhaps, for the moment, this is enough by way of speculative philosophy of history. Still, it would be unseemly not to press a bit further, for if neither of the philosophical reasons for pretending that art can make nothing happen are compelling, the fact remains that the history of art is the history of censorship, and it would be interesting to inquire what sort of thing it is that art can make happen, which is of a kind to be regarded dangerous enough to merit, if not suppression, then political control. So I will try to end on a somewhat positive note regarding the powers of art.

The first observation to make, admittedly a quite unexciting one, is that once we have separated art from the philosophical theories that have given it its character, the question of whether art makes anything happen is not any longer a philosophically very interesting question. It is, rather, a fairly empirical question, a matter for history or psychology or some social science or other to determine. There are theories of history, Marxism being a good example, in which art is excluded from the deep determinants of historical change, since it merely reflects or expresses such changes: it belongs in the superstructure rather than the base of a historical process which moves on two levels, only one of which is effective. Philosophy too has at times been placed in the passive superstructural position by Marxism, a self-neutralizing transposition if Marxism itself is philosophy and means to change the world: a dilemma neatly sidestepped by Marxists treating Marxism as a science, and as in the famous linguistics controversy in the Soviet Union, placing science in the dynamic base. A deeper incoherence, it seems to me, is to be found in the repression of certain forms of art, which is after all a benchmark of communist governments which happen also to subscribe to the tenets of historical mate-

rialism: for if the latter were true, art would be impotent to do anything but express the deep structure of historical reality whatever its form: so repression should be either unnecessary or impossible. It is, to be sure, open to ideologists to say that what does not conform to theory is not art—but this saves theory by trivialization, and leaves us with the anomaly of something evidently effective enough if not suppressed, which would be art were it not ruled out as such by politboro fiat. A less trivializing response would be to say that the offending art reflects a contaminant substructure, and repression will not be needed when the basis is purified of all contradictions. But *that* leaves the question of why mere reflections of the contaminants should be attacked and repressed, since they will vanish when their material conditions do, and it is the material conditions that ought then to be attacked, rather than their superstructural epiphenomena. This is not the place to analyze Marxist theories of history, but even if they are true, what follows from them is only that art is impotent to make anything happen *at the base*: so Auden's thought would have to be modified to say that poetry makes nothing *deep* happen. But neither does anything in the superstructure: so why single art out?

Much the same argumentation applies to all those deep theories of history, fortunately or not no longer much in intellectual fashion. Even politics, on these theories, is ineffective but expressive, and Burkhardt's famous chapter, "The State as Work of Art," takes on a special meaning against those views of history and historical style that constituted the atmosphere in which he thought. This view of historical style asks, for example, that we appreciate Abstract Expressionism as expressing the same deep realities politically expressed by Eisenhower foreign policy, McCarthy domestic policy, and the feminine mystique—or Pop Art as expressing the same reality as the politics of Nixon, the counter-culture, and the Women's Liberation Movement—and tends to dissolve all horizontal relationships between surface phenomena in favor of vertical relationships between surface and depth—with again the consequence that art is not especially more ineffective than anything else in the surfaces of historical change. It requires a very deep view indeed of history to

say that politics makes nothing happen. But once we sanely cede power to politics, it becomes difficult to know where the line is to be drawn, and why art should in the end be uniquely ineffectual and merely reflective.

Once we return to surface history—or once we return surface history to historical effectiveness—it seems simply a matter of fact whether poetry makes anything happen. It would be futile to suppose that poetry readings should have saved the Jews. There are times when the sword is mightier than the pen. But it would only have been against some current of extravagant and immoderate expectations that one could have believed that poetry should have saved the Jews or that folksongs should have saved the whales. Hamlet, for example, believed art could be effective in his own war with Claudius, and he was right, in a way. He was right, however, not because the play within the play was art, but that as art, it was able to communicate as Hamlet perhaps lacked the courage to communicate directly, that Claudius's crime was known to a consciousness other than Claudius's: for how was Claudius otherwise to explain the choice of a drama in any terms other than that Hamlet knew, and meant for Claudius to know that he knew the bloody truth, and that he had chosen *The Murder of Gonzago* with the intention of conveying this fact? So the play was, metaphorically, a mirror for Claudius, but not for anyone else in the audience, save irrelevantly: and yet it was as much art to them for whom it was not a mirror as to him for whom it was. They were shocked or bored or even amused, and as a general theory of art and its efficacy Hamlet's theory is a bad one. It is bad as would be a theory that poetry is code when in fact someone writes an anagrammatic poem by means of which the instructed reader can get the formula of the atomic bomb: the little melody in *The Lady Vanishes* encodes some important secret, but its being a folksong has nothing to do with the special uses it might have been put to.

Perhaps what it is unexciting to observe is all there is to observe, though the example just canvassed has the danger of suggesting that art makes something happen only adventitiously, when it is put to an extra-artistic use: and that leaves the familiar thought that intrinsically it makes

nothing happen as art. And we are back in the first form of the Platonic attack. There must be something wrong with this if I have been at all right in my arguments of *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* that the structure of artworks is of a piece with the structure of rhetoric, and that it is the office of rhetoric to modify the minds and then the actions of men and women by co-opting their feelings. There are feelings and feelings, on the other hand, some issuing in one kind of action and some in another, and poetry may make something happen if it is successful in promoting action of a sort that may make something happen. And it cannot be extrinsic to the artwork that it should do this if indeed the structure of the work of art and the structure of rhetoric are of a piece. So there is reason after all to be afraid of art.

I am not sure that the structure of rhetoric and the structure of philosophy are of a piece, since it is the aim of philosophy to prove rather than merely persuade: but the common structures of rhetoric and art go some distance toward explaining why Plato might have taken a common posture of hostility towards them both, and why aesthetic Socratism should have seemed so congenial an option. And who knows but that the analogy between artworks and females is due to a reduction of the latter to *feeling* in contrast with reason, presumed to be masculine? So that Plato's program of making women the same as men is another aspect of his program of making art the same as philosophy? In any case it has been a long and fateful disenfranchisement, and it will be a task to disassemble portions of the philosophy of art from art: all the more timely since there has been a recent effort to deconstruct philosophy by treating it as though it were art!

