

After the “Death of Art”: Is there any Life for Aesthetics?

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ABSTRACT. Alongside with the often proclaimed end of metaphysics and of history, the “death of art” has been a concern for philosophers by the end of the millennium. This topic is deeply related to the questioning of the status of philosophical aesthetics. The present paper traces back the history of the topic of the “death of art” attempting to clarify its relation to the aesthetic discourse, by exploring the different discursive strategies it implies and explaining the reasons for various theoreticians and artists have embraced it. The examination of the eschatological rhetoric related to art opens up a new way of thinking about the means for aesthetics to stay alive and to preserve its relevance for contemporary art and everyday life.

In a book entitled *Adieu à l'esthétique* (2000), Jean-Marie Schaeffer claims that the belief or hope in the renaissance of an aesthetic doctrine has a deceptive character, despite the increasing debates and philosophical considerations on art and aesthetic experience. This would be due mainly to the continuous association between aesthetics and art, by which aesthetic and artistic dimensions are reduced or identified to one other, and to the claiming to subject the artistic and aesthetic facts to the jurisdiction of philosophy as to their validity and legitimacy (Schaeffer 2000, pp.1-12). Moreover, but from a different standpoint, a correlation was established by authors like Gianni Vattimo in *La fine della modernità* (1985) between the end of philosophical aesthetics and the “death” or “twilight of art”, seen as symmetrical aspects of a general situation described as the age of the end of metaphysics and of history (Vattimo 1993, pp.53-65). Is this an apocalyptic diagnosis, a mere millenarian lament, or a genuine fear raised

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by the upheavals in the arts, philosophy and politics of the past century? Would be this the end of any aesthetic discourse or there is some place or life for aesthetics after the "death of art"? Which discursive form could this take in the latter case?

In order to answer these questions, the paper traces back the history of the topic of "death of art" attempting to clarify its relation to the aesthetic discourse, by exploring the different discursive strategies it implies and explaining the reasons for various theoreticians and artists have embraced it.

I. The "Death of Art": A Trans-Historical Topic

Alongside with the often proclaimed end of metaphysics and of history, the "death" or "end of art" has been a concern for philosophers by the end of the millennium. One of the most famous views is that of Arthur Danto, first formulated in a 1984 essay called *The End of Art*, later developed in his book *After the End of Art* (1997). However, he was not referring to the end of art practice (people still make art) but, like the art historian Hans Belting in his book *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte?* (1983), to the end of a certain story of art. According to Danto, what is drawing to an end is the master narrative of the linear progress of art, thus opening a post-historical age when art reaches the end of its philosophical investigation and is liberated:

[T]he master narrative of the history of art — in the West but by the end not in the West alone — is that there is an era of imitation, followed by an era of ideology, followed by our post-historical era in which, with qualification, anything goes [...] In our narrative, at first only mimesis was art, then several things were art but each tried to extinguish its competitors, and then, finally, it became apparent that there were no stylistic or philosophical constraints. There is no special way works of art have to be. And that is the present and, I should say, the final moment in the master narrative. It is the end of the story (Danto 1997, p. 47).

The first claim of this paper is that the theme of the end of art, although current in the philosophical debates of past decades, is not a recent one but

is a *topos* of a trans-historical eschatological rhetoric. Danto's thesis of the end of art not only refers to contemporary art and criticism but also find support in Hegel's views according to which "art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is" (Hegel 1975, p.11, cited by Danto 1997, pp. 14-15).¹ The thesis of the death or twilight of art in Vattimo's *La fine della modernità* (1985), which takes the figures of the "utopia of reintegration", the "kitsch", and the "silence", is a continuation of the questioning of art's destiny restated by Heidegger. In a Postscript to the seminal essay *Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (1936/1957) he was wondering whether — in the age of technology and of subjectivity that tend to eliminate the traditional *poiesis* of the fine arts — art is still alive or is still an essential and necessary means wherein appears the decisive truth for our existence bound to History (Heidegger 1995, pp. 107-109). The end of traditional art, notably the "death of painting", was a familiar slogan of the artistic avant-gardes since the 1920s, when artists like Malevich (1920) proclaimed that "painting has lived its life, and the painter himself is nothing but a prejudice of the past" (Malevich 1997, p. 895), and then was reiterated by the post-war avant-garde artists, from proponents of Conceptual Art, *Arte Povera* and Land Art, to those of performances and multimedia genres. A similar ethos — rejection of the traditional criticism and embracing of the literary avant-garde — is expressed by other ideas under which this topic manifested, such as the "disappearance of the work of art" (literature dissolved in writing/*écriture* or in critical meta-discourse) and the "death of the author" as creator and guarantor of meaning (replaced by the "author function"), proclaimed by Roland Barthes (1968, 1971) and Michel Foucault (1969).²

¹ There is to mention that in an essay subsequent to *After the End of Art*, Danto constructs a defense against criticism of his thesis of the 'end of art' as set forth in that book, notably by emphasizing the differences between Hegel's views on the end of art and his, and between the end of art history (a theory of consciousness) and the 'death of painting' (a theory of exhaustion). See Danto 1998, pp. 127-143.

² According to Foucault, "the author is not an indefinite source of signification which fill the work; the author does not precede the work; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction [...] The author is therefore the ideological figure

The idea that (fine) art is transitory and replaceable was a recurrent issue not only in the late modernity but also in the dawns of the modern age. One could follow it from Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1821/1835) who stated that art, "considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past", and thus its metaphysical function has come to an end being supplanted by philosophy (Hegel 1966, pp.16-17), to Marx's (1859) prophecy of the end of art as form of autonomous activity in a society which will exclude any relations generating myths (Marx 1966, pp. 312-316), and to Nietzsche's announcement in *Human, All Too Human* (1878) of the "sunset of art", which could only disappear once a perfect state would be established.³ Paradoxically, the topic of art's decay was widespread in the Renaissance historiography, from Filippo Vilani chronicles (1381) to Leon Battista Alberti's *Della Pittura* (1436) and Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of artists* (1550/1568), until the works of theorists of French Classicism like Roland Fréart de Chambray's *Ideé de la perfection en peinture* (1662). Moreover, the topic of art's decadence had also been frequently used in the rhetoric schools of the first century A.D., as proved by Petronius' novel *Satyricon* (61 A.D.), and had found a master place within the encyclopaedia of Greco-Latin antiquity, the *Natural History* (77 A.D.) by Pliny the Elder, where in books XXXIV and XXXV he lamented the "eclipse of art" and condemned the degenerate painting of his time, labelled as *ars moriens* (Plinius Secundus 1953, §5, §52, 1985, §2-28).

by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning." Finally, he suggests that the author-function as regulator of meaning will disappear once the society will (revolutionary) change, that would permit to fiction and polysemous texts to function according to another mode (of constraint), which will have to be determined or experienced (Foucault 1984, pp. 118-119).

³ See Nietzsche 1966, § 223: "*Sunset of art*. As in old age one remembers his youth and celebrates its memory, so mankind will soon relate to art as to a touching memory of youthful joys. Perhaps never before has art been grasped so fully and soulfully as now, when the magic of death seems to play about it..." and § 234: "*Value of the middle of the path*. Perhaps mankind, in the middle of its path, the middle period of its existence, is nearer to its actual goal than it will be at the end. The energies that condition art, for example, could very well die out; pleasure in lying, in vagueness, in symbolism, in intoxication, in ecstasy, could come into disrepute. Indeed, once life is structured in a perfect state, then the present will no longer offer any theme for poetry whatsoever, and only backward people would still demand poetic unreality. They would then look back longingly to the times of the imperfect state, the half-barbaric society, to *our* times."

II. The "Death of Art": Discursive Strategies and Meanings

This brief archaeological investigation into the topic of the end or death of art highlights the recurrent character of the eschatological rhetoric applied to art. A question is then rising on the meaning of this "death" or "end" in the past and nowadays: does it mean the exhaustion of art as disappearance of its traditional forms and mediums, as proclaimed by the successive avant-garde movements, or conversely the dissolution recently announced of the historical ethos (the master narrative of progress) of the avant-garde itself?

The second claim of this paper is that the eschatological rhetoric, despite its trans-historical character, has different stakes and meanings according to the nature and aims attributed to art, as well as to the related theory of history. The various proclamations of the "end" or "death of art" depend on the aesthetic and temporal models underlying them.

The classical doctrine of art — defined as an aesthetics of perfection based on the belief in a transcendent ideal of beauty related to a cyclic temporal model where progress and decay succeed each other — gave a specific touch to the topic of "death of art". The decay of art appears to be the consequence of its infidelity to the ideal it has to match and embody. Proclaiming the "death of art" was justified by the increasing distance between artwork and ideal, which should be recuperated in order for art to be reborn. Thus, in the classical doctrine of art, the eschatological rhetoric is but a propedeutic of art resurrection. It is the case with occurrences from Antiquity to Italian Renaissance that had for a central motive the "rebirth of long gone painting", so that art history looks like a permanent play of death-and-rebirth. The image of an art "buried" and then "resurrected", as well as the historical system of decay and progress, were employed and clearly outlined by Alberti in the prologue of the Italian version of his treaty *Della pittura* (1436), dedicated to Brunelleschi. Here he reminds how he himself had lamented the almost total passing away of the painting and of so many sciences and arts "excellent and divines" of the ancient times, and how he had explained this state of decay by the exhaustion of nature, "old and tired", that ceased to produce the giants and the great minds of the beginnings. The aim of this treaty was thus to serve as a model for contemporary artists in their efforts to bring again the paint-

ing to perfection and at the same time to save her memory. Furthermore, Alberti uses in his treaty the image inherited from Boccaccio of the resurrection of painting, when he declares to have exhumed this art buried — in the Italian version — or to have extracted it from hell (*ab Inferis*) into light — in the Latin version (Alberti 1992, pp. 68-70, 199-201). Vasari's biographic exercise, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori et scultori italiani* (1550/1568), was also conceived as a salvation from a "second death" thanks to remembrance. After underlining the idea of art decadence in the medieval period, he proclaims Giotto the initiator of the "rebirth" of painting that would culminate with Michelangelo, the artist who reached once more the perfection of art (Vasari 1981, pp. 53-64, 216-234). This way, and also by using the term *maniera moderna*, Vasari attempted to legitimize the new ideal of beauty promoted by Florentine painting, seen as an overcoming of the old fashioned medieval style and, in the same time, the re-discovery of the true way of painting practiced in Antiquity. It is the same case with French Classicism and the episode of the Quarrel of Ancients and Moderns, where the eschatological rhetoric acquired a supplementary tint, that of contest for authority and artistic supremacy between the Italian modernity, interpreter of Greco-Latin authorities, and the French and Christian one. When Roland Fréart de Chambray in his *Idée de la perfection en peinture* (1662) accused in a violent and polemic manner the decay of painting from the perfection it had reached before to the point where just "shadow" or "phantasm" was left of it (Fréart de Chambray 1662, 172-173), he employed this topic in order to assert the superiority of French art over the Italian art and to ensure its domination. His attempt to define the principles of classic art was also a violent attack against Vasari's theses, aiming to ensure the artistic pre-eminence of France that should have re-established the perfection of art.

For Hegel too, who formulated the idea of art as "thing of the past" since the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and revisited it in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* given between 1816 and 1830, the end of art is inseparable from dialectic of death-and-rebirth. According to him, the ending of the Great Art — whose task was to reveal Spirit in sensuous form — firstly occurs as a consequence of its moving away from the ideal and of its incompatibility with the prosaic character of the modern world that, replacing feeling with reflection, positions itself as incompatible with the (poetic) realm of art.

As compared to the classical doctrine, the novelty of Hegel's view consists in the abandoning of the idea of a cyclic repetition in art history and the adoption of an increasingly larger temporal model, that of the disclosure of Spirit in the world. At the deeper level of the absolute Spirit's history, the "death" of art appears as a necessary, inevitable fact: the Spirit in its sensuous manifestation must accept the negative determination of death as belonging to its own concept and must take the course of progressive disappearing. Hence, art stops being a living form losing the superior position it had within the dialectic of spiritual forms — the sensuous expression of the absolute Spirit — and of human forms — the expression of a people's spirit (*Volkgeist*). The "death of art" means the end of the Great Art's destiny that, unfolding in accordance with an inner necessity, fulfilled its essence in history (Hegel 1966, pp. 13-4, 110, 548). Nevertheless, the end of art prophesized by Hegel is not final. On one hand, because the death of art is just a stage in the life of absolute Spirit on its way to superior forms, that is religion and eventually philosophy. On the other hand, the end of the Great Art (by dissolution of its romantic form) marks the beginning of a new art form freed of any necessity: the art as free play of subjectivity, which, at its best, is an art of the present but also of the undying human nature (Hegel 1966, pp. 603-617).

The emergence of new aesthetic models and artistic practices, related to the cultural mutations that occurred during the modern age, has radically changed the meaning and stakes of the eschatological rhetoric. On one hand, along with the imposition of the temporal model of linear progress, the place of the ancient aesthetic of perfection was taken by the aesthetics of immanence and transitory, having for principles "change" and "innovation" and as crucial values the new and the originality, found on subjectivity and devoid of their transcendence (Călinescu 1995, pp. 15-6, 65-67). Thus, the crisis of the aesthetic tradition deepened in case of what it was used to name with functional terms "delectation" and "knowledge", as well as of concepts as *mimesis*, "representation", and "beauty". The result was the birth of a revolutionary aesthetics of innovation and rupture, defining the 20th century avant-garde, whose aims and values are social criticism, political activism, negation, subversion, abstraction, etc. On the other hand, within the artistic practices area, the challenges become increasingly radical: from abandoning the traditional subject mat-

ters and the perspective as method of organizing the pictorial space to the refusal of representation and even of the artwork as such. Also, the artistic creation, the display of art and its functions became problematic aspects begetting the cult of spontaneity, the refusal of the museum and a focus on the critical and subversive powers of art, whose field of action was to be identified with life itself. The focus moved from the ontological and aesthetic dimensions of art on its critical-subversive dimension, as the practical function of criticizing and changing life and society substituted the theoretical function of revealing the truth about the world or the hedonist function. This new meaning attributed to art and to its relations to its own tradition and to the world can also be explained through the transposition of the millenarian project of the Revolution in the realm of art. The artistic projects of the avant-gardes were also shaped by political utopias: Marxism offered the ideological foundation, even if not always directly but, as with some trends of the post-war avant-garde, through the aesthetic of negativity like that proposed by Adorno in *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970), who defined the social function of art using the conceptual couple of "affirmation" and "negation". In his view, art has a double character: it is both "autonomous" and "*fait social*". The paradox is that art is a social fact precisely by adopting a position antagonistic to society, and it occupies that position only as autonomous art. As Adorno warned, the relation between art and society is not to be sought primarily in the sphere of reception, but in production: the social aspect of art consists in a determinate negation of a determinate society, the "late capitalism". The key phrases used to define the artistic strategy in the age of "late capitalism" are: social criticism, denial of commercial value, resistance and refusal of servitude to the profit and of transforming art into entertainment. As the author of the critical theory writes, "art keeps itself alive through its social power of resistance; unless it reifies itself, it becomes a commodity.. " The inherent negativity of the artwork consists therefore in its insurgent-subversive and progressive-reformist vocations, by which it contributes to the social emancipation. The opposite of this negative art would be an affirmative art that, by pleasure or relaxation, turn itself into an instrument of power (Adorno 1982, pp. 15-17, 298-302).⁴

⁴ See also Chalumeau 1994, pp. 88-9, and Jauss 1983, pp. 60-70. As Hans Robert Jauss

After World War Two, both the ethos of historical avant-garde and its arsenal of artistic procedures were adopted by various neo-avant-garde trends, whose common ground remains the tendency towards breaking the traditional limits and constraints of art. One of this trends embodiments is the transgression of the canonical genres, such as painting and sculpture, to the benefit of mixed or inter-media genres begotten by the new industrial-informational technologies. The difference lies in the technological leap, "the union between art and technology" appearing according to Harold Rosenberg (1972) as one of the present manifestations of the "end of art": history, in the form of technology, seems to condemn painting labelled as an obsolete medium that should be dissolved in the immediacy of mass-media (Rosenberg 1972, pp. 235-237, 251-252). Another common tendency for most neo-avant-garde movements is that of blurring or suppressing the distinction between art and life, between the aesthetic phenomenon and other phenomena belonging to the personal experience of the artist or of the surrounding world: art's frontiers are shattered either through the mixing with cultural or commercial artefacts or through the identification with works oriented against aesthetic transcendence, such as ready-made, earth-works, actions, and installations. The continuity between the post-war avant-garde and the historical avant-garde movements lies not only in the aspiration of art to fuse with the realities of everyday life but also in the attacks against the "illusion of permanence", to which they oppose the exaltation of the ephemeral nature of artistic production or action, as well as their subversive potential. New post-war movements such as Conceptual Art, *Arte Povera*, Land Art, happening, performance, etc., reinvested art with a critical-subversive role, submitting to avant-garde logics: the domain of artistic action is identified with both limitless formal experimentation and social criticism, as art is situated in an antagonist relation to its own tradition and to society. The spiral of radicalization launched at the beginning of the 20th century reaches again its extreme point: the disappearance of the artwork as a permanent object, like in performance where the execution acquires a value of its own, in Conceptual Art where the idea is valued as such, or in *Arte Povera* where any

notes, the therapy of negativity prescribed by Adorno and his refusal of enjoyment have as results the investing of the social function of art exclusively as negation, thus paying the price of ignoring all its communicative and hedonistic valences.

technique producing commodities is refused (for ideological reasons).

In this new aesthetic and ideological contexts, "the death of art" — announced by the artists themselves — has different echo and stakes as compared to previous occurrences. In the case of historical avant-garde, the eschatological rhetoric has a critical-polemic function, implying the contestation of art's traditional forms and functions and the overcoming of limits inside which art was traditionally thought. From this perspective, the "death of art" means the dissolution of its traditional forms, either through the disappearance of the border that separates art from life⁵ or from non-art, or through the renunciation to the production of objects as artworks. It also means the replacement of art's traditional functions with the practical task of transforming social reality, as in the case of the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s wherein the proclamation of the death of art, associated with the rhetoric of Revolution, stands for the end of painting as a form of representation, followed by its dissolution as a creative force in the collective impulse to build the new Communist society (Gan 1997, pp. 361-364, Tarabukin 1997, pp. 895-900).

In the case of post-war avant-garde, when the artistic contestation was directed against the market and capitalist system, the eschatological rhetoric gets a new meaning: it implies the refusal to turn art into commodity and to instrumentalize it, that is to put it in the service of the dominant power, that of the technical-industrial and political capitalist systems, or of the consumption society eager to integrate art in its own economical functioning (Argan 1982, pp. 198-202, 252-253; Celant 1997, pp. 963-968; Lippard 1997, pp. 972-975). The neo avant-garde's practical and discursive *thanatophilia* pertains to a double strategy of extracting art from the correlative processes of commercialization (participation in the production-consumption cycle) and of historicization (integration into the capitalist system). The first strategy consists in the refusal to produce artworks ("commodities") for avoiding the exchange system and turning the artis-

⁵ For example, Mondrian's hypothesis in his article *La morphoplastique et la néoplastique* (1930) was that painting, after having determined its essence, prepares its fulfilment, dissolving into "life as art". Despite his visual asceticism, the Dutch painter did not ignore life, but instead wanted the emergence of a new world. As he wrote, "art is just a substitute; it will exist only as long as the beauty of life will be insufficient" (Mondrian 1997, pp. 900-903).

tic work irrecoverable for the market; this way, the "death of art" is but the result of the suicidal effort to free it from the spell of consumerism, through the transfer of the artistic operation from the domain of object production to that of action or spectacle (Argan 1982, pp. 238-239). The second strategy, somewhat more subtle, consists in permanently putting art into crisis: the avant-garde artist doesn't aim anymore at a success that would give him the right to place his works within a determined set of values — that of objects with aesthetic qualities — but, on the contrary, the success means now precisely to render this set problematic and irrecoverable for the power (Vattimo 1993, pp. 55-56). A suggestive example in this regard is the "therapy of the new" or permanently runaway prescribed by Roland Barthes in *The pleasure of the text* (1973) for preventing that dominant power recuperates the art, and for maintaining its force of negation. According to the French critic, the artist actions should not be destructive, because the destruction of art has proved to be inadequate: either it reaches the outer art, so is irrelevant, or it is quickly recuperated, so is unnecessary. Instead he requires a subtle subversion, which is not directly interested in destruction, but to continuously put into crisis the established paradigms and moving them towards something unexpected and impossible to seize (Barthes, 1994, pp. 13-14, 38-39, 49-52). This led to the modification of the artwork assessment criteria: this is now evaluated through the capacity to question its own status, and its critical, negative, subversive function. This way, the crisis has become the proper status of art, and the "bringing to crisis", the "questioning" or the "displacement" has become the proper tasks of the artist.

Nonetheless, the changes in the artistic practices in the past decades have led to a new configuration of the artistic field, usually described as sliding from avant-garde to post-avant-garde: a positioning in the framework of post-modernity dominated by the feeling of the "end of history", as well as the decline of the avant-garde ethos, in parallel with the exhaustion of the revolutionary ideology and the ideology of progress. "Rebellion" and "refusal" lost their force of fascination, and the dominant trend became the revival, the recuperation of lost traditions, among which the "rebirth" of painting in the 1980s and 1990s. In this new context, the eschatological rhetoric aims, on the contrary, at the end of avant-garde, understood as exhaustion of the ethos of negativity and permanent refusal,

and reconciliation with the public and even the capitalist system.

III. The Crisis of Legitimizing Discourses: Aesthetics versus Philosophy of Art.

From this point, the third claim of this paper is that the supposed "death of art" could find another explanation, being related to the crisis of its legitimating discourse. The idea that underneath the crisis of art hides in fact a crisis of the philosophical discourse upon art is also on stage, even though from two different philosophical perspectives.

It was Heidegger who first established a correlation between metaphysics, aesthetics, and the crisis or death of art: the latter would find its source in the impasse of modern aesthetics that reduced beauty and artwork to something affecting sensibility, thus hiding the true essence of art as a privileged means for the truth of being to put-itself-into-work. Thus, aesthetics — understood as a specific reflection upon beauty and art derived from the metaphysics dominated by the oblivion of being — would be responsible for the "death" of Great Art or at least for its complete misunderstanding (Heidegger 1971, pp.75-89). On the same path, Vattimo (1985) ascertained the correspondence between the "death of art" and the end of philosophical aesthetics, as symmetrical aspects of the age of the end of metaphysics and of history. According to him, while the first manifestation of the "death of art" — the refusal of aesthetic limitation and its transgression towards practical-political action — was connected to the revolutionary utopia of historical avant-garde, its present manifestations are connected to the impact of technology on the post-war avant-garde: the "utopia of reintegration", that is the disappearance of art as a specific fact, separated from the rest of human experience; the "kitsch", *i.e.* the mass culture made aesthetic by the expansion of mass-media domination; and the "silence", that is the suicide, as a protest, of authentic art (Vattimo 1993, pp. 53-65, 104-06, 178). As for the philosophical aesthetics, it came to an end because the emphatic, metaphysic character of its concepts, such as the ideas of artwork as eternal and of values as absolute, derived from the thinking of being in terms of presence, plenitude, perfection, permanence, force, and authority. By refusing this view, the aesthetic discourse

opens to the affirmation of both temporal and perishable character of the artwork, but in a sense unknown to traditional aesthetics, and also opens to a new aesthetic experience, different from the previous "intense" living of values. This new experience is labelled as "abstracted reception" or "declining experience", as it corresponds to the ontology of decline that is the rethinking of philosophy in the light of a "weak" conception of being (Vattimo 1994, pp. 15-16, 23-26).

However, the explanation of present crisis of art through discursive reasons is also consistent with authors who do not affiliate to the heideggerian approach. Jean-Marie Schaeffer points out on the contrary a crisis of the speculative tradition in the interpretation of art, precisely of its major legitimating myth — the definition of art as ecstatic knowledge or revelation of the absolute truth. The negative consequences of this sacralisation of art were the reduction of beauty to the cognitive dimension (due to its identification with truth), the confusion between descriptive and evaluative approaches, as well as the excessive puritanism following the elimination of the problem of aesthetic pleasure. Furthermore, the speculative tradition would have marked negatively the artistic practice: from the moment it was defined through its content of truth, the art realm stopped being those of the encounter with works and was submitted to an artistic-philosophical discourse placing them in the framework of a strategy of historical intervention. Hence, the speculative historicism would have its share of responsibility for the dead end where some of the artistic activity sectors are now (Schaeffer 1992, pp. 343-357). As for the therapy, Schaeffer looks at the same discursive level. The solution would consist essentially in reorienting the thinking on the artistic facts towards a "naturalistic" approach — whose proper horizon is anthropological, meaning that human being has no transcendental basis: it only has a genealogy and history — and in recuperating the hedonist dimension of the aesthetic experience. Such a "naturalized" aesthetic approach of the artworks would enable, at last, the extraction of art from the field of speculative philosophy and, thus, its "healing" (Schaeffer 1992, pp. 375-376; 2000, pp. 9-12).

IV. Conclusion

The question remains whether or not art still needs nowadays a philosophical justification. I would answer that one cannot speak of the irrelevance, the uselessness or even harmfulness of any philosophical approach to art. One has to take note of the exhaustion of speculative discourses that identified art with the revelation of absolute truth, or of revolutionary discourses that displaced its legitimacy from the aesthetic realm to the social-political one because regarding it exclusively in terms of negation and subversion. But it is precisely this exhaustion that opens up the way to a philosophical approach set free of metaphysical illusions, of ideological clichés, and receptive to the real issues of the art practice and to the justified concerns of the artists, as well as to the aesthetic of everyday life. Beauty — neglected in the new regime of art — pervades instead the daily life, enfolding our experiences into aesthetic dimension, as noticed by Yves Michaud in *L'Art à l'état gazeux : Essai sur le triomphe de l'esthétique* (2003). Without pretending to final answer, this paper only aimed to open a reflection (to be continued) upon the role that aesthetics would be then capable of playing in practical life, and its potential significance as practical philosophy: could its object also be practice (*praxis*), the human behavior and the ways in which human beings organize their lives in common? Hence aesthetics would join ethics and politics, inasmuch as all these "arts" stand at the service of the *polis*.⁶

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